

# Your community - your say

## The key findings

### Introduction

Your community - your say (YCYS) was commissioned by Herefordshire Council in order to start the process of engaging Herefordshire residents in meaningful conversations about the future of public services in the county. The consultation process was set within the context of significant financial cuts resulting in major changes in the way that public services are commissioned and delivered. The YCYS consultation was the community engagement element of the 'Root and Branch Review Programme', an in-depth internal review of all services provided by and on behalf of the council, to help inform strategic and service planning and set future priorities for public services.

There were two parts to the engagement programme, the first being a large postal survey of 4,125 households called the Quality of Life (QOL) survey in the spring of 2012. The findings from the 1,346 respondents was then used to inform the second phase, which was the Your community – your say process in the autumn of 2012.

The following key findings are those which have emerged from the YCYS process and are divided into six areas:

- 1) About the process
- 2) The participants priorities
- 3) The views raised by specific groups
- 4) Common suggestions
- 5) Suggestions for how things can be done differently
- 6) The polarised views of the importance of services

### About the process

A number of different approaches were used to try to ensure that as many residents as possible were engaged in meaningful discussions about the future of public services in Herefordshire. We used the following:

- 14 locality events
- Three workshops targeting specific groups
- Voluntary and third sector organisations
- Young and community researchers
- An online discussion forum
- Twitter
- Facebook
  
- A total of 1,427 people participated in the Your community – your say process, of which 1,163 were engaged in meaningful discussions about the future of public services.
  
- A total of 295 people attended the 14 locality events, of which 114 (39%) of these had never previously engaged in a consultation with Herefordshire Council.

- 125 people attended the three targeted workshops, of which 45 (36%) of these had never previously taken part in a council consultation.
- 743 people contributed their views through either voluntary and third sector organisations or via the young and community researchers.
- Just under half of those involved with the YCYS process were aged between 45 and 74, with over a third being under 25.
- An additional 264 people engaged with YCYS via the online channels, with 189 people following the Twitter account, 45 people liking the Facebook page and a further 30 contributing their views via the discussion forum.
- Overall, from those who completed an evaluation form, 886 people (81%) had never previously participated in any form of Herefordshire Council consultation.

### **The participants priorities**

- Health services, public transport and policing are unsurprisingly all seen as high priorities.
- In the context of reducing budgets, it was felt that public toilets, street lighting, cultural facilities and services and planting schemes are less important to residents. There were also mixed views about the importance of maintaining public rights of way and street cleaning, although general consensus suggested that these services could be better delivered at a local level.
- The areas which were identified as most in need of improvement are road and pavement repairs and public transport.
- The need for Herefordshire Council to make internal efficiencies and to demonstrate how this has been done was also felt to be a priority.

### **The views raised by specific groups**

- Young people reported that public transport was a high priority, but it was also seen as an area most in need of improvement. The second highest priority for young people was health services, while the second area most in need of improvement was public toilets.
- Social care services, the wheelchair service and public transport were all seen as very important to disabled people. It was felt that the accessibility of public transport needed to be improved, while there was also concern about the closure of public toilets, as many toilets in pubs and shops are not easily accessible.
- The workshop held with Polish and Lithuanian residents highlighted affordable decent housing as a particular issue, with many perceiving there to be a lack of affordable rental property. They also stated that the quality of the 'affordable' rental properties on offer is poor.

- Health services were seen as the highest priority for those over 65, although some specific areas of improvement were identified in relation to accessing an out of hours GP. Public transport was the second highest priority for older people, which was seen as critical in terms of accessing medical appointments. However, public transport was also perceived to be an area which needed improving, with specific problems of not being able to use a bus pass before 9:30am being highlighted.
- Health services and public transport were both perceived as being high priorities and those areas most in need of improvement by those aged 25 to 64.

### **Common suggestions**

- It was felt that means testing across more service areas could be applied. This was particularly the case where there is blanket provision of a service, such as free bus passes for over 65s. It was felt that people may be prepared to pay for some services, if they could see an improvement to that service as a result.
- It is essential to maximise existing resources and facilities. For example, increased access to school facilities including mini buses, bringing empty properties back into use and increasing car sharing.
- As a general principle, it was also felt that there should be better integration of services both physically, for example moving the one stop shop into the library and operationally, for example having a single point of contact within social services. It was felt that there needed to be a much more joined up approach to service delivery.
- A culture of collective responsibility and community self-help needs to be engendered. Collectively as a society, we need to encourage people to take more responsibility for their local environment. The examples given in relation to this included farmers being responsible for clearing ditches and mud from roads, shopkeepers keeping the area around their premises tidy, local people carrying out litter picks and introducing voluntary dog warden schemes.
- Devolving service delivery to a local level was also seen as way of improving service delivery and giving local people more control over how services are delivered. The services which were most often mentioned in relation to this were car parking, maintenance of public areas, street cleaning and public toilets. There was also strong support for using local contractors wherever possible.
- It was strongly felt that Herefordshire Council and other service providers should explore whether services can be delivered differently and more efficiently, before a decision to withdraw a service is made.

### **Suggestions for how things can be done differently**

- Reduce black bin collections to once a fortnight
- Reduce the hours for street lighting

- Introduce a fee for using public toilets but also make them cleaner
- Make internal savings, for example by capping high salaries and not producing Herefordshire Matters, although some people suggested that this could be available online only.
- Introduce means testing in certain areas, particularly where blanket provision of a service currently exists, such as the provision of bus passes for over 65s.
- The use of local contractors for road and pavement repairs.
- More joined up working by service providers and more co-production of services.

### The polarised views of the importance of services

- **Public toilets:** These were most often cited as being something which people 'could do without', if public spending needs to be reduced. However, public toilets were seen as very important for disabled people, who may not be able to access toilets in pubs or shops and they were also considered to be important in relation to supporting the tourist economy.
- **Street lighting:** This was often seen as an area where savings could be made, for example by limiting the hours when it is on. However, there was also a concern that reduced street lighting would lead to increased levels of crime.
- **Weekly refuse collection:** Whilst it was felt by some that a weekly black bin collection is not needed, due to high levels of recycling and therefore a reduction in waste, others felt that it was very important. Those that felt it was important were mostly people living in towns, who were either concerned that a build up of refuse would lead to rat infestations or who had to store their bin bags close to their house.
- **Youth services:** Whilst youth services, specifically the provision of youth facilities, was commonly raised as a priority by participants at the locality events and was even identified as being relatively important by young people themselves, youth clubs and activities for young people both feature as services that people felt they 'could do without'.