



Northumberland

County Council

CABINET

Date: 12 April 2022

BERWICK PARTNERSHIP ORGANISATION

Report of the Executive Director of Children's Services - Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services: Councillor Guy Renner-Thompson

Purpose of Report

This report sets out the findings of the meetings that have taken place with schools in the Berwick Partnership since April 2021 to discuss the organisational issues facing the partnership and to identify potential models of organisation that could address those issues. The results of an informal survey with parents and the wider community in the area served by Berwick Partnership are also included in the report.

Cabinet is also asked to permit a first stage of informal consultation with wider stakeholders in the area served by Berwick Partnership schools to establish whether any models of organisation that may be brought forward at a later date for consultation should consist of only 3-tier models of organisation or include 3-tier and 2-tier (primary/secondary) models of education. Other key areas such as Special Educational Needs, post-16 and early years provision would also be included as part of this first stage of wider phase of consultation.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 1) Approve the first stage of a planned 2-stage informal consultation process with the wider stakeholders of the Berwick area on the following key areas:
 - a. Whether any future models of organisation for schools in the Berwick Partnership should be based on a 3-tier organisation only or a 2-tier model of organisation;
 - b. The need for an improved SEND offer for the Berwick area;
 - c. The need for an improved Early Years offer for the Berwick Area;
 - d. The need for the development of a Post-16 and Post-18 provision in the Berwick area;

- e. Whether Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools should remain part of the Berwick Partnership or be included in the Alnwick Partnership.
- 2) Note the analysis of the outcomes of this first stage of informal consultation would be reported to Cabinet, and also a request to carry out the second planned stage of informal consultation on detailed proposals for individual schools within a wider school reorganisation of the Berwick Partnership may be included. Such proposals in the second planned stage of informal consultation may include possible school closures.
 - 3) Note that local authorities do not have powers to propose or change the organisation of academies; therefore, any proposed changes to the organisation of Berwick Academy as part of a wider partnership reorganisation would need to be consulted on by the Trustees of the Academy and taken to the Regional Schools Commissioner for a decision.
 - 4) Note should Cabinet approve a second stage of consultation, the outcomes presented to Cabinet may include a recommendation to permit the publication of statutory proposals in relation to relevant maintained schools.

Link to Corporate Plan

This report directly links to the Council's Corporate aim 'Living, Learning - We will ensure the best education standards for our children and young people.'

Key Issues

1. The Council has allocated £39.896 million in capital funding within its Medium Term financial Plan for capital investment in education within the Berwick partnership of schools.
2. Before committing to such investment in these schools, Cabinet will want to be assured that the organisational structure within the Berwick Partnership is viable and sustainable in the medium to long-term through the retention of the majority of students in all phases, and that the agreed structure is the most likely to lead to improved educational outcomes for all children and young people in the Berwick area.
3. In order to identify the most likely structures to provide such assurance, officers have been working with the headteachers in their capacity as educational professionals and school governors since April 2021. Over the last year, this work has included meetings with these groups at the partnership and individual school levels; themed workshops with headteachers on a number of possible models of organisation including the current 3-tier model structure have also taken place. In addition to the question of which is the most appropriate structure for the partnership, another issue for discussion arose which was whether certain schools should remain as part of the Berwick Partnership at all or whether it was more relevant for them to join other partnerships in the future.
4. Throughout the work undertaken with the Berwick Partnership, headteachers and school governors understood that whatever structure was ultimately agreed,

this possibly would have to be within the context of some other fundamental changes, such as a reduction in the current number of schools in the partnership, including some schools moving to other partnerships as noted at para. 3. The issues facing the partnership that would require some of these changes are set out in the Background to this report.

5. A high-level survey was also carried out with the wider Berwick Partnership community in Autumn 2021 to gauge their key priorities when considering school organisation in the area and to assist in formulating the next steps in the process. The results of this survey are also included in the Background to this report.
6. A detailed summary of these activities and the feedback received is set out in the Background to this report. Overall, the analysis of this feedback suggests there are two preferred models of organisation most likely to achieve long-term viability and sustainability for education in the partnership, which are the current 3-tier structure or the 2-tier (primary/secondary) structure. This conclusion has been reached as a result of the views of schools on the potential positives and challenges of a 2-tier system in the partnership (see para. 17,19 and 20) where there was a mixed response, with 9 Governing Bodies in support of 2-tier, 4 against and 3 unsure or undecided.
7. In the light of this conclusion and the potential for other changes within the final structure as noted above, it is recommended that in order to inform detailed models of school organisation for consultation, the next step in this process should be to carry out high level informal consultation with the parents, staff, pupils and the wider community of the Berwick Partnership area on the benefits and rationale for both the 3-tier structure and the 2-tier structure in order to establish whether there is a general preference for either, and whether they have any views on the potential for some schools to become part of other partnerships.
8. Should Cabinet approve Recommendation 1, a period of informal consultation (stage 1) would take place beginning on 23 May and concluding on 23 July. The consultation would include the development of a consultation document made available electronically via the Council's Citizen Space facility in the first instance and also two public events within the period, one to be held in the north and one further south in the partnership.
9. The results of this stage 1 informal consultation would be brought to Cabinet at a later date, at which point approval for the second planned stage of informal consultation on detailed models of organisation for maintained schools in the Berwick Partnership may be requested. The outcomes of any stage 2 informal consultation may also include a request to publish statutory proposals for relevant maintained schools.
10. Cabinet should note that local authorities do not have powers to change the organisational structure of academies, therefore any future proposals for organisational change to the structure of maintained schools in the Berwick Partnership would need to be made with the agreement of the Trustees of Berwick Academy to carry out parallel consultation on any changes for the structure of the academy.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Issues facing Berwick Partnership

11. Education Outcomes

First School Phase: Key Stage 1 (KS1) assessments, which are taken by children at the end of Year 2, are not published. However, 12 of the 13 first schools are graded Outstanding or Good, while Tweedmouth Prior Park First School is graded 'Requires Improvement', although it continues to be taking effective action.

Middle School Phase: Key Stage 2 (KS2) assessments did not take place in 2020 and 2021, therefore the last available data for Berwick Partnership from 2019. The percentage of students achieving the expected standard at KS2 in 2019 was 72% for Berwick Middle, 75% for Tweedmouth Middle and 63% for Glendale Middle. The Northumberland average in 2019 was 66%, while the England average was 65%. Therefore, the two Berwick town middles are well above average scores while Glendale Middle is just below (with a smaller cohort) and therefore generally the schools performed well at KS2. All 3 middle schools are currently graded 'Good' by Ofsted.

High School Phase: Berwick Academy was inspected by Ofsted in November 2021 and was graded as 'Requires Improvement', having previously been judged to be Inadequate.

The last verified outcomes at GCSE(Key Stage 4) for Berwick Academy were in summer 2019 as set out in Table 1. The DfE has stated that due to the unprecedented change in the way GCSE results (KS4) were awarded in the summer terms of 2020 and 2021 and the resulting significant changes to the distribution of the grades received (in comparison to exam results), pupil level attainment in 2020/21 and 2019/20 is not comparable to that of the previous exam years for the purposes of measuring changes in pupil performance. However, GCSE results for Berwick Academy for 2020 and 2021 are included in Table 1 for information purposes, but for the reasons explained it is not possible to produce a Northumberland or England average.

Table 1 – GCSE results, Berwick Academy

		GCSE 2019	GCSE 2020	GCSE 2021
Progress 8 (0 = Expected Progress)	Berwick Academy	-0.55	-0.26	Not available, but expected to make progress on 2020 results
	Northumberland average	-0.12	N/A	N/A
	England average	-0.03		
%Achieving Grade 5+ inc Eng and Maths	Berwick Academy	21%	35%	36%
	Northumberland average	43%	N/A	N/A
	England average	43%	N/A	N/A
Attainment 8 (higher figure is best)	Berwick Academy	38.9	43.8	41.8
	Northumberland average	46.5	N/A	N/A
	England average	46.7	N/A	N/A

However, GCSE examinations are planned to go ahead as normal for 2022 and Berwick Academy expects to see the recent improvement in 2020 and 2021 outcomes being sustained into this year's results.

As for GCSE results, 'A' level grades achieved by students in 2020 and 2021 cannot be directly compared to the last verified results in 2019 as a result of the alternative grade awarding methods. 'A' level results achieved by students in Berwick Academy are set out in Table 2.

Table 2 – 2019 'A' level results, Berwick Academy

Progress Score	-0.18 (Average for England)
Average result - Berwick Academy	D+, 22.5 points
Average result - Northumberland	C+, 32.5 points
Average result - England	C+, 34.01

Berwick Academy has reported that all university applicants in the 2020/21 cohort gained a place at one of their chosen universities, with 95% being placed at their first choice. Students seeking routes into employment and training were supported by staff throughout the lockdown period and most secured their next step.

12. Viability and Sustainability of schools in Berwick Partnership

Fewer children year on year are being born in the Berwick Partnership area. Table 3 is based on the number of children living in the partnership area at this time, and not the number on roll in Berwick schools. This demonstrates the continuing fall in the pupil population over time:

Table 3

Current Phase	Average cohort size
High School (Year 9 to 11)	221
Middle School (Year 5 to 8)	222
First School (Reception to Year 4)	200
Reception 2022 to Reception 2025	165

In fact, the number of children living in the Berwick area who will require a place in Reception in 2025 is 150. With 278 places currently available in Berwick first schools there will be 128 surplus places in schools (assuming all pupils attend a local school); this is the equivalent of 4 forms of entry i.e. 4 classes of 30 children.

Compounding the falling pupil population is the current flow of pupils out of the partnership at the middle and high school phases in particular. Table 4 shows the number of pupils resident in the Berwick area who attend schools in Alnwick,

Scotland and the private sector (pupils attending special schools or elective home education are not included).

Table 4

Phase	Attending Alnwick Schools	Attending Scottish Schools	Attending Private Schools	Total
High (Yr9-11)	103	48	32	183
Middle	27 (5 in primary)	32 (14 in primary)	35	94
First	28	3	9	40

The above data equates to 28% of high school (Year 9 to Year 11) students living in the Berwick area choosing to attend other schools, as shown above. Of students in the Berwick area of middle school age, 10% choose to attend these schools; at first school phase, just 4% of pupils living in the Berwick area attend these schools. In economic terms, at high school phase these student numbers equates to around £915k while at middle school phase this equate to £470k. Of course, there will be a variety of reasons why students attend certain schools, for example distance from home being a factor, while some parents would send their children to private schools in any event. However, some feedback received during the informal meetings with schools and via the community survey indicates there is a level of dissatisfaction with the offer at high school phase and some parents are choosing an alternative pathway even earlier in their children's educational journey. The high level informal consultation on the proposed school organisation models recommended in this report would provide further information on this issue.

13. Special educational needs

Cabinet will already be aware from relevant reports, most recently in relation to the proposal to relocate and expand numbers at Atkinson House Special School, that due to the increase in children and young people in Northumberland and nationally being assessed to have special educational needs (SEND), there is an increasing strategic requirement to plan and provide additional specialist places and/or specialist support for this group of vulnerable students within the county over the coming years.

The work carried out with the Berwick Partnership over the last 12 months supports this requirement and it is proposed that any investment in educational structure in the partnership should include proposals for additional SEND provision within the Berwick area to provide the specialist support needed for relevant children and young people within or closer to their local community.

There are currently 102 students resident in the Berwick area who have been allocated an Education and Health Care Plan, which equates to 3.8% of the school age population in Berwick; this is very close to the county average of 4%. 58 of these students attend a special school and 44 are supported in a mainstream school or academy. In relation to the 58 students attending specialist provision, 36 attend The Grove School in Berwick; therefore 22 students in this group (38%) need to travel outside of the partnership to other special schools in the county or out of county. Furthermore, 12 of the 22 have a

primary need in autism, social emotional and mental health or speech, language and communication, which are the 3 categories increasing most rapidly in the county.

14. Post-16 Educational Offer

The stage 1 informal consultation would also present the opportunity to collate the views of a wide range of stakeholders in relation to post-16 provision for young people living in the Berwick Partnership area beyond parents, schools and current students e.g. colleges, universities, local commerce and industry. Views would be sought on where the gaps in the post-16 offer currently lie, as well as ideas on how and where provision could be improved. These views would assist in shaping more detailed proposals to be put forward to stage 2 informal consultation.

15. Early Years

Currently, all first schools in Berwick Partnership offer some form of early years provision on site, whether as part of the maintained school, via Community Powers, or via an independent provider or community group. As part of the stage 1 informal consultation, it would be proposed to review whether the current Early Years provision is appropriate both in terms of quantity and quality of offer across the partnership.

Process and feedback from work with the Berwick Partnership and the wider community survey

16. The work carried out with the Berwick Partnership to gain views on possible models of organisation over the last year to address the issues set out in paras. 9-11 journeyed along the following timeline:

- **15 April 2021**
Opening meeting between NCC officers, Heads and Chairs of Governors of Berwick Partnership schools, diocesan representatives and Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and DfE representatives. Initial 6 options put forward as starting point for discussions.
- **21 April – 25 May 2021**
NCC officers conduct confidential meetings with headteacher and Chair of Governors of individual schools; CE diocesan representative attendant at some CE school meetings.
- **22 June 2021**
Plenary meeting of NCC officers with headteachers and Chairs of Governors, diocesan representatives, RSC and DfE to share high level themes arising from individual meetings. 6 options suggested to be reduced to 4 as a result of feedback.
- **7 July 2021**
Plenary meeting with attendance as noted above to plan workshops to refine the options and advise on content of planned survey with the staff/wider public.
- **7 September 2021**
Briefing to local members on progress with partnership work.

- **14 September – 22 October 2021**
Berwick staff/community survey asking for priorities for educational provision in the Berwick area.
- **22 September – 14 October**
4 Workshops held with NCC officers, headteachers, CE diocese, RSC and FE representatives to refine/assess remaining 4 options further.
- **13 December 2021**
NCC Officers met with heads and Chairs of Governors to agree Vision for Change and summarise outcomes of workshops. Agreement to seek each Governing Body's views on conclusions on the 4 options reached by headteachers by 21 January 2022.
- **14 March 2022**
Proposed recommendation to carry out informal consultation on principle of 3-tier or 2-tier organisation conveyed to Headteachers and Chairs of Governors and next steps.

17. Themes arising from assessment of original 6 options during individual school meetings April – May 2021

Following the full partnership meeting in April 2021, 6 potential models of organisation were discussed with the headteacher and Chair of Governors of each school/academy; these models were based on previous discussions with the partnership, including a model put forward to NCC by a group of schools. The models and the key themes are set out as reasons to support the model and areas for further consideration are set out in Table 5.

Table 5

Option	Feedback – Reasons to support	Feedback - Areas to consider
<p>Campus option (option from Berwick heads) - Berwick Academy, Berwick Tweedmouth Middle schools, the Grove School and Tweedmouth Prior Park School, with post 16 provision being led by NALS, on to the site of the current high school</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would create an educational and financially viable campus through economies of scale, and creation of capacity to improve if all schools academise. • Opportunity for The Grove to have new build. • Collaborative working, improved transition. • Opportunity to redesign curriculum to match national. • Positive about potential improvement of sixth form offer, need to retain students in Berwick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community view too many schools on one site • Some first schools felt it would impact their viability if another first school had new build. • Age range on one site too wide (9year olds and 18 year olds) • First step towards full merger of schools. • Risk of losing individual schools identity • No middle school on North side of river, community won't like 9 year olds travelling • What would community view of wider academisation be? • Not sure this will resolve the issues and quickly enough. • Is this about saving money rather than beneficial educationally? • Logistics of so many schools on one site.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts choice of schools re middles. • Relies on co-operation of headteachers, if change of personnel it could impact negatively.
<p>Organisation option (primary/secondary) system - Organisation of whole partnership to a primary secondary model.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial benefit for firsts and academy as has additional year groups. • Fits with national curriculum, fewer transitions. • Some heads have experience of working in 2-tier • Retain children longer in village schools • Accountability for whole key stages • 3-tier out of sync with regional and national structure • High school could improve if get students in Year 7 rather than Year 9 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First and middles all good, • Is the main issue with KS4 outcomes? • Some first schools wouldn't be able to change because of sites. • Need to improve schools before adding more year groups, • Some schools may have to close • 3-tier very popular with some schools and parents, works well
<p>Single school option (age 9-18 school) - Relocation of both Berwick Middle and Tweedmouth Middle Schools onto the Berwick Academy site to form a single academy for pupils age 9-18.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership schools could support each other to improve • Fewer transitions • Improves financial position • Could redesign curriculum to fit with National Curriculum • Specialists have more time to teach their own specialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2 maintained middle schools would need to academise – how would the community feel? • Needs approval of Governing Bodies followed by approval of the RSC. • No current successful example to reference. • Doesn't solve issue of split key stages • Removes choice in relation to middles. • North and South of town divide – north left with nothing at secondary level. • Doesn't address first schools financial situation, so not a partnership-wide solution. • Age profile too wide 9 yos to 18 yos • No provision in Wooler after age 9.
<p>Two middle schools option – Both town middle schools combine into one school on Tweedmouth Middle site in new buildings and extend the age range to form a school for pupils age 9-16. Post 16 provision to be provided on the same site by Berwick Academy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retains good schools, facilities and outcomes • This option is likely to be popular in the community as it would be seen that secondary education comes back to local control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community may not be supportive of the relocation of Berwick Middle School. • Concerns about experience of Middle school staff to deliver secondary curriculum. • Lacks clarity around 6th form provision and transport

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A larger school will enable specialists to spend more time on their specialisms • KS4 specialists could teach Year 7/8 • Financial benefits of larger school • Parental perception that middles are good retained • Opportunity to redesign the curriculum, perhaps change phases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern around head to head battle for students, schools not supportive of each other • Would need co-operation of existing academy and RSC to achieve effective transition. • Removes choice of middle school • Concern around community support for very large school, particular concerns around bringing together the younger pupils onto the same site as 18 year olds. • Focus would potentially be lost on Years 5 and 6 • Disruption to pupils already in system.
<p>New High School only option - New school building for Berwick Academy only, could also include the closure of the academy and replace with a new free high school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children need something aspirational to work towards. • Improved perception of school • This is the model the community are expecting to hear about. • Needs new building • Could help with rebranding if a Free School. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need new building but this alone wouldn't address the issues of financial and education viability. • Won't change teaching and learning. • Model limited to only one school. • Chance to make a significant impact in the North could be missed. • How would SEND provision be improved in this model? • Would standards improve as a result? • Doesn't address financial issues of all schools • Missed opportunity to redesign curriculum to match national approaches • Majority of available funding spent on one school • Not clear how SEND offer would be improved
<p>New Multi Academy Trust option - set up MAT incorporating Berwick Academy, Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle schools and The Grove Special School. Berwick Middle site used for Years 5 and 6 provision. Tweedmouth Middle site used for KS3 provision (Years 7,8,9). Berwick Academy reduces age range becoming KS4 (Year 10 and 11). Special school on site of current Berwick Academy and review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAT could be applied to any model • Better transition • Single accountable body overall 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools not involved in a MAT may feel isolated. • Could inclusion of another secondary/high school be supportive? • More transitions • Loss of identify of individual schools • How would the community feel about all schools being academies? • Needs agreement across a number of Governing Bodies

<p>designation to include and ARP and SEMH provision.</p>		<p>to progress the process of academisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previous experience of MATS amongst some is negative, loss of autonomy of individual schools and governing bodies.
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In the light of the analysis of the feedback received from schools, it was clear at this stage that there was no clear favoured option within the partnership. However, it appeared that there was enough support for a number of the options to go forward for further discussion and development to the workshops planned with schools in September-October (see para. 15), which were:

- Campus model (as presented)
- Merge Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools and extend age up to age 16 (and potential variations)
- 2-tier reorganisation (and potential variations)
- Mixed economy of 2 and 3 tier – this new option emerged from the meetings with schools

Another emerging option from the meetings with schools was the potential for Wooler schools and Belford Primary to follow a different pathway, including becoming part of Alnwick Partnership.

Three of the original 6 options that kicked off the process were found to have so little support with the majority of the schools that it was suggested that they should not be taken any further in the discussion process; these were:

- Merge the Berwick and Tweedmouth Middle Schools with Berwick Academy to form a 9-18 academy
- Replace the High School building only
- Set up a Local Authority MAT to include all schools in the partnership

18. Berwick Community Survey September – October 2021

As agreed with the partnership, a survey targeted more widely at staff, governors, parents, pupils and anyone within the wider community with an interest was developed and launched in September 2021 via the Council's Citizen Space platform and 436 responses were received from consultees who identified against the following groups:

- Parents of children in a Berwick School – 226
- Staff member of a Berwick school - 107
- Resident/member of the community – 43
- Other - 30
- Governor in Berwick School – 26
- Parish Councillor in Berwick area - 4

It should be noted that the Berwick Community Survey took place prior to the Ofsted inspection of Berwick Academy of November 2021, where the school was judged to have moved to 'Requires Improvement, from the previous 'Inadequate'

judgement. The majority of the survey questions were set at a very general level requiring a simple Yes/No response (listed below) to introduce some of the issues facing the partnership. Table 6 sets out the questions and general responses.

Table 6

Question	Yes	No
Do you agree that outcomes could be improved across all schools in the Berwick Partnership?	89%	11%
Do you agree that the provision for all children with SEND who live in the area needs to be extended to ensure children and young people's needs are met locally?	94%	6%
Do you agree that solutions for ensuring viability of schools for the future needs to address how surplus places could be reduced?	83%	17%
Do you agree that any change to the school system ensures medium to long-term viability within a clear school pathway from beginning to end, and is supported and valued by the wider Berwick community for years to come?	83%	17%
Do you agree that it would be best value for public funding to be invested in a school system that is viable for the future and improved educational outcomes overall?	95%	5%

The survey also asked two questions that required a specific response:

- What changes, if any, do you think could be made to schools in the Berwick Partnership that could improve outcomes?

The main responses to this question were:

- Implement a 2-tier (primary/secondary) system; 3-tier doesn't match National Curriculum
 - Improve discipline and behaviour
 - Recruit and retain good teachers
 - Investment in school buildings
 - Put Berwick Academy back into LA control
 - Support the 3-tier system, issue is with KS4
 - Better and more facilities for children with SEND
 - Support outcomes at KS4 to improve
 - Share good practice; increase collaboration between schools
- What would be your priority for investment in education?

The main responses to this question were:

- Invest in buildings and facilities
- Invest in SEND facilities/new SEND school
- Set up 2-tier system
- Improve facilities in 3-tier system
- Invest in good staff for excellent teaching and learning
- Invest in education resources
- A new building for the academy

Lastly, the survey asked respondents to review the statements in Table 7 and to rank them in order of their priority – the statements are presented in order of overall ranking, with 1 being the most popular.

Table 7

Statement	Ranking
Improved outcomes for all children whatever their abilities	1
A system that attracts and retains the best teachers	2
School buildings that are appropriate for teaching and learning in the 21st Century	3
Improved and extended provision to meet the needs of children with SEND in the area covered by Berwick Partnership schools	4
Schools that have excellent facilities that are shared with the local community	5
All schools large enough to withstand fluctuations in pupil numbers	6

The full results and comments received in the survey are provided at Appendix 1 as a link.

19. Workshops to refine remaining options September-October 2021

As previously state, 4 potential options were taken forward for more in depth discussion and refinement at workshops held in Berwick and attended by NCC officers, headteachers, CE diocesan representative, and RSC and DfE representatives in September and October 2021, running in parallel with the Berwick Community Survey. The reasons why these discussions were taking place were also being refined to become the ‘Vision for Change’ for Berwick Partnership.

At the plenary meeting with the headteachers and Chairs of Governors in December 2021, the proposed Vision for Change and summaries of the further work on the relevant four options were shared, which were;

- **Vision for Change for Berwick (after refinement):**
 - **Improving Education Outcomes** at each phase to ensure every child meets their potential.
 - **Sustainability of Education** across the whole of the Berwick Partnership for the long term.
 - **Improving and extending SEND offer** for children and young people in Berwick Partnership so that their needs are met locally and travel times are reduced significantly.
 - **Engaging the Berwick Community** in the review process to build an understanding of all the issues and to grow support for any proposed

changes within schools in order that the community engages, supports and thrives.

- Ensure **schools work together** to further develop the partnership and create a sustainable model for the future.
- Underpinning the **best value for NCC capital Investment** as well as any wider investment opportunities which may arise.

- **Workshop 1 - Summary of views on Mixed Economy (3-tier/2-tier) model**

Overall, no support to progress this option for the following reasons:

- No clear pathway for parents, likely to create more pupil movement with children changing phases at different times.
- Choice, but also risks financial viability of schools.
- Heads identified a lot more weakness and threats
 - Confusing
 - Doesn't address falling rolls
 - Lack of curriculum continuity
 - Pupil mobility
 - Transition issues
 - Slow death of some schools
 - Lack of ability to future plan

- **Workshop 2 – Summary of views on the Campus Option (as presented)**

Overall, headteachers found this model did not address the issues facing the partnership across all schools and phases, although it had some merits.

Positives

- Improved transition and curriculum planning.
- Opportunity to create a legacy and community hub, enhanced post 16/18 offer.
- Questions raised regarding it being a two or three tier campus e.g. could be either?
- The model has been superseded by Three Bridges [as was] and Berwick Academy looking into becoming MAT.

Concerns

- Model doesn't address wider partnership issues with falling rolls.
- Would create an educationally and financially viable campus through economies of scale, but not for all phases.

However, it should be noted that a campus model is primarily a building solution and could work within a 3-tier or 2-tier structure. With an alternative group of schools, this solution could still emerge as an option from wider consultation.

- **Workshop 3 – Summary of views on the 2-tier (primary/secondary) Option**

Overall, there was enough support for this option among headteachers for it be considered as a relevant option for consultation with the wider public.

Positives

- May stop drift south and over border of pupils.
- National data suggests better outcomes under two tier system.
- Children choosing GCSE options with teachers who know them well and have trusted relationships.
- A better system for mainstream SEN and vulnerable pupils.
- Fits national curriculum and fewer transitions.
- School accountable for key stage.

Concerns

- Change of system won't change falling rolls.
- Fear of change.
- Transition from small rural school to secondary school could be daunting for some pupils/parents.
- Capacity of small schools to manage the change.
- Potential MAT between high and middle not known.
- Anxiety over job losses at all levels.

- **Workshop 4 – Summary of views on merging Berwick and Tweedmouth Middles and extending the age range to become 9-16 (version of 3-tier)**

Headteachers decided that this proposal was too divisive and would be unsuitable as a solution to resolve the issues facing the partnership for the following reasons:

- Creates competition (head-to-head battle for students) and could lead to potential closure of one or more schools as not sufficient pupils to make having two high schools financially viable.
- Nothing to add to the current offer and doesn't resolve current issues.
- Does not address the agreed vision.
- No support for first schools.
- Concern around community support for very large school.

20. Views of full Governing Bodies

At the meeting of 13 December 2021, the proposed Vision and summaries of the options refined in the workshops were presented to headteachers and Chairs of Governors. Schools were asked to share the vision and summaries of the options with their full Governing Bodies to ascertain whether the latter shared these views, and responses were requested by 21 January.

All but one of the Governing Bodies supported the Vision, although requests for some minor amendments were made to clarify meaning and intent.

Feedback from Governing Bodies in relation to their assessment of headteachers' conclusions on the options reached at the workshops were as follows:

Option 1: Mixed Economy – All Governing Bodies (except 1 nil return) resoundingly rejected this as viable option to resolve the issues facing the partnership.

Option 2: Campus model - The majority of Governing Bodies were against this option for a variety of reasons including its limited impact on only those schools involved in the campus proposal. A minority saw some merit or were ambivalent as it would not affect them.

Option 3: 2-Tier – This option split the views of the Governing Bodies, with 9 schools in support, 4 against and 3 unsure or undecided.

Option 4: Merge Berwick and Tweedmouth Middles and extend age range to 16 – All Governing Bodies supported the headteachers assessment of this model and were against it for a number of reasons, including setting schools up in direct competition, lack of fit with the Vision for Berwick, and does not address the underlying issues facing the partnership.

In addition, there was a specific request from the Belford Governing Body to become part of the Alnwick Partnership as it is already organised as a primary school, while the Governing Body of Wooler and Glendale raised their continuing concerns of being located in Berwick Partnership but impacted by the 2-tier structure in Alnwick. The need to address additional provision for students with SEND also featured in the comments.

21. Recommended Next Steps

In summary, the work carried out with the Headteachers and Governing Bodies of Berwick Partnership, and the results of the Berwick Community Survey, it appears that there are just two favoured options for organisational structure. These are the continuation of the current 3-tier system, albeit with some changes to address falling pupil numbers, educational standards and investment in buildings and whole partnership reorganisation to the 2-tier (primary/secondary) system to include relevant proposals to address the same issues.

Another issue that has arisen through this work is the question of whether Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools should remain within the Berwick Partnership and in what circumstances (e.g. under reorganisation to 2-tier) or whether it would be more appropriate for the schools to become part of the Alnwick Partnership to match the flow of pupils at the secondary phase.

Therefore, Cabinet is recommended to approve a period of pre-consultation with schools, staff, parents and the wider community to establish whether specific proposals for individual schools should be brought forward within a 3-tier structure or a 2-tier structure and linked to this provision for SEND, Early Years and Post-16 and Post-18 in the partnership. Cabinet is also recommended to approve the inclusion of a question to ascertain views on the future of Belford Primary, Wooler First and Glendale Middle Schools in relation to their inclusion in Berwick or Alnwick Partnership.

IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	The proposed planned first stage of informal consultation is consistent with the Council's Corporate aim 'Living, Learning - We will ensure the best education standards for our children and young people.'
Finance and value for money	The wider principles of financial and educational viability and sustainability of schools in the Berwick Partnership will be considered as part of the first stage of consultation.
Legal	<p>The manner and format of informal consultation on school structures is not prescribed, although DfE guidelines recommend a minimum period of 6 weeks of consultation and the Council has a tried and tested robust process for carrying out such consultation. Consultation should be in line with the guiding principles set out in <i>R v London Borough of Brent, ex p Gunning [1985] LGR 168</i>, frequently referred to as "the Gunning principles":</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consultation must be at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage. • The proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response. Those consulted should be aware of the criteria that will be applied when considering proposals and which factors will be considered decisive or of substantial importance at the end of the problem • Adequate time must be given for consideration and response. • The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising any statutory proposals.
Procurement	No implications
Human Resources:	There would be no direct HR implications as a result of carrying out stage 1 informal consultation. Should stage 2 informal consultation be approved at a later stage, some HR implications may arise.
Property	Not applicable at stage 1 of informal consultation.
Equalities (Impact Assessment attached) No	An Equalities Impact Assessment is not relevant to Stage 1 of informal consultation as it relates to general principles. Should there be approval for a stage 2 of informal consultation which would look at specific proposals for individual schools, an EIA would be completed to reflect the outcomes of such consultation.
Risk Assessment	A full risk assessment would be carried out should Stage 2 of informal consultation be approved at a later date.

Crime & Disorder	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
Customer Considerations:	The proposal set out in this report is based upon a desire to improve outcomes for current and future children and young people and their families in the Berwick Partnership area.
Carbon Reduction	At this stage, it is not envisaged that the processes set out within this report will have any impact, positive or negative, on carbon reduction
Consultation	This report has been considered by the Executive Director for Adult Social Care and Children's Services and the Member for Children's Services
Wards	Berwick East, Berwick North, Berwick West with Ord, Norham and Islandshires, Wooler and Bamburgh.

Background Papers

None applicable

Report Sign Off

	Full Name
Service Director Finance & Deputy S151 Officer	Alison Elsdon
Monitoring Officer/Legal clearance	Suki Binjal
Deputy Chief Executive	Cath McEvoy-Carr
Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Children's Services	Cath McEvoy-Carr
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Appendix 1 – Responses from Berwick Community Survey - [Berwick Wider Survey - Appendix 1.pdf](#)