**Broomhaugh & Riding Parish Council**

Response to Northumberland County Council – A consultation about education in the West of Northumberland

The Parish Council supports none of the three models outlined in the consultation document and makes the following statement:

**Consultation Process**

* The Parish Council is dismayed at the way the County Council has undertaken this consultation. Asking headteachers and governors to respond to such tight timescales, and then proceeding with the second stage of the consultation before it is likely that any of the schools’ responses could be assimilated, has lead to the belief in communities that this is a paper exercise only and that decisions have already been made. The consultation states it is to cover the west of the county but no mention is made of the Haltwhistle or Prudhoe partnerships. If this is fundamentally a consultation about three-tier education as opposed to two-tier, why is this not a county-wide discussion?
* We have seen no financial modelling to show the justification for the proposed school closures. Recommendations seem to have been made arbitrarily which has ultimately set schools against each other.
* The proposed timescale for the introduction of these changes also seems to be unnecessarily fast. Apart from issues at Haydon Bridge, we are not seeing failing schools. The majority of our schools are classified as Good or Outstanding and before changing the current model much more reasoned justifications should be forthcoming.

**Haydon Bridge High School**

The situation in Haydon Bridge is appalling for the children and families involved and this most certainly has to be rectified speedily. By simply closing Haydon Bridge High School, the County Council would not be addressing the needs of the local community. Haydon Bridge High School has itself proposed a new model which would include vocational and apprenticeship opportunities for students in the Tyne Valley – something which is clearly lacking at the moment as many students travel to Newcastle to complete their post-16 education.

***We would encourage the County Council to explore this option with the school.***

**Hadrian Learning Trust**

We understand that one of the reasons for this consultation has been the desire of the Hadrian Learning Trust to create an 11 - 18 secondary school.

We are concerned that an academy trust is dictating the provision of education in the west of the county and we feel that very little regard is being shown to the schools in the Hexham Partnership, who we believe are opposed to these changes. Government guidance to academies states: “Where local provision is organised in three tiers and the aim is to move to two tier age range, the department expects schools to work together to ensure an appropriate co-ordinated implementation, and will only approve any individual proposal in that context.” We do not believe that this is being adhered to and will be highlighting this to the Regional Schools Commissioner. Whilst HLT might be ensuring its financial sustainability, no evidence has been provided that the changes will bring financial sustainability to the smaller newly-formed primaries.

Whilst appreciating the need for capital investment for school buildings and facilities at HLT, we are concerned that, as it is an academy, there is no recourse to its admissions policy etc. Funds could be provided but it might not fulfil the needs of the community. Hexham needs a school which caters for students of all abilities.

**Summary**

It is clear that the majority of parents/carers in the west of Northumberland value and support the continuation of the three-tier model of education. Schools in the Hexham Partnership work well together and are proposing ways of forming new alliances that could, in time, deliver the necessary financial savings. First schools form the heart of small, local communities and before damaging this situation, the County Council must show that it has undertaken due diligence with this consultation in order to give it any credibility. We therefore encourage the County Council to review its timescale for change, allow new models to come forward which are properly costed and, most importantly, ensure that any changes which are agreed are in the best interest of children and communities in the west of Northumberland.