

# North Yorkshire Council

## Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee

7 March 2024

### Receipt of Petition ‘seeking an investigation into the leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation’.

#### Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services)

<b>1.0 Purpose of the Report</b>
1.1 To advise of a petition containing more than 500 signatures.
1.2 To ask the Area Constituency Committee to consider a response.

#### 2.0 The Petition

- 2.1 A petition has been received by North Yorkshire Council. This is a paper-based petition with 1,103 signatures, of which 572 are of people who live in the county.
- 2.2 The wording of the petition is ‘Petition seeking an investigation into the Leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation’.
- 2.3 The covering letter for the petition provided the following context (see *italics* below):

*Signatories of this petition seek a full, objective and thorough investigation into the leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation prior to the council’s decision to close yet another rural school within this county.*

*Small rural schools play a crucial role in the development and well-being of our communities. They provide a nurturing environment, foster a close-knit community spirit and can deliver high quality education, when managed and governed appropriately.*

*North Yorkshire County Council is considering the closure of yet another rural school and we respectfully request that a full and thorough investigation be conducted prior to any decision being made.*

*This investigation should carefully assess the leadership and management of the Upper Nidderdale Federation, including their academic performance, financial stability, community engagement and communication with parents. It is imperative that all relevant stakeholders, including parents and former parents, direct and non-direct contracted staff as well as local residents, have the opportunity to contribute their insights and concerns during this investigation process.*

*We request that this matter is taken seriously and that the best interests of our community’s children are prioritised.*

*We urge North Yorkshire County Council to halt any decision-making process regarding the closure of Fountains Earth Primary School until a full and thorough investigation has been conducted.*

2.4 The petition can be seen on the Council's website here: [Petitions received | North Yorkshire Council](#)

### **3.0 The Council's Arrangements for Receiving and Responding to Petitions**

3.1 The key features of the Council's arrangements for receiving and debating petitions, as published on the Council's website, are as follows:

- Receipt of the petition is published on the Council's website (which has been done in the case of this petition).
- If a petition contains 500 or more signatures (but less than 30,130 signatories), it will be scheduled for debate at the next meeting of the appropriate Area Constituency Committee.
- The petition organiser is offered the opportunity to speak for five minutes at the Area Constituency Committee meeting to present his/her petition. Subsequently, at the meeting, the petition will be discussed by Councillors for a maximum of 15 minutes and a decision will be made on how to respond to the petition.
- Possible responses by the Council to petitions, as shown on the website, are:
  - (a) to take the action requested by the petition;
  - (b) not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate;
  - (c) to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee; or
  - (d) where the issue is one on which the council Executive is required to make the final decision, the council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.
- The petition organiser will receive written confirmation of this decision. This confirmation will also be published on the website.

3.2 In accordance with the arrangements described above, the petition organisers have been invited to join today's meeting to present their petition.

### **4.0 Officers' Comments Regarding the Petition**

4.1 The Council undertook a consultation on the proposed closure of Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School between 17 November and 22 December 2023, including a public meeting that was held on 29 November 2023.

4.2 On 23 January 2024 the North Yorkshire Council Executive reviewed the responses to the consultation. By the consultation closing date 34 responses had been received to the proposals. An additional three respondents did not leave any comments at all on their on-line form, and so their views were not known. The consultation responses were reported in full to the Executive, although with the names of individuals removed as appropriate. Six of the respondents supported the proposal to close the school but the majority did not.

4.3 The Executive report contained the information on the petition received on 11 December and also the public statement submitted to the Skipton and Ripon Area Constituency Committee at the meeting on 14 December 2023. Appendix 6 of the Executive report included both the statement and the officer response in full. These are attached at Appendix A of this report.

4.4 Officers commented in the report to Executive that it was their view that the dominant theme of the consultation feedback was a reflection on how the school arrived at the

situation where there were no pupils on roll in September 2023. Officers noted that neither the petition received nor the public statement at the Area Constituency Committee called for the school to remain open, and that none of the responses received affected the fundamental reasons for consulting on closure. There remain no pupils on roll and as result the school has not been allocated any funding by the Department for Education for the 2024/25 financial year.

- 4.5 The Executive resolved to proceed with the publication of statutory proposals and notices for the closure of the school. The closing date for further representations was 29 February 2024. The Executive are scheduled to determine the proposal at their meeting on 19 March 2024. If approved the School would close on 31 March 2024.
- 4.6 The complexity of the education system and the multiple responsibilities held by school leaders, governors, the Council, the DfE and the Diocese are set out in the response in Appendix A as well as information about the requirement for schools to manage and respond to complaints. The petition states that *'This investigation should carefully assess the leadership and management of the Upper Nidderdale Federation, including their academic performance, financial stability, community engagement and communication with parents.'* All four of these areas (performance, financial stability, community engagement and communication) are the responsibility of governing boards and as such would need to be considered through the governing board's own procedures for managing complaints. However, as some of these matters were shared during the consultation process, they were reported on in section 5 of the report to the Executive on 23 January 2024.

The petition also states that *'It is imperative that all relevant stakeholders, including parents and former parents, direct and non-direct contracted staff as well as local residents, have the opportunity to contribute their insights and concerns during this investigation process.'* The report to the Executive on 23 January 2024 confirms that a number of people contributed through attendance at the public meeting (approximately 54 people attended) and 34 written/online responses were received to the proposals. The full list of consultees was set out in Appendix 4 to the Executive report. These views, some of which related to operational leadership of the school were included in the report to the Executive.

- 4.7 Comments on the options available to Members:

Option A: North Yorkshire Council would not be responsible for an investigation into the Leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation.

Option B: As North Yorkshire Council are not responsible for an investigation into the Leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation, the petitioner could follow the school's procedure for raising complaints which has an escalation process within it.

Option C: North Yorkshire Council would not be responsible for an investigation into the Leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation and therefore further investigation is not possible.

Options D: Whilst the Executive / Executive Member is not looking into an investigation into the Leadership of the Upper Nidderdale Federation, it will be considering a related issue. Members may ask the Executive / Executive Member to take note of the concerns raised when making their decision.

## **5.0 Recommendations**

5.1 That the Committee notes the petition and provides a response as detailed in paragraph 3.1.

*Possible responses by the Council to petitions, as shown on the website, are:*

*(a) to take the action requested by the petition;*

*(b) not to take the action requested for reasons put forward in the debate;*

*(c) to commission further investigation into the matter, for example by a relevant committee; or*

*(d) where the issue is one on which the council Executive is required to make the final decision, the council will decide whether to make recommendations to inform that decision.*

Appendices:

Appendix A – Public statement and Officer response to the 14 December 2023 Skipton and Ripon ACC.

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Background Document: North Yorkshire Council's petitions information and advice, a copy of which is on the Council's website [Petitions | North Yorkshire Council](#)