

# **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

## **THE EXECUTIVE**

**21 January 2025**

### **PROPOSAL TO CEASE SIXTH FORM PROVISION AT THE WENSLEYDALE SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM, LEYBURN.**

#### **Report by the Corporate Director – Children and Young People’s Service**

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 This report details the outcomes of the public consultation carried out by the Council on the proposal to change the age range at The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, effective from 31 August 2025, by ceasing the Sixth Form Provision, and asks the Executive to authorise the publication of proposals and statutory notices, and to schedule taking a final decision on the proposal on 18 March 2025.

## **2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

2.1 The Governing Board of The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form resolved to ask North Yorkshire Council to consult on the permanent closure of the sixth form at the school. The sixth form has been temporarily suspended since September 2023.

2.2 This report details the responses to this consultation and asks the Executive to authorise the publication of statutory proposals and notices (Appendix 1), and to schedule taking a final decision on the proposal on 18 March 2025. If approved, the sixth form provision would cease from 31 August 2025.

2.3 The report is supported by a number of Appendices as listed below:

Appendix 1: Report of Corporate Director Meeting with Executive Members – 7 November 2024

Appendix 2: Published Consultation Paper

Appendix 3: List of the Consultees

Appendix 4: Note of the Public Meeting

Appendix 5: Consultation Responses

Appendix 6: Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 7: Climate Change Impact Assessment

Appendix 8: Full Draft Statutory Proposals and Statutory Notice

## **3.0 BACKGROUND**

3.1 The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form opened its Business and Innovation Centre in 2018, offering BTEC qualifications in a range of practical courses, to try to maintain Sixth Form provision at the school. However, numbers on roll continued to decrease, making it more difficult to maintain viable class sizes at post-16 in terms of quality of experience, subject breadth and financial viability.

- 3.2 In response to falling numbers of sixth form pupils and the withdrawal of government funding for BTEC courses, the decision was made by the Governing Board to temporarily suspend entries to the sixth form for two years to take effect from September 2023.
- 3.3 The school population is now stabilising and is projected to increase in future. However, even if all post 16 students could be retained at The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, the Governing Board does not feel that numbers would be large enough to provide a high-quality post-16 provision both in terms of curriculum and experience, or that it would be financially viable.
- 3.4 The period of suspension has allowed time to assess the practicalities of continuing with post-16 provision, and in Autumn 2024 the Governing Board asked North Yorkshire Council to consult on the permanent closure.

#### **4.0 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN AND ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES**

- 4.1 The decision to consult on the proposal was taken by the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills on the 7 November 2024. A copy of the Report, which provided the full background to the proposal, is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.2 A consultation paper setting out the proposal was sent to staff of the school as well as other interested parties and individuals. A copy of the Consultation Paper is attached as Appendix 2 together with a list of the consultees at Appendix 3.
- 4.3 The consultation period ran from 11 November to 20 December 2024. A public meeting was held on 5 December and was attended by officers of the Council, Governors, and members of the local community. A record of that meeting is attached as Appendix 4.
- 4.4 By the closing date of the consultation, 7 consultation responses had been received to the proposals. The consultation responses received are shown in full at Appendix 5, although with the names of individuals have been removed as appropriate.
- 4.5 The following section of the report summarises the main issues raised by individuals who submitted a written response to the consultation. It also summarises the issues raised at the public meeting on 5 December 2024.

#### **5.0 ISSUES RAISED AND RESPONSES**

- 5.1 Although some of the respondents supported the proposal, most of the written responses to the consultation were not supportive of the proposal and perceived the proposal to reflect a neglect of Wensleydale's rural communities. They felt that post-sixteen provision should be local and not require transport to another school or FE college.
- 5.2 The key issues raised during the consultation process are listed below alongside relevant responses from officers.

### Local Provision

- 5.3 A respondent suggested that the closure proposal reflects a neglect of rural communities in educational planning. A consultee said that the proposal is not supportive of rural pupils aiming for sixth form and that the school should support its pupils by keeping its own provision open. There was also a concern that highly experienced teachers, who enjoy the focus and challenge of sixth form would leave the school as a result of the closure.

### Responses

- 5.4 Falling numbers of post sixteen pupils choosing to attend The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form School's Business and Innovation Centre underpinned the Governing Board's decision to suspend its sixth provision. The funding model for post-16 education has changed in recent years and now favours larger sixth forms than Wensleydale School has ever had. Other smaller school sixth forms in North Yorkshire have experienced similar challenges to those faced by The Wensleydale School, resulting in the suspension of provision. At Boroughbridge High School, the Governing Board suspended post 16 provision for two years, prior to the permanent closure of the school's sixth form. Recent years have also seen removal or suspension of sixth form provision at academy schools in North Yorkshire.

### Alternative Provision in the Area

- 5.5 A consultee thought it was more beneficial for pupils to attend a larger sixth form or college post 16 and others thought that Richmond School and Darlington College offered broader provision.

### Responses

- 5.6 There are benefits for young people of going to a larger sixth form. Several larger secondary schools across North Yorkshire have already made a change in recognition that their sixth form is unable offer the full range of A Level courses that larger post-16 providers can.

The range of practical courses and vocational qualifications offered by Further Education colleges in the surrounding areas has also increased over recent years. These organisations, such as Askham Bryan Agricultural College and Middlesbrough and Darlington FE Colleges, also offer specialist vocational facilities, and their size bridges the gap between school and employment. They have become very popular with local families who broadly feel these organisations provide a wider offer for post-16 education.

### Alternative Proposal

- 5.7 One consultee recommended an alternative proposal. Their alternative is that the current school buildings are demolished, and the school site then sold for housing.

They suggest that the capital receipt received from the sale of the school site to a housing developer could be used to fund a new school building in an alternative location and that this new school should focus on skills with workshops and classrooms for training pupils in trades, particularly in agriculture and in hospitality and tourism.

## Responses

- 5.8 The council works closely with local planning teams to understand projected housing developments and to ensure that there are sufficient school places available. An allowance of potential additional secondary aged school children generated by current housing permissions are included in the forecasts of future pupil numbers and The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form has sufficient surplus spaces to accommodate the pupils generated from any new housing.
- 5.9 It is difficult for smaller school sixth forms to offer a wide range of post 16 courses as they generally lack the staff, specialist facilities, and student numbers which are available at larger post 16 colleges, in particular for vocational subjects.
- 5.10 The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form is not proposing to reduce any school spaces, facilities or capacity should the temporary sixth form closure become permanent.

## Free Transport and Appropriate Transport

- 5.11 One respondent felt that it is more beneficial for the pupils to attend a larger sixth form or college post 16 but they should be able to access free transport to a variety of colleges and sixth forms offering a variety of vocational and A Level courses. Another respondent felt that Wensleydale's pupils should not be expected to travel to alternative schools or FE colleges and that post sixteen pupils from these institutions should instead travel to Wensleydale School. Constable Burton & Finghall Parish Council responded that, while they "understood the need for the permanent change ...we highlight the need for appropriate transport to Richmond 6th Form, Darlington College & Queen Elizabeth 6th Form from the area."
- 5.12 A parent responded that a school with a sixth form they selected had not informed them about the travel subsidy available from NYC. They had incorrectly paid the school direct rather than applied for transport through NYC and therefore felt they had overpaid.

## Responses

- 5.13 Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Darlington runs a minibus service from Leyburn at the beginning and end of the school day for sixth form students and there is also public transport to Richmond School and Darlington College. Students attending post-16 courses in Darlington have tended to travel into Leyburn on public transport and then catch the College bus provided by Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.
- 5.14 Local authorities do not have to provide free or subsidised post 16 travel assistance but do have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport, or other support that the authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training. This is set out in North Yorkshire Council's Post 16 Transport Policy Statement. The Council provides transport assistance for students to enable them to access Post 16 education at an appropriate sixth form or further education college designated to serve the area where a student lives. Transport will be offered to eligible students in return for a contribution towards

the cost of this transport. To qualify for assistance with transport to sixth form or college, the following applies:

- students must be over 16, under 19, on 1 September and live in North Yorkshire
- students must be attending the nearest sixth form or further education college to their home address, or the sixth form of the secondary school which is recognised as the normal school for the home address
- the course attended must be full-time (eg more than 12 hours a week)
- the sixth form or college is the nearest establishment offering a course that the Council consider suitable to a student's career choice, or that is a pre-requisite for entry into higher education
- the nearest sixth form or college is more than three miles from the home by the shortest walked route
- students have agreement from their parent or guardian to pay for the pass.
- Transport assistance needs to be renewed annually and is not provided for students on apprenticeships or work placements.

5.15 Schools that offer their own home to school travel services will provide details on their website. They also advise parents that if their children are eligible under the Council's home to school travel policy then transport will be provided by the Council. It is the responsibility of parents to first check if their children are eligible for transport through the LA; if so then they will pay the permit fee advertised by the LA and transport will be organised for them. If they are not eligible then parents need to contact the school directly and purchase a permit, if available, through them or make their own arrangements.

#### Comments supporting the proposal

5.16 Constable Burton & Finghall Parish Council said they understood the need for the permanent change of closing the sixth form. Middleham Town Council discussed 'the pros and cons of both retaining the provision of the Sixth Form and the discontinuation of the Sixth Form' at the Town Council's November meeting and concluded that 'The Council feel that this is a regrettable but inevitable decision that the school have to make to close the Sixth Form provision and understand the reasoning behind this decision'. Some consultees said that The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form was too small to be able to provide and fund a range of subjects and that it was not viable to keep the sixth form open for a low number of pupils. Redmire Parish Council commented that they agreed with the proposal.

#### 5.17 Response

Officers acknowledge the comments that were received in support of the proposal.

## **6.0 PROPOSAL**

6.1 The proposal is to change the age range of The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form by closing the sixth form from 31 August 2025.

The full statutory proposal is set out in Appendix 1, Section A.

6.2 The proposed timetable would be:

31 January 2025	Publication of Statutory Proposals
28 February 2025	Closing date for representations (4 weeks as prescribed in regulations and cannot be shortened or lengthened)
18 March 2025	Final decision by Executive
31 August 2025	Proposed date of closure of the sixth form.

## **7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 School funding**

Under Local Management of Schools, schools are responsible for their own budgets. It is for heads and governors to determine at school level how to optimise the use of resources and maximise value for money.

### **7.2 Capital implications**

There are no capital implications as a result of this proposal.

### **7.3 Transport costs**

As there are currently no pupils in the sixth form at The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form there would be no immediate transportation costs. Any pupils living in the current Wensleydale catchment area applying for post 16 places would be assessed under the Council's Post 16 Transport Policy Statement at the appropriate time. As such future transport costs cannot be estimated.

## **8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 The School Organisation regulations and guidance<sup>1</sup> cover the processes involved in school closures. Careful regard has been paid to these provisions.

## **9.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no Human Rights issues in relation to this decision.

## **10.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of this proposal and is attached (Appendix 6).

## **11.0 NEXT STEPS**

11.1 It is proposed to publish proposals and statutory notices on 31 January 2025. The proposals would be published on the Council's website and the statutory notice would be published in a local newspaper and displayed at the main entrances to the school.

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<sup>1</sup> The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 and Department for Education, Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools (January 2023).

These would provide four weeks for representations to be made to the Council, by 28 February 2025.

- 11.2 The Executive agreed a model for decision-making on school organisation proposals on 25 September 2007. If approval is given to publish statutory proposals and notices, it is proposed that a final decision is taken by the Executive on 18 March 2025.

## **12.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 12.1 i) Statutory proposals and notices be published on 31 January 2025 proposing to change the age range of The Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, by ceasing sixth form provision, with effect from 31 August 2025.
- ii) The Executive (or the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills if there are no objections during the representation period) schedule taking a final decision on these proposals on 18 March 2025.

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### List of Appendices

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