

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 14a

Subject: Deputations

Date of meeting: 4 March 2024

A period of not more than fifteen minutes shall be allowed at each ordinary meeting of the Council for the hearing of deputations from members of the public.

Notification of three Deputations has been received. The spokesperson is entitled to speak for 5 minutes.

1) Deputation: St Peters Community Primary School & Nursery

I am here today to talk to you as a parent of St Peters Community Primary School & Nursery.

I have children who currently attend both the nursey and the infant part of the school. This whole process has been extremely distressing and has caused a lot of anguish especially with my children who are now potentially going to be torn from their friends who in some instances have been with since preschool.

The whole process of this consultation very much resonates of a box ticking exercise just so you can show that you have followed necessary processes and procedures.

I personally do not feel that any of our concerns have been truly listened to or considered during this process.

With an overwhelming 85% of responses to the initial 6-week consultation being from people who disagree/strongly disagree with the proposal this council still voted to proceed to the next stage.

Again, during the 4-week statutory notice period an overwhelming majority of responses expressed a disagreement to the proposal to close again this council have proceeded to the next stage.

Where is the consideration of the parents, children, staff, and local community who have expressed their concerns to you.

This council has been asked on several occasions to clarify some of the concerns raised about points in the EIA that was published in January 2024, as to this day I am still waiting for someone/anyone to come back to me with clarification.

Please explain where you are listening to our concerns and feedback.

Please explain where the welfare of our children has been your priority, this I can answer for you which is that it hasn't. Your priority though this whole process has been clearly just about numbers and pound signs. You are failing our children, and you are failing all the staff at the school who have had to continually put on a brave face for the sake of our children's wellbeing.

You are adding to an already strenuous situation regarding SEND which as you should be aware is at crisis point nationally.

You have already shown in your EIA that people across all protected characteristics will be negatively impacted from this proposal to close our school but have not shown how you are planning to support these people to reduce the level of negative impact.

You have stated that we could be expected to travel up to 2 miles to take our children to school, this will obviously impact our families financially as many will

have to increase their car usage or rely on public transport to ensure children are able to get to school, where has this been seriously considered.
Why has no-one been able to provide the evidence showing that you have followed DfE policy, surely once this was raised you would have wanted to show that you haven't broken policy but still nothing has been shown.
This is people's lives and livelihood that you are playing with, it is not all about the bottom line.

Supported by:

Helen Williams (Lead Spokesperson)

Kim Enticknapp

Patricia Sacre

Emma Sacre

Pierre Sacre

Thomas Williams

2) Deputation: St Peters Community Primary School & Nursery

Again, I find myself here for the teachers & children of St Peter's community primary and nursery school. I am here as a final plea to please stop this closure. I am here to encourage you to please be more kind and compassionate towards our staff and families, please be the listening council you claim to be.

We are now 6 long and painful months into the closure proposal and families and staff are still yet to receive adequate support.

You can't say this is painful for you to have to do, when you are not actually affected at all by the closure. You still have a job, and a paycheque at the end of the day, and your children are not affected. Now put yourself in our position and imagine how you would feel if your children were living through this trauma..

You haven't had 6 months of sleepless nights, 6 months of tears, anger, aggression and anxiety like my family have had, you can't say you understand when you really haven't the faintest idea of what we are going through.

Staff have, and still feel unheard by this 'listening' council.

families are at breaking point and scrambling for the lack of spaces there are available.

Children are having friendship bonds broken, friendships which are very important for children like my daughter, who uses her friends to communicate her needs with her teachers when she struggles to verbalise herself. Can you put yourself in my shoes and imagine having a child with Special education needs and her not actually understanding why her school is closing, and why she will be losing her friends. Why she has to go to this new, significantly bigger school with all these strange people she doesn't know? Do you know how daunting and anxious this is making her?

The West Sussex families of our school, which is a staggering 40% have been neglected throughout. I have actually been in touch with the West Sussex inclusion team who are yet to offer any support, how is this justifiable? And what hope does this give us? Whilst I understand it's complex with the two boarders, but I think this should have been a thought process before even considering the closure.

Why did it take a St Peter's family emailing West Sussex admissions for them to become aware? And if she hadn't done so would they even be aware now?

Why are the families of West Sussex not getting the support they desperately need? Why can we not apply for school places until May/June time? This is unfair and greatly disadvantaging families of West Sussex like myself to actually get a school place at our chosen schools. Not to mention the two months of uncertainty following the final decision.

How can you recommend a school to a family like myself which is 10 times bigger than St Peter's, knowing my child is unable to cope particularly well in the amazing school she's currently in? Do you realise how damaging and worrying this is to know this is the ONLY option for my children in West Sussex due to lack of spaces in the two years I require.

How can you recommend West Sussex schools to our families but not actually invite them to head teachers meetings unless a family applies for that school should the closure goes ahead? Surely if you've recommended a school then they should be invited regardless if a child applies.

When I told my daughter her safe place was possibly closing she said to me 'Sadness is the worst feeling. If you're angry you can do something to calm down but when you're sad it just stays and stays.' And that has stuck with me ever since we had the discussion about looking for a new school.

Should this closure go ahead which no doubt it will as we all still feel unheard, my solicitor will be in touch with you and I am greatly looking forward to the route it takes.

I will not bow down quietly where my children are concerned.

Supported by:

Kirsty Moore (Lead Spokesperson)

Vanessa Worgan

Annie Farrant

Sam Farrant

Noah Ali

Laura Whittington

3) Deputation: the apparent lack of compromise from the council in regard to the closure of St Bartholomew's CE Primary School

The process that has been inflicted on the community of St Bartholomew's has felt unforgivably unkind and appeared to lack compassion for any of our community.

We don't believe our school should close and we have said many times that the time scale of the closure will have a detrimental effect on our children and there seems to be no clear argument to close the school in such an abrupt manner.

However, we have also made it clear we understand the challenging picture that the council finds themselves in and have been open from the very beginning to compromise, to support the council to reduce pupil numbers across the city.

We have offered alternative ideas, all of which have been dismissed. Whilst we don't agree with the dismissal of these ideas, again we recognise that the council find themselves in a challenging situation so we have made it clear we would consider a conversation about a school closure over a longer period. As the professionals who know our children best, we hope that you trust us in saying that a slower closure would be the best option for our children.

Many times, schools and boroughs in London have been mentioned as an example of equally quick school closure. However, these boroughs have strategies that have been written and planned over a number of years, so school closures didn't come as a shock. In contrast, we had councillors canvassing in the spring, promising no schools closures, and by Autumn the same councillors told us they intended to shut our school.

There are timing constraints dictated by the consultation process however, the council can choose the date of closure, therefore staff and pupils, would have a longer time to consider their future and good transition could be put in place. If this happened, the redeployment consultation would NOT have had to started BEFORE a decision was made.

We acknowledge that us closing will benefit other schools but the council have to accept that the benefit to our pupils is minimal at best and none-existent at worse. The school professionals know that a longer transition will be better for many of our children and abrupt transition will be detrimental to many of them.

Whilst keeping us open for longer might present some risk, there is no doubt that closing abruptly will damage some children education and if this is not the council intention, they may need to start talking to school leaders with the spirit of compromise.

There is little confidence that this school closure is being done with kindness and compassion towards our community and it is clear that the mental health and well-being of the community has not been considered.

Supported by:

Katie Blood (Lead Spokesperson)

Helen Banks

Leanne Wulitich

Emily Thomas
Tessa Pacey
Rachel Christie-Davies