

Appendix 4

Notes of Public Consultation Meeting concerning Wensleydale School's Sixth Form Proposal.

Meeting held on 5 December 2024 at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form

Present: Cllr Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, North Yorkshire Council (NYC)); Cllr Karen Sedgwick (Leyburn and Middleham Division); Louise Wilson (Assistant Director, Education and Skills, School Improvement Service, CYPS, NYC); Jon Holden (Strategic Planning Manager, Children and Young People's Service, CYPS, NYC); Rachel Conyers (Admissions and Appeals Officer, CYPS, NYC); Julia Polley (Headteacher, Wensleydale School); Stephen Jennings (NY Secretary for NASUWT Union); Cllr Denise Houghton (Redmire Parish Council); Andrew Jones (Former member of Wensleydale School's Governing Body).

Apologies: None
9 people were present.

AGENDA

5.30	Meeting Opens – Brief welcome and opening remarks	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
5.35	Presentation from NYC on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The proposal• Background to the proposal• How can people comment	Local Authority Officer and Head of The Wensleydale School
5.40	Comments from those present	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
5.45	Closing Remarks	
5.45	Meeting Closes	

1. Welcome

The Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, opened the public meeting at 5.30 pm and she welcomed those present.

2. Executive Member's Opening Remarks

The Chair, Cllr Wilkinson, introduced herself as the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills at NYC. She then asked those present to introduce themselves.

Cllr Wilkinson then outlined the agenda. She said that there would be a presentation by the Local Authority on the proposal with an opportunity afterwards to comment and ask any questions.

3. Presentation from NYC

Jon Holden, Strategic Planning Manager, NYC, and Julia Polley Headteacher of Wensleydale School covered the background to the proposal.

Jon Holden explained the roles and responsibilities in determining the proposal. He explained that the Executive Council of NYC is the decision maker, Cllr Wilkinson is impartial in this process and that officers of the Local Authority are conducting the consultation on behalf of the council. He explained that the Governing Body can ask the Council to consult on the proposal, however the Council then determines the proposal, and it is not a decision the Governing Body can make.

Julia Polley explained the background to the proposal. When she became Headteacher nine years ago, the school offered nine subjects at A level with about 20 pupils on roll. In 2018 the school opened the Business and Innovation Centre, focusing on vocational BTEchs, to ensure students had a wide post 16 offer. There was strong support for this within the community and local businesses.

However, while the school had tried to maintain a sixth form provision in this way, the government's withdrawal of BTECs and changes in the funding model for post 16 education meant the post 16 provision had narrowed and numbers were falling. Julia Polley explained that she did not believe the school should try to compete with the offers provided by local colleges and that if the sixth form no longer operated then it opened up the options available to students.

Historically, funding for those pupils in Year 7-11 in the school had helped to subsidise sixth form funding but this has become increasingly unsustainable.

The decision was taken to temporarily suspend the sixth form provision from September 2023. The proposal is to make this temporary suspension a permanent one. Julia Polley felt that the school can give better educational provision to students as a Years 7-11 provider. The school was oversubscribed in Year 7 for the academic year 2024-25 and the expectation for 2025-26 is the same.

Jon Holden concluded by explaining the consultation and he emphasised that a two-stage consultation process would take place before any decision on the proposal is 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 a further opportunity for comments and responses.

Jon Holden then handed over to Cllr Wilkinson, who invited questions or comments from those present.

4. Comments – chaired by Cllr Annabel Wilkinson.

There were no questions from those present, but the following comments were made:

Cllr Denise Houghton, representing Redmire Parish Council, was in agreement with the proposal but did have concerns about the transport implications, particularly in the Dales.

Andrew Jones, a post 16 consultant and former Governor, said he had done a lot of work with the school when the suspension of the sixth form was first considered. He felt that the business and financial case for closure was justified and also the educational case was strong and that the school had a better chance of success going forward if the sixth form were to be closed.

Stephen Jennings, representing the NASUWT Union, said he had no reason to object to the proposal.

Others present agreed with the comments put forward.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

Cllr Annabel Wilkinson, the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, thanked everyone for their comments and said that those would be noted and included in the report to the Executive. She also commended Julia Polley for all her hard work in bringing the school to its current standard.

The Meeting Closed at 5.45 pm