The Ponteland Partnership

Report of the Deputy Chief Executive/DCS

Cabinet Member: Councillor Robert Arckless, Children’s Services

Report prepared by Andrew Johnson, Director of Education and Skills

Purpose of report

This report sets out a request from Belsay, Whalton CE, Heddon on the Wall St Andrew’s CE, Darras Hall, Ponteland and Stamfordham First Schools in the Ponteland Partnership that the Council carry out consultation to extend the age range of all six first schools to incorporate Years 5 and 6. A request has also been received from Ponteland Community High School to move to the necessary consultative stage regarding a primary/secondary model of organisation within the Ponteland Partnership. A recommendation is set out in this report to request that Cabinet agree to permit consultation on this model of organisation in relation to the six community schools in the Ponteland Partnership.

Should Cabinet permit consultation on the proposed model in relation to the above schools, the Governing Bodies of Richard Coates CE Middle School and Heddon on the Wall St Andrews CE and Whalton CE First Schools would carry out their own consultation concurrently.

Cabinet may be requested to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal following the outcomes of consultation at a future date.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Agree that consultation takes place as requested by the six first schools in the Ponteland Partnership and Ponteland High School on the following model of organisation:
Proposed Model:
- extend the age ranges of Belsay, Darras Hall, Ponteland and Stamfordham First Schools from age 3 (or 4) to 9 to age 3 (or 4) to 11 with effect from 1 September 2017;
- close Ponteland Community Middle School with effect from 31 August 2019;
- extend the age range of Ponteland Community High School from age 13-18 to age 11-18 with effect from 1 September 2019.
- Note that linked to the proposed model, the Governing Body of Richard Coates CE Middle School is expected to undertake its own consultation to change the age range of its school from age 9 to 13 to age 3 to 11. The Governing Bodies of Heddon-on-the-Wall St Andrew’s CE and Whalton CE VA First Schools are expected to undertake their own consultations to extend the age ranges of their schools from age 3 (or 4) to 9 to age 3 (or 4) to 11. These consultations would take place concurrently with consultation by the County Council should approval be given.

2. Delegate the decision to undertake further consultation, if necessary, to the Deputy Chief Executive/DCS in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services;

3. Note that a further report following consultation would be submitted to a meeting of the Cabinet at which a decision on whether or not to issue a Statutory Proposal in relation to the model set out at Recommendation 1 above would be made;

4. Note that following their own consultations, the Governing Bodies of the relevant voluntary schools would each decide whether or not to implement the proposals to extend the age ranges of those schools.

Link to Corporate Plan
This report is relevant to the Economic Growth priority included in the NCC Corporate Plan 2013-2017.

Key issues
1. If Cabinet agrees to consultation, a document would be made available to all statutory stakeholders and interested parties for a period of 6 weeks (excluding school holidays). Council Officers and relevant Governing Bodies would hold meetings and consultation events for staff, Governors, parents and other interested parties within the Ponteland Partnership during the consultation period.
2. If, as a result of consultation, it is felt necessary to consult on any modifications, the Deputy Chief Executive/DCS in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services would decide on the content and form of any further consultation. The outcome of this consultation would then be reported to a further Cabinet meeting where, subject to a preferred model being recommended, a decision would then be made as to whether or not to progress to the issuing of Statutory Proposals, taking into account the outcomes of the consultation.

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The Ponteland Partnership

Background

Proposals from schools in the Ponteland Partnership

1. In October and November 2015, informal consultation by the Council was undertaken with Governors, parents and staff of Ponteland Community High School, Ponteland Community Middle School, Darras Hall First School and other relevant interested parties including local County Councillors, town and parish councils and local interest groups on a proposal to relocate the three schools to brand new school buildings on a shared site in the South West of Ponteland, together with new leisure facilities for the town.

349 consultees submitted a written response to the consultation and over 700 consultees attended a consultation event in Ponteland on 7 November 2015. However, the overwhelming response from Governors, staff and parents of Ponteland Community Middle School and Darras Hall First School was that they did not support the proposed relocation of the three relevant schools to the shared site. A summary of the feedback received from this consultation is included at Appendix 1. Since the closure of the consultation, Council officers have been analysing the feedback and carrying out further work on alternative models.

2. Parallel to the work being carried out by Council Officers, the Ponteland Partnership as a group of schools has been having discussions on a proposal to create a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), which would include all of the schools within the partnership across the first, middle and high school phases. As yet, there has been no consensus among all the schools to submit an application to the Secretary of State to begin the process towards setting up a MAT.

3. As part of the process to consider the implications of becoming part of a MAT and what other options could be available in order to improve standards and transition across the Ponteland Partnership, the headteachers of the first schools invited the Director of Education and Skills and the Deputy Chief Executive/DCS to a meeting on 23 February for advice. As part of this meeting, the organisation of schools in the Ponteland Partnership was discussed. It was reiterated that there was no Council policy to move from a 3 tier to a 2 tier form of school organisation, but the Council would listen to school views.

4. Given the discussion with the first school headteachers, the Director of Education and Skills met separately with the Headteachers of Ponteland Community Middle School and Richard Coates CE Middle School, together with the Church of England Diocese on 25 February to share the themes of the discussions with the first schools. A meeting was also held by Council Officers with the headteacher of Ponteland Community High School on 29 February in order to apprise him of the discussions with the other schools in the Ponteland Partnership.
5. Subsequently to these meetings, emails were received by the Director of Education and Skills from the headteachers of all six first schools in the Ponteland Partnership requesting that the Council carry out consultation on a proposed new model for the Ponteland Partnership in order to gauge the views of parents, pupils, governors, staff and the wider community. He responded to the headteacher emails to clarify whether Chairs of Governors had been consulted and were in support of this request and then received confirmation that this was the case. An email was received from the Headteacher of Ponteland Community High School, with the support of his Chair of Governors, also requesting that consultation on a proposed new model be undertaken.

6. The Council does not have a policy in relation to the form of school organisation within partnerships, it has a duty to support schools to improve standards, support continuity of education, ensure sufficiency of school places within Northumberland and smooth transition between schools. Therefore, in the light of these requests, Cabinet is recommended to support the request of the first and high schools by approving consultation with relevant stakeholders on a new model organisation for the Ponteland Partnership.

7. The consultation would focus on a wide range of factors, including:
   - Reasons and rationale for the various proposals
   - Pupil transition
   - Admissions arrangements
   - The home to school transport, and the travel and car use implications of the proposal
   - SEN/additional needs
   - Staffing issues
   - The Sport and Recreation implications of the proposals.
   - Catchment areas

   Consultees would also be asked if they had any alternative suggestions that could be adopted for some or all of the schools in the Ponteland Partnership.

8. Further details of the proposed Model are given in the following table:
### Table 1 – Proposed Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>CURRENT SITUATION</th>
<th>PROPOSED PRIMARY/SECONDARY MODEL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capacity in Sept 2015 (Number on Roll in Oct 2015)</td>
<td>Forms of Entry (FE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belsay First School</td>
<td>75 (69)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darras Hall First School</td>
<td>450 (446)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heddon on the Wall St Andrew’s CE First School</td>
<td>150 (137)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponteland First School</td>
<td>300 (299)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stamfordham First School</td>
<td>82 (79)</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whalton First School</td>
<td>50 (52)</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Coates CE Middle School</td>
<td>549 (476)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponteland Middle School</td>
<td>518 (609)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ponteland Community High School</td>
<td>1159 (Y9-Y11 - 773) (Y9-6th F 1091)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

- All 6 existing first schools become primary.
- Darras Hall First School reduces from 90 places in each year group, to 60 places in each year group
- Stamfordham First School increases from 18 places in each year group to 20 places in each year group
- Richard Coates CE Middle School reorganises to become an age 3-11 primary school
- Ponteland Middle School closes
• Ponteland Community High School becomes an age 11-18 secondary school

Admissions Arrangements

9. The existing first schools changing to become new primary schools would operate up to Year 5 in the first year of operation and then up to Year 6 in the second year of operation. Further details of this transition are set out in paragraph 14.

In the case of Richard Coates CE Middle School, specific transition arrangements would need to be put in place to manage the effective transition of the school from a middle school to a primary school.

SEN Provision

10. There is no specialist SEN provision currently within any of the schools. However, consideration of current provision by stakeholders and other interested parties would be encouraged by the Council with a view to suggesting alternative models for SEN provision.

Early Years Provision

11. As part of the consultation, consideration of the current Early Years provision would be made in the light of the Government’s policy to increase free entitlement to childcare to 30 hours a week for working parents from September 2016.

Catchment Areas

12. If the proposed model was approved for implementation, the current catchment area of Ponteland Middle School would no longer be required. However, as the proposed model includes a proposal from the Governing Body of Richard Coates CE Middle School to change the age range of the school from an age 9 to 13 middle school to an age 3 to 11 primary school, a new primary catchment area for Richard Coates CE Primary School (as it would be) would be developed by the Council. It is also proposed that the school would operate from the current Ponteland First School building, which is currently adjacent to the Richard Coates CE Middle School site.

It is proposed that Ponteland First School would relocate to a new building on a shared site with Ponteland High School and that a new catchment area for the school would be developed. This would also have an impact on the current catchment area of Darras Hall First School as this school is proposed to reduce its Planned Admission Number (PAN) from 90 to 60.

The catchment areas of Heddon on the Wall St Andrews CE, Whalton CE, Stamfordham and Belsay First Schools and Ponteland Community High School would remain as they are currently.

Changes to catchment areas would not preclude parents from exercising their
parental preference to apply for a place for their child at any school should they wish to do so.

Implications for school buildings, indicative costs and funding

13. An initial desk-top analysis of the implications for school buildings as a result of the implementation of the proposed primary/secondary model of organisation and this suggests that the associated costs would be affordable. Should approval for consultation be given, detailed buildings costs in relation to the model would be worked up and the various working options would be included within the consultation process.

As part of the building solution, it is proposed that new buildings are constructed for Ponteland Community High School and Ponteland First School on a shared site with leisure facilities adjacent to the current high school site.

Timeline for implementation

14. The timeline for implementation of the proposed model of organisation would be as follows:

Proposed Model

All First Schools in the Ponteland Partnership

1 September 2017
- Pupils in Year 4 in the first schools on 31 August 2017 would be retained by their new primary schools as Year 5.

1 September 2018
- Pupils in Year 5 in the primary schools on 31 August 2018 would be retained as the new Year 6 from 1 September 2018.

1 September 2019
- Pupils in Year 6 in the primary schools on 31 August 2019 would transfer as the new Year 7 to Ponteland Community High School at its new site

Ponteland Middle School;

1 September 2017
- Ponteland Middle School would not receive a Year 5 intake and would operate with Years 6, 7 and 8 only

1 September 2018
- Ponteland Middle School would operate with Years 7 and 8 only

31 August 2019
- Ponteland Middle School would close on 31 August 2019.

1 September 2019
• Pupils in Year 8 in the middle school in August 2019 would transfer as Year 9 as usual to either Ponteland Community High School at its new site or to another high school according to parental preference.
• Pupils in Year 7 in the middle school in August 2019 would transfer as the new Year 8 to Ponteland Community High School at its new site or to another high school according to parental preference.

Richard Coates Middle School
• In the case of Richard Coates CE Middle School, specific transition arrangements would need to be put in place to manage the effective transition of the school from a middle school to a primary school. Details of this transition timeline would be shared with consultees by the Governing Body of the school during consultation. The Council would support the Governing Body in developing such transition arrangements in order to preserve the balance of denominational provision within the Ponteland Partnership in the interests of parental choice.

Ponteland Community High School
1 September 2019
• Ponteland Community High School would change its age range from an age 13 to 18 high school to an age 11 to 18 secondary school and relocate to its new site in Ponteland.
• Pupils in Years 7 and 8 in the middle schools would transfer as the new Years 8 and 9 to Ponteland Community High School at its new site.
• Pupils in Year 6 in the primary schools in August 2019 would transfer as the new Year 7 to Ponteland Community High School at its new site.

Implications for Staff

15. There would be implications for staff in all schools as a result of this proposal. Detailed discussions with the Governing Bodies of all schools impacted and with the Trades Unions would be undertaken about how any adverse implications of the proposals for staff could be minimised.

Transport

16. Transport for pupils affected by the proposed reorganisation, should it be approved, would be arranged in accordance with the Council’s Home to School Transport Policy. Should the proposed model be approved for implementation, most pupils in Years 5 and 6 would have shorter journeys to schools as they would be educated for an additional two years in their local communities.

Sport and Recreation

17. Any potential impact on Sport and Recreation would be discussed as part of the consultation process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS
IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:

The consultation would be consistent with the Council’s policy to implement changes in the structure of schools as appropriate in accordance with local wishes and needs so as to ensure that pupils attend only good schools.

Finance and value for money

The possible closure of Ponteland Middle School would save £140k in a full year. This saving would accrue to the Dedicated Schools Grant and be spent on the education of pupils across the whole county.

Should Ponteland Middle School be approved for closure, it may close with a surplus or a deficit depending upon the costs, including redundancy costs which the County Council may need to incur during the period leading up to the proposed closure. Any surplus would accrue to the DSG whilst any deficit would have to be met from either the DSG or other Children's Service’s budgets.

Should the Governing Body of Richard Coates CE Middle School approve the proposed change of age range from an age 9 to 13 middle school to an age 3 to 11 primary school, the school would be likely to require additional financial support during the initial transition years in order to support continuity of education for pupils. The costs for such transition support would be worked up during consultation.

An initial desk-top analysis of the implications for school buildings as a result of the implementation of the proposed model has been undertaken and this suggests that the associated costs would be affordable. Should approval for consultation be given, detailed buildings costs in relation to the model would be worked up.

Human Resources:

There would be a need to support staff displaced as a result of the proposed reorganisation with redeployment opportunities.

Property

Refer to ‘Finance and value for money’ above

Equalities

An Equalities Impact Assessment would be carried out concurrently with consultation, should it be
Risk Assessment

A full risk assessment would be carried out on the project should consultation be approved.

Carbon Reduction

It is not envisaged that this proposal would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction.

Crime & Disorder

This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.

Customer Considerations:

The proposals set out in this report are based upon the desire of the Governing Bodies of the majority of schools in the Ponteland Partnership to consult on ways to provide improved educational opportunities for pupils.

Consultation

This report has been considered by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Legal Officer.

Wards

Ponteland East and Stannington; Ponteland North; Ponteland South with Heddon; Ponteland West; Bellingham; Bywell

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Report sign off

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<tr>
<td>I.T.</td>
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<td>DL</td>
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<td>Portfolio Holder</td>
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Cabinet:
Partnership Feedback, 16 March 2016
Appendices

Appendix 1  Feedback from informal consultation on proposals for the relocation of Ponteland Community High School, Ponteland Community Middle School and Darras Hall First School together with leisure facilities
Appendix 1

Feedback Received from information consultation on school relocation proposals Autumn 2015

Petitions

The Council received a petition entitled *Don’t move DHFS*. The petition has 900 hardcopy signatures and over 680 online signatures.

Summary of Formal Feedback Received from Schools

Darras Hall First School:

- Proposals need to be better than what the School already has.
- No educational rationale has been given for relocating the school
- The school and its Governors are keen to work with NCC to develop DHFS on its current site.

Ponteland Middle School:

- Concerns re proposed relocation.
- Concerns re sharing a building and core facilities
- Ponteland Middle School currently has the best maintained building, the school would be sad to leave it.

Ponteland High School:

- Good opportunities will come from co-locating school and leisure together
- Sharing a building could potential relieve the financial burden
- Concerns re access; walking routes, parking and traffic.