Northumberland County Council

Purpose of this briefing

To establish the views of schools in the west of Northumberland on carrying out a consultation, in light of recent events that have taken place out of the local authority's control.

In the light of these events it is being considered whether a consultation to find out what the wider community believe are acceptable options for the future structure of schools and academies in the west of the county. In addition the local authority has been asked to respond to a request from the Regional School's Commissioner to determine the viability of Haydon Bridge High School. In order to fully respond to this request we need to seek your views.

Key Issues:

1. The withdrawal of Bright Tribe from being the sponsor for Haydon Bridge High School.

2. The Regional Schools Commissioner wrote to the council on 7th November 2017, stating that section 68 of the Education and Inspections 2006 Act enables the secretary of state to direct a local authority to discontinue a maintained school, where that school is eligible for intervention.

3. HBHS remains in special measures two years after an Ofsted inspection. It has built up a financial deficit of circa £1million over the last 5 years. It has been served with academy orders due to failing an Ofsted inspection. After two years no academy sponsor is willing to take over the running of the school.

4. The Hadrian Trust which makes up QEHS and Hexham Middle school has already carried informal consultation as it believes that a reorganisation to an 11-18 structure is necessary for their multi-academy trust to be financially and educationally viable and has informally consulted schools in the Hexham Partnership and more widely.

5. There is significant over-capacity in terms of school places in the west of the county. 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.

6. Several of the small schools in the west of the county are predicting precarious financial positions by 2020.

7. The 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.

8. The Local Authority would like to establish its own 'spin-off' Trust to enable it to establish a multi-academy trust (MAT) across the whole county to enable small rural schools to build sufficient capacity to remain both financially and educationally viable. This application would be made as a separate process to the Secretary of State.

9. If a consultation was agreed then the following points would be considered:

- Consult on the long term future of Haydon Bridge High School (HBHS).
- Consult with the Hadrian Trust if as a result of their consultation they intend to extend the age range of Queen Elizabeth High School (QEHS) to an age 11-18 academy and examine the consequences of such a change.
- Consult whether a new school should be constructed for QEHS.
- Consult on the future model of provision and any schools closures that may be necessary in a reorganised model.
- Consult on whether the Council should work towards establishing a Trust that would enable it to become a multi-academy trust sponsor.

Question

Do you think a consultation is necessary?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please could you return the view of your school's governing body or trust board by 6th December 2017.

School: ……..

Signed: ……..

Position: ……..

Please could you return this form to Deborah Anderson (Deborah.Anderson01@northumberland.gov.uk)