

Your community - your say

Summary of findings from Hereford (Belmont)

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.

To ensure that any decisions made as a result of this review were informed by up to date views from local residents, participants were provided with a range of opportunities to have their say. The focus of this consultation was to collect information of a high standard from residents to help the council understand and explore:

- Whether we are focusing on the right priorities
- Whether we are providing the services people believe are needed
- Which services matter most to the residents of Herefordshire and which are less important
- How services could be delivered differently

YCYS was also used as an opportunity to test the statistical findings of the 2012 Quality of Life survey (QOL)¹ and to gain greater insight into the responses of this survey.

Between September and November 2012, 14 Your community - your say locality events were undertaken. These covered the county's nine locality areas with additional events being held in the areas of Hereford, Golden Valley and Mortimer in order to increase the reach of the events. In addition targeted consultation was undertaken with young people, disabled people and minority ethnic groups, with community and young researchers being trained to undertake consultation with their peers. Support was also enlisted from local voluntary and community sector organisations working with seldom heard groups and virtual consultation was encouraged through the use of Twitter, Facebook and an online discussion forum.

We held two events in Hereford, the first of which was on 2 October at the Belmont Community Centre. The event was attended by 15 residents, the majority of which were over 45 with over half aged between 45 and 64. It was found that just under half had never participated in a Herefordshire Council consultation.

¹ The Herefordshire Quality of Life survey is a survey of residents' views within the county. The 2012 survey was posted to 4,125 households across Herefordshire and was based on the 2008 Place Survey with some changes to support the needs of ongoing service review and budgeting. 1,346 responses were received, giving an overall response rate of 33%.

For these events a World Café style approach was adopted which sees people being invited to take part in small group discussions based around a series of key questions. They were also asked to participate in a prioritisation exercise. The following is a summary of the participants' responses to these questions and the prioritisation exercises.

Which public services do you feel are priorities for the county and your local area?

The Quality of Life survey identified the following three areas as priorities for residents in the south of Hereford for making somewhere a good place to live:

- 1. The level of crime**
- 2. Clean streets**
- 3. Affordable decent housing**

There was general consensus that while low levels of crime and clean streets are important, there are higher priorities such as health services, job prospects and transport related issues, including traffic congestion and road maintenance. Residents did agree that affordable housing was a priority for south Hereford.

1. The level of crime

- A general feeling was expressed that although it's important to keep crime levels low, it's actually people's fear of crime that has made it the top priority and there are more important priorities to consider.
- Whilst crime levels are low it was felt they could be even lower if the police or Community Support Officers (CSOs) were more visible. Low visibility was particularly mentioned in relation to the Hunderton area.
- There was a perception that Neighbourhood Watch Schemes are not always well advertised or promoted.
- There were issues around police station opening hours, as there are times when the station is closed due to staff absences.
- The frequency of crime related information coming from the police Ringmaster system to councillors is very good, but needs to be more localised.
- There were reports of tree branches covering street lighting because they had not been cut by the council. It was therefore felt this provided an opportunity for crime.

2. Clean streets

- Some people felt that whilst people valued clean streets this was not a priority in relation to other services such as health.
- The issue of chewing gum on the pavements was raised as an issue.
- CSOs should have the power to give on the spot fines for littering.
- It was felt that all public litter bins should be combined recycling bins.
- An issue with dog fouling was reported in the area with residents stating that the lack of dog wardens was seen as problematical. They did however recognise that dog owners need to take more responsibility.

- Fly tipping is an issue in Dinedor and although it is reported, it doesn't get cleaned up quickly enough.
- There needs to be more enforcement to make local farmers clean up after themselves.
- There doesn't appear to be any coordination between contractors who are responsible for cutting the grass, as only certain areas are cut by certain staff. It was felt that perhaps it would be easier to have one person or team cut everything together at once.
- The overgrown vegetation needs to be cleared from around road signs.
- There is interest and willingness in the community to come together to tackle the above issues, however there needs to be support and resources from the council with activity being properly managed and supervised. There was support for a 'community task force' to be formed, which would be made up of local volunteers, who need training and the right equipment.
- It was stated that a volunteer's time is not free and that organisations should not take advantage of it. Residents advised that although they're willing to do their bit, the council must also do theirs.

3. Affordable decent housing

- The Quality of Life survey needs to contain a better definition of affordable decent housing.
- Affordable housing was seen as being a top priority for Hereford city as there is a shortage of social housing with 5,000 people currently on the waiting list.
- Housing was seen as an issue countywide. In some rural areas, communities may not want affordable housing but as the jobs are in the city, this leads to travelling costs and congestion.
- There is a need for more mixed housing developments.
- Hereford should be a vibrant city which is encouraging to young people, therefore we need housing, jobs and recreation.
- The average local wage is not sustainable for home ownership.
- There is a need to consider the existing infrastructure if more housing is built.
- Housing allocation should be given to those with greatest need, specifically local people and young people. There was a perception that local people are not being prioritised as there is pressure on social housing due to immigration.
- Poor job prospects mean people can't afford to buy houses, so more affordable rental property is needed.
- People recognise that there is a lack of suitable land for development, but do not want to lose open spaces to housing development.
- Creative thinking is needed in relation to brownfield sites or industrial premises. A vision should be developed for how these can be utilised.

- Community land trusts could provide a solution for the provision of affordable housing.

Additional priorities

4. Road maintenance

- This is perceived to be an issue across the county.
- Quicker responses to problems are needed and it was felt that Amey are too slow to respond to issues. It was deemed that temporary fixes are not very successful or cost effective.
- We need a global approach not piecemeal.
- The standard of our roads particularly impacts on cyclists with pot holes and broken drains.

5. Health and social care

- People were generally pleased with the level of service they receive and the ease of getting appointments, specifically in relation to GP surgeries. The walk in clinic in South Wye was cited as being particularly good.
- There were mixed views about whether health services were a priority for south Hereford, mainly linked to the high levels of satisfaction with existing services.
- The available access to both private and NHS dentists was seen to be good. There was a perception that NHS dentist waiting lists have been significantly reduced.
- There is a need to maintain Hereford County Hospital.
- Preventative services were seen to be very important, with a focus on investing to save. The use of village wardens was quoted as an example of good practice and a question was raised as to whether such a scheme operates in Hereford.
- A more joined up approach across health service providers and organisations is needed, so there is a mechanism for working together.
- There was a suggestion about the use of 'health champions' to advocate for people and help them to navigate the health system.
- The important role played by the third sector in delivering social care was recognised, however it must be remembered that this is not a free service and still needs resourcing.

6. Public transport

- There was general consensus that public transport was a high priority and in need of improvement.
- Weekend, particularly Sunday services and evening transport was deemed to be insufficient. A particular issue mentioned was around the difficulty in getting from one side of the city to the other such as Belmont to Hampton Dene.
- There were mixed views about the frequency of bus services within the city and while some felt they were adequate, others felt they were insufficient particularly during peak times, when the buses are often overcrowded with too many people standing.

- Community transport should be used to link in with core public transport provision.
- There is a need for more demand responsive community taxis as 50 seat buses are simply not viable. It was stated that the loss of WyeS Moves was a disappointment.
- A suggestion was made around the need for dedicated parking spaces along bus routes in rural areas, to encourage people to drive part of the way and then catch the bus into Hereford.
- Another suggestion was around using the river as a means of transporting people around the city, this would also help to ease traffic congestion.

7. Traffic congestion

- There was concern expressed that more housing would mean more traffic.
- There should be more done to encourage cycling and walking, with cycle routes being joined up properly.
- It was felt that car parking charges are too high.
- There is a lot of space dedicated to car parking in the city centre, couldn't this space be better used? A suggestion was made to have more multi storey car parks, which take up less floor space.
- Another suggestion was around turning the traffic lights off at the Belmont roundabout or at least making them part time. These lights were recently out of order and yet it was felt that the traffic flowed much easier without them.
- There was a suggestion for a park and ride scheme for school children. Instead of having hundreds of cars travelling in and out of Hereford for the school run, would it be possible to have one or two buses from a designated location, so parents can drop off and collect their children? It was felt that it wouldn't matter if these locations were close to schools, as it would still get traffic flowing better.
- A question was raised about the progress of the Hereford relief road.

8. Job prospects

- There was concern that local young people will not have the necessary skills to take advantage of employment opportunities being presented by the new Hereford Enterprise Zone development. It was felt that people from outside the local area will end up getting these jobs. We need to work with our local colleges to ensure this mismatch of skills doesn't occur.
- Good career advice and access to work placements in schools are needed early on for young people. A suggestion was made around having a week's training in school, but this needs to occur when pupils first start high school to provide inspiration, as opposed to being during their last year of school.
- Young people need training to help them get jobs which will enable them to buy their own home.
- There is a need for more apprenticeship schemes and local training opportunities. There was a suggestion that Herefordshire Council or relevant contractors should be offering apprenticeships to people in the community, using them to carry out local projects.

- There is a need for affordable and reliable public transport to enable people to access training or work.
- The Robert Owen Vocational School is opening in 2013 with over 60 students. This was thought to be a good alternative to the traditional curriculum.
- There is a need to make the most of what there is in Herefordshire, for example there should be training available in the service industries, food production and small engineering businesses.
- Herefordshire Council should make rates affordable, offer training opportunities and be open to new businesses by providing business start up grants.
- The youth service used to play an important role by giving young people the life skills needed for work. There was concern expressed about the loss of funding for youth services.

What do we need to improve and how can we do things differently to improve services?

The Quality of Life survey identified the following as the areas that residents in south Hereford felt most needed improving and were of the highest priority:

- 1. Job prospects**
- 2. Affordable decent housing**

There was general consensus that the QOL survey results were generally reflective of the priorities for south Hereford, although people felt that public transport and traffic congestion were also a priority and in need of improvement.

1. Job prospects

- See pages five and six for full details.

2. Affordable decent housing

- See pages three and four for full details.

Additional improvements

3. Public transport

- See pages four and five for full details.

4. Traffic congestion

- See page five for full details.

5. Other service related comments

- There was a request to provide more satellite recycling facilities, for those items not collected as part of the doorstep collection service, to prevent the need to travel to the recycling depot in Hereford.
- Concerns were raised about the reduction in youth service provision, as this is needed and should be approached in a more holistic way and with a long term vision.

- There are no facilities in Hereford for large concerts, as The Courtyard is too small.
- Parish councils could play a much larger role in service delivery with the right support and resources. They could make better use of the local precept and address local problems such as a lack of transport.
- It was felt that some services, such as community libraries, would be better delivered locally.
- Parish councils could also possibly provide money management and debt advice.
- A system is needed to support those who can't pay for services, although it was stated that not all services need to be free, for example not all over 60s need a bus pass.
- There is good access to emergency services in the city, but it was felt this isn't the case in rural areas.
- The Allpay model was cited as an innovative approach to the provision of Broadband.
- It was suggested that access to cash machines in rural areas is limited.

6. Other general comments

- It was deemed that the shops close too early and there are no coffee shops open after 6pm.
- There are not enough family friendly restaurants open in the evenings.
- There was recognition that the area is proud of the local school's academy status and sees great opportunities to positively impact on the younger generation.
- Help is needed to set up oil buying consortiums.
- A proactive vision is needed for delivering services in a different way.
- The YCYS DVD should have had subtitles, but why was it necessary anyway?
- Knowledge and skills need to be shared around how we can do things differently and better.
- Herefordshire Council mustn't be reductionist in their thinking.
- There was a perception that money is wasted in Herefordshire Council and there are too many 'non-existent' jobs such as 'diversity officers'.
- Herefordshire Council need to say 'we are open for business.'
- There was concern expressed that the Edgar Street Grid initiative will result in the closure of local businesses. What is the vision for Herefordshire and what will the city look like in 2020? We need positivity to encourage people to stay here.
- Changes in council staff and departments result in a lack of continuity and stability.

- Herefordshire Council need to ask “is it necessary, is it value for money and are we the right people to be doing it?”

Questions

- Q: Is there any equivalent to the village warden scheme in Hereford city Centre?
- A: No, there is no village warden scheme in Hereford. This type of scheme is normally best suited to smaller rural communities, although Hereford City Council is reviewing ways of delivering a similar service in partnership with Herefordshire Council.
- Q: What is the update on the relief road?
- A: We are undertaking a stage two level project for the southern link road (A49 / A465), as part of the Belmont transport package, with a potentially preferred route being announced next year. The remainder of the relief road is subject to the ongoing Local Development Framework (LDF) process and further information is available on the council website at: <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/housing/planning/24311.asp>.

Prioritisation feedback

As a group, participants were asked to allocate services according to whether they perceived them to be ‘must have’, ‘nice to have’, ‘could do without’ or ‘could do differently’.

This exercise built on earlier discussions and was used to encourage people to think about the comparative value they placed on different services, whilst exploring alternative ways services could be delivered.

The services allocated to the ‘must have’ category were very broad, but there was a particular emphasis on health services, emergency services and policing.

In terms of what people felt we ‘could do differently’, the most common suggestions were that street lighting could be fitted with motion sensors and public toilets could either be available through pubs and shops or existing public toilets should be chargeable. An enhanced role for communities and the third sector was also seen as a way of doing things differently.

The table shown below on pages 10 and 11 gives the full range of responses. However, please note that it was not necessary for each table to reach a consensus on the importance of a service, therefore some services appear in more than one column.

The findings from this exercise and the group discussions will provide Herefordshire Council with an indication of where people’s priorities lie and how people feel that services could be delivered differently. Information from across all the YCYS events is being collated and analysed to provide a countywide perspective in addition to locality specific views. All of this information will be considered alongside the findings from the Quality of Life survey and the council’s Root and Branch Reviews to inform future decision making.

Event evaluation

At the end of each event, participants were asked to record what they liked and didn’t like about the event and the way the consultation had been run. They were also asked what they would like to see happen as a result of the consultation. We received a number of positive comments about the event format, the facilitation and the level of discussion.

Some of the comments included:

“There was lots of engagement in the room.”

“I’m pleased that the council is consulting the public.”

“Open atmosphere.”

The things that people commonly said they didn’t like were:

“Not enough time to talk as a group.”

“No changes and the same consultation will be held in a couple of years.”

The element that people most wanted to see happen next was a change in the approach to how services are delivered.

A few of the comments made included:

“We can do everything if it is organised differently and with a fresh approach.”

“We need to accept that communities need to do things for themselves
and not rely on the council.”

Feedback

Must have	Nice to have	Could do without	Could do differently
<p>Health services including ambulances and hospitals</p> <p>Fire service</p> <p>Policing</p> <p>Public transport</p> <p>Support for carers</p> <p>Community development support</p>	<p>Better cycle routes</p> <p>A community one stop shop</p> <p>Tidier streets and grass areas</p>	<p>Bureaucracy</p> <p>The vehicle fleet used by the council</p>	<p>Clean streets including asking shop owners to look after their frontage</p> <p>Youth services delivered through the third sector, but not for free</p> <p>Street lighting is more important in the city centre, but we could use motion sensors</p> <p>Public toilets don't need to be free but are important for disabled people, we could look to use toilets in pubs and shops</p> <p>Libraries could be delivered by local groups</p> <p>Community transport could be used more, but we need smaller buses</p> <p>Health prevention services could be delivered by the third sector</p> <p>We need to improve the frequency of bus services</p> <p>Planning, licensing and trading</p>

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