

Summary of consultation event held at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form on 23 September 2019

At the event, 43 appointments took place with 51 interested parties in attendance. Some of the attendees spoke to more than one LCC officer at the consultation event. A breakdown of the attendees is as follows:

Parents of students at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	14
Staff at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	13
Current students at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	10
Staff from other local schools	7
Grandparents of students at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	3
Pupil at a local school	1
Parent of a member of staff at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	1
Member of staff from Burnley Campus	1
Member of staff from UCLAN	1
Governor at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	1
Chair of a Trust working with Thomas Whitham Sixth Form	1

Please note that some attendees fall in to more than one category in the table above.

Local authority staff in attendance were as follows: Head of Asset Management; Senior Adviser for Secondary and Post 16; Head of Service for Financial Management (Development and Schools); Senior SENDO; Integrated Assessment and Monitoring Manager; HR Business Partner; Senior HR Manager (Schools); and 16-19 Education and Skills Lead.

The comments captured at the event have been summarised in a number of headings as set out below.

Impact on current students, including vulnerable students

Sixteen people made comments about the impact on current students, including vulnerable students. Of the people who made comments, five were members of staff at the school, one was a member of staff from Burnley Campus, eight were parents or families and two were current students.

Ten people made reference to vulnerable and disadvantaged students and how closing the school would impact on them. Two members of staff asked whether an equality impact assessment had been undertaken as closing the school may have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged students, therefore affecting social mobility. One member of staff questioned who would provide for vulnerable young people who can't cope or where the college say they can't meet their special needs/disabilities. A student and their parent asked about students in Year 12 who have additional support and nurture needs. A Year 12 student and their parents asked how students with SEND will get the support they need and support for their mental health. A member of staff from Burnley Campus was concerned that some young people with autism need space and that closing the school would be discriminating against them. One parent said that the SEN support at the local college is not good and her daughter won't be comfortable there. Another parent said her daughter was worried she would be anonymous in a large college and that she needed the attention and pastoral support Thomas Whitham Sixth Form offers. She wants her

younger children to have the same opportunity. A member of staff and a former member of staff who now works at a local school were concerned about the long-term provision options for vulnerable students and those who require pastoral support that a school sixth form provides.

Seven people raised concerns about the courses students are following and the impact a closure would have on this. One student was concerned about losing the first year of her work if she has to move. Two students, a parent and a family raised concerns about the availability of provision and that no other provider offers the same combination of courses as the school, such as combining BTECs and A levels or BTECs and GCSEs. They are concerned that they will not have access to the same curriculum, that they may fall behind in their studies and that there may not be places at other providers. A family asked whether their son would have to start all over again as nowhere offers the same combination of courses. A student and their parent asked what would happen if the student needed to resit their A levels. A parent asked what would happen to her daughter who is in the second year of a three year programme. The same course of study is not available elsewhere and she feels that Lancashire County Council (LCC) is failing her daughter in her education. A student and their parents said that they would want to complete their course at the school in 2021. A member of staff asked whether the syllabus students are following would be available elsewhere.

Five people asked about the support which would be provided for current students if the school closes. A member of staff said that transitions to a new setting would be needed. Two students asked what support would be provided for students if they have to find a new provider and that this would impact on their friendships and the teaching styles they currently receive. A family asked whether students in Year 12 will be able to continue into Year 13 at the school. A student and their parent said that their previous experience with LCC in terms of support has not been good so they are concerned that they will not get support they need if the school closes. One student was concerned about the cost implications if she has to move to another provider.

Four people raised concerns that a college environment was not suitable. One student was worried about how she would manage in another setting. One parent said her daughter would not be comfortable in a large college. Two students and their parents questioned whether a college environment was right as some students get lost in a big environment and some students may not want to be at the same place as their former classmates.

One member of staff and the parents of a Year 12 student asked how a possible closure would impact on NEET (young people not in education, employment or training) in the area.

Impact on the local community

Five people made comments about the impact on the local community.

The Headteacher of a local school noted that the campus provides the local community with access to facilities such as sports.

A governor at the school said that Thomas Whitham Sixth Form has very strong community links and is very well integrated locally.

A grandparent and Chair of a Trust supporting the school said that removing school sixth form provision from a deprived community is removing a route into higher education and that this also leads to the disenfranchisement of Asian heritage girls.

A teacher from another organisation who is working with the school stated that they have very good community links and strong volunteer groups/links and that students have strong multi-cultural links. She said that the school has a big input into the local community and helps to improve community outcomes. It was suggested that engaging more with adults in community would help to support the school.

A parent questioned what the impact would be on other campus partners if the school closed and that the community cannot afford to lose this resource.

Alternative provision options

Twenty three people made comments about alternative options in relation to the future of the school.

Twelve people suggested alternative uses for the site or made suggestions about how the school could be supported. One family suggested that the school be marketed as specialist provision for students with additional needs and they also wondered whether the Ogden Society could support the school to become a School of Excellence for Physics. A member of staff from another school, a student and two parents asked whether the school could become an academy. A grandparent and Chair of a Trust supporting the school and a Year 12 student and their parents asked whether the school could be classed as a college and funded likewise. The Year 12 student and their parents also suggested that the school becomes specialist SEND provision, which would help to reduce NEET. A parent suggested that the school becomes an 11-19 or a 14-19 school as this would help to address the shortfall of secondary places in the area. They also suggested that the school could increase its age range to accommodate adults. A member of staff also suggested that the school is used to accommodate the shortfall of secondary places in Burnley. A parent of a Year 12 student also suggested changing the age range of the school, for example to accommodate 14 year olds with SEND, adult learners or adult learners with SEND. A parent suggested that students are allowed to finish their education at the school with Year 12 students moving to Hameldon Community College to complete their courses. This would allow the Thomas Whitham site to be used for other educational uses. A member of staff and their parent questioned how the school can diversify and offer different provision which can compete with the local college.

Seven comments were made about travel implications to other providers. One parent said that travel is an issue for autistic young people and that they are concerned about the transport for their child to another setting. Another parent and a member of staff at another school said that the travel times to other providers are long to be able to access a similar offer. A student said that Accrington St Christopher's C of E High School is the closest sixth form and that this is an expensive bus ride away. A pupil at a local school raised a concern about transport to other providers. A member of staff raised concerns about travel issues and whether independent travel training would be offered to students. They also raised the additional costs of travel if the school was to close. A member of staff from Burnley Campus was concerned about the costs of travel and whether transport support would be in place.

Seven people made comments about the choice of provision in the area. The parents of a Year 12 student said that more post 16 provision is needed in the area, not less. A student and their parent said that, without the school, there will only be one big college in the area. A member of staff and their parent stated that post 16 provision should not be provided by just one college. A student was concerned about the alternative options which have good pastoral support and flexible academic and vocational routes. A member of staff asked whether there is enough variety in the provision available locally. A Year 13 student and their parents said that closing the school will leave reduced choice for vulnerable young people. A member of staff and a former member of staff who now works at a local school said that the area has inner city problems and that alternative options are needed.

Four people raised concerns about the availability of places at alternative providers. The Headteacher of a local school was concerned that pupils won't get a place at Burnley College and asked what support there would be to help pupils find places. A member of staff asked about the sufficiency of places in the area. A pupil at a local school was concerned about provision/places for students with access arrangements for exams. A member of staff and a former member of staff believe that students won't take up places locally and that they will move out of the area to access provision.

Four comments were made about college provision. A grandparent and Chair of a Trust supporting the school said that she was sceptical of the ability to offer high quality A levels in an FE college. A member of staff at another school said that colleges are only judged on standards and not on the support they provide for students. A member of staff said that Burnley wards are some of the most disadvantaged in the county so young people may struggle in a large college where they may be anonymous. A member of staff from Burnley Campus said that there is a perception that local colleges cannot meet the needs of students with SEND.

Two other comments were made in relation to alternative provision. A parent asked what can be done to save the school and to stop it from closing. A member of staff asked where the pastoral support and sixth form provision will be in Burnley.

Provision at the school

Twenty five people made comments about the provision at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

Fourteen comments were made about the support provided by the school. Two members of staff, a parent and a governor at the school commented on the quality of the pastoral support at the school, with one adding the SEN and careers support is better than at a college. The parent also said that the school caters really well for those with high functioning autism. A member of staff said that student anxiety issues are taken into consideration and that closing the school could have life changing implications for these young people. A family and a student said that there is more support than there would be in a large college and what would happen to young people who don't fit in. A Year 13 student and their parent said that the school offers proper pastoral care and that students are known. A student and their family said that they get a lot of support, that the school is inclusive with different communities and that there is no pressure to leave if you are not making progress. A student and their parent said that the school offers good SEN support and they are concerned they won't get that in another college. A parent said that their daughter gets good SEN and additional support whilst doing A levels and GCSE resits and

that her previous school did not put support in place. She also said that the school treats people as individuals. The parents of a Year 12 students said that the stronger support network caters for more challenged students far better than the colleges. A member of staff from Burnley Campus felt that the support given at the school would not be replicated in another setting. A parent of a Year 12 student said that the school provides a specialist nurture approach which colleges don't provide and that it is the right environment for challenging and SEN students. A parent of a Year 12 student said that the school provides good academic care.

Eleven comments were made about the size of the school. A member of staff said that students like the smaller scale of the school. A family said that their son has additional needs and chose the school as he can be happy in a smaller setting. A student said that the school is friendly and small and you can be yourself as an individual without bullying. A pupil from a local school said that they liked the small size of the school when they came on a visit. Two students and their families said that they like the small class sizes. A governor at the school commented that the school is small but it is very focussed and supportive and that it offers opportunities and benefits well beyond its size. A member of staff said that the school's small environment helps young people with SEND as students can find a larger environment difficult. A member of staff from Burnley Campus said that this is a deprived area and females are not educated due to the large environment of a college, whereas Thomas Whitham Sixth Form is seen as more of an extension to school. She felt that closing the school was discrimination. A student said that the smaller environment allows staff to really support students and allows young people to have choices. She felt that the environment was inviting and supportive and that it feels like home. A member of staff from UCLAN felt that the school is better than a college as it is smaller and can deliver better learning and outcomes because of its size.

Six comments were made about the provision offer at the school. A member of staff said that the provision offer by the school is rare. A parent stated that the school has a history of providing opportunities for catch up provision and resits to allow further access to courses and without this, NEET will rise. A student and their parents said that nowhere else allows a blend of A levels and vocational courses. A member of staff and their parent said that the school has built up a good offer of education for diverse students and that no other provider does this. A parent of a Year 12 student said that the school is the only place which allows GCSE and BTECs together and that some specialised provision, such as Criminology, is not available elsewhere. They went on to say that A levels in FE are not as focussed as at the school. A member of staff from UCLAN said that extra curriculum activities are very strong and that they are developing exchange links with China, with several students working towards this.

Five comments were made about student numbers. Three members of staff made reference to students still enrolling in September 2019 despite receiving the letter about the consultation taking place. One member of staff asked where these young people would go if the school closes. A member of staff made reference to the school having a number of students with autism. A member of staff from UCLAN said that the school plans to attract around 100 more students.

Five other comments were made in relation to the provision at the school. A Headteacher of another school said that Thomas Whitham Sixth Form has been successful for their pupils. A member of staff at another school said that the children of Burnley deserve a choice and some would not have a chance without this school. A student and their parent

said that the teaching is good and that they enjoy being at the school. A parent said that the school should be promoted, not closed. A member of staff from UCLAN said that the school has amazing facilities and a different ethos to FE colleges, it has energetic and good students, a caring environment and strong staff support for students.

Three comments were made about the staff at the school. A student said that teachers give up their lunchbreak to support students. A student and their family said that they trust the staff and can confide in them. A parent of a Year 12 student said that staff are better qualified in subject specific areas than at other providers.

Four comments were made about the quality of provision at the school. A parent said that the school has always provided Good education, as judged by OfSTED. A parent of a Year 12 student said that quality is high and improving. A governor at the school said that the school is significantly better than it was 10 years ago. A member of staff said that quality has improved and that the school should have another year to recover.

Financial and building related issues

Twenty comments were made about financial and building related issues.

Nine people commented on the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and the associated issues. A family, two parents and the grandparent and Chair of a Trust supporting the school asked if the costs of the building and the PFI contract could be renegotiated. A Headteacher of a local school said that they make a significant contribution to the operating costs of the campus. A member of staff and their parent asked how the PFI costs for the school had been determined. A member of staff asked about how the school's contribution to the PFI costs is determined. A parent of a Year 12 student asked whether the equipment in the school could be reallocated or if it would go back to PFI if the school closes. The parents of a Year 12 student said that, if the school closes, there is still the PFI liability which would need to be paid and can the ongoing costs of the facility not be reconsidered.

Seven people made general comments related to finance and buildings. A member of staff and their parent asked how the school was funded. A student asked who the debt belonged to. A member of staff said that the school had reduced their published admission number and would this not help. A student and their parent asked how the deficit can be addressed. Another student and their parent asked if there is anything else which can be done to keep the school open and solve the budget issues. A Year 12 student and their parent asked how the authority has supported the school to manage the deficit. A member of staff said that there was a financial impact of the letter being sent in the summer as reduced student numbers also reduces the schools funding.

Five people asked about the building rates. A member of staff asked if the rates issue was material and whether this was more than other schools. Three members of staff asked about the rates issue and whether this would have helped the financial position of the school. A parent asked whether the rates issue would reduce the deficit and if any of this can be claimed back.

Five people asked about financial forecasting and the recovery of the school. A member of staff asked about the forecast recovery of the school, including the rates issue and space utilisation, and whether the school's viability can be reviewed again. A governor at

the school said that a full forecast with further funding should be done. A member of staff asked if all options for cost reduction were explored. They said that further independent financial analysis and projections should be done to inform an honest decision about financial viability. The parents of a Year 12 student said that a longer term forecast taking other factors into account is needed. A parent of a Year 12 student asked whether a forecast can be done which reflects increasing student numbers, the increasing rate per student, NEET funds and other factors such as Energise, the City Learning Centre (CLC) and marketing, to give a 3-5yr view of where the school would be.

Five people made comments about the buildings and the campus. A Headteacher of another local school made a number of points: the future use of the premises and the potential impact on campus partners; Lancashire County Council (LCC) needs to have conversations with campus partners to consider contingency planning; her school is over-subscribed and could expand further; what will campus management look like in the future; and that consistency and clarity is required. A student and their parent asked what will happen to the building if the school closes. A Year 12 student and their parent and a member of staff said that there will still be a cost to LCC if the school closes so why close it; would it not cost less to keep it open. A member of staff asked why money was spent to expand the primary school on site when there was capacity at Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. A Headteacher of another local school said that, if the school closes, any replacement post 16 provision on site needs to have the same ethos as Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

Four people made comments about other income streams. A member of staff asked if part of the building could be rented out and reduce the space used by the school. A student and their family asked if anything can be done to raise funds for the school. A parent asked whether the school could be redesignated to attract higher per-student funding. A parent of a Year 12 student asked about other funding options such as grants, parents and lottery funding for community learning and workshops.

Staffing and HR issues

Ten people commented on staffing issues and these people consisted of nine members of staff at the school and one parent of a student at the school.

Nine members of staff raised HR concerns and these related to the following: pension entitlements; the support available for staff throughout the process, such as support to find alternative employment; the timing of the process and when staff will be informed of this; redundancy payments and calculations; impact on staff on different contracts and that processes need to be aligned; impact on staff employed by Burnley Campus rather than the school; the importance of staff wellbeing through this process; measures being taken to avoid redundancy, such as redeployment; retention incentives, how these are determined and whether they are taxable; and how teaching is maintained for students if staff start to leave the school.

A member of staff at another school asked whether another Burnley school could support Thomas Whitham Sixth Form and make links with a collaborative approach to staffing.

General comments, including the consultation process

Twenty nine general comments were made during the consultation event.

Sixteen comments were made about the letter which the governing body sent out in the summer in relation to the viability review and the consultation process. Comments were made by members of staff, students, parents and staff at other schools. Comments included the following: the timing of the letter was inappropriate and had a negative impact on the number of students who enrolled; the letter should not have mentioned closure; 75 students did not attend as a result of the letter and this cost the school £300,000 in lost funding; the school was expecting 140 students to enrol, based on first preferences, but the letter prevented this from happening; the letter should not have been sent before the consultation started; the letter has created a catch-22 situation as the school cannot progress if we say we are closing; numbers were increasing until the letter went out, would this trend not have continued; felt like the letter was sent on purpose to deter recovery; and why did the CLC move into the building at the same time as the letter was sent out.

Eleven comments were made about the marketing of the school. Comments were made by members of staff, students, parents and staff at other schools. Comments included the following: LCC hasn't marketed the school; the advertising budget doesn't compare to that of the college; can there be any help to advertise the school; can the school's marketing budget be increased to encourage young people to apply; was the school's marketing good enough; would numbers not increase with better marketing; we weren't aware that the school existed; can the school be promoted differently to encourage enrolments; the school is not as well advertised as the college; what do we understand about why students choose where they go; and LCC should support the marketing of the school.

Eight people made reference to a phone call which was allegedly made to local schools about the closure of the school. Comments were made by members of staff, students, parents and staff at other schools. Comments included the following: local headteachers said that LCC called them to advise them not to send young people to the school; who rang schools to tell them not to send their pupils to Thomas Whitham Sixth Form as this had a negative impact on numbers before the consultation started; I had message from LCC on results day advising us not to encourage pupils to go to Thomas Whitham Sixth Form; and pupils were told by their local school not to go to Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

Seven people asked about the support which has been given to the school. A member of staff asked what support LCC has given to the school. A family said that there does not seem to be any backing from LCC. A member of staff at another school questioned the accountability of LCC in supporting the school. A student asked what else LCC can do to keep the school open. The parents of a Year 12 student said that there should have been more support from Burnley Borough Council and LCC and that neither council's website makes reference to the school. A parent of Year 12 student said that both LCC and Burnley Borough Council should put money in to support the school. A member of staff and their parent said that it looks like LCC has favoured colleges in what they have been able to offer, such as apprenticeships.

Four people made comments about the consultation process. A parent of Year 12 student said that there was too little time to respond to the paperwork. A member of staff asked about the process if the school were to close. A member of staff said that we seem to be starting the process when the school is turning a corner and does the consultation mean game over. A member of staff commented that the consultation booklet says that the school is no longer financially viable and it should be the consultation which determines this. This member of staff also believed that the student numbers in the booklet were incorrect.

Three people made reference to the local population numbers. A member of staff and a parent said that the local population is due to rise and did LCC not require the places at the school. A member of staff asked about LCC's plans for future FE provision in Burnley and Pendle and whether closing the school would increase NEET in Burnley.

A wide range of other comments were made and these were as follows: the school has met all of the Gatsby benchmarks; employers are really supportive of the school and believe in our students; what options are available for the future of the sixth form; why is the school in this position and why has nothing been done sooner; why is the school closing; what is the benefit of closing the school; concerned that future students will not have the same opportunities; what will happen to 'Tommys' if the school closes; I have a long association with the campus, I use the library etc after school and I have friends who would like to come here; this is the third school sixth form to close in Burnley; 1,600 signature petition shows concern locally over potential closure and 60-70 people also attended this event; does LCC want Burnley College to be the only sixth form provision; Burnley Borough Council's 'Burnley Action Plan' mentions Burnley College but not the school – is there a real local commitment to Thomas Whitham; there has been a lack of creativity to solve the issue; involving Burnley College was a mistake; are we being punished for poor leadership decision in the past; what happened to the partnership with Burnley College; how much can LCC influence colleges; and if the school closes, Building Schools for the Future will be seen as a failure.