NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

STATUTORY PROPOSAL FOR THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF
ST MARY’S CE MIDDLE SCHOOL, BELFORD AND THE EXTENSION OF THE AGE
RANGE OF BELFORD FIRST SCHOOL

The following proposals fall into two categories.

Discontinuance
In accordance with section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, this proposal sets out the intention of Northumberland County Council, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF to discontinue the following school;

- St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford, Williams Way, Belford, Northumberland, NE70 7NX, with effect from 31 August 2018.

St Mary’s Church of England Middle School is a local authority maintained aided middle school.

Change of age range
In order to facilitate the above proposal, it is linked to the following proposal. In accordance with Section 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Northumberland County Council intends to make the following prescribed alterations to the school below:

- Belford First School, West Street, Belford, Northumberland, NE70 7QF by changing the age range of the school from an age 2 to 9 first school to an age 2 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2018.

Belford First School is a local authority maintained community school.

Contact Details
Copies of this this proposal may be obtained from:
Northumberland County Council
County Hall
Morpeth
Northumberland
NE61 2EF

Or from the Council’s website at www.northumberland.gov.uk

Both schools named above form part of the Berwick Partnership of schools.

Implementation.
St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford is proposed to close with effect from 31 August 2018.

Belford First School is proposed to extend its age range to become an age 2 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2018.

Objectives and reason for closure of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford and extension of the age range of Belford First School
The objective of the above proposals are to:

- discontinue (close) St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford, Williams Way, Belford, Northumberland, NE70 7NX with effect from 31 August 2018;
- extend the age range of Belford First School, West Street, Belford, Northumberland, NE70 7QF with effect from 1 September 2018
Reasons for proposed closure of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford and extension of the age range of Belford First School:

The consultation on a proposal to close St Mary’s and extend the age range of Belford First School was brought forward as a result of the request of the Governing Bodies of St Mary’s CE Middle School and Belford First School and following a consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of St Mary’s CE Middle School from 25 January to 15 March 2017 on a stand-alone proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2017. The Governing Body had reluctantly initiated the consultation at that time on the basis that the school budget would be impacted by the continuing low pupil numbers over recent years, and in particular by the projected fall in pupil numbers at the school in September 2017 due to the transfer of a significant number of pupils transferring at the end of Years 6 and 7 to Years 7 and 8 in The Duchess High School. St Mary’s Church of England Middle School has for many years had around 75% take up of places available at the school.

The Governing Body believed that the school would be placed beyond financial viability and would not be able to continue to offer a broad and balanced curriculum to students on this basis. Furthermore, the school had received a letter from the Regional Schools Commissioner stating explaining that St Mary’s has been identified as a “coasting” school meaning that pupils’ academic performance has not improved in the past 3 years. In October 2017, there were only 40 pupils on roll at the school and only 13 pupils joined the school in Year 5. Furthermore, there were only 2 pupils in Year 7 and 4 pupils in Year 8 on roll at the October census. The capacity of the school is 120.

As a result of the request of the two Governing Bodies of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School and Belford First School, consultation on the proposals set out in this document was approved by the Council’s Cabinet on 12 September 2017. The results of consultation showed that the Governing Bodies of St Mary’s CE Middle and Belford First Schools, the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board and the majority of respondees to the consultation, including parents, all expressed support for the proposal to close St Mary’s and extend the age range of Belford First School. Although six alternative models or proposals were submitted for consideration during the consultation and considered by the Council’s Cabinet at their meeting on 12 December 2017, it was concluded that none were viable alternatives to the original proposals consulted upon i.e. to close St Mary’s Church of England Middle School and extend the age range of Belford First School. The alternative proposals are set out in the Report of the Interim Director of Children’s Services which can be accessed at http://committee.northumberland.gov.uk/Meeting.aspx?MeetID=7792

Pupil Numbers and Admissions

St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford
There are currently 40 pupils on roll at St Mary’s Church of England Middle School in Year 5 to Year 8.
The age range of the school is 9-13 and provides education to both boys and girls.
There are currently no pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs/Educational Health Care Plans enrolled at the school.

Belford First School
There are currently 57 pupils on roll at Belford First School in Reception to Year 4.
The age range of the school is 2-9 and provides education to both boys and girls.
There are currently no pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs/Educational Health Care Plans enrolled at the school.

Displaced Pupils
In accordance with section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Northumberland County Council intends to discontinue (close) the following schools with effect from 31 August 2018:

- St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford, Williams Way, Belford, Northumberland, NE70 7NX
To facilitate this, it is proposed that the following model be implemented in accordance with the following arrangements and timeline:

- **St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford**
  - **31 August 2018**
    - St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford would close on 31 August 2018;
  - **1 September 2018**
    - Pupils in Year 8 in St Mary’s Church of England Middle School in August 2018 would transfer as Year 9 as usual to a local high school according to parental preference;
    - Pupils in Year 6 and 7 in the middle school in August 2018 would transfer to join the Year 7 and 8 cohort at Berwick Middle School, as the new catchment school for pupils in Year 7 and 8 residing in the former St Mary’s Church of England Middle School catchment area, or to another school providing education in those year groups according to parental preference.
    - Pupils in Year 5 in the middle school in August 2018 would join the roll of Belford Primary School (as the new catchment school for pupils in Years 5 and 6 residing in the former St Mary’s Church of England Middle School catchment area) as the new Year 6, or would transfer to another school providing education in those year groups according to parental preference.

- **Belford First School**
  - **1 September 2018**
    - Belford First School would extend its age range to include Years 5 and 6 and becomes the catchment school for pupils in these year groups residing in the former St Mary’s Church of England catchment area.
    - Pupils in Year 5 in St Mary’s Church of England Middle School in August 2018 would join the roll of Belford Primary School (as the new catchment school) as the new Year 6 or to would transfer to another school providing education in this year group according to parental preference;
    - Pupils in Year 4 in Belford First School in August 2018 would remain in the school as the new Year 5 as it becomes Belford Primary School or would transfer to another school providing education in this year group according to parental preference.
  - **1 September 2019**
    - Pupils in Year 6 in Belford Primary School (as it would be) in August 2019 would transfer to join the Year 7 and 8 cohort at Berwick Middle School (as the catchment school) or to another school providing education in this year group according to parental preference.
    - Pupils in Year 5 in Belford Primary School in August 2019 would remain in the school as the new Year 6, or would transfer to another school providing education in this year group according to parental preference.

Belford First School is located 0.2 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School.

Berwick Middle School is located at Lovaine Terrace, Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Northumberland, TD15 1LA and is located 16.3 miles from Belford. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 residing in the former catchment area of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School may therefore have longer journeys to school.
Impact on the Community

There is no anticipated impact on the community as a result of this proposal as educational provision up to Year 6 would continue to be provided in Belford at Belford Primary School (as it would be). Berwick Middle School is proposed to become the catchment school for pupils in Years 7 and 8 from 1 September 2018, although parents would be able to apply for a place at any other school providing education in those year groups according to their preference.

Balance of denominational provision

There would be an impact on the balance of denominational provision within Belford as, with the closure of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, there would no longer be a school with a religious character in Belford providing education for pupils in Years 5 to 8. However, parents who would wish to have their children educated within a faith school would be able to apply for places at other local schools with a religious character.

The nearest school to Belford providing education in Years 5 and 6 with a religious character is Ellingham C of E VA Primary School, Ellingham, Chathill, Northumberland, NE67 5ET, which is 8.6 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford.

The nearest school to Belford providing education in Years 7 and 8 with a religious character is Dr. Thomlinson’s C Of E Middle School, Silverton Lane, Rothbury, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 7RJ, which is 27.7 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford.

Pupils who meet the eligibility criteria would be provided with free home to school transport on denominational grounds.

Rural Primary Schools

St Mary’s Church of England Middle School is a middle school, deemed secondary therefore in the opinion of Northumberland County Council it does not fall within the categorisation of a rural primary school as set out in Section 15 (4) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Belford First School is a designated rural primary school, listed on the Department for Education’s designated list of primary schools 2016.

Maintained nursery schools

There is no nursery provision at St Mary’s Church of England Middle School.

Belford First School has a maintained nursery with provision for children from the age of 2 to 4. This provision would not be affected by the implementation of the proposals set out in this document.

Provision for 16-19 year olds

N/A - There is no provision for students aged 16 to 19 in either St Mary’s Church of England Middle School or Belford First School.

Special educational provision

Provision for pupils with SEN is provided at Belford First School and Berwick Middle School.

- There are currently no pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs on roll at St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford.
- There are currently no pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs on roll at Belford First School.
### Travel

- **Transport** for all pupils affected by the proposed closure of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford and the extension of the age range of Belford First School should it be approved would be arranged in accordance with the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy.

- Pupils on roll at Belford First School transferring from Year 4 to Year 5 in September 2018 would remain in Belford First School as it extends its age range and becomes a primary status. There would be no increase to the length of the school journey for these pupils as a result of the implementation of this proposal.

- Pupils on roll at St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford transferring from Year 5 to Year 6 in September 2018 would transfer to the roll of Belford Primary School or to another school according to parental preference. There would be no increase to the length of the school journey for these pupils as a result of the implementation of this proposal as Belford Primary School (as it would be) is approximately 0.2 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School.

- Pupils on roll at St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford transferring from Years 6 and 7 to Years 7 and 8 in September 2018 would transfer to the roll of Berwick Middle School or to another school according to parental preference. Berwick Middle School is approximately 16.3 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford.

- Some pupils transferring from Years 6 and 7 into Years 7 and 8 at Berwick Middle School in September 2018 would have an extended journey length dependent on where they reside.

- Pupils transferring to Berwick Middle School from the school and those from low income backgrounds may be eligible to free Home to School Transport. Transport issues have been analysed and the change proposed would mean that on average secondary aged pupils from Belford village would spend approximately 25 minutes each way travelling to and from school, subject to the number of pick up points along en route. This would not breach the Department for Education’s School Travel and Transport guidance, which recommends that students of secondary age (11 upwards), should travel no more than 75 minutes each way to and from school.

- Transport arrangements for pupils currently on roll at Belford First School who would continue to be on roll at the school in September 2018 as it becomes primary would not be affected by the implementation of these proposals.

- As stated in ‘Balance of denominational provision’, some pupils who would be displaced by the closure of St Mary’s Church of England Middle School whose parents would wish to continue their child’s education within a faith school may be eligible for free Home to School Transport on denominational grounds. The nearest school to Belford providing education in Years 5 and 6 with a religious character is Ellingham C of E VA Primary School, Ellingham, Chathill, Northumberland, NE67 5ET, which is 8.6 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford. The nearest school to Belford providing education in Years 7 and 8 with a religious character is Dr. Thominson’s C of E Middle School, Silverton Lane, Rothbury, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 7RJ, which is 27.7 miles from St Mary’s Church of England Middle School, Belford.

- In any event, transport for displaced pupils would be arranged in line with the County Council’s Home to School Transport Policy.

- There would be no anticipated significant increase in car use as a result of these proposals.

### Consultation

In the interests of providing further information, all of the applicable statutory requirements to consult on this proposal as set out in Section 15(1) and Section 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 were complied with during the pre-publication consultation period of 13 September and 1 November 2017.

Notification of the consultation was distributed to a range of consultees in line with Department of Education guidance, including parents, staff and Governors of the St Mary’s CE Middle School and Belford First School. A consultation document was also made available on the Council’s
website and electronic and hard-copy versions of the consultation feedback form could be accessed.

A meeting for the staff of St Mary’s CE Middle School was held at the school on 3 October 2017 and a meeting for the staff of Belford First School was held on 9 October 2017; staff representatives were also present at both meetings. A drop-in event was held at St Mary’s on 11 October 2017 to which all interested parties were invited. Around 20 consultees attended over the course of the event, most of whom were parents and members of the Governing Bodies of St Mary’s CE Middle School and Belford First School. The Director of the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board also attended the event.

An advertisement was placed in the Northumberland Gazette on 28 September 2017 detailing the consultation drop-in event and on the Council’s website.

Details of the persons and parties consulted, the minutes of the staff consultation meetings, and views of the persons consulted are detailed in the Interim Director of Children’s Services Report to Cabinet 12 December 2017 and the Report of the Interim Director of Children’s Service to Cabinet, 12 September 2017 and Report of the Interim Director of Children’s Services 10 November 2015, which are available on the Council’s website at www.northumberland.gov.uk.

Submission of Objections and Comments on Proposals

Within four weeks after the date of publication of these proposals (i.e. by midnight on Thursday 11 January 2018), any person may object to or make comments on the proposals by sending their written representations to: The Executive Director of Children’s Services, County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland NE61 2EF, or by email to Lorraine.Fife@northumberland.gov.uk.

Signature: Cath McEvoy

Publication Date: 14 December 2017

Cath McEvoy
Executive Director of Children’s Services
Northumberland County Council