

Consultation About Education in the West of Northumberland

JANUARY 2018



You are invited to give your views

NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

www.northumberland.gov.uk

Although the Council is pleased with the educational standards achieved by many schools and academies in the west of the county, there remains some uncertainty about the long term educational future. This is due to a variety of external factors beyond the direct control of the authority.

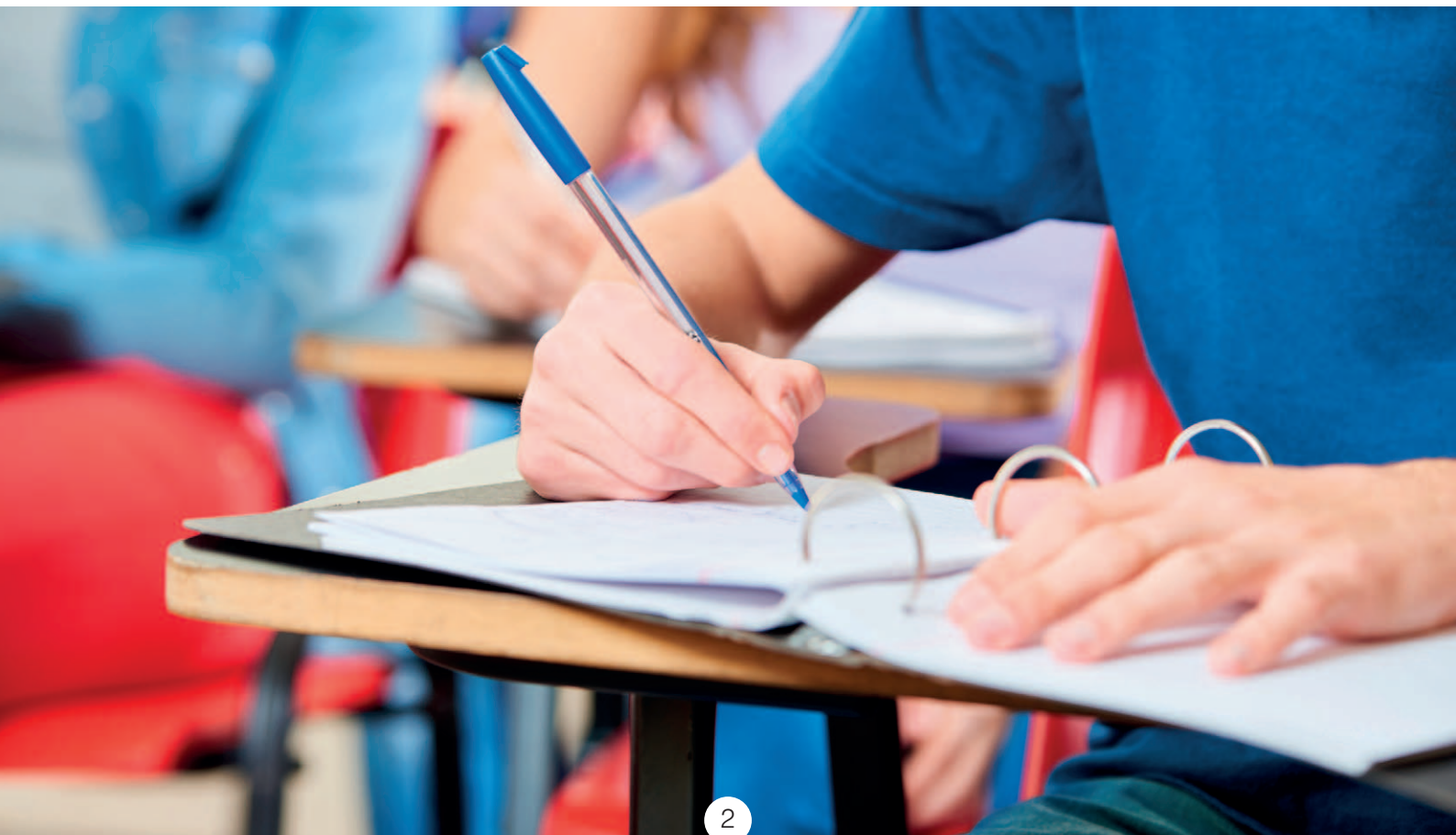
1. These external factors include:

- The withdrawal of the Bright Tribe Trust as the proposed sponsor of Haydon Bridge High School and the subsequent letter from the Regional Schools Commissioner asking the Local Authority to assess if the school is viable in the long term.
- The consultation of Hadrian Learning Trust (QEHS) on the potential for it to become an age 11-18 academy and the impact this will have on middle and first schools.
- The financial difficulties forecast by the vast majority of schools in the west.
- The introduction of the National Funding Formula, based upon assumptions of large pupil numbers in primary schools and an 11-18 model of secondary education.
- The significant over-capacity of school places in the west of the county.
- The need to ensure our school buildings are of top quality and invest in resources to meet the needs of the new curriculum.
- The need to provide excellent provision for the most vulnerable and those with special educational needs.

2. While these issues present considerable challenges to schools, academies and the Local Authority, they also bring exciting opportunities. Northumberland County Council is determined to support the schools and academies in the west to provide the very best education in state of the art facilities. It has indicated that potentially many millions of pounds could be invested - but first there is a need for a consensus to be found on how this once in a lifetime investment should be made.

Northumberland County Council is seeking your views, with the objective of developing options for the future.

This document sets out the issues and opportunities that the council feels should be considered as part of this process and it poses a number of questions. Initially it will launch the first stage of the consultation at meetings on 15, 18 and 24 January, and these will be followed by extensive discussion with the community later in the year.



Haydon Bridge High School

3. Haydon Bridge High School (HBHS) was inspected by Ofsted in December 2014 and was judged to be inadequate and placed in Special Measures. While the Local Authority had intervened earlier in 2014 to raise standards and replaced the governing body with an interim executive board (IEB), the Ofsted inspection took place before the IEB could have any significant impact.

The law states that schools in Special Measures should become academies, or be considered for closure, therefore the Bright Tribe Academy Trust were identified as a preferred sponsor by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and academy orders were served on the school.

However, the conversion process to become part of Bright Tribe Trust was very protracted.

In November 2017, Bright Tribe announced their withdrawal as a sponsor of HBHS on the basis that, in its view, the school is no longer financially or educationally viable. No other academy sponsor has been willing to take on the school due to the financial risks and educational challenges of running the school.

Currently there is Secretary of State appointed IEB responsible for the governance of the school. The Local Authority has applied to re-gain control of the school once again via its own IEB.

The RSC reached the conclusion that they require the council to carry out a viability assessment, as the first step, towards directing the closure of the school.

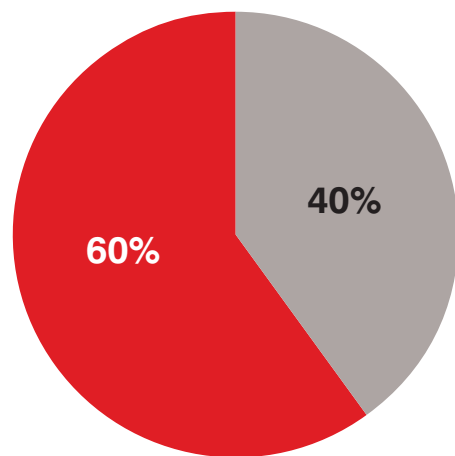
4. Capacity and Surplus Places

When it was established HBHS had the capacity to educate 904 students within its buildings. Only 361 students (including 6th Form) were on roll at the school in October 2017.

The school struggles to recruit sufficient pupils to fill a single class of 30 in each of years 7 and 9. So far for 2018, there have only been 23 applications for a place in Year 7 and just 14 for year 9.

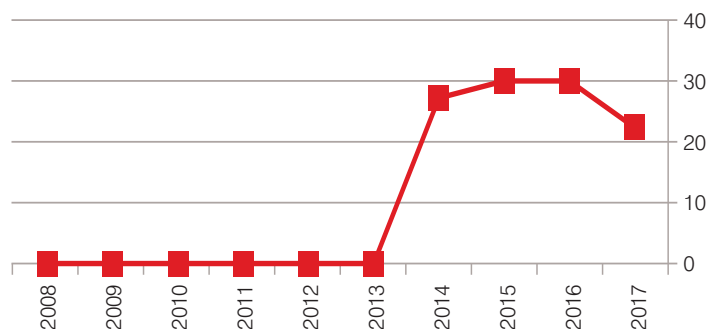
Haydon Bridge High School

■ Percentage of Surplus Places
■ Attending



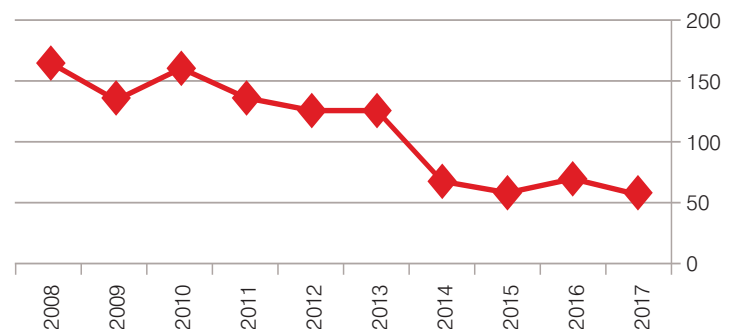
Haydon Bridge High School

■ First Preferences Y7



Haydon Bridge High School

◆ First Preferences Y9

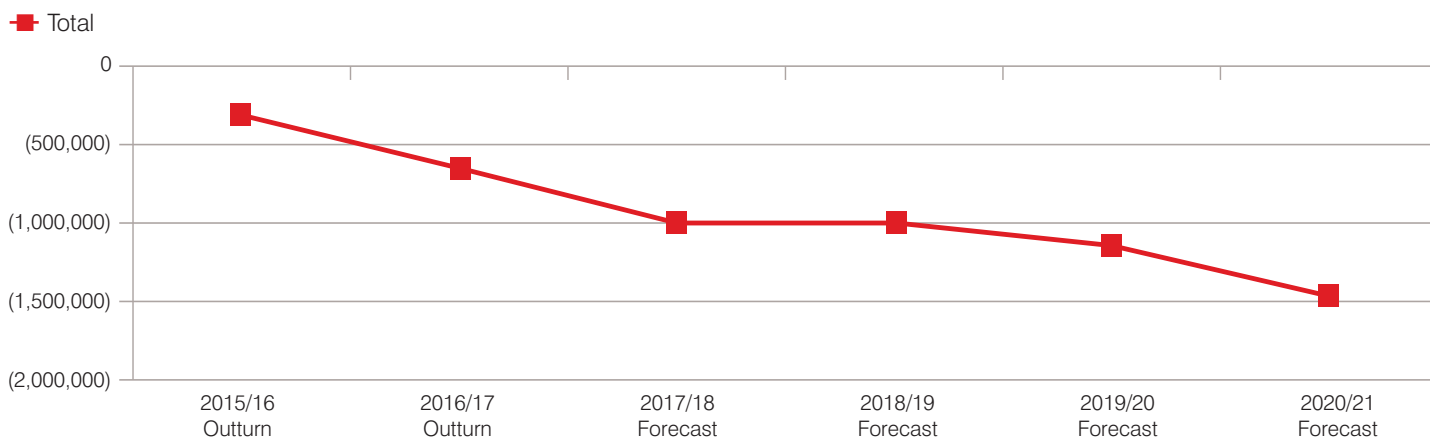


While these issues present considerable challenges to schools, academies and the Local Authority, they also bring exciting opportunities.

5. Finance and budgets

As a result of the small numbers of pupils and its required staffing levels, HBHS is currently running with a budget deficit of around £641,000 per annum. If a secondary school/academy is to remain in Haydon Bridge and is required to deliver a full secondary school national curriculum that includes Key Stages 3, 4 and 5, then it will need to employ sufficiently qualified and experienced staff and have appropriate specialist resources. Given current and projected pupil numbers, and the impact this has on the funding received from central government, this would mean the school would run at a very significant deficit and would have to be subsidised from Council taxpayers money each year.

Haydon Bridge High School



Brackets indicate deficit

6. Many parents in the catchment area already choose to send their children to QEHS; current data indicates there are 239 students, including sixth form, living in the HBHS catchment are on roll at QEHS. Based on Year 9 to Year 11 students only, this means around 38% of families within the HBHS catchment choose to send their children to QEHS. Parents living in the HBHS catchment area who choose to send their children to QEHS are not eligible for free transport unless QEHS is their nearest school.



7. Potential Options for Haydon Bridge High School

If the school remains open, unless a new sponsor is found the RSC may direct the authority to close the school.

If the HBHS site is to remain open and operate as it does currently, the council would have to provide capital investment in the region of £1.5m to reduce the number of empty or unused buildings and address the building condition issues.

There are limited potential options for an educational presence to be maintained in Haydon Bridge as follows:

- Removal of the sixth form at Haydon Bridge and the resulting expansion of the Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS) sixth form offer.
- The Year 9, 10 and 11 curriculum offer at Haydon Bridge could become more vocationally focussed and offered as an alternative to the more academic model offered at QEHS.
- The establishment of an all-through school on the site, with pupils from early years through to Year 11.
- Continue the school as it is now but with a very large annual subsidy from the Local Authority.

Capacity and Surplus Places

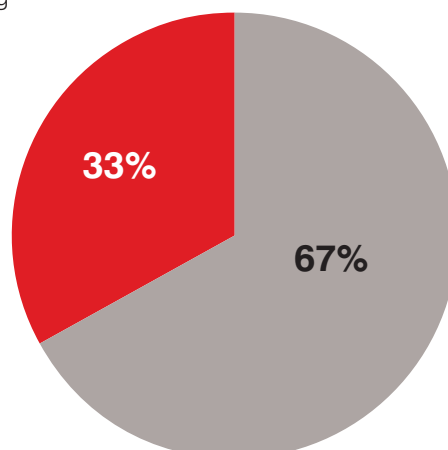
8. The 'net capacity' of a school is a calculation derived from the number of work spaces and the size of the school building. A maximum and minimum number of places are calculated and a net capacity somewhere between this range is allocated. In the past when rolls in schools were larger, particularly in rural areas, the net capacity would have been a close match to the summation of the Planned Admission Number (PAN) in each year group of a school. However, Planned Admission Numbers are based on the number of children within a school's catchment area in order to assist schools in staffing appropriately and over the years, as populations have fallen PANs have also reduced. **Therefore, there can often be a significant difference between the total number of pupils a school is able to have on roll based on its PAN and the actual size of the school buildings.**

In the west of the county, there is significant overcapacity in terms of school places. In total, there are 6,942 places available in schools in the Hexham and Haydon Bridge Partnerships, with 4,896 pupils on roll in those schools. This represents 30% surplus places across the combined partnerships.

While the charts opposite provide the overall picture at partnership level, there is considerable variation between individual schools within this data. **In the light of the level of surplus places across both partnerships of schools, the financial positions of all schools are affected. Put simply if two small unviable schools merge they create one larger viable school.**

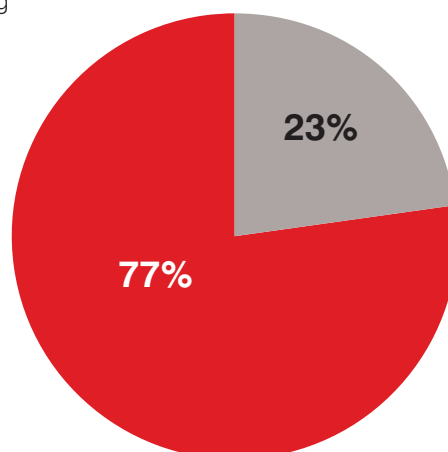
Haydon Bridge Partnership

■ Percentage of Surplus Places
■ Attending



Hexham Partnership

■ Percentage of Surplus Places
■ Attending



In total, there are 6,942 places available in schools in the Hexham and Haydon Bridge Partnerships, with 4,896 pupils on roll in those schools.

Financial Challenges and opportunities to invest

9. HAYDON BRIDGE PARTNERSHIP

In the Haydon Bridge partnership of schools there are 13 maintained schools of which 10 are predicting a financial deficit by 2021 based on latest information they have provided to the council from indicative budget meetings, with an estimated deficit for the partnership as a whole of -£2,187,029. *Note:* The council holds no financial information for Haltwhistle Upper and Lower academies; however the council is aware that there is significant spare capacity in terms of pupil numbers.

HAYDON BRIDGE PARTNERSHIP - SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES DATA

School	Distance to Nearest School (miles)	Predicted financial deficit by 2021 (Y or N)
Haydon Bridge High	6	Y
Haltwhistle Upper	16	Academy
Bellingham Middle	16.1	Y
Bellingham First	5.6	Y
Kielder First	13.8	Y
Otterburn First	5.8	Y
West Woodburn First	5.8	Y
Greenhaugh First	5	Y
Wark First	4.8	Y
Greenhead Primary	3.4	Y
Haltwhistle Lower	4	Academy
Shaftoe Trust Primary	3.8	N
Henshaw Primary	4	N
Whitfield Primary	5.3	Academy
Allendale Primary	5.3	Y
Newbrough Primary *	3.8	N

* Updated December 2017

10. HEXHAM PARTNERSHIP

In the Hexham partnership of schools there are 14 maintained schools of which 9 are predicted to be in a financial deficit by 2021 based on the latest information from indicative budget meetings, with an estimated deficit for the partnership as a whole of -£588,818. There are also 2 academies in the partnership for which the Local Authority do not hold budget information. The council understands the QEHS has a budget deficit of £94,287 for 2015/16, the previous year the school had a budget deficit of £113,204, which again may be attributed to a result of spare capacity and costly buildings.

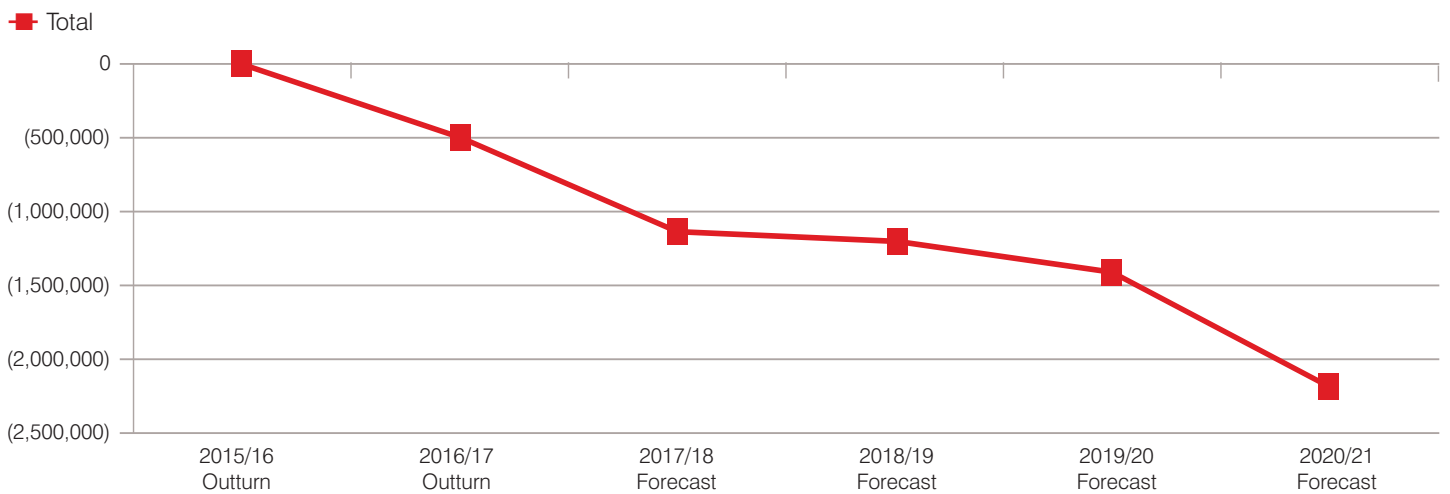
HEXHAM PARTNERSHIP - SCHOOLS AND ACADEMIES DATA

School	Distance to Nearest School (miles)	Predicted financial deficit by 2021 (Y or N)
Queen Elizabeth High	6	Academy
Hexham Middle	1.2	Academy
St Joseph's RC Middle	1.2	Y
Corbridge Middle	4	Y
Whittonstall First	5.7	N
The Sele First *	1	N
Slaley First	3.5	N
Hexham First	1	Y
Acomb First	1.9	Y
Beaufront First	1.9	Y
St Mary's RC First	1	Y
Corbridge CE First	2.8	Y
Chollerton First	3.6	N
Whitley Chapel First	4	N
Humshaugh First	3.5	Y
Broomhaugh First	4.6	Y

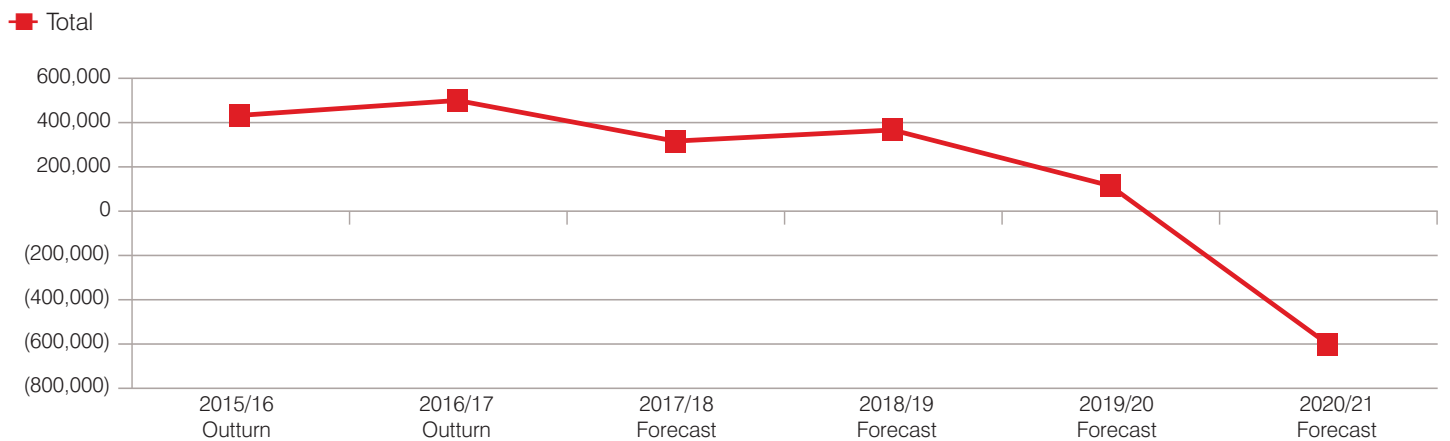
* Updated December 2017



Haydon Bridge Partnership



Hexham Partnership



Brackets indicate deficit



11. HADRIAN LEARNING TRUST

The Hadrian Trust consists of QEHS and Hexham Middle School. The Trust believes that a reorganisation to an 11-18 structure is necessary for its multi-academy trust to be financially and educationally viable and has informally consulted schools in the Hexham Partnership.

The council has asked the Trust to provide open access to information about the reasons for its desire to become 11-18 – both educationally and financially.

12. NATIONAL FUNDING FORMULA

The new National Funding Formula (NFF) will begin to be implemented from April 2018. The proposal is that from April 2020 the DfE will move to a 'hard formula' in which the funding formula factor values will be set by the DfE. This will be subject to agreement in the next Comprehensive Spending Review. Whatever the formula, it is estimated that 72% of a schools budget is simply related to the numbers of pupils it has. A school with 220 pupils gets approximately twice the funding of a school with 110. But the school with 110 still has to meet national curriculum requirements. The formula is based upon a primary secondary model because of the 150 local authorities only about 6 have significant numbers of middle schools.

In considering the financial and structural implications for schools set out above, the council would like your views on whether you believe that the current structure and number of schools will remain financially and educationally viable.

An exciting opportunity to update the schools estate in Haydon Bridge and Hexham Partnerships?

13. Several school and academy buildings in the west of the county are in need of significant capital investment, particularly at QEHS, which has already been identified as a national priority for investment and is included in the Priority School Building Programme. The council's data shows that the combined backlog of maintenance work in schools in the Haydon Bridge and Hexham Partnerships amounts to approximately £17.85 million; this figure does not include work needing to be carried out at the faith schools in the partnerships, which fall under the responsibility of the relevant dioceses. Over half of this amount relates to work required at Haydon Bridge High School alone. With an annual central government allocation of only around £3 million it would take 6 years to carry out this backlog work, and then only if all centrally allocated money for Northumberland was spent on schools in the west.

The consultation provides an exciting opportunity not only to quickly address the issues in the Haydon Bridge and Hexham Partnerships, but also an opportunity to invest in state of the art school resources. This would require a separate capital investment programme into the schools from the council core budget, potentially linked with a programme of rationalisation of school buildings. Such money cannot simply be spend on subsidising existing schools because it relies upon a rationalisation and investment process.

The council would like you to consider if capital investment could be sought and allocated.



Proposed Local Authority Led Multi-Academy Trust

14. Another potential innovation for the county is whether the Local Authority and its partners should attempt to establish a 'spin-off' Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). One of the prime purposes of such a trust would be to enable small schools to build sufficient capacity to remain both financially and educationally viable.

This idea would require schools to buy-in to the idea and become part of the MAT, if there was no interest from schools then the idea would not be viable and the authority would not progress it further.

15. If there was sufficient interest then an application would be made to the Secretary of State, via the RSC. Such a MAT may involve partners from the Higher Education sector, NHS, the wider community and industry. Initially a pilot MAT would be established, involving a small group of good and outstanding schools from a variety of phases. Subsequently schools would be invited to join the MAT. It is uncertain how quickly the MAT could be established or whether the DfE would accept such a proposal.

You are invited to comment on whether you believe a local authority MAT would be beneficial to schools in the county, in particular in the west.

How will your views be gathered?

16. The council will be gathering the feedback you provide at the various meetings. **The first phase of consultation is open until midnight on 26 January 2018.**

What happens to the feedback from this first phase of consultation and what are the next steps?

17. Following the review of all feedback received from consultees, officers will develop a number of options based upon the views provided. These will be used as a format to consult with the wider community in the second phase of consultation. This consultation will begin on **5 February for six weeks until 9 April 2018.** Following this element of consultation, officers will prepare a report on the outcomes of consultation with recommendations for the Council's cabinet to consider in early **May.**

