

**Buildwas Consultation Meeting**  
**23 September 2015, 19:00 – 21:00**  
**Buildwas Village Hall**

**Local authority officers present:**

Karen Bradshaw, Director of Children's Services  
Chris Mathews, Commissioner for Education Improvement and Efficiency  
Helen Murray, Senior Education Improvement Adviser  
Phil Wilson, Service Delivery Manager  
Lorraine Edwards, HR Business Partner  
Jo Haswell – Notetaker.

Karen Bradshaw welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that this was an opportunity for them to contribute to the decision making process on the proposal to close Buildwas Primary School in August 2016. A consultation is not only about questions but also about putting forward viable proposals and solutions.

Karen Bradshaw welcomed the Shropshire Council elected members and the local MPs who were present, namely:

Cllr Ann Hartley – lead member for Children's Services  
Cllr Nick Bardsley – deputy lead member for Children's Services  
Cllr Claire Wild – local member for Severn Valley  
Daniel Kawczynski MP  
Lucy Allan MP.

Karen Bradshaw went through the consultation PowerPoint presentation that will be made available on the Shropshire Council website <http://new.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved/proposal-to-close-buildwas-primary-school-consultation-document/>

Following the presentation Karen Bradshaw opened the meeting for those attending to put forward any questions, discussions points or viable solutions.

A number of pupils from the Buildwas Primary School spoke up against the proposal to close the school:

Olivia – explained the positive impact of coming from a large school into a smaller school like Buildwas Primary has had on her confidence and self-assurance.

Megan – stated that her mum is a school governor and is trying to improve the school so please can the consultation process be stopped.

Brooke – handed over a signed petition, with over 700 signatures, to keep the school open.

Karen Bradshaw thanked the children for attending and for their contributions.

The panel were asked whether any decision had been made about becoming an academy and what was the local authority's position on this option?

Karen Bradshaw explained the decision to become a sponsored academy does not rest with the local authority but is made by the Regional Schools Commissioner.

While discussions are ongoing and a potential sponsor has been identified, no decision has yet been made.

Nigel Bowen explained that he has spoken to the Department for Education academy broker and they are aware of this consultation process so are trying to reach a decision as quickly as possible.

The question was asked about why if improvements have been made at the school the local authority has not allowed time to continue these improvements - everything has taken place too quickly.

Chris Mathews recognised the improvement that has occurred since the school was placed in special measures. He also confirmed that concerns about the school remain, that the local authority has a duty to promote high standards of education over a sustained period and, that the local authority had informed the school governing body of the vulnerabilities of the school including the decline in pupil numbers before the school was subject to special measures. Chris Mathews also confirmed that governors had overseen a period of sustained decline in provision and outcomes at the school.

A member of the audience asked for an answer to Olivia's earlier question about coming from a large school and the positive impact Buildwas has had on her confidence and self-assurance.

Karen Bradshaw stated she was pleased to hear about the positive impact the school has had on Olivia, but that this is an individual case and in overall educational terms Ofsted has judged the school as requiring special measures.

Helen Murray agreed that there has been improvement and while there has been a positive turnaround in Key Stage 2 further improvements need to be made. The local authority has continued to provide advice and support to the governing body.

The officers were asked why the local authority has to close the school.

Chris Mathews stated that when a school is judged by Ofsted to require special measures the local authority is required to consider a range of options, of which one is the closure of the school. Buildwas Primary School has not been a high performing school for some time.

An audience member stated that not one child from this school has been in trouble with the law and that surely that meant that it had provided a good education.

Chris Mathews responded and confirmed that a good education involved more than abiding by the law. He also reminded those present that the local authority is expected to promote high standards of education in its schools and the current situation is that Buildwas Primary School is not providing this or demonstrating that it is sustainable over time.

Nigel Bowen stated that a number of pupils left when the school had a lack of leadership but 18 pupils left following the local authority announcement to consult on the proposed closure of the school. The governing body asked for support continuously, but what support did the local authority provide? In November 2014 the governing body asked the local authority for support in starting the process of appointing a new headteacher. The local authority didn't recommend this as it was felt the school would not find a suitable candidate.

The former chair of governors supported this and echoed the lack of support from the local authority.

Chris Mathews responded and confirmed that the local authority had provided a high level of support including a visit from an additional school improvement adviser (SIA) to cover the absence of the regular SIA to advise and support the school and governing body. It was confirmed that the school's rolling record identified concerns, that the school had received appropriate advice and support and that the chair of governors had been sent information informing him of the rolling record and encouraging him or another governor to attend the SIA meeting with the headteacher. The local authority also keeps the record on file.

Nigel Bowen disputed the fact that as chair of the governors he had ever received a copy of the rolling record and stated that when he subsequently tried to get a copy was told by the local authority that the only copy was kept at the school.

A member of the audience stated that in the Spring 2015 school census Christ Church CE Primary School in Cressage had 8 vacancies but in the Autumn 2015 they had 34 vacancies. He stated that they have poor attendance, poor results and their academic performance is below that of Buildwas Primary School and so why is this school being put forward as an option as a receiving school?

Helen Murray responded that the local authority has been open and honest on what options there available. Parents will have the opportunity to express 3 preferences for an alternative school, which does not have to include the school in Cressage.

A parent stated that Buildwas Primary School was their choice of school and by closing the school their choice is being taken away.

Karen Bradshaw confirmed that there are 5 other alternative Shropshire schools within a 4.5 mile travelling distance from Buildwas.

Phil Wilson advised that there are currently 52 pupils at Buildwas and across the named 5 schools there are 92 vacancies across all year groups. There are currently 33 vacancies at Christ Church CE Primary School, Cressage.

A member of audience advised that in the choice of 5 schools only 2 are non-denominational schools, namely John Wilkinson Primary School in Broseley and Much Wenlock Primary School. There are currently only 2 vacancies in Reception, 2 in Year 3 and 3 in Year 5 in these schools. If the local authority closes the school they are taking away parental preference to place their child in a non-faith school. Chris Mathews advised that members of Cabinet would take this into consideration when making their decision.

In relation to the number of equivalent non-denominational places, another member of the audience stated that the Council was in violation of the human rights of parents and children and that the Council appeared to be unaware of its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.

Karen Bradshaw advised that the Council would always seek to comply with their statutory responsibilities.

Concerns were raised about the loss of early years provision. A parent had specifically chosen the school for its teacher-led provision – the alternative private provision is not teacher-led.

Helen Murray – this will be considered.

A member of the audience stated that the Conservative government is wanting to boost the local economy and by closing this school this objective is not being supported. He asked why this proposal has gone ahead when there is the possibility of becoming an academy? Karen Bradshaw responded that at the point when the local authority decided to put forward the proposal to close Buildwas Primary School no potential sponsor for an academy had come forward and so at the time this was not an option. Nigel Bowen confirmed there is still a possibility of becoming an academy.

At the invitation of Nigel Bowen, Daniel Kawczynski MP stood up and addressed the room and confirmed that parents and the governing body had been lobbying him. He confirmed that he has provided a researcher from his office to support the governing body.

A question was asked about whether there are there any vacancies at the Telford and Wrekin schools nearby. Lucy Allan MP advised that it was her understanding that there were few vacancies in the primary phase.

A member of the audience asked whether there has been any dialogue with Telford & Wrekin about this proposal. Karen Bradshaw confirmed that she had had conversations with her counterpart in Telford & Wrekin Council. Also, Telford & Wrekin are a statutory consultee and so had been advised of the proposal and would have the opportunity to comment during the consultation period. With regards to the number of vacant places in Telford & Wrekin primary schools, this is a responsibility for Telford & Wrekin Council.

A member of the audience advised that the results at Key Stage 2 at Christ Church CE Primary School in Cressage for the last three years were: 2012 – 75%, 2013 – 65% and 2014 – 54%. Why then are parents being advised to go to this school? Chris Mathews responded – 1 year is a blip, 2 years is a pattern and 3 years is a trend. However, the local authority are not stating that parents have to attend this school – parents will be able to express 3 preferences for the schools they want their child(ren) to go to. The consultation is not about Christ Church CE Primary School in Cressage but about the long term educational and financial sustainability of Buildwas Primary School.

Research by a member of the audience showed that the deficit of a Shropshire school when they became a sponsored academy was £168k. Buildwas Primary School has had a balanced budget for the last 3 years and so what does the local authority define to be a sustainable school. Karen Bradshaw advised that schools finances are managed by the individual governing bodies. Chris Mathews advised that if Ofsted were to inspect the school tomorrow the outcome is likely to be Requires Improvement which is recognised as being better than special measures. Sustainability concerns the capacity of a school to provide a good quality education with a balanced budget over time. Karen Bradshaw advised that the deficit for a school when it becomes a sponsored academy is picked up by all other local authority maintained schools. The local authority has no influence if a school determines that it wants to become an academy - this is the decision of the school's governors in consultation with their school community.

The question was asked about why the local authority is listening to Ofsted but not the parents and local community. Chris Mathews responded that the local authority is listening but that it has a duty to consider options when a school is placed in special measures.

A member of the audience shared a story of how the school has been supportive and worked together.

The discussion moved onto the issue of rurality and the impact of the proposal on the village. Karen Bradshaw advised that this assessment is a standard process and a statutory requirement that the local authority has to follow. The consultation period is the opportunity for residents to inform the decision-makers of the possible impact on the community and raise any concerns so that these can be considered.

A member of the audience read out a paragraph from the statutory guidance which stated that the local authority should consider the impact on the local community. Karen Bradshaw emphasised that it says 'consider' and the local authority will take all information received into account. It is for the residents to feedback as much information as they can which will then be considered as part of the decision-making process.

Nigel Bowen read out a list of consultees the local authority was statutorily required to consult. He asked if these groups had been consulted?

Did you contact the parish council? Yes.

Did you consult the pupils? At this point in time no but will be undertaken by the School Improvement Adviser in collaboration and with the co-operation of the school. Have you consulted non-denominational parents? Yes as every parent has been written to.

Have you consulted with local schools? Yes. They were informed about the proposal, how to access the consultation document and how to respond. While Telford & Wrekin Council have been informed of the proposal and have been invited to comment, there is no obligation to consult Telford & Wrekin schools or the parents who reside in Telford & Wrekin and who might wish to send their children to the local authority's schools.

Karen Bradshaw confirmed that all of the pupils who currently attend Buildwas Primary Schools, whether resident in Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin, will be treated equally.

A member of the audience claimed that the local authority made a false statement and therefore they cannot be trusted. They stated that the closure announcement had made the situation worse and created panic. Chris Mathews stated while accepting the decision to consult had created uncertainty, it was the vulnerability of the school that had led to this situation.

Nigel Bowen claimed that the reason for their numbers on roll falling was due to the lack of support from the local authority. Helen Murray responded by stating that an extensive amount of support has been provided by the local authority and that this has been recognised in Ofsted reports. Advice has been given not only to the school but to the governing body.

Nigel Bowen asked about, in the past, how much time have schools been given to go through the federation process. He stated that the school was given 1-2 weeks which was at a stage when they were without a headteacher as she was on sick leave. The school were rated requiring improvement going into special measures, and so it was not the right time to discuss federation. Helen Murray replied that all schools considering federation have been given a short amount of time to do so. Also, in the case of Buildwas Primary School, this was the right time to be exploring federation

A member of the public asked about the future sustainability of other schools. If Buildwas Primary School was to close what assurance do would parents have that that another school wouldn't also close?

A councillor from Leighton and Eaton Constantine Parish Council commented that Eaton Constantine had a school, Leighton had a school, Buildwas had a shop. Staff have been consulted with so they have reacted in a way tipping the decision in the local authority favour. In his view things are turning around but not enough time was being given.

A member of the audience asked whether Shropshire residents will be given preference over Telford & Wrekin residents. The point was reiterated that current pupils in the school, whether resident in Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin, will be treated equally. Phil Wilson advised that if the school were to be closed the local authority, in particular the School Admissions team, would work with individual families to find placements for the children based on their expressed preferences.

A parent provided the audience with an example of how her child has come through Buildwas Primary School and had succeeded. Karen Bradshaw congratulated the young man who was present at the meeting.

Karen Bradshaw concluded by reiterating that everything that has been raised during the meeting will be considered in Cabinet. She thanked everyone for attending.

Meeting closed at 21:00