

APPENDIX 3

Notes of Public Consultation Meeting concerning Hovingham CE Primary School. Meeting held on 9 November 2022 at Hovingham Village Hall

Present: Johanna Senior (Chair of Hovingham School's Governing Body); County Cllr Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC)) Andrew Smith (Director of Education, Anglican Diocese of York), Sarah Moore (acting Headteacher of Hovingham School), , Amanda Newbold (Assistant Director, Education, Learning and Skills), Andrew Dixon (Strategic Planning Manager, (NYCC)), John Lee (Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC), Mark Ashton (Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC), County Cllr Steve Mason (Amotherby & Ampleforth division), County Councillor George Jabbour (Helmsley & Sinnington division) school staff, trade union representative parents, and residents.

Apologies: Kevin Hollinrake MP
64 people were present.

AGENDA

6:30	Meeting Opens – Brief welcome	Chair of Governors
6:30	Opening Remarks	Chair of Governors & Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
6:35	Presentation from NYCC <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The proposal• Background to the proposal• How can people comment	Local Authority Officer
6:50	Questions and Answers	Executive Member for Education Learning and Skills
	Closing Remarks	
8:00	Meeting Closes	

1. Welcome

Hovingham's Chair of Governors, Johanna Senior, opened the public meeting at 6.30 pm and she welcomed those present.

2. Chair of Governor's and Executive Member's Opening Remarks

Johanna Senior introduced herself as the Chair of Governors of Hovingham CE Primary School and then introduced various panel members sitting alongside her.

Ms Senior said that pupil numbers at Hovingham CE Primary School had declined to such a point that there were no longer any pupils in school. Therefore Hovingham School is no longer financially sustainable. As a result, the governing body had unanimously voted in favour of asking the Local Authority to consult on a proposal to close the school.

Ms Senior introduced County Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, who would chair the meeting.

Cllr Wilkinson introduced herself as the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills at NYCC.

Cllr Wilkinson outlined the agenda, saying that John Lee would make a slide presentation on the proposal. She said there would be an opportunity for questions and answers following John's presentation for the Local Authority, which she would chair.

3. Presentation from NYCC

The Strategic Planning Officer, NYCC, Mr John Lee explained that the meeting was being held to discuss the proposal to close Hovingham CE VC Primary School from 31 March 2023.

Mr Lee presented several Powerpoint slides, which included explaining the proposal (slides 3 and 4) and the proposal's background (slides 5 to 11). Slides 12 to 22 covered proposed new catchment area, while final slides 25 to 29 covered consultation timescale and details on how to respond to the consultation.

Mr Lee's slides explained how the background to the closure proposal has three parts, the falling roll, the financial position and leadership.

Mr Lee's early slides explained how falling pupil numbers formed one aspect of the background to the proposal. Mr Lee explained that the school has a net capacity of 60 spaces and that, while the numbers on roll have reduced since 2020, there was a significant drop from 24 to 7 between May 2021 and May 2022. Pupil numbers in the school had fallen far quicker than expected and there are currently 0 pupils on roll.

Mr Lee then went on to explain that associated with this very low cohort is a concern about the finance. As a result of pupil numbers falling to 0 the DfE has confirmed that no funding would be provided to NYCC for Hovingham School for 2023/24. Any 2023/24 NYCC funding for Hovingham CE Primary would need to be made from the funding allocations provided by DfE for other schools and academies within North Yorkshire.

Mr Lee explained that Hovingham School is federated with St Hilda's CE School Ampleforth and the two schools operate an amalgamated budget, which is forecasting an accumulated deficit of £196.5k by the end of 2024/25. This deficit forecast is based upon decreasing pupil numbers, but assumed 8 pupils at Hovingham in October 2022 and 5 in October 2023. Mr Lee said that the school's financial projections do not factor in 0 pupils.

Mr Lee explained how there was no permanent leadership in place for Hovingham school due to the Headteacher post becoming vacant. While temporary leadership is currently provided by the Executive Headteacher of Foston, Terrington and Stillington schools, given the practical and financial difficulties presented by Hovingham having no pupils it would not be possible to engage a permanent Headteacher on the existing shared cost arrangements

In order to consider future catchment areas should Hovingham School close, Mr Lee gave details on the four neighbouring primary schools, including their distances from Hovingham and their good Ofsted judgements. Mr Lee explained that there are 4 neighbouring North Yorkshire primary schools within c.2 to 7 miles of Hovingham School: Slingsby (Community); St Hilda's Ampleforth (CE VC); St Benedict's (Catholic); and Terrington (CE VA).

Council Officers have identified two options which seem to offer sensible catchment schools to the residents of the current catchment area, should Hovingham School close. At present, there is a discrete catchment area solely for Hovingham, and a second catchment area which is a shared area between Hovingham and St Hilda's, Ampleforth. In Option 1

Slingsby's catchment would be expanded to accommodate Hovingham CE's discrete catchment area, and the area currently shared between Hovingham and St Hilda's would become part of St Hilda's catchment area. Under Option 2, Hovingham parish would become part of Slingsby's catchment area, the area currently shared between Hovingham and St Hilda's would become part of St Hilda's catchment area, and the parishes of Coulton and Scackleton would become part of the catchment area for Terrington CE School.

Mr Lee explained that views on these two options, or other ideas for future catchment areas, should the school close, are being asked for as part of this consultation.

Mr Lee then explained how school staff would be looked after during the consultation. He said that there is a parallel staff consultation process being undertaken.

He said that the federated governing body would remain in place during the consultation. In the event of closure, the federation would be disestablished and a new governing body established for St Hilda's Ampleforth.

Mr Lee then outlined the consultation's time-scales and he emphasised that a two-stage consultation process would take place before any decisions on the proposals are taken. All views expressed at this public meeting would form part of the report which is considered when the decision on whether to proceed to the second statutory consultation is taken. The statutory consultation is a further 4 week period when there is opportunity for comments and responses.

Mr Lee then handed over to Cllr Wilkinson, who chaired the question and answer session.

4. Questions and Answers – chaired by Cllr Annabel Wilkinson.

Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, invited questions from those present.

A resident, said that, if the school had acted like a private company, it would not find itself in this position. She said that a private company would not wait until the end before acting. Instead, it would ask customers what is wrong. She said that no one had tried to find this out earlier and the public meeting is therefore 4 or 5 years too late

John Lee replied that governors will always be getting feed-back from parents and the local community as part of their role.

Mr Lee added that a public meeting like this is only part of the formal consultation process. He said, if a public meeting like this had been held earlier, it might lead to concerns and only serve to de-stabilize the school.

The resident then asked where is the slide showing the evidence of the investigative work that has been done over the last five years?

A resident asked whether there was any information on children left the school and why there was such a drastic decline in pupils in the school.

A resident and also a member of the Action Group, said he had a wide range of evidence to support his claim that there had been a failure in the school's leadership, which led to pupils and staff leaving.

The resident said that he believed there was still a need for the school and that all the schools in the area should be looked at when considering closure.

Amanda Newbold, Assistant Director for Education, Learning and Skills in the Children and Young People's Service of NYCC, replied that the local management of schools is a matter for governors.

Mrs Newbold said that this case is unusual in that the numbers have dropped so rapidly and the pupil charts and forecasts in the presentation showed declining numbers and an issue with viability.

Mrs Newbold said that, if it is felt that there is a strong case to continue with the school, this consultation is the opportunity to express that. This is an opportunity to respond to the consultation.

The resident said there had been a failure in leadership and in governance. He said that decisions were being taken at great pace and he asked what plans were in place to grow the school and to bring the pupil numbers up.

Mrs Newbold said the school governors had developed plans for growth and she asked Johanna Senior to comment on this.

Johanna Senior, the Chair of Governors replied that the governing body had developed plans for growth.

She continued that their growth plans had included developing links with the baby and toddler group and with the nursery. There had been a staff exchange, with school staff going over to the playgroup.

Ms Senior said that their plans also included developing links with the Forest schools. They had also explored options for outdoor learning in the Hovingham Estate.

She said that the growth plan had involved governors organising a school open day during the summer holiday to attract parents. Similarly it had involved organising a stall on Hovingham market, with displays of school work.

She concluded that in these ways and others governors had gone to considerable lengths to explore and promote their plans for growth and to publicize that the school need more children.

The resident replied that while these plans and actions helped, what was missing were a good curriculum and a good Headteacher. However, he said, the key issue for parents was the lack of wrap around care and this was needed to attract more pupils.

Cllr Wilkinson thanked the resident for his various comments and asked him to put those views in his response to the consultation. She asked if others had questions.

A resident said that a neighbour in the village had 2 children and drove them to an alternative school every day. Her neighbour's children did not attend Hovingham because of the school's lack of wrap around care.

An ex chair of governors and a parent, asked why the governors had asked for the consultation. She said if the governors had not asked, what would happen.

Mrs Newbold replied that the Local Authority had held various meetings with the governors in the summer term because they could see that the numbers were very low. The governors

put forward their plans for growth and the Local Authority supported this. However, concern about numbers was still an issue.

The ex chair of governors responded to Mrs Newbold by saying that those plans for growth were similar to those developed when she was chair of governors. They could not get these actions off the ground due to the head. She said she had asked for exit interviews to take place with leavers, but this was not followed up.

She said that St Hilda's would be placed in a tricky financial situation in the event of Hovingham closing, and St Hilda's would need to look for another partner to share leadership costs.

Cllr Wilkinson asked the ex chair of governors to put her views into her response to the consultation.

Mrs Newbold replied that in the event of closure there would be a dissolution of the federation and it would be likely that St Hilda's would look for another partner to federate with. She asked Mr Lee to expand on governance arrangements in the event of closure.

Mr Lee confirmed that the schools are currently federated under one governing body and that the governing body would be dissolved on closure and that St Hilda's would need to look for other partners to share their leadership costs.

It was asked how likely is it that they will be able to find a partner, given they are close to an academy.

Andrew Smith, the Director of Education, Anglican Diocese of York, replied that the likelihood of the school finding a partner is quite strong. He said it is likely that small schools will work together, because they need to share their costs. Funding issues around schools are an issue we are all aware of and this is a reason why schools are keen to look for partners.

Mr Smith then went on to talk about the difficulty of parental preference for small village schools. He went on to expand this point by explaining that there are usually spare places in village schools so parental preference for an out of catchment school is freely available. Parental preference for other popular schools is significant in increasing the difficulty for village schools in sparsely populated areas.

A parent of a child of school age, explained she is part of the committee who set up the playgroup. She challenged the school's development plan. She said that the claim there had been links with the playgroup was disingenuous because the head did not pursue this. She said there were 20 to 35 attending the playgroup session each Wednesday.

She said that the school's open-day during the summer was not widely published.

She added that parents would attend, if wrap around care was made available.

A school governor at Hovingham said, while he could accept the argument too little too late and that their development plan was similar, there had been a lot of hard work on the part of the school governors.

The governor said that, while he agreed that wrap around care was an important issue for parents, the governors did try and put this provision on. However, while the request for wrap around care was high, the actual take up for it was very low. He then asked what NYCC would need to see out of the consultation to keep the school afloat.

Mrs Newbold replied that the Councillors are the decision makers. She said they will make the decision based on the information presented to them.

Mrs Newbold said that at the moment they are seeing the information that there are no children on roll and an inability to recruit future leadership. She concluded that ultimately their decision is going to come down to pupil numbers.

Cllr Wilkinson referred back to the financial information in the presentation, particularly the DfE's confirmation that they would not fund the school in future.

The governor asked if the DfE were not now going to fund the school, where could future funding come from.

Cllr Wilkinson and Mr Lee both replied that it would have to be taken from the existing budgets of other schools.

Steve Mason, the Local County Councillor, said he had some questions to ask, based on points made. He asked whether a discussion has been held with Slingsby Primary about partnering with Hovingham.

Cllr Steve Mason then asked about home to school transport. He said that the increased cost of transport to other schools should be factored into the closure proposal, and that budgets should be allocated to the schools, rather than on buses.

Cllr Mason asked if this situation is 'really unusual', as claimed, should it not be examined? When you get an anomaly you look into it. So if there were leadership issues at the school, why were these not thoroughly looked into?

Mr Lee replied that the total school transport costs would depend on future catchment area arrangements. Home to school transport is provided in line with NYCC policy, which is that home to school transport would be provided to the catchment school if the child lived more than 2 miles away aged under 8 and more than 3 miles away if aged 8 to 11. Mr Lee said that he could not give a total figure to transport costs until future catchment areas and pupil entitlements were established.

On Cllr Mason's question about contacting Slingsby Andrew Dixon, Strategic Planning Manager, said that an early stage in the summer when this was looking a possibility the LA did make sure that the governing board of other local schools were aware of this developing situation. He said that other local schools were made aware of low numbers, the proposed timescales, were consultees and therefore made aware of the consultation.

Cllr Mason responded by asking whether Slingsby had been directly approached to partner.

Mr Dixon said it was for those schools to express an interest in partnering, if they assessed partnering desirable and something they wanted to consider. He said a difficulty, however, is that if you are operating a school across two sites that comes with additional costs and you would have to clear that was absolutely needed in the local context.

Mr Dixon concluded by saying that Slingsby is aware of the consultation and it is for them to determine how they want to respond.

An accountant and a finance governor at another school, said he wanted to throw into the air a question for everyone to ask themselves, even if the rescue plans work. He questioned whether, even if the plans worked and pupil numbers went up to 35, given the current

situation of funding and costs, particularly staff costs, would the school be viable. He said that even with larger schools with higher pupil numbers school deficits are getting bigger and bigger.

He explained that while there had been a small increase in his school's funding, 85% of the costs were salaries and there had just been a pay award. He said that in a large school it is possible to spread the additional costs to some extent. However, in a small school of 30 or so pupils it is not possible to spread the costs. He said even if the rescue plans work, at 35 pupils the school would be unviable financially, in his experience, unless central government puts more money into school budgets.

An ex governor of Hovingham School, said that the previous head of Slingsby had tried repeatedly to partner with Hovingham, through shared sports days and shared work, but at every opportunity the head would not entertain the idea.

Mrs Newbold responded by saying she didn't think anyone on the panel would speak about an individual.

Andrew Smith, from the Diocese of York, said that it was unfair to comment on an individual who was an employee and who is not present.

Gary McVeigh-Kaye, Secretary of the North Yorkshire branch of the National Education Union, said he represented 3 members of staff who had given their lives to the school. He said it was sad, as someone who works in education, to see this situation for a second time recently, since he had faced a similar closure proposal recently in Harrogate, where pupil numbers had similarly gone down and down.

Mr McVeigh-Kaye said the Harrogate experience had taught him that collecting names of potential future pupils was key. He said if the community in Hovingham is strong enough to work together to collect names, it could help.

A resident asked when the deadline for pupils applying for places in the next academic year.

Mrs Newbold replied that the primary admissions deadline for next year is 15 January. However, she added, parents can make in-year applications to change school at any time of year.

Mr Dixon added that the next stage in the consultation process for County Councillors to make a decision is 13 December.

The Estate Manager at Hovingham Estate, said she was representing the owner of the Estate, who is away. She wanted to make clear that the Hovingham Estate has been very supportive of the school in recent years. She said the forest school had already been mentioned and that the Estate would do anything it could to support the school going forward. The Estate sees the school as key to the village and does not want the school to close.

A resident, said that his children did not go to the school because his wife works and they need wrap around care. He said children go to other schools because of the lack of wrap around care and was critical of previous senior management.

A woman who had been an administrator at the school when numbers were higher, said that she thought the adviser should have been frequently visiting the school when numbers were

dropping. She asked whether advisers had visited frequently and whether references were checked.

Cll Clare Docwra said, while she was a Ryedale District councillor, she was representing the local MP, Keith Hollinrake, who could not attend. Cllr Docwra said that, however, Mr Hollinrake wanted to let the community know he is behind them and would support the residents in their objections to the proposal.

A teacher at Hovingham, said she wanted to share her experiences at the school, which pick up on the main points raised. She explained that she had been a teacher at Hovingham for many years, that staff loved the school, were determined to keep it going, and felt like their concerns had not been listened to.

She said the staff had asked for wrap around care to be made a priority several years ago. She accepted that it might not be financially viable initially. However, she thought that the school's budget should be prepared to take a financial hit initially, in the hope that it would subsequently become financially viable.

She said that under a previous head the school had attracted pupils from other catchment areas. She said that she had raised her concerns with advisers on a number of occasions when numbers were dropping.

She said some families with several children had sent their oldest to the school but not their youngest due to issues.

The Chair, County Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, thanked the teacher for expressing her personal experiences in school and asked whether there were any final comments or views on the proposal.

The teacher said she wanted people to know the heart of the school is still there. She said the teachers and staff are still in the school and wanted to develop links with the community.

A member of support staff, said she was serving the final stage of her redundancy, and that she had lost her job because of the situation.

The teacher said the deadline for responses to the consultation was too short. She asked if the consultation period had been shortened from 6 weeks to 4 weeks.

Mr Dixon replied that the first stage of the consultation process is non-statutory. There is no specific time frame and in fact no statutory requirement for it to be held at all. He said that it is actually the second part where there is a statutory 4 week consultation period.

Mr Dixon said it was the case that in North Yorkshire there is usually a 6 week consultation initially, but that is not always the case and the last consultation undertaken at another school was also 4 weeks.

Mr Dixon said that to run the timeframe through, given that there were no pupils and the pertinent point that DfE funding would stop, the informal consultation period was 4 weeks to enable the timeframes for decisions to be met. That timetable had to be adopted to enable members to make a decision before the end of the financial year.

The teacher said the school still has a good Ofsted judgement and enquiries for pupils to attend had been made.

A grandparent said her grandchild would be disappointed not to attend.

A woman said that at playgroup that morning a parent had said their child would attend.

Cllr Wilkinson starting to draw the meeting to a close, by asking whether there were any final questions.

A resident said that there should be schools retained in each village and in order to do this each school should share their skills and their buildings.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

The Chair, Cllr Wilkinson, drew the meeting to a close by thanking everyone for their thoughtful questions. .

Cllr Wilkinson assured those present that all of their comments would be included in the minutes and considered in the final report.

The Meeting Closed at 7.55 pm