

## **Outcome of Pre-Statutory Consultation on School Places in Highworth**

### **CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

#### **Dear Parents/Carers, Staff and Governors of Northview and Westrop Primary Schools**

This consultation document sets out a proposal to address an increasing number of surplus places in primary schools in the Highworth area. We are very keen to hear your views, and those of the local community, on the proposal and these will be reported back to Swindon's Cabinet who will make the final decision.

Please note that end of the consultation period and the last day therefore for you to send your comments, is **30<sup>th</sup> September 2009**.

#### **What is proposed?**

The proposal on which the Local Authority (LA) wishes to hear your views is the option to close Northview Primary School and expand Westrop Primary School by 105 places (15 in each year group which is the equivalent to ½ form of entry). If the proposal is agreed, then Northview Primary School would close on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2010 and all children who are attending at that time would automatically transfer to Westrop Primary School for 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010.

We fully appreciate that this is a difficult and uncertain time for parents, staff, pupils and everyone associated with the Highworth Primary schools. If you have concerns, questions or views about what is being proposed, then the LA is arranging a consultation meeting for you to attend (see details on page 2). We are keen that you complete and return the response form at the back of this document. You can also contact Gareth Cheal on telephone 01793 465802 (email [gcheal@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:gcheal@swindon.gov.uk)) or Chris Williams on telephone 01793 465771 (email [cpwilliams@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:cpwilliams@swindon.gov.uk)).

#### **Consultation meetings with school community**

A special Cabinet meeting was held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2009 that considered options for consultation to address the increasing number of surplus places in the Highworth area. Further detail can be found in the report and it is available at [www.swindon.gov.uk/yourcouncil](http://www.swindon.gov.uk/yourcouncil) or by contacting the telephone numbers above.

In addition to the LA written information and response form provided in this document, the LA has also arranged meetings at Northview and Westrop Primary Schools to allow you to ask questions you might have and put forward any comments.

The dates and times of the Council's consultation meetings are set out below.

Additional consultation meetings may be arranged during the consultation period, as required.

*Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Ian Bickerton, Director of Access & Provision, on 465724 or Email [ibickerton@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:ibickerton@swindon.gov.uk).*

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Please note that parents and carers have a choice of two meetings to attend at the school their child is on roll:

Westrop Primary School - 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2009	
Parents/Carers	3.30pm
Staff	5.00pm
Governors	6.15pm
Parents/Carers	7.30pm

Northview Primary School - 9 <sup>th</sup> July, 2009	
Parents/Carers	3.30pm
Staff	5.00pm
Governors	6.15pm
Parents/Carers	7.30pm

A crèche facility will be available at each school for the 3.30 p.m. parents' meeting, with a limited number of places available. If you would like to book a place for your child, please contact Tricia Devaney on 01793 465748 or speak to Gareth Cheal or Chris Williams on the telephone numbers referred to earlier.

### **Background to Pupil Numbers in Highworth**

Pupil numbers have been and are forecast to significantly decline in the Highworth area over the coming years. There are currently 4 schools in Highworth offering primary education from ages 4 to 11. They are:

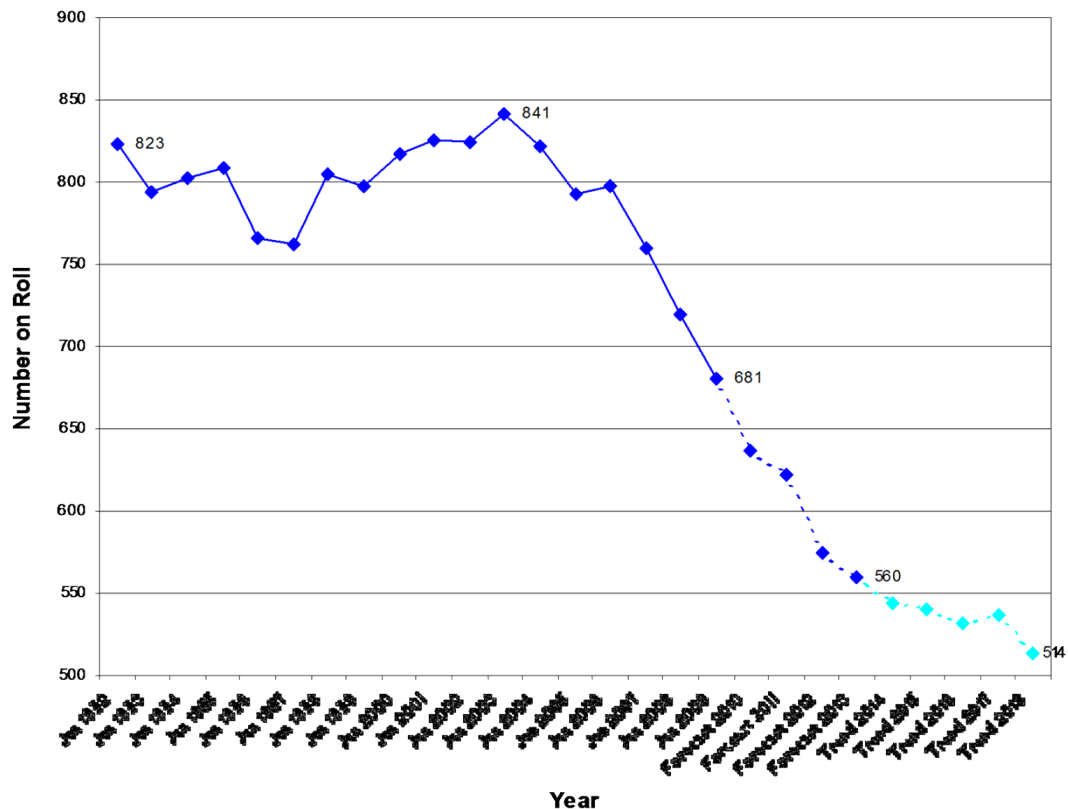
- Eastrop Infant School 4 to 7
- Southfield Junior School 7 to 11
- Northview Primary School 4 to 11
- Westrop Primary School 4 to 11

Overall, these schools have the capacity to offer 812 primary school places. However, the demand for these places is currently expected to decrease to 560 by September 2012 leaving 252 places unoccupied. The situation is set out in the graph on page 3.

The forecast pupil numbers use the actual class sizes rolled forward and also the live births and pre school children information from the Primary Care Trust that the LA receives annually in the Autumn. The latest information will be reported to Cabinet when received. A nationally recognised method of forecasting is used and the trend forecasts for 2014 onwards are calculated using a linear trend to estimate birth figures, which have been based on actual birth data for the last 10 years.

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**Highworth Area Number on Roll from January 1992 to January 2009**  
**Forecast and Trends to January 2018**



The above graph therefore shows the actual and forecast numbers of primary pupil numbers in Highworth, together with trends from 2014 onwards.

Local Authorities are required to address the position for those schools with significant and increasing levels of surplus capacity. The LA has a Surplus School Places Strategy, as set out in the School Organisation Plan, which requires “excessive” surplus places to be addressed. The purpose of the Strategy is to ensure that:

- Schools do not have “excessive” levels of surplus capacity, which can create problems with school organisation and financial viability. In the longer run this can have an adverse effect on the quality of education provided.

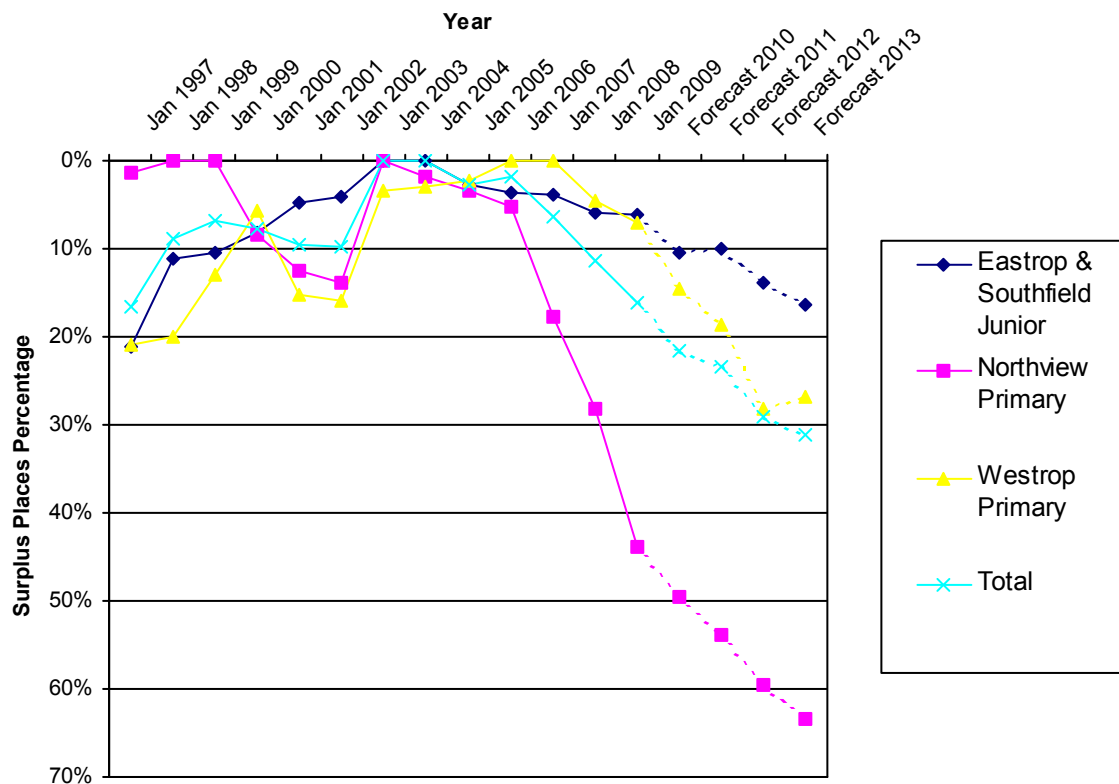
The Audit Commission (an independent watchdog, driving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in local public services) recommends a Local Authority’s overall surplus places to be in the region of 6% to 8% in order to allow some flexibility. At an individual school level, the benchmark for considering action to remove surplus places is 25%.

The graph on page 4 shows the overall actual, forecast and trend primary pupil numbers across Highworth affecting individual schools, including the particularly high level of surplus places at Northview Primary School.

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**Highworth Area Surplus Places Percentage from 1997 and Forecast to 2013**



## Objectives of the proposal

The LA, wishes to consult the parents, staff and Governors of Northview and Westrop Primary Schools about the proposal to close Northview Primary School and expand Westrop Primary School by 105 places. This would therefore have the effect of reducing the overall number of places available in Highworth by ½ form of entry, the minimum considered necessary to address falling pupil numbers in the area. A single or one form entry school has an admission number of 30 in Reception and has a total of 210 places available across all year groups in the school.

We would also wish to hear the views of others within the local community about this proposal.

The proposal for the two schools would mean, if this went ahead that:

- Northview Primary School would 'close' on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2010 and Westrop Primary School would be expanded by 105 places (1/2 form of entry) from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010
- All children on roll at Northview Primary School at the time of the closure would automatically transfer to the roll of Westrop Primary School
- The LA believes that generally there are strong arguments in favour of the proposal.
- At meetings and discussions held to date, Head Teachers and Governors of other Highworth schools have indicated their support for this proposal. On the other hand, parents and others from Northview Primary School have so far made clear that they do not support what is being proposed.

## Surplus Places at Northview and Westrop Primary Schools

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Ian Bickerton, Director of Access & Provision, on 465724 or Email [ibickerton@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:ibickerton@swindon.gov.uk).

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The proposal is therefore primarily to resolve an issue about surplus school places due to the changing age profile in Highworth.

Both Northview and Westrop Primary Schools are currently 1 form of entry (i.e. an admission number of 30). The surplus capacity as at November 2008 in Northview Primary School was 43% and at Westrop Primary School 7%. However, it is currently predicted that the surplus capacities for the two schools will increase to 63% and 26% respectively by 2012. The most recent figures available for Northview Primary School (at June 2009) indicate that there will only be a very small number of pupils entering Reception in September 2009, with relatively few pupils in all age groups.

### **Teaching and Standards**

The standards of pupil achievement are in line with expectations at both schools. However, we are concerned that Northview Primary School may be unable to maintain these standards in the longer-term, with the declining numbers of pupils on roll. Whilst a lower number of pupils on roll does not mean lower standards, it may be more difficult to attract staff, with the range of expertise needed for a small school, and this could have a negative impact on pupil achievement. We consider that this proposal would further strengthen the capacity of Highworth schools to sustain improvement. As part of each school's strategic planning, the LA expects every school to develop clear actions to raise standards, or if they are already high, to maintain that level of performance.

As mentioned above larger primary schools offer more opportunities for flexible teaching arrangements, for example, for intervention groups through more efficient use of money and staff and opportunities for teachers to extend their expertise. An expanded primary school can provide a broader range of learning experiences including extended schools opportunities and it can also make targeted or specialised appointments taking account of the current skills base.

Our belief is that this proposal will have the most positive impact on improving standards and achievement in the longer term.

### Other Key Issues

We also want to hear your views on other aspects of this proposal, including:

- "Rural" Schools  
All Highworth schools are designated as "rural" schools by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. When considering the proposed closure of a "rural" school, the LA must consider:
  - likely effect on the local community;
  - transport costs;
  - effect on traffic;
  - alternatives to closure (alternative options were considered at the special Cabinet meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2009).

All of these factors must be considered by Cabinet and you may have

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views on these that you would want to express at the consultation meetings.

- Travel and Traffic

If Northview Primary School were closed, then this would mean some families would have to travel further to a Highworth school. This could increase traffic and would mean, in some cases, that the A361 would need to be crossed. Some parents have expressed strong concerns about this. However, the LA and School could take measures to mitigate these effects, such as improved pedestrian and cycling facilities, “walking buses” etc.

- Links with Local Community

The possible closure of Northview Primary School would have an effect on the local community and we would particularly like to hear your views on this, so they can be reported to Cabinet.

However, were Westrop Primary School to be expanded, it would provide an opportunity to develop links with a wider community, with a broader range of extended school opportunities. This is already underway at Westrop Primary School through the provision of a Children’s Centre. The facility will be run by the School and will offer the following services:

- Jobs and Benefits advice and childminding training
- Family and parenting support
- Child and family health services
- Early Years education provided by the voluntary sector in partnership with the School

- Staffing

Separate consultation meetings will be held with the teaching and support staff of both Schools and Trade Unions will be fully involved in those discussions. This is a very uncertain time for staff, especially of Northview Primary School, and as a member of staff, you may wish to contact Anne English in HR (Tel: 01793 464884, email: [aenglish@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:aenglish@swindon.gov.uk)).

- Value for money

As mentioned earlier, excessive levels of surplus places do not represent good value for money. In particular, high and increasing levels of surplus places in schools:

- > make it more difficult for Head Teachers and Governing Bodies to manage their budgets efficiently and effectively on a day-to-day basis

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as 80% of a schools budget is generated by the number of pupils they have in the school. It is estimated that schools with between 80-100 pupils cost 16% more per pupil to run.

(<http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/context/smallschools>)

- create uncertainty, making future budget planning more difficult and may mean that schools need to consider redundancies;
- draw more money out of the finite pot of Government finance (the “Dedicated Schools Grant”, (DSG) which is allocated on a per pupil basis) available for all schools in Swindon, particularly bearing in mind that the Borough is the 17<sup>th</sup> worst funded in the country. It is therefore important that the LA pro-actively keeps the number of surplus places to the minimum necessary.

This is the reason why the LA has a policy of considering school reorganisations when there is 25% surplus capacity in a school, particularly where that figure is forecast to increase over the coming years.

In the case of Northview Primary School, it is currently forecast that there will be over 60% surplus places by 2012. This means, for example, that the School will receive an increasing level of “small schools’ protection”, up to a maximum of £63k. This additional allocation has to be found from within the existing DSG budget from which schools are funded. The LA will not receive any further funding from the Department for Children, Schools and Families as pupil numbers have not increased, As a result, this puts additional pressure on the DSG.

Although a decision to close a school should not be based on financial grounds alone, Children Services will, in consultation with related stakeholders, produce a high level financial business case to be presented to Cabinet to assist in the final decision.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

<b>Will there be a place for my child in Highworth if Northview Primary School closes?</b>
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Yes. There will be places made available for all pupils in Highworth from September 2010, based on current pupil forecasts.
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<b>Will there be transport available for my child to attend Westrop Primary School?</b>
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No. Although the distance for most parents to travel to school will increase, the School and College Transport Policy will only offer transport to pupils who live over two miles from their catchment school. The current Northview Primary School catchment area is within two miles of Westrop Primary School.
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### **Will parents/carers of children at Northview Primary School need to apply for a place at Westrop Primary School if the proposal goes ahead?**

No. All the children on roll at Northview Primary School at the time of the closure will automatically be transferred on to the roll of the expanded Westrop Primary School. However, parents are entitled to express a preference for any school and, if there is a place available, the Admission Authority has a duty to agree to this. It is expected that an additional mobile classroom will be made available at Westrop Primary School to ensure there is sufficient space initially.

### **What would be the impact on childminding/childcare arrangements if this proposal went ahead?**

There are 15 childminders in Highworth of whom 6 offer to pick up children from Northview Primary School. Three of these also collect from other schools. Westrop Primary School has both a breakfast club and an after school club. In addition 5 childminders offer a pick up service from Westrop Primary School. This provides good childcare capacity. As mentioned earlier, the new Children's Centre at Westrop will provide a range of services and opportunities for the Highworth Community, including family and parenting support and childminding training.

### **Will children be taught in mixed age classes?**

If Westrop Primary School is expanded it is expected that there may be a need to mix classes by age in the short term. This is something that the LA, Head Teacher and Governing Body would consider carefully and we would want to hear the views of parents on this.

### **How would Westrop Primary School infrastructure cope with the influx of an additional 105 pupils?**

Westrop Primary School site has been assessed using the Department for Children, Schools and Families guidance and is able to accommodate the additional ½ form of entry utilising the existing school infrastructure. In the short term a temporary classroom is expected to be installed on the school site if the proposal went ahead.

### **Who decides if this proposal goes ahead?**

The LA is able to decide the closure of Northview Primary School and the expansion of Westrop Primary School locally. The target timeline below sets out the various stages of the decision making process. The views expressed by parents/carers, staff, Governors and others will be fully reported to Cabinet, expected to be October 2009. The meeting is open to members of the public.

### **Has Northview Primary School received the support it has needed?**

Every school in Swindon is supported by a School Improvement Partner who visits the school a minimum of 3 times a year and advises the governing body of the Head Teacher's performance management.

Northview Primary has received the following additional support from the LA:

- 2004-05 16 days – advice on the curriculum, leadership and



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	assessment.
▪ 2005-06	66.5 days – intensive support to leadership, governance, curriculum and assessment.
▪ 2006-07	34 days – advice on the curriculum, leadership and assessment.
▪ 2007-08	17.5 days - advice and training on making teaching and learning.
▪ 2008-09	outstanding and support to the school's self evaluation. extensive support whilst the Head Teacher is absent due to ill-health, provided by Grange Infant School and arranged by the LA. Advice and training in governance, personnel, finance, numeracy, writing and support to pupils with English as an additional language.

### **What happens to a parent's choice of school if Northview Primary School closes?**

Every parent is entitled to express a preference for the school of their choice. The LA has a duty to comply with the preference if there is a place available at the preferred school. If Northview Primary School does close then this entitlement will not be affected, although the options available to parents will reduce.

### **What will happen to the staff at Northview Primary School if the proposal goes ahead?**

If the proposal goes ahead, the LA would undertake a full consultation with staff and Unions to go through the implications to individuals. We have a clear process in place to follow in such circumstances.

### **What will happen to the land and buildings of Northview Primary School?**

There is no decision yet about the long-term use of the land and buildings. Any proposed use would be subject to consultation with local residents. The land has not been reserved for housing.

## **Timetable – Target Dates**

Target dates in the decision making process are as follows:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> July 2009	'Pre-Statutory' Consultation begins
6 <sup>th</sup> July 2009 (Westrop Primary School) 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2009 (Northview Primary School)	Consultation meetings take place at Westrop Primary School and Northview Primary School
30 <sup>th</sup> September 2009	'Pre-Statutory' Consultation ends
21 <sup>st</sup> October 2009	Outcome of 'Pre-Statutory' Consultation reported to Cabinet Meeting
October/November 2009	If agreed, the statutory consultation commences
December 2009/January 2010	Decision by Cabinet Panel
September 2010	If agreed, proposed implementation

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Thank you for reading this document.

It is not possible to cover all aspects of this proposal in detail in this brochure and it is suggested that you come along to one of the consultation meetings. You may or may not take a different view to us about this proposal, and the consultation meetings and the response form attached are your opportunities to put your views and opinions for Cabinet to consider.

If you have any specific queries or concerns, please do contact:

Gareth Cheal	Tel: 01793 465802	Email: <a href="mailto:gcheal@swindon.gov.uk">gcheal@swindon.gov.uk</a>
Chris Williams	Tel: 01793 465771	Email: <a href="mailto:cpwilliams@swindon.gov.uk">cpwilliams@swindon.gov.uk</a>

You may wish to complete and return the attached response form by  
**30<sup>th</sup> September 2009 at the latest.**

Thank you

## **Outcome of Pre-Statutory Consultation on School Places in Highworth**

### Response Form

Pre-statutory consultation

Proposed closure of Northview Primary School and the expansion of Westrop Primary School by 105 places (15 in each year group) from September 2010

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick:

Which school are you representing?

Northview

☐

Westrop

☐

Which of the following category do you belong to?

Parent

☐

Governor

☐

Staff

☐

Other (please specify  
below i.e  
Community/Resident)

☐

Do you support the linked proposals to close Northview Primary School and expand Westrop Primary School by 105 places (15 in each year group)?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Comments: (You may wish to attach additional sheets)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Responses must be received by **30th September 2009** at the latest

Please return response forms to either school office or by post to:

Tricia Devaney

Children Services, Swindon Borough Council

Sanford House

Sanford Street

Swindon Borough Council SN1 1QH

01793 465748

email: [tdevaney@swindon.gov.uk](mailto:tdevaney@swindon.gov.uk)



The information you provide will be used for the analysis of responses received as part of the Pre-Statutory consultation on the proposal to close Northview Primary School and expand Westrop Primary School for the purposes of compiling recommendations for Cabinet. Personal Information will not be shared with any other sections of the Council.

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