

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **CABINET**

At a meeting of the **Cabinet** held at County Hall, Morpeth on Tuesday 12 January 2016 at 10.00 am.

### **PRESENT**

Councillor J. Davey  
(Leader of the County Council in the Chair)

### **CABINET MEMBERS**

Arckless, G.R.  
Dungworth, S.  
Hepple, A.  
Kelly, P.

Ledger, D.  
Reid, J.  
Swithenbank, I.C.F.  
Tyler, V.

### **OTHER COUNCILLORS**

Dickinson, S. J.  
Graham, K.O.  
Grimshaw, L.

Sambrook, A.G.  
Simpson, E.  
Wallace, A.

### **OFFICERS**

Aviston, S.  
Hadfield, K.  
Henry, L.  
Johnson, A.  
Lally, D.  
Mason, S.  
Young, J.

Capital Projects Officer  
Committee Services Manager  
Legal Services Manager  
Director of Learning and Skills  
Deputy Chief Executive and DCS  
Chief Executive  
Housing Services Manager

Around 8 members of the press and public, and a number of school representatives were also in attendance.

### **59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor Jackson.

## 60. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on Tuesday 8 December 2015, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

## 61. REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICE

### Proposals for Reorganisation of the Alnwick Partnership

The report provided an analysis of the representations received from interested parties relating to the linked proposals to close Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne, Seahouses and St Paul's RC VA Middle Schools and to extend the age ranges of Seahouses, Swarland, Branton, Hipsburn, Shilbottle, and Swansfield Park First Schools and The Duchess's Community High School during the four week statutory period that began on 12 November 2015.

The report requested Cabinet to approve the closure of Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne, Seahouses and St Paul's RC VA Middle Schools with effect from 31 August 2017 and to approve the extension of the age ranges of Seahouses, Swarland, Branton, Hipsburn, Shilbottle, and Swansfield Park First Schools from age 2 - 9 (or 4 - 9) first schools to age 2 – 11 (or 4 – 11) primary schools with effect from 1 September 2016 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix A, along with the report of the FACS OSC on this matter circulated at the meeting).

The Leader made some introductory remarks to outline the procedure which would be followed at the meeting, which would include hearing from those school representatives who had made representations to the statutory notice, the Family and Children's Services OSC and the portfolio holder.

Members would be able to ask questions, legal advice would be provided and members would debate the proposals and come to a decision. Members would then adjourn to prepare a written record of the decision and the reasons for it, which Cabinet would be asked to confirm.

Councillor Arckless reminded members that this process had been initiated by the schools and that a very extensive consultation exercise had been undertaken, resulting in a strong consensus of opinion in favour of the proposals in front of members today for final decision.

He thanked the officers, governing bodies and staff for the huge effort which had gone into the process, and highlighted the positive responses to the statutory notice detailed in the report.

Mrs Lally also referred to the extensive consultation undertaken with schools and partners involving numerous meetings to ensure that all views had been heard. This had resulted in the best options which were now before members. The proposals also provided the opportunity for capital resource investment into schools, which should lead to an improvement in standards across the system.

**Mr B. Grisdale**, Vice Chair of Swansfield Park Governing Body thanked officers for their work and support. He very much commended the proposals, and read from a statement included on the school's website detailing the school's position, which was very much in support of primary school status on the existing site. His personal view, having been involved in many schools in the County, was that two tier education was best for pupils and this was shared by his governing body.

**Ms Amelia Hunter**, Hipsburn First School Chair of Governors, gave thanks for the nature and level of the consultation and fully supported the proposals. She stressed the need for appropriate investment into the buildings to ensure they were up to scratch in the long term, and also the need for proper support for the current year 4 pupils in their move across the system from primary to secondary. **Ms D. Charlton**, headteacher, supported these remarks and thanked the Council for its support.

Councillor Arckless welcomed the report from FACS OSC, which had fully supported the recommendations in the report, and he acknowledged a couple of important points:-

- The impact of the change on pupils needed to be carefully considered and appropriate support provided.
- The concerns around staffing, particularly middle school staff, needed to be addressed and whilst a staffing protocol would be implemented, the support of governing bodies would be needed in the process. He reassured members that officers were keen to work with schools to secure the best outcomes for staff.

Councillor Kelly queried the progress made with regard to Embleton and Branton First Schools, which had been proposed for closure earlier in the consultation process, and whether the initial momentum had been maintained.

Councillor Arckless referred to the element of risk for all small primaries which had been acknowledged at the 10 November 2015 Cabinet meeting, but the schools had put forward a very strong case for retention. He was as confident as he could be that they would be able to meet their challenges, with support from their governing bodies and from the Authority, though he could not of course give any guarantees. He reiterated the crucial issue of parental choice – parents had to send their children to local schools to make them viable.

Mr Henry then provided members with the necessary legal advice, covering statutory guidance, the statutory process, the extension of the age range process, the factors to be taken into account in considering the proposals and the options available in reaching a decision. He reminded members that they were being asked to approve the proposals subject to the granting of planning permission by 31 August 2016 for the building works at The Duchess's Community High School, Swansfield Park, Shilbottle, Hipsburn, Swarland and Ellingham CE First Schools.

Councillor Arckless then moved the recommendations as detailed on pages 1-2 of the report, reminding members that they were conditional upon the granting of planning permission, also as detailed in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Ledger.

On being put to the vote there voted **FOR: 9; AGAINST: 0, ABSTENTIONS: 0.**

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the following be noted:
  - the Council's linked proposal to close Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne, and Seahouses Middle Schools with effect from 31 August 2017;
  - the linked proposal of the Governing Body of St Paul's Catholic Schools Federation to close St Paul's RC VA Middle School, Alnwick with effect from 31 August 2017;
  - the Council's linked proposal to extend the age ranges of Seahouses, Swarland, Branton, Hipsburn, Shilbottle, and Swansfield Park First Schools with effect from 1 September 2016 and The Duchess's Community High School with effect from 1 September 2017;
  - the responses to the Statutory Proposals and the commentary contained within this report;
- (b) the impact and implications of the linked proposals as set out in the Statutory Proposal for Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne, and Seahouses Middle Schools, the Statutory Proposal for St Paul's RC VA Middle School, Alnwick and the Statutory Proposal for Seahouses, Swarland, Branton, Hipsburn, Shilbottle, and Swansfield Park First Schools included with the background papers to the report be noted
- (c) it be noted that either all of the linked proposals should be implemented or none should be implemented;
- (d) it be noted that the Governing Bodies of St Paul's RC VA, Ellingham CE, St Michael's CE, Whittingham CE, Felton CE, Longhoughton CE and Embleton Vincent Edwards CE First Schools have approved the extension of the age ranges of their schools with effect from 1 September 2016 conditional upon the decision of Cabinet to close Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne, Seahouses and St Paul's RC VA Middle Schools, and to extend the age ranges of Seahouses, Swarland, Branton, Hipsburn, Shilbottle, and Swansfield Park First Schools and The Duchess's Community High School;
- (e) the implications for Home to School Transport set out in the report be noted;
- (f) in the light of all the information in the report and taking into account the latest Statutory Guidance from the DfE attached to the report at Appendix 3, it be agreed to:
  - i) approve the Council's linked proposal to close Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne and Seahouses Middle Schools with effect from 31 August 2017; and
  - ii) approve the linked proposal of the Governing Body of the St. Paul's Catholic Schools Federation to close St Paul's RC VA Middle School, Alnwick with effect from 31 August 2017; and
  - iii) approve the Council's linked proposal to extend the age range of Swansfield Park and Hipsburn First Schools from age 2-9 to age 2-11 with effect from 1 September 2016; and
  - (iii) approve the Council's linked proposal to extend the age range of Seahouses, Shilbottle, Swarland and Branton First Schools from age 4-9 to age 4-11 with effect from 1 September 2016; and

- (iv) approve the Council's linked proposal to extend the age range of Alnwick The Duchess's Community High School from age 13-18 to age 11-18 with effect from 1 September 2017; and
- (v) agree to allocate £4.5m from the Medium Term Plan, £10.1m and £10.1m from the School's Capital Investment Programme to accommodate the capital costs outlined in this report; and
- (vi) approve the implementation of the preferred building options set out in paragraph 26 of this report

all of the above conditional upon the granting of planning permission by 31 August 2016 in relation to the building works at The Duchess's Community High School, Swansfield Park, Shilbottle, Hipsburn, Swarland and Ellingham CE First Schools; and

- (g) the report of the Family and Children's Services OSC be noted.

The meeting then adjourned at 10:40 am so the decision, and the reasons for it, could be confirmed. On the meeting reconvening at 10:57 am, the Leader read out the following statement:-

The proposals to close Alnwick The Duke's, Alnwick Lindisfarne, Seahouses and St Paul's RCVA Middle Schools and to extend the age ranges of The Duchess's Community High School and Seahouses, Branton, Swarland, Swansfield Park, Hipsburn and Shilbottle First Schools should be adopted and implemented for the following reasons:-

1. Schools in the Alnwick Partnership are in favour of the reorganisation proposal in the belief that it will improve educational outcomes and this view is supported by the Council.
2. The Governing Bodies of the Church schools within the Alnwick Partnership have conditionally approved the extension of the age ranges of their first schools subject to the decision of the Council to approve the reorganisation of the 10 community schools.
3. Linked to the above, in supporting the wishes of schools to reorganise, the Council will remove the risk of fragmentation of the educational system across the Alnwick Partnership and will retain clear pathways of progression for pupils for the benefit of them and their parents.
4. There is sufficient capacity in the continuing schools in the partnership to provide suitable places for pupils that would otherwise have attended the four middle schools in the partnership. While there would be increased transport times for some pupils, the length of journeys would continue to be within Government guidelines.
5. While there would be an impact on denominational provision with regard to the removal of Roman Catholic educational provision in the partnership at Years 7 and 8, those parents who would wish their child to continue their education within a Roman Catholic setting would be able to apply for a place at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy in Bedlington which provides education from Year 7 onwards.

6. Through consultation, it has become evident that a significant number of responders were in favour of reorganisation only subject to Year 7 and 8 students being educated together with the other year groups on a single site.

7. To support reorganisation of the Alnwick Partnership to a primary/secondary structure, between £11.5 and £14.9m would be invested in relevant school buildings across the partnership.

The consultation on this proposal has been very extensive, reasonable and robust.

Councillor Dungworth expressed her thanks to Councillor Arckless for the significant amount of work he had put into this particular issue.

## **62. REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

### **Homelessness Strategy**

The report sought approval of the Northumberland Homelessness Strategy and associated Action Plan for 2016-2021 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix B, along with the report of the Economic Growth and Corporate Services OSC).

Councillor Wallace confirmed she had nothing to add to the report of the Economic Growth and Corporate Services OSC.

Councillor Hepple praised the strategy which correctly focussed on prevention (a key priority for the Council), and encouraged good partnership working.

There were challenges in implementing the strategy to be addressed stemming from current government policy. The 1% reduction in council rents would mean the loss of £164m from the Council's housing business plan. In addition, private sector rents were increasing – estimated at around 5%-8% by 2020 which would create even more homelessness and represented an all-out assault on social housing and its tenants. He moved the report's recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Reid.

### **RESOLVED** that:-

- (a) the Northumberland Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan (2016-2021); be approved;
- (b) Council be recommended to adopt and incorporate the Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan (2016-2021) into the Council's policy framework; and
- (c) the report of the Economic Growth and Corporate Services OSC be noted.

## 63. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF LOCAL SERVICES AND HOUSING

### Asylum Seeker and Refugee Dispersal

The report updated members on activity regarding the Government's request that asylum seeker and refugee dispersal be widened to consider areas where dispersal had not currently taking place, which included Northumberland (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix C, along with the report of the Economic Growth and Corporate Services OSC). A letter from Morpeth Town Council in support of asylum seeker initiatives was circulated (copy attached to the signed minutes).

Councillor Hepple introduced the report and referred to two government schemes – one for vulnerable Syrian refugees which had funding attached, and one more general which did not. He stressed to members that Northumberland had not refused to take asylum seekers, but G4S had not been able to identify any suitable accommodation in the County to date. It was important for members to realise that the provision of accommodation was not the only part of the solution; the location of it and the infrastructure support available were also crucial to success, and the Authority would need to work in partnership with other agencies to identify what support could be provided and at what cost. The establishment of a steering group would begin that task.

Councillor Wallace confirmed she had nothing to add to the report of the Economic Growth and Corporate Services OSC.

A number of member comments were made as follows:-

- Councillor Dungworth supported the proposals in the report and agreed that the issue was not just about housing. The far wider implications for children's services and adult services, and the differing assimilation needs of different groups, also had to be considered. The geography of the County made the issue a challenge but she supported the idea of a multi-agency group and suggested that both she and Councillor Arkless should be included on it.
- Councillor Reid queried which other Authorities in the region had not been classed as asylum dispersal areas and echoed the comments already made about supporting the proposals. He had previous experience of a similar issue with the settlement of Vietnamese boat people, and he agreed that integration was the crucial issue. It was essential that there was sufficient support and opportunities for refugees to encourage them to assimilate into a community and agreed it was not just about housing. In response to his query, members were advised that Durham and Darlington were the other Authorities involved.
- Councillor Ledger agreed on the need to create a support network and felt sure that local communities would be very welcoming.
- Councillor Arkless welcomed the support from Morpeth Town Council and advised that he had been approached by his own constituents who wanted to help. There were challenges to be met, many of which would be new to the Authority, and he supported the formation of a cross party working group to ensure that the right and sensible approach was taken.
- Councillor Tyler fully supported the proposals and agreed the Authority needed to be involved in a way which was best for the refugees. She

commented that there could be some educational or special educational needs for adults as well as children, particularly with learning English.

- Councillor Swithenbank welcomed the report and the support expressed. He personally would not see it as failure if families moved out of the area as it would show they had fully settled into the country.
- Councillor Dickinson welcomed the report but queried the level of financial support available after the initial first year pledged by the government as significant financial support would be needed far beyond that. Councillor Dungworth felt that members needed to make a decision on what would work for Northumberland, and put aside the financial aspect. The funding provided would not cover actual costs in any event so the Cabinet's decision had to ignore that factor. Julie Young confirmed the funding situation for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (SVPRS) which was for one year. However, DCLG had indicated that they would negotiate on year two, though this was not guaranteed.

Councillor Hepple moved, duly seconded, that support be given in principle for the dispersal of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, including those identified under the SVPRS and the formation of a multi-agency steering group, subject to effective and adequate support being available. On this being put to the vote there voted **FOR: 9; AGAINST: 0, ABSTENTIONS: 0.**

It was therefore **RESOLVED:-**

- (a) that support be given in principle for the dispersal of Asylum Seekers and Refugees, including those identified under the SVPRS and the formation of a multi-agency steering group, subject to effective and adequate support being available; and
- (b) the report of the Economic Growth and Corporate Services OSC be noted.

#### **64. AREA COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

Cabinet was asked to consider feedback from recent Area Committee meetings (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix D).

Councillor Dungworth commented that her apologies had not been recorded.

**RESOLVED** that the report be received.

#### **65. CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAMME CABINET ADVISORY GROUP**

Cabinet was asked to receive the notes of the Capital Works Programme CAG held on 10 December 2015, and to agree all of the recommendations highlighted within Minute No.3 (copy attached to the signed minutes as Appendix E).

**RESOLVED** that the notes be received, and the recommendations detailed within Minute No. 3 be approved.



**CHAIR** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_