

Consultation on the future viability of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, Burnley Campus, Barden Lane, Burnley, BB10 1JD



September 2019

A consultation event will be held on Monday 23 September 2019 at the school.

Further information is provided inside.

Produced by
Lancashire County Council

Introduction

Lancashire County Council and the governors of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form have agreed to hold a public consultation on the future viability of the school. This was agreed at a meeting of the County Council's Cabinet held on Thursday 5 September 2019. This document outlines the main reasons why the viability review is taking place.

Despite the best efforts of the school, and with the support of the local authority, Thomas Whitham Sixth Form has not been able to increase its student numbers sufficiently and the funding they received has reduced as a result of this. The school's financial position has been in steady decline for a number of years and the size of the debt has risen rapidly in the last two years.

The school is currently operating well below the number of students it was designed for and this, coupled with reduced funding, has led the governing body to request that the local authority undertakes an assessment of its future viability.

Lancashire County Council has a statutory duty to secure sufficient and suitable education and training provision to meet the reasonable needs of all young people in its area. Whilst we have no concerns about the quality of provision being delivered by Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, as part of this review, the authority will determine the suitability of the alternative post 16 education and training options for young people in the Burnley and Pendle districts.

The consultation period will run from 16 September 2019 until 1 November 2019. During this period, we will seek the views of parents and carers, students, staff, governors and other interested parties on how we can provide the best education possible for the young people in this area. This booklet should contain all the information you need to make up your mind on what you think the future of the school should be, including the measures we could consider to ensure its future viability. It must be noted that, if the consultation determines that the school is no longer viable, it is possible that the school will close with effect from 31 August 2020.

An event will be held at the school as part of the consultation. I hope that you will take the opportunity to attend and ask us any questions you have about the future of the school.

The views you share with us will be used to inform the decisions that need to be taken. Most importantly, by doing this, you'll help us to provide the best education we can for young people in this area.



County Councillor Phillippa Williamson
Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools

The purpose of the consultation

To consult on the future viability of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. Any changes would be managed in the best interests of both the students currently at the school, whose education is our highest priority, and the staff. It must be noted that, if the consultation determines that the school is no longer viable, it is possible that the school will close with effect from 31 August 2020.

We want to gather as many views as possible regarding the future viability of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, including the possibility that the school may close, to inform the decision making process of Lancashire County Council's Cabinet at its meeting in December 2019. This is your opportunity to:

- seek clarification on the process
- raise any issues that may impact on you and which you would like us to look at further
- put forward any suggestions that you think will improve the viability of the school, and
- ask us any questions about the information contained in this booklet.

Lancashire County Council, with the governors of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, will consider all of the views received through the consultation. The results of the consultation will help councillors to decide on the future of the school.

Please note that this consultation only relates to Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. The other providers based on the Burnley Campus are not included within this review, although they will be asked for their views as part of this consultation.

The reasons why we are holding a consultation

Student numbers

When the school was created in 2006, it was designed for 600 students. The school has never reached this capacity, with the highest number of students being 463 when the school first opened. Since 2012/13, the school has seen a reduction in student numbers each year up to the current figure of 104 in the 2018/19 academic year. However, the school's funding allocation for the 2019/20 academic year is based on 139 students, which shows that they had a growth of 35 students during the 2018/19 academic year.

As a point of comparison, if a maintained school wished to open a sixth form, the Department for Education states that a minimum of 200 places must be provided and that there should be sufficient demand for the places.

The decline in student numbers over time has resulted in a continued reduction to the amount of funding the school receives from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This means that the school is at risk financially and has been unable to cover its operating costs for more than five years.

Population projections

The significant majority of students accessing the school are from the Burnley and Pendle districts. In terms of future student numbers, the Office for National Statistics projections show that the number of 16-18 year olds in Burnley and Pendle are forecast to grow by 1,125 young people over the next 10 years. The more immediate projections show that the number of 16-18 year olds in Burnley and Pendle are forecast to grow by 444 young people over the next three years. It must be noted that these figures do not reflect the housebuilding taking place so the actual number of young people may be higher as a result.

As young people are required to participate in education or training until at least their 18th birthday, the local authority has a duty to ensure that there is sufficient and suitable education and training provision available for young people in the area.

Secondary school pupil numbers

In addition to the future growth in the 16-18 year old population, the number of pupils in secondary education should also be considered as they should progress into post 16 education or training when they finish school.

Based on the January 2019 school census, there were 4,808 11-16 year old pupils on roll at a secondary school in Burnley. This is an increase of 11% in the last five years. There has also been a 5% increase in the proportion of pupils from Burnley primary schools progressing into Burnley secondary schools over the last five years.

With the current numbers on roll at the secondary schools in Burnley at 4,808, there is a projected increase of 15.7% in the total number of 11-16 year old pupils and a 31% increase in the number of Year 11 pupils over the next five years. Therefore, it is possible that there will be a rise in student numbers.

Financial position

The decline in student numbers has led to a reduction in the amount of funding being received by the school. As a result, the school's costs have been higher than its income for a number of years and this has led to the school reporting a deficit balance on its financial position. At the end of the last financial year, the deficit was £3.3 million, which is an overspend of almost 280% on the school's total budget. The deficit position is forecast to grow in excess of 80% per annum of the schools budget which means that the school is no longer financially viable.

The governing body

Following the resignation of the Principal in the summer term, Thomas Whitham Sixth Form's governing body reviewed the financial position of the school and the student number projections. As a result of this, the governing body wrote to the local authority in July 2019 to express their concern about their financial situation and asked Lancashire County Council to undertake a review on the future viability of the school.

Governors took steps to appoint an Acting Principal from within the existing leadership team at the school until the future of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form is clarified.

Alternative options

Based on the financial position of the school and their student numbers, the school is aware that an alternative solution must be found if it is to secure its future viability.

Over the last few years, the school has explored the option of converting to academy status and joining a Multi Academy Trust but it has not been possible to progress this option.

In addition, the school has looked into creating a federation partnership with a local school but this did not proceed.

Key considerations

The results of the consultation will inform the review of the school's viability and what options are available for its future, which may include the possibility of closure. Lancashire County Council's Cabinet will consider the outcome of the review and will make a decision as to how to proceed and the next steps required. In coming to a decision, Cabinet will need to consider:

- the financial position of the school and whether this can be addressed
- the school's ability to attract more students and, therefore, increase the amount of funding it receives, and
- if it is deemed that the school is no longer viable, whether young people have access to sufficient and suitable high quality provision.

Your views will be important to help us to achieve this.

Impact on students at the school

We know that this may be an unsettling time for students, as well as staff and parents. Whilst no decisions have been made at this stage, it is understandable that you may have concerns. Therefore, we encourage you to let us have your views on the future viability of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

Students may wish to contact Lancashire County Council's Talkzone service to speak to a trained adviser, in confidence, about any issues which may be worrying them. Talkzone staff can be contacted in a number of ways:

- Phone on 0800 511 111
- Text on 07786 511 111
- Email at talkzone@lancashire.gov.uk
- Webtalk at www.lancashire.gov.uk/youthzone/get-in-touch.aspx
- Facebook at www.facebook.com/LancashireYPS

The Talkzone service is available from 2pm to 10pm each day including weekends and bank holidays.

Next steps – timescales for the process

There are five stages of a statutory process that have to be followed legally:

16 September to November 2019	Stage one – Consultation
December 2019	Cabinet meeting to consider feedback from the consultation and decide whether or not to publish a statutory notice on a proposal to close the school
	IF REQUIRED
January 2020	Stage two - Publication of statutory notice on a proposal to close the school
January / February 2020	Stage three - four week statutory representation period
April 2020	Stage four - Final decision to be taken by Lancashire County Council's Cabinet
31 August 2020	Stage five - Implementation (if approved)

Consultation event

You are invited to express your views on the future viability of the school, including its possible closure, at an event being held at the school on **Monday 23 September 2019 from 3pm to 8pm.**

Please note that this will be an appointment-led event, requiring interested parties to make a booking prior to the event. This will allow us to manage the process effectively, minimise waiting times and ensure that appropriate officers are available to offer advice and guidance relating to specific matters of interest. You can attend without an appointment but may have to wait longer as those with an appointment will take priority.

Appointments can be made by emailing the 16-19 Education and Skills Team at post16participation@lancashire.gov.uk or by phoning 01772 530111. It would be very helpful if you could let us know the issues you wish to raise in advance of the consultation event so that we are able to provide you with as full a response as possible.

The closing date for booking an appointment is Thursday 19 September 2019 at 5pm. Please note that if there are only a few or no appointments made, then the event may be shortened.

Who we will consult

We will seek views widely on the future viability of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. This document will be provided to a range of stakeholders who may have an interest in this review. These include the following:

- Parents, carers, staff, governors and students of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. The views of students will be gathered through the school
- Headteachers, governing bodies and staff of local secondary schools
- Local post 16 education and training providers
- Providers based on the Burnley Campus
- Local Members of Parliament – Burnley and Padiham and Pendle
- Lancashire County Council Councillors – Burnley and Pendle
- Lancashire Parent Carer Forum
- Chief Executive, Leader and elected members of Burnley Borough Council
- Chief Executive, Leader and elected members of Pendle Borough Council
- Neighbouring local authorities who border the area
- Diocesan/Church Authorities and Faith Groups
- Members of the Education Scrutiny Committee
- Education and Skills Funding Agency
- Trade Unions and Associations
- Lancashire Association of School Governing Bodies
- Ofsted: Her Majesty's Inspector for the area
- The Regional Schools Commissioner, and
- The wider community – through libraries in Burnley and Pendle and both Burnley Town Hall and Pendle Town Hall.

Copies of the consultation document can be made available to the local community on request.

How to share your views

We welcome your views on this viability review. All comments will be considered very carefully before any further action is taken.

It is important that you share your views by Friday, 1 November 2019, by any of the ways listed below. We will not be able to consider any responses received after this date.

An online questionnaire at: www.lancashire.gov.uk/schoolorganisationreviews

A written response by email to: haveyoursay@lancashire.gov.uk

A written response by post to:

Business Intelligence
Lancashire County Council
PO Box 100
County Hall
Preston
PR1 0LD

Alternatively, you can return your completed questionnaire to the general office at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. This will then be returned to Lancashire County Council on your behalf.

Please submit one response per person to this consultation

Unfortunately, due to the high number of responses we expect to receive, we will not be able to acknowledge written responses, or enter into correspondence with interested parties during or after the consultation period.

It is important to attend the relevant consultation event if you require clarification or more information on the review.

Further information can be found at
www.lancashire.gov.uk/schoolorganisationreviews.

During the consultation period, all the information we receive will be collated, and used to inform any decision. For your information, in accordance with the Department for Communities and Local Government regulations, all written responses may be disclosed to the public and could also be published on the website of Lancashire County Council as background papers to the report to the cabinet.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Who should complete this questionnaire?

- Staff, governors, current or prospective students and parents/carers of pupils at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form
- Any other interested member of the community

Q1

Which of the following options, if any, would you prefer for the future of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form?

Please tick one box only

Option 1 – continue as things are

Option 2 – close Thomas Whitham Sixth Form and find students places at another post
16 education or training provider

Option 3 – do something else

Unsure/don't know

Q2

Thinking about your choice in the previous question, why did you choose this option? If you chose Option 1, please explain how you think the school's viability can be improved. If you chose Option 3, please explain what you think should be done.

Please write in the space below

Q3

One of the options being considered is to close Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. If this was to happen, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the closure?

Please tick one box only

Strongly agree

Tend to agree

Neither agree or disagree

Tend to disagree

Strongly disagree

Unsure / don't know

Q4

If Thomas Whitham Sixth Form was to close, how would this impact on you?

Please write in the space below

Q5

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Please write in the space below

About you

To help us to consider how we provide our services to different groups of people, it is important that we ask you a few questions about yourself. All the questions in this section will be completely confidential. However, if you do not wish to answer a question, please leave it blank and go on to the next one.

Q6

Are you responding to this proposal as...?

Please tick as many as apply

	Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	Other post 16 education or training provider*
A student currently at:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A future student at:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A member of staff at:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A governor at:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A parent/carer of a student currently at:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A parent/carer of a future student at:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If other post 16 education or training provider*, please specify:	<hr/>	
A political representative for:	<hr/>	
Member of the local community:	<hr/>	
Other (please specify):	<hr/>	

Q7

What was your age on your last birthday?

Please tick one option only

Under 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	35-49	<input type="checkbox"/>
16-19	<input type="checkbox"/>	50-64	<input type="checkbox"/>
20-34	<input type="checkbox"/>	65+	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Q8

Are you...?

Please tick one option only

Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q9

Are you a deaf person or do you have a disability?

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Please tick as many as apply

Yes, learning disability

Yes, mental health condition

Yes, physical disability

Yes, other condition

Yes, sensory disability

No

Prefer not to say

Q10

Are there any children or young people in your household aged under 18?

Please tick as many as apply

No, but expecting

Yes, aged 12-15

Yes, aged under 5

Yes, aged 16-17

Yes, aged 5-8

No children aged under 18

Yes, aged 9-11

Prefer not to say

Q11

Which best describes your ethnic background?

Please tick one option only

White

Mixed

Black or Black British

Other

Asian or Asian British

Any other ethnic group (please write in the space below)

Prefer not to say

Q12

What is your religion or belief?

Please tick one option only

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| No religion or belief | <input type="checkbox"/> | Jewish | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Christian (including
CofE, Catholic,
Protestant and all other
denominations) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Muslim | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Buddhist | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sikh | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Hindu | <input type="checkbox"/> | Any other religion or belief | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Prefer not to say | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Q13

What is your home postcode?

Please write in the space below.

Thank you for taking part in this questionnaire. You can return your completed questionnaire to:

Business Intelligence, Lancashire County Council, PO Box 100, County Hall, Preston, PR1 0LD

Alternatively, please return your completed questionnaire to the general office at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. This will be returned to Lancashire County Council on your behalf.

Important Information

Lancashire County Council may be required to publish consultation responses as part of the reports for consideration by its cabinet either as appendices to those reports or as part of the background papers referred to in those reports and available on request. Please be aware that your responses to this consultation may be made available on the county council's website as part of this process