

Your community - your say

Summary of findings from Shobdon

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.

The Shobdon event, which was held at Shobdon Village Hall on 8 October, was attended by nine local people the majority of which were over 45. It was found that two thirds 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 four areas as priorities for residents in the Mortimer locality for making somewhere a good place to live:

- 1. Affordable decent housing**
- 2. The level of crime**
- 3. Refuse collection and disposal**
- 4. Health services**
- 5. Job prospects**
- 6. Education provision**

There was general consensus that some of the QOL results, specifically affordable decent housing, job prospects and education provision did not reflect the demographic area, which is predominately older people. There were also mixed views about affordable decent housing being the top priority, especially those from Shobdon village and the high priority given to refuse collection and disposal. There was a general feeling that health services should have been higher up the priority list.

1. Affordable decent housing

- It was felt that there was a need to clarify what was meant by affordable decent housing within this context, as it was not clear whether this related only to social housing or more broadly to the 'affordability' of property in the area.
- There was a perception that no more affordable decent housing was required in Shobdon, as 26 units have recently been built and that development was not always matched to demand or need.
- Recent developments of affordable decent housing in Shobdon have happened on two relatively large sites and residents would like to see better use of in-fill sites and a more organic approach taken to development.
- Residents would like to see new developments more in keeping with the local area.
- There was a perception that there is a lack of affordable property for rent in the area.
- There were concerns over how social housing was allocated and it was felt that those with local connections should be prioritised.
- There was a general feeling that more sheltered housing would be required in the future to keep older people in their own homes for longer. It was also suggested that this would be less of a drain on other services.
- There was consensus that Shobdon village did not have the infrastructure to support further development, such as sewerage, telephone exchange, broadband or public transport.
- There was recognition that new developments had led to an increase in numbers at the local school, which meant it was much more likely to remain open.
- Comments were made about younger people leaving the village and there was a feeling that a sustainable community needed a good demographic spread.

2. The level of crime

- It was noted that there are low levels of crime in the area.
- Residents feel there is good visibility of the local Community Support Officer (CSO) and the surgeries they hold in the local shop are valued.

3. Refuse collection and disposal

- Participants were surprised that refuse collection was such a high priority, particularly in relation to health services.
- The refuse collection service is highly valued.

4. Health services

- There were issues raised regarding access to a GP surgery, as the nearest ones are in Kingsland or Kington. This is particularly an issue for older people and those without access to a car.
- There is a lack of NHS dentists in the local area.

5. Job prospects

- Please refer to page five for details.

6. Education provision

- The quality of local education provision was felt to be good.
- There is an issue about children moving out of the catchment area for secondary schools, as Pembridge children are going to Wigmore High School.

Additional priorities

7. Broadband

- Please refer to page five for further details.

8. Public transport

- Please refer to page four for details.

9. Social services

- Social services, particularly those linked to supporting older people, were particularly felt to be a priority due to the demographic of the area, specifically the need to support older people to remain living independently. There was recognition of the role that third sector organisations play in this area of service delivery and the need to invest in these organisations. Herefordshire Lifestyles was also raised.

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 the Mortimer locality felt most needed improving and were of the highest priority:

- 1. Road and pavement repairs**
- 2. Public transport**
- 3. Job prospects**
- 4. Affordable decent housing**
- 5. Wage levels and the local cost of living**

There was general consensus that the QOL survey results partly reflected the priorities for the Shobdon area and that road and pavement repairs and public transport deserved to be first and second. However, there was a perception that road safety and broadband were higher priorities and more in need of improvement than job prospects, affordable decent housing and wage levels and the local cost of living.

1. Road and pavement repairs

- The issue of the temporary nature and poor quality of Amey repairs was raised. This has led to a significant deterioration on some local roads that now require major resurfacing work, which could have been avoided had the problem been dealt with when it was first raised by the community. This 'sticking plaster' approach to road maintenance is not cost effective.
- The rural roads through Shobdon are used a lot by HGVs and agricultural vehicles and therefore any repairs need to take this into account. The structure and surfacing of our roads, needs to be able to accommodate high levels of heavy use.
- The pavements in many areas are non-existent or of poor quality, which is a real issue in terms of the safety of pedestrians, particularly when combined with the issue of speeding traffic. This is seen as a deterrent for people using public transport, due to the poor access to bus stops.
- Quiet road surfaces have been laid in some areas, but there is still a problem with noise pollution from HGVs.

2. Public transport

- It was felt that there is a need to take a more joined up approach to public transport and services should be based on community needs.
- There was a perception that there are too many empty buses travelling around the county.
- There are issues for young people as they can't take their bikes on buses and that there is no bus to Mortimer's Cross.
- There was a suggestion that transport provision for young people could be solved through a community based solution, such as an online booking system linked to a locally coordinated car sharing scheme.
- There is a perceived need for more demand responsive transport and community run transport, such as Community Wheels.
- Participants felt that they should be given more choice about how they use their travel subsidy to choose something that suits them better, such as a reduction in taxi fares rather than a bus pass.

3. Job prospects

- There are very few job prospects for young people in the local area and many leave to seek employment.
- Job prospects were linked to the need for faster and more reliable broadband in the area.

4. Affordable decent housing

- Please refer to page two for details.

5. Wage levels and the local cost of living

- A question was asked about what the living wage for Herefordshire is?

Additional improvements

6. Traffic calming and road safety

- Participants felt that there is a need for road safety to be a higher priority and improved. This is a particular issue in Shobdon where there is a need for traffic calming measures and possibly the introduction of a gateway. It was felt that sleeping policemen and red road markings were not the answer to addressing speeding.
- It was noted that the parish council are looking into using a Speed Indication Device (SID) camera.
- There is a perception that the only way the issue of speeding will be resolved, is if Shobdon gets a reputation for somewhere that you are likely to be caught speeding. It was advised that other areas have this reputation, because they have a regular mobile speed camera presence.
- It was felt that there is a need to review the speed limit signs as they are too variable and it is not clear which speed area you are in. Residents also commented on the number of signs, which they felt were distracting to drivers and that the council shouldn't be wasting money on new signage in times of austerity.

7. Broadband

- There was a consensus that broadband should be on both the priority and the in need of improvement lists. This is strongly linked to other key priorities such as job prospects and economic growth and is seen as an essential part of the local infrastructure.
- The poor broadband access is a particular issue in Shobdon, due to the distance they are from the telephone exchange.
- There is a concern that Herefordshire Council's broadband project can only guarantee 90% coverage and that it won't target black spots such as Shobdon.

8. Other service related comments

- Residents thought that the lengthsman could play a greater role in some aspects of local routine maintenance work.

9. Other general comments

- There was a query as to how information from parish plans would be used to influence decisions relating to services.

Questions

Q: What is the living wage for people in Herefordshire?

A: There is no living wage defined at county level and we don't have enough information about living costs in the county to know whether it might be higher or lower than elsewhere. The living wage for the UK is estimated to be £7.45 per hour and £8.55 for London. The median average hourly pay rate for all employees in Herefordshire in 2011 was £9.54, which means that somewhere in the range of 25% to 30% of employees in the county were likely to have earnings below the UK living wage of £7.45. For more information about the living wage, please visit: <http://www.livingwage.org.uk/> or for information on Herefordshire, please visit: <http://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/factsandfigures/1215.aspx#end>.

Q: How will the information from parish plans be used to influence decisions relating to services?

A: The strength and value of parish plans comes from the high proportion of parishioners who are actually consulted, usually these represent the majority of local residents and the rich scope of the consultations. As a result, parish plans can confidently assert that they accurately reflect the majority views of their communities across a wide range of issues.

This gives the local parish council and its residents more confidence when seeking to influence decisions regarding local services and provides valuable supporting evidence when seeking grants and funding. Service providers are also keen to support parish planning groups at various stages of the process, but especially at the action planning and implementation stages. The information from parish plans has also been incorporated into the locality profiles available to council officers, councillors and members of the public, who are involved in the nine new service localities across the county.

The majority of communities across Herefordshire have now completed or are starting parish plans and most of those which have been published are available at: <http://www.herefordshirepartnership.com/53F019BB10CA4E02BC90A916A9FD415B.aspx>. To find out more, please contact Chris Gooding, Herefordshire Council's community led planning coordinator on 01432 383612 or cgooding2@herefordshire.gov.uk.

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 as 'must have' were broad, ranging from health services to leisure centres with local leisure facilities being most commonly recorded.

While there were no services identified as things people 'could do without', there were suggestions about what we 'could do differently', including extending the lengthsman scheme, making better use of the Community Payback scheme and reducing street lighting.

The table shown below on page 8 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.

Participants were also asked to note down their top three priority services and three services which they perceived as less important. These were recorded on individual cards and not shared with the group. Health and social care services were most commonly seen as the top priority, followed by education and road maintenance.

Public toilets were most commonly noted as being less of a priority, closely followed by street lighting and libraries.

The findings from both of these exercises and the group discussions, 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.

One of the comments was:

"I liked the sensible questions and everyone's involvement."

The things that people said they didn't like were the lack of people in attendance, the lack of access to more detailed financial information, information about levels of service usage and that there was no method used to weight peoples views for and against ideas.

The things that people said they most wanted to see happen next was positive action as a result of the consultation, robust feedback and more information on what services are provided and what they cost to deliver.

Feedback

Must have	Nice to have	Could do without	Could do differently
<p>Health services including community health services</p> <p>Education including good quality schools and pre schools</p> <p>Sport and leisure, as local leisure centres are important</p> <p>Children’s and youth services</p>	<p>Chargeable public toilets, although they’re more necessary in towns and cities</p> <p>Cultural services, although there were mixed views on this matter</p> <p>Museums which people have to pay to visit</p>	<p>The length of time the street lights are on for</p>	<p>Car parking in Hereford needs to be pay on exit or all day</p> <p>We could move libraries into a single building with other community services or meeting places, such as in Yarpole</p> <p>Neighbourhood planning needs to respect local people's views and people should be informed of what is happening at each planning stage</p> <p>We could have clean streets through the lengthsman or Community Payback schemes</p> <p>The multi use games area in Shobdon should be used to generate income</p>