Consultation with NCC:

Possible changes to education in the West of Northumberland.

- When considering the possible changes to the education provision in the West of Northumberland, we believe it is important that we look first at what we want to achieve, before deciding on the best ways to meet those goals.

- In the original documents shared (page 8, paragraph 23) it mentions the key factors. We urge all officers and councillors to reflect on these factors and put each of them in the context of each community. These will be in a different order for a large city (Newcastle), a town (Hexham), a small town (Haltwhistle) and villages (Wark).

- Then there are issues which may have an effect on educational outcome, that are not immediately obvious, but these things can be important and should also feed into the decision making. These issues include things like friendship groups (living too far away from the main catchment) and being able to attend after school activities, whether that be sports, arts, or catch up academic classes.

- When putting our proposal together we have ranked the importance of these factors as a whole for the West of Northumberland. We have made considerations for the large town, the smaller towns and the rural villages. The order in which we have placed these are:
  1. Catchment areas
  2. Home to school transport
  3. Rural and wider community issues
  4. Special Educational Needs and Disability
  5. Pupil Transition
  6. Buildings and Finance
  7. Admission Arrangements
  8. Sport and Recreation Implications
  9. Impact on employees of schools and academies

Leading to:

- Positive Educational Outcomes

Proposal

- To address the concerns surrounding surplus places and present and future funding (which are directly linked to surplus places) we believe there has to be a discussion and decision made regarding the two-tier and three-tier system.

- It is impossible for a hybrid system to be in place, as this creates conflict and a lack of clarity for parents and children. It equally creates competition for children between schools, which is not helpful. This hybrid system has contributed to the falling numbers in the Haydon Bridge Partnership due to too few children being spread across too many schools.

- From the information shared, we believe there are a total of thirty-seven schools in the West of Northumberland. We believe this could be reduced to thirteen schools saving 1000 surplus places, addressing the financial challenge and providing parents with choice and a best-fit for community and local schooling offer.

- We believe the focus should very much be the focus on the development and shape of education in the whole West of Northumberland and not purely about Secondary education: Haydon Bridge and QEHS

- When considering the whole picture we believe the following structure would address many of the concerns:
    - Retain (and reintroduce) a Three Tier System consistently across the <u>whole</u> of the West of Northumberland.
        - This would include:
            - Six First Schools
            - Four Middle Schools
            - One 3-13 Provision incorporate First / Middle in Bellingham
            - Two High Schools

        - This would reduce the surplus places by just under one thousand places.

        - In a recent informal consultation, it is quite clear that there is not an appetite from parents, carers and professionals for a change in the three-tier system and a move to a larger two-tier model.

        - It would be vital that the Three-tier System was incorporated across the whole of the West of Northumberland, with very clear PANs and feeder schools identified, to ensure closer partnership and educational continuity.

        - Special Educational Needs should be incorporated in all three tiers and not centrally located. There should be a local offer and an inclusive approach to all wellbeing and disability issues. The majority of children should attend a mainstream school within their local area.

        - Transport and infrastructure must be reflected upon when making decisions on whether to retain an element of local offer - is there a transport and road network sufficient enough to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all children?

- **Restructure First and Primary to create six First Schools**
        - There would be a need to review all first and primary Schools and reduce the number to seven first schools, ranging from 250 to 370 on roll. Therefore due diligence would need to take place to ensure the amalgamation of schools ensures the best locations, facilities and resources.

        - These first schools would now be large enough to be cost effective, without large numbers of surplus places, and with staff being redeployed where needed.

        - Transport and facilities would need to be reviewed and considered.

        - Some work would need to be done to upgrade buildings and it would be right and proper to offer some funding from the central pot which has been identified as in the region of £40m.

        - Although some younger children may have to travel a little further than at present to their first school, on the whole the vast majority of children will be placed in an educational hub near to their home communities, and will only have longer travel as they grow older.

        - Children currently in smaller schools will now have an offer where they can attend schools in which they will be in a class of similar age children, and not having to share classes with older and younger children due to financial constraints, as is the case at present.

- **Maintain Four Middle Schools**
    - Retain the middle schools in:
        - Corbridge
        - Hexham RC
        - Hexham
        - Haltwhistle

    - Having a middle structure means there is a stepped approach and children stay closer to their local communities. Although this goes against the national trend, the West of Northumberland needs a bespoke offer due to the size of the area we are serving and the travel that children will have to make out of their local communities. It is not correct to say that the three tier system is educationally less sound – we know this not to be the case.

    - By ensuring there is a structured and consistent three-tier structure in place, then all four middle schools would have enough children to reach their PAN and therefore be financial viable.

    - Some work would need to be done to upgrade buildings and it would be right and proper to offer some funding from the central pot identified as in the region of £40m.

- **Bespoke Offer in Bellingham**
    - To address the specific need in the Bellingham area, there needs to be a bespoke model, as their influencing factors are quite different to those in Hexham.

    - We propose that they are still in line with the 3 tier system, and we propose there is an all phase school in Bellingham that caters for three-to thirteen year-olds on one site. This would address the surplus places and ensure there are clear pathways for the local children to attend a 'local' provision and then go into the 14-19 curriculum as other children do in the area.

- **Maintain the offer of Two High Schools**
    - At secondary level, the limited success of new government 14-19 initiatives, such as UTCs and Studio Schools is largely due to the fact that they compete for Year 9s in a two tier system, where children are already settled into secondary schools from year 7. However, these new 14-19 schools fit perfectly with a three tier system. It is vital that all schools have an identical entry age to avoid a disjointed system.

    - We propose that QEHS has a new build, but remains a 14-19 provision, as this supports the three tier system, identified as suiting the West of Northumberland best. Its PAN would remain at 1300. The argument that QEHS as it stands is not financially viable can be addressed by QEHS working differently (ie 'cutting their cloth accordingly').

    - We propose that a second 14-19 High School offer (PAN 600) should be within the area west of Hexham, (also in a new build), either on the present Haydon Bridge Site or somewhere else within the west of Northumberland, to compliment the curriculum offer at QEHS and to ensure that there is a genuine parental choice. This would give the west of Northumberland a secondary offer of 1800 places, with clear choice and pathways.

    - At present the recent Haydon Bridge 2017's data states that this is an 'Average' school and actually sits eighth out of fifteen schools in the whole of Northumberland. This is in spite of the recent challenges and difficulties it has faced. We propose that NCC and the RSC work together to ensure that this positive description is shared with all local MATs and communities to foster a more positive view of the school and seek a sponsor.

- We propose that a second high school is vital to address the academic and vocational educational offer in the west, at the same time as supporting those socially or academically vulnerable groups of children who in our experience, are more likely to develop well and exceed expected progress in a smaller, more personalised environment.

- It would be right and proper to offer this provision a new build too, funded from the funding of £40m identified.

- The alternative secondary school in for children in the west of Northumberland, is over the border in Cumbria, and has just announced that it is reducing its PAN by thirty children, which will result in one hundred and fifty fewer spaces. Therefore fewer Northumberland children will be accepted in the future. This will create a lack of choice for the children in the extreme west of the County, if there is no offer west of Hexham.

- The wellbeing of all children should be a key principle. The need to address attendance issues at Key Stage 4 and to look to long term solutions for the area regarding young people Not in Education, Employment or Training should be a key consideration when designing new educational establishments and offers.

Summary

- We believe that Northumberland County Council, The Regional Schools Commissioner and Councillors have a duty to review the key influencing factors for all the communities in the West of Northumberland and the needs of all groups of children.

- There is an acceptance by all professionals that something has to change the surplus places and financial pressures that go hand-in-hand with them.

- This is a debate about the whole educational structure of the West of Northumberland and not purely about a particular phase or area.

- There is a need to take into account the local offer of schools for all abilities and to address the inclusion agenda. Parent and community voice should be heard and respected, and parents should be given choice.

- We propose a three-tier system to reflect the challenges and needs of the rural communities and the size of the area in which we serve. There needs to be a bespoke response to the unique challenges that the organisation of the education of children in the West of Northumberland brings.

- We believe the re-introduction of the First schools, with a reduced number of establishments:
    - Addresses the surplus places
    - Ensures children are attending classes with children of their own age
    - Financial security helps ensure a good or better offer is given to all children
    - Upgrade in facilities, where needed, for all establishments from the £40m

- We believe the establishment of four middle schools allows:
    - Addresses the surplus places
    - Financial security helps ensure a good or better offer is given to all children
    - Upgrade in facilities, where needed, for all establishments from the £40m
    - Address the governments challenge at Key Stage 3 and the 'Missing / Hidden Years'

- The retention of the offer of two high school establishments that complement each other, with both having new facilities to serve their curriculums will enable
    - New building offer to QEHS for 1300 on roll
    - New building offer for another 'more western' high school for 600 on roll
    - Curriculums that are bespoke to support the diverse challenges of the local area
    - Addresses the surplus places
      Financial security helps ensure a good or better offer is given to all children
    - Allows some parental choice, and an alternative if a situation 'breaks down' for a student at high school age.

- We believe the SEN offer should be retained at community level, where appropriate support and resources are built into the thirteen schools to address children's needs in their local school, with their local friends.

- We believe these proposals ensure that local communities still maintain school buildings that can be used as a central hub for community identity and use. Great schools have great parental and community support and in-put.

Haltwhistle Middle School

2 February 2018