Stage 2 consultation document

FAQ's

BACKGROUND:

Q1. Why are we having this consultation?

A. A number of external factors have occurred that mean a wide-ranging consultation is required. These are the withdrawal of Bright Tribe as sponsor of HBHS and the Hadrian Learning Trust's desire to change its age range to become an 11-18 academy in Hexham. Other factors for consideration include the condition of the schools estate, provision for vulnerable children and young people and those with SEND, finance and the impact of National Funding Formula, and surplus places.

Having this consultation now creates opportunities for discussion on what system of organisation for schools in the west of the county would offer the greatest chance of sustainability and viability for the next 30+ years, together with the possibility of securing significant capital investment in buildings and facilities. The consultation allows the views of all interested parties to be heard.

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT:

Q2. ***At no point, anywhere in the proposed models put forward is there any detail on the modelling of how your proposed options would address two main issues (surplus places and financial deficits).***

A. There is a general overview of the financial position. The outcome of the consultation is not predetermined, if and when a potential option is identified for statutory consultation then a more complete model will be written. Detailed financial and pupil numbers will be made available at the next stage of consultation if a preferred model is recommended to Cabinet for publication. We have estimated that the potential models under consultation now would require around £50m - £60m capital investment, but until a preferred model for statutory consultation is identified (which may be a 'Model D') it would not be cost effective to present a detailed analysis of models that may not be taken further in any event. Finance is only one aspect of an educational model and we do not want people to focus simply on what is the most cost effective way to provide education in the west; rather it has to be based on what is in the best educational interests of the current and future children in this area.

Q3. In the consultation document why have church schools not been given the option of merging but just closing

A. In actual fact, within the models set out in the tables in the consultation document, all of the church and non-church schools are identified as possibly merging or closing. It is not the intention of the consultation to suggest that church schools would be treated differently to any other school. In any event, all of the proposed models are suggestions as to how schools could be organised and we welcome alternative models that may incorporate parts of any of the models or are entirely different to any of those proposed.

Q4. Do we have to vote on each model as though it is a referendum?

A. The models are a starting point for a conversation. They are not to be voted on, they are asking you to think about the educational viability of schools. It is not a referendum and through analysing the models and discussions you may have as a Governing Body, staff group or ideas you have as an individual member of the community there may be a Model D which appears as an alternative model and may be the model which goes to statutory proposal. The models are options to stimulate discussion and thoughts about the education model in the West of Northumberland to have sustainable schools for the next 20 years.

FINANCES:

Q5. How much of taxpayers money is this going to cost?

A. This is a capital programme investment which is being supported by NCC and Government funding through the Priority Schools Building Programme. A desktop analysis indicates Models A and B would use in excess of £50m and model C in excess of £60m. If the current system is to be maintained an additional £1 -£2m per year would have to be set aside to subsidise schools

Q6. How much does it cost to educate a pupil?

A. Costs per pupil data in first schools in Hexham and Haydon Bridge partnership are as follows:

- 2016/17 Ranges from £2,912 to £15,461 per pupil.
- 2017/18 Ranges from £3,051 to £21,478 per pupil
- 2018/19 Ranges from £2,965 to £17,259 per pupil

Q7. Hadrian Learning Trust are not in a financial deficit as is being reported.

A. HLT are reporting in their document 'Building a better future for our children', on page 9 a balance of £297,000 for 2018/19 but as stated in the document the financial position would quickly become untenable at both HMS and QEHS in year for 2021/22 deficit of £404,000 and a deficit balance of £781,000. For further details see the consultation document at:
http://www.qehs.net/files/docs/formal_consultation_document_mar18.pdf

Q8. Why has the LA allowed financial difficulties by the vast majority of schools in the West?

A. The vast majority of schools are not in financial difficulties. Headteachers are responsible for managing school budgets and Governing bodies are responsible for monitoring them - schools are able to buy in financial assistance with budgets from the local authority to help them manage effectively. Some of the difficulty with regard to Haydon Bridge High School has come from the withdrawal of Bright Tribe and other schools may be impacted by the National Funding Formula when it is introduced from 2019. The other difficulty the school faces is due to parents in the catchment area choosing over the last five years not to send their children to the school therefore reducing the amount of funding it receives. Therefore we need to address these issues as part of this consultation and be ready to provide an outstanding level of education for all schools in the west of the county.

Q9.Why are we facing "once in a lifetime" investment when surely investment should be made every day in our children?

A. The once in a lifetime investment opportunity comes from potential additional capital Council investment in school buildings that could be approved by the Councils Cabinet; this could be available to schools in addition to the usual process for securing capital funds. Investment from the Council together with the Priority Schools Building Programme in relation to new buildings for QEHS could provide a unique opportunity.

Q10. What is the National Funding Formula (NFF) and what does it mean for Northumberland Schools? The needs of Northumberland are so different to the rest of the UK that NCC should be confident of making its case for special funding to support the needs in Northumberland.

A. Link: https://www.theschoolrun.com/national-funding-formula-for-schools-explained

The DfE has explained that a new approach to how money is allocated to schools is necessary because the current system is 'unfair, untransparent and out of date.' For example, in some areas, schools receive funding of over £7,000 per pupil, per year, while in others, they get just over £4,000. The current system is based on assessments and statistics from 10 years ago, hence the need to reassess how budgets are shared between schools.

Some schools stand to benefit from the NFF, but others could end up with less money to spend.

The NFF aims to remove discrepancies in funding that have arisen from budgets being allocated by local authorities, rather than central Government, and ensure that all school budgets are set using the same criteria. The DfE believes that this will direct resources where they are most needed.

There are also plans to help schools manage their budgets better.

Under the proposed NFF, there are 13 different factors – clumped together in four 'building blocks' – that will be taken into account when setting schools budgets. These are all discussed in detail at the above link.

Ultimately, the NFF is a standardised model from April 2020. 72% of a schools budget is related to pupil numbers. The Government is clear it does not want to subsidise over capacity, so the question is how do we create a sustainable, high quality system?

The Department for Education has confirmed its intention to introduce a National Funding Formula for Schools with effect from 2020/21 so that all schools will have funding set according to the same allocation mechanism. For 2018/19 & 2019/20 local authorities retain some discretion. Northumberland County Council is consulting on how it should introduce the NFF. Please see the link on NCC website for the consultation document and details as to how to access further information: http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Consultations.aspx#schoolconsultations

TRANSPORT:

Q11. How is my child supposed to get to their new school as their current school is proposed to close?

A. Most children would be eligible for free transport; this is based on an individual assessment against the Councils Home to School transport policy. Further information is available on the Councils website at www.northumberland.gov.uk

Q12. How can you justify a range of distances to another school from 1 to over 16 miles? How long do you think my child will be travelling to school if they had to travel 16 miles at each end of the day. How do you think I have time to make this different journey? How can I do this journey and get to work in time and I do not have a flexible manager?

A. Length of journey to school would be a factor in considering options for schools to merge. No decision has been made. Government guidance recommends a journey of no more than 45 mins each way for primary aged children (aged up to 11) and 75 minutes each way for children aged 11+. The Council will endeavour to keep distances travelled to that which is recommended in Guidelines, although in some rare instances this is not always possible. The Council's Home to School Transport Policy supports eligible Northumberland resident children to attend their catchment or nearest school (or nearest faith school); where parents have chosen to enroll their child at a school that is not their catchment or nearest school, the responsibility for transport to that school lies with them.

Q13. You are asking young children to commute on narrow roads, larger buses would be needed which are not suitable for the roads. The roads that would be used in your model are not appropriate.

A. We welcome local knowledge on the viability of the proposals, which includes the suggested transport routes. Please clearly document in your response to the consultation which routes you believe to be unrealistic and this will be looked at in the analysis.

SPONSOR:

Q14. How are Bright Tribe allowed to walk away from their agreement?

A. The DfE made the decision to allow Bright Tribe to withdraw and have asked the Council to take back control of the school. As stated earlier, this is one of the external factors that has promulgated the need for a wide-ranging consultation on the future of education in the west.

SEN:

Q15. How will my SEN child be supported throughout any transitional processes?

A. NCC SEN team would provide pupils and parents the full support required. There is a transport policy which supports SEN pupils. SEN pupils would be fully supported throughout the process as will all pupils who will be affected by the changes.

EDUCATION STANDARDS:

Q16. HBHS became Special measures in 2014, why has the LA or Government not helped out before now?

A. The governments proposed solution to assist HBHS was for it to become part of the Bright Tribe Academy Trust. Unfortunately, BTT took 2 years to decide that the school was not viable, during which time the Council had proposed an alternative which was rejected by the Secretary of State and the Council was ordered not to have any further involvement from January 2017. Now that the DfE have made the Council responsible for the school following the withdrawal of Bright Tribe, the Council is holding this wide-ranging consultation to assist in forming proposals that will secure sustainable, viable and good educational standards for the children and young people in the west of the county.

BUILDINGS:

Q17. With regards to the empty / unused buildings, are these just going to be left to become ruins?

A. In the first instance we would be looking within the council to re-use the buildings for other services. After that there may be an option to sell the buildings or they may need to be demolished.

Q18. How can QEHS get a new building but other schools are not?

A. Building work is based on need after assessment and the department for education believe the need is greatest at QEHS.

Q19. £80m backlog of maintenance, how has this been left to develop to this extent?

A. The LA receives £3m per year from central government for funding of school buildings; this has to be allocated across the whole schools estate based on priority of need. In addition to this, there are bidding programmes which the LA has bid for with varying results. For example changes in Government have resulted in some building programmes being disbanded (e.g. the Building Schools for the Future programme was ended before reaching Northumberland). There have been bids for Alnwick, Prudhoe, Bedlington and bids tend to come around on a 4 or 5 year cycles so the latter bid that was submitted was for Haydon Bridge, James Calvert Spence College, Queen Elizabeth High School (bid to refurbish the hydro block) and Prudhoe Highfield (bid to replace a building) have been successful. In all national bidding programmes, the Government awards funds on the basis of need.

YEAR GROUPS / PLACE NUMBERS/CAPACITY:

Q20. If my child's Middle school closes, will they be going back to their First School or going to High School earlier?

A. Under Model B and Model C, some middle schools would close. Under Model B, pupils on roll in middle schools would transfer to Hexham HIgh School. Under Model C, pupils on roll in middle schools in the Haydon Bridge Partnership who would otherwise have continued in those schools if they hadn't closed would transfer to Haydon Bridge High School as it would become an age 4-16 school.

Q21. ***How do you expect my child to cope with the number of pupils changes when it is as large as three fold (e.g. Otterburn becoming a primary from 34 to 105)? They are used to small classes. (Kielder 9 - 56).***

A. Staff are professional and will manage the transition of pupils. The average size of a Primary school in England is 210-230 pupils. Children succeed in these schools on a daily basis. Pupils from very small first schools have to make the transition to very much larger schools now.

Q22. ***I don't want my child to be in a school as age 9 with 18 year olds, they'll get exposed to potentially bad influences. (Hexham Middle School becomes age 9 to 13 phase in 9-18 school in new shared building on new site in Hexham*).**

A. Of the 150 local authorities around 145 are organised as Primary/Secondary. This means that children aged 4-11 are in the same school and children aged 11-18 are in the same school. No schools want any of their students, no matter how old to be exposed to bad influences and all schools have safeguarding processes in place. Again, teachers across the country manage pupils in a way that keeps them safe. QEHS is very well-managed, being one of the highest performing schools or academies in the country and the students at the school have a good reputation.

Q23. Capacity numbers need to reflect the current use of classrooms

A. Capacity figures do include rooms that are no longer in use as classrooms , but the actual use is reflected in the assessment. The capacity figures are used by the DfE as it forms part of the Basic Need funding calculations.

REDUNDANCIES:

Q24. If schools close, where will the teachers, receptionist, cleaners etc go?

A. It is usual in larger reorganisations for the Council to facilitate an agreement called a Staffing Protocol between schools to ensure that staff at risk of redundancy are interviewed first for any available jobs in continuing schools where they meet the criteria. Detailed discussions would take place between the Council, school Governing Bodies and the unions to work towards the agreement of a Staffing Protocol. In any event, the Council would support staff to find suitable alternative employment.

Q25. How long will Pay protection be?

A. There will be three years protection paid. Full advice can be given by our HR department if you contact your HR Officer.

TIMESCALE:

Q26. What is the timescale for all of this to be completed from today to when? When will my child be attending a new school?

A. If it is decided as a result of the consultation that first and primary schools proposed for closure would close, then they may close in August 2019, while schools proposed to become primaries may change age range in September 2019. Middle schools proposed for closure in any of the models may close in August 2020, with pupils transferring to new schools in September 2020. Educational / school changes will start to be implemented from 2019 / 2020.

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QUESTIONS RAISED BY A SCHOOL:

Q27. Why is there a lack of recognition in the consultation document of the exceptional educational outcomes achieved in West Northumberland in general?

A. In each model presented, there is recognition of the latest ofsted grades which largely reflects good educational outcomes achieved in schools. The individual meetings that LA Officers are attending with schools clearly demonstrates the known data per school on an individual basis and is discussed at the meetings in detail.

Q28. Why is there misleading and out of date financial information?

A. The financial data used in the consultation document was accurate and up to date at the time of publication. We are aware that financial data can change on a daily basis and that schools are reviewing their budgets currently. As stated, the projections in the consultation document were correct at the time of print and were the indicative budgets that schools submitted to NCC finance department. There were some updates made for the second consultation document based on correct census data being imported to try and make the data presented as accurate as possible.

Q29. Why is there a lack of transparency of the financial costs / benefits of the different models?

A. Please see the consultation document section which explains this (CONSULTATION DOCUMENT:)

Q30. Why are there no details within any model about how educational performance would be improved?

A. Again, this is dependent on which model (if any) may move forward to the statutory stage. If a preferred model is brought forward for statutory consultation, it would clearly need to state the educational rationale that supports it.

Q31. The consultation is based upon confused and muddled thinking. Why do the options presented in this document conflate the following key issues which require separation, detailed thought and individual justification:

- **Future of Haydon Bridge High School**
- **Whether to move from a two tier to three tier system**
- **Whether to close individual schools**
- **Requirement for capital investment in schools**
- **Broad-brush approach to closing multiple schools rather than considering and encouraging individual cases on a school by school basis**
- **Is NCC paying sufficient attention to these separate and complex issues?**
- **Financial information presented in the consultation document not been updated to take into account announced changes to schools' funding in 2018/19.**

A. It is not easy to separate the complex key issues of education in the west of Northumberland as there are so many main areas to be addressed, as detailed above. Individual cases are being encouraged on school by school basis as we are having our individual school meetings as we a) need a model which will work across the West of the County but b) also need to make sure that individual schools can demonstrate their educational and financial viability for forthcoming years and especially set against the impact of the introduction of NFF.

Q32. There is no financial justification for the proposed changes:

- **Why does the consultation document imply there is a financial crisis amongst the schools when in fact the schools in the Hexham Partnership are forecast to be in an aggregate financial surplus in all three years (even utilising old financial data)?**
- **Does the consultation reflect NCC strategic planning ideology rather than financial reality?**
- **Why have none of the models presented by NCC been adequately costed?**
- **Does the ultimate cost of the models exceed the financial savings?**

A. While the maintained schools in the Hexham Partnership to 2020 are forecasting a moderate surplus, this does not include the forecasted financial situation of the Hadrian Learning Trust; in their consultation document, they forecast that the Trust will be in deficit of £781,000 by the end of the 2021/22 financial year. In addition to this, a significant number of maintained schools in the Haydon Bridge partnership are facing deficit budgets in 2017/18 financial year onwards. As previously mentioned this is about Education in the West and safeguarding the educational and financial viability of schools for forthcoming years. The driver of the consultation is primarily to maintain (and in some cases achieve) good or better educational standards for all pupils in the west of the county, within a financially sustainable and viable organisational structure. Model costing has been previously discussed (CONSULTATION DOCUMENT:). Should Councillors approve a preferred model for formal consultation, a detailed rationale including impact on standards, community, financial viability and so on would be required to support any such model of organisation.

Q33. The proposed changes may lead to poorer educational outcomes:

- **Why has there been no published analysis (by NCC or independent third parties) of the impact of these changes on educational outcomes?**
- **What is the expected impact of longer journey times to school on pupils?**

A. As part of their decision making process at the end of this informal stage of consultation, the Council's Cabinet would need to consider the impact of any models of organisation (including the current one) on a range of variables, which would include journey times etc. However, the primary factor in any decision made by Cabinet would be based on what would be in the best educational interests of the children.

Q34. Disingenuous approach by NCC

Why does the consultation document state that "Northumberland County Council has already sought the views of educational professionals and Governors in schools in the first phase of informal consultation" but:

- **Does not explain what the views of educational professionals were; and**
- **Omits to mention that educational professionals were not consulted on the closure of schools**
- **Why did NCC Councillors not make their views and intentions clear prior to recent council elections?**
- **How will local councillors ensure that they represent the views of their constituents in NCC meetings?**

A. The views of the Educational Professionals from Phase 1 meetings (January 2018) assisted in forming the proposed models A, B and C. These included views that first or primary schools should be at least 1 Form Entry and that some schools would need to close (although proposals for schools of 0.5 Form Entry have been proposed within the models for consultation). Responses from Phase 1 of the consultation will be published with the outcomes of Phase 2. Educational professionals were also consulted on the possible closure of schools e.g possibility of Haydon Bridge High school closing and impact; HLT changing age range with possible closure of Hexham Middle School.

It was not know that a consultation would be required prior to recent council elections so making views at that time was not possible for Councillors. At this point, Councillors need to hear from their constituents in order to feedback in to any meetings. Cabinet Members need to remain neutral until they are required to make as decision.

Q35. What criteria were used to identify schools for closure/merger? Why us? Why fix what's not broken?

A. Models were developed from the Phase 1 consultation analysis. We want views on what would be a sustainable system now and in the future. Therefore, criteria have included size of school, distance to next school, length of journeys, GP (birth) data and finance.

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Response to received letter

Q36. Policy objectives - what is the policy and what are we seeking to achieve?

A. We are seeking to achieve good educational standards in the West of the County within a financially sustainable and viable system for the next 25+ years. There are budget implications with regard to the new National Funding Formula to be implemented in the next few years and we need to address this as part of the overall educational sustainability in the area. There is further discussion in the finance section of the FAQs (FINANCES:)

Q37. How do you intend to evaluate how well each option delivers the objectives?

A. The views of consultees will be analysed, with particular reference to suggestions for improving any of the current proposed models and any new proposed models. Any new model brought forward as the preferred model for formal consultation would need to be supported by data and information that would show that it's implementation would be in the best educational interests of children and young people to implement, including that it was financially viable and sustainable i.e. that it would be better in relation to these criteria than the current system in place.

Q38. With regard to GP data, what are you using to project figures? Nationally the number of children aged 0 - 15 is projected to grow by 8.8% between 2014 and 2039. Under 5 year old is not expected to change much. The number of Primary school age (5-11) is projected to increase by 9.2% and children aged 12 - 15 projected to rise by 17.8%. The Office of National statistics highlights that these rises reflect lower numbers of births in the first decade of this century, leading to a smaller population in that age group being used as the base for the comparison.
The national level is supported by the figures below for Northumberland.

(Figures in thousands to one decimal place)

CODE	AREA	Age group	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
E06000057	Northumberland	0-4	15.7	15.4	15.1	14.9	14.7	14.7	14.7	14.7
E06000057	Northumberland	5-9	16.6	16.8	16.8	17.1	16.9	16.7	16.4	16.1

CODE	AREA	Age group	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
E06000057	Northumberland	0-4	14.7	14.6	14.6	14.5	14.4	14.3
E06000057	Northumberland	5-9	15.9	15.7	15.7	15.8	15.8	15.7

A. Northumberland level population data masks the considerable variation in population figures across the county. In the South East of the county, the population is increasing and this is being reflected in the need to increase school places e.g. Blyth. However, the number of children registered with GP practices in the Haydon Bridge Partnership shows a slightly reducing number of children that will be joining schools in the next few years, whilst this decline is more pronounced in the Hexham Partnership. GP data is provided by the NHS and provides an accurate reflection of forecasted numbers within each school catchment area, although it cannot of course predict which schools parents will ultimately select for their children.

Q39. If the cabinet members decide to follow the 'do nothing' option, what are the consequences?

A. In relation to Haydon Bridge High School, the Council will have to formulate a preferred model for the school as it remains in Special Measures and no sponsor has come forward to support the school. Any preferred model is also dependent on the outcome of the consultation of the Hadrian Learning Trust, who are currently consulting on whether or not they would extend their Planned Admission Numbers in order to take the 300+ students in Haydon Bridge High School, should the decision be made by the Council's Cabinet to close the school at some point. Should HLT decide not to extend their PAN, then the Council's options for students of Haydon Bridge High School would be reduced. There is also uncertainty around the Haltwhistle Community Campus, as Bright Tribe have indicated they wish to withdraw from this academy trust also. With regard to maintained schools in the Hexham Partnership, if Councillors decide to 'do nothing' and HLT decide to change their age range to 11-18, then it will be entirely in the hands of parents as to which schools they decide to send their children and at what age, specifically in the secondary phase. The consequences of this would be potential confusion for parents and increasing uncertainty for schools with regard to funding (linked to pupil numbers) and therefore planning; in short this would not be good for the educational standards of schools in general.

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GP DATA:

Q40. Why and how are you using GP data?

A. GP data is used rather than birth data to give a more accurate reflection of forecasted numbers. If we used birth data then we could have inaccurate numbers due to a child being born in a village but then moving out of the village before they started school. GP data shows the pupils that are registered with a GP currently in the village. The address of the pupil is used to reflect the area rather than the address of where the GP surgery is.

PUPILS / COURSES

Q41. I have children in Year 9 and Year 11 who are embarking on 2 year courses each. What happens to them?

A. We recognise that during any change, there would be impacts. However, if any new model of organisation was approved for implementation at some point in the future by the Council's Cabinet, then specific attention would be given to those school year groups that were most impacted; staff in schools are professional and would put plans in place to ensure as little impact as possible on students.

Q42. What will happen to children who live outside of Northumberland, but attend a Northumberland school that is proposed for closure in this consultation?

A. Initially places will be offered to current pupils. Moving forward from September 2019 admissions will be based on the new PAN allocation. Each local authority is responsible for providing sufficient school places for all pupils in their area and therefore those relevant local authorities would need to expand provision at relevant schools.

CHURCH SCHOOLS

Q43. If we are a Church school, can the LA close us without the Diocese?

A. The LA can make a decision to close a voluntary or foundation school, but the Roman Catholic and Church of England Dioceses would have a right to appeal to the Schools Adjudicator if they disagreed with such a decision.

MAPS

Q44. Availability of maps showing options A B and C which make it much easier to understand the proposals

A. There is a link to the maps on the consultation website: http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Consultations.aspx#schoolconsultations