

Your community - your say

Summary of findings from Weobley

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 Weobley event, which was held at Weobley Village Hall on 1 October, was attended by 23 local people the majority of which were aged between 45 and 74. It was found that just over 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 areas as priorities for residents in the Weobley locality for making somewhere a good place to live:

- 1. Health services**
- 2. The level of crime**
- 3. Public transport**
- 4. Access to nature**
- 5. Affordable decent housing**
- 6. Refuse collection and disposal**

There was general consensus that the QOL results were generally reflective of priorities for the Weobley area, although there was some uncertainty about access to nature coming above affordable decent housing.

1. Health services

- The retention of health services both locally and those delivered via Hereford County Hospital were seen as absolutely vital and of increasing importance as the population ages.
- There was general consensus that GP access in Weobley was very good and the quality of the service was highly rated. The surgery is also a dispensing practice which is highly valued.
- Those who attended from Wellington stated that they have to travel to Hereford to access a GP, but rate the service they receive very highly.
- The Weobley dental practice was held in high regard, however it was noted that it is unable to register new NHS patients.
- Anecdotal evidence was provided that the council prevented the medical practice in Kington from having an NHS dentist.
- The issue of poor out of hours medical care was raised, specifically around the lack of access to personal medical records if someone is taken in to hospital out of hours.
- There was an acknowledgement that a few of the most specialised services would have to remain out of county.

2. The level of crime

- There was a general consensus that local policing from the Community Support Officer (CSO) was good and they had good visibility in the local area and understood the needs of the community.
- It was widely acknowledged that the fear of crime did not match the actual levels of crime, which are very low.
- Rural crime such as theft from farms and heating oil theft were highlighted as an issue.

- There is a very strong sense of community in the area, with people looking out for each other, which it was perceived helps to keep crime levels down.
- Speeding and the lack of speed limits in the Bishopstone hamlets group were raised as a concern.

3. Public transport

- It was felt that free bus passes help to tackle rural isolation by allowing passengers to travel freely throughout the county.
- The bus service to and from Hereford and Ledbury was felt to be very good. The daily bus service was felt to be adequate for the communities needs and is well used. The retention of this service was seen as important given the increasing needs of the elderly to gain access to essential services such as GPs.
- It was commented that there is also a very good service to the train station.

4. Access to nature

- There are good established walking routes and it was felt that the routes are well maintained and the area is recognised for this. Maintaining these routes was felt to be important although there was a general feeling that this was too high up in the priority list.
- It was felt that the lengthsman and footpathsman, the local people who look after sections of roads and pathways, were valued and did a good job of maintaining access and verges.
- It was felt that the parish council could take over the resources and management of services linked to accessing nature.

5. Affordable decent housing

- There was general confusion about the term 'affordable decent housing' and participants felt there was a need to clarify what was meant by this term, as it was not clear whether this related only to social housing or more broadly to the 'affordability' of property in the area.
- It was felt that planning must pay more attention to local opinions and there was a suggestion that local communities could be part of housing allocation teams.
- Residents felt that housing allocation should prioritise people that were born in Hereford or work here. There was a perception that local families were not being prioritised for local housing and that in some cases people from outside the area were being 'bussed in'.
- The existing housing allocation policy is perceived to have too many loopholes, allowing properties to be swapped or remain empty.
- It was felt that there was a need for a more integrated approach to housing development, including more mixed housing and a mixture of social and smaller housing.

- There is a perceived lack of publically owned affordable rental accommodation in the area.
- It is difficult to establish exactly what the need for affordable decent housing is locally, but it needs to reflect the demographic of the community.
- There was a feeling that affordable decent housing would enable younger people to stay in the village and would also help to attract more young families.
- It was noted that those who are reliant on affordable decent housing were not in attendance at the event.

6. Refuse collection and disposal

- Overall, residents were satisfied with the doorstep refuse collection and supported the move to get rid of the different recycling bins and replace them with one bin per household.
- Some commented that they had not been offered green wheelie bins and that they would like the doorstep recycling collection to include glass.
- The loss of the local recycling bin at the village hall is an issue, as this provided an income of approximately £400 a month, which helped towards the upkeep of the village hall. There was also a call for the introduction of more local community collection points.

Additional priorities

7. Social care for older people

- Social care for older people was identified as a high priority and concerns were raised about how this would be funded in the future, given the cuts and the rising ageing population.
- The potential loss of the meals on wheels service was highlighted as a problem for those in rural areas and it was suggested that the Weobley service is currently under threat. This was seen as a valuable service which not only provides a nutritional meal, but also a regular check on older people's welfare.
- It was suggested that the threatened closure of local day care services would have a negative impact on older people.
- There was a suggestion that social care for older people needs to be looked at more holistically and that services should be means tested.
- There was a suggestion that some local care for the elderly could be undertaken by volunteers from the local community.

8. Job prospects

- Please refer to page six for details.

9. Road and pavement repairs

- Please refer to page six for details.

10. Broadband

- Please refer to page six for further details.

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

1. **Affordable decent housing**
2. **Public transport**

There was a general consensus that the QOL survey results were generally reflective of priorities for the Weobley area, although those from Weobley village felt that public transport was satisfactory. In addition, it was felt that road and pavement repairs, job prospects and broadband should also form part of this list.

1. Affordable decent housing

- Residents felt that more information and advice on renting rooms should be made available, as people need to know the implications of renting a room out.
- There was a suggestion about retaining the single person discount on council tax, if someone was renting a room to someone on the social housing list.
- It was felt that new builds should be targeted at first time buyers and that a percentage of all housing in new developments should be affordable.
- There was concern about how new housing allocation regulations would affect communities and that the stability of a community could be disrupted by shorter term tenants.
- There was also a request that the rural exemption policy be looked at. There are a number of affordable social houses, but a lack of sizeable homes for families in the local area.

2. Public transport

- There were concerns raised about the sustainability of the current bus system.
- Public transport in Weobley was thought to be good but outside of Weobley and in the hamlets, it was an issue in terms of the irregularity of services.
- While public transport provision from north to south of the county was deemed to be good, travelling from east to west is more difficult. There was specific reference made around the need for a more regular service to Leominster.
- There is currently no late evening bus service and this was seen as a problem for younger people in the area, who may wish to go out on the weekend but are unable to get back to Weobley and the surrounding area.
- It was noted that there is a minibus owned by the school, which can be used by the community, although more information and advertising is needed to make residents aware of this.
- It was felt that there was a need for more demand responsive transport.
- There were mixed feelings about the ability of the parish council to play a greater role in transport provision, with some believing it would take too much coordination.

- There was a suggestion that supermarkets could contribute to public transport on routes which go to their shops or they could fund special shopper buses. There was some concern raised around the impact this may have on local shops.

Additional improvements

3. Road and pavement repairs

- It was noted that improvements had been made to the golf course road and Hereford Road.
- When discussing the Local Transport Plan's proposal to stop patching up roads and do 'proper fixes' on them, it was commented that the patching up needs to continue until the roads are fixed.
- There was concern over how road repairs are prioritised and the fear that rural roads would come lower down the list.
- There was a perception that a lot of rural road damage is caused by farm vehicles and HGVs.
- It was felt that there was a need for greater consultation between Herefordshire Council and the Highways Agency, particularly over the A49, around safety and repairs.

4. Job prospects

- There was a feeling that more could be done to encourage and increase employment potential in the local area.
- Poor public transport, a lack of or slow broadband and the lack of investment in businesses were all seen as hurdles in relation to improving job prospects.
- There was a question raised about how the new enterprise zone would benefit people in the Weobley area, as there is concern that there will be a lack of local people with the right specialist skills to take up enterprise zone jobs.
- Employment has been lost in Weobley village due to the closure of businesses. It was also noted that the local business park has very few tenants.
- There is concern over the threat of closure of the post office in Weobley, although they are looking for alternative solutions and local branches of banks and the impact this may have on local businesses. It was noted that Wellington has recently opened a community run shop and post office.
- It was noted that in Monkland, 35% of homes have businesses run from them.

5. Broadband

- The current broadband provision in the area is slow, only 1 to 1.5 mbps and this is seen as a problem, especially in attracting businesses to the local area that are not traditional rural industries.

6. Planning

- There was a general feeling that planning regulations need to be reviewed. An example was given locally of a brown field site, an old petrol station, which is derelict and an eye sore, but the owner of the land can't obtain permission to build on it.
- There was also a request that the rural exemption policy be looked at. There are a number of affordable social houses, but a lack of sizeable homes for families in the local area.
- There was a request for local knowledge to be taken into account by the planners.

7. Youth provision

- There are no evening activities for young people locally, only after school activities.
- It was felt that young people need to be involved in discussions about the provision they want. It was also noted that there were no young people at the event.
- It was felt that sports provision in the area was good and that there were halls and spaces available to accommodate sports activities.
- Some residents perceived that there was no coordinated approach to sports development and commented that people appear to be less interested in sports clubs than they used to be, such as cricket, rugby and football.

8. Other service related comments

- There was a general feeling that the council should listen more to what the people of Weobley want.
- There was a discussion around council tax and how many services those in rural areas actually use. Some felt it was unfair that they should pay the full council tax.
- There was a feeling that people should pay to go to museums.
- A need was identified for public toilets at Hopelands, where facilities have increased including a playground and shelter. It was felt this would help attract more families to use the facilities.
- Weobley and the surrounding area attract a number of tourists for the scenery and walking opportunities. As this generates income to the local community, it is felt more investment could be made to attract tourists.
- The local library, school and post office are all highly valued and seen as an important part of the community.
- While there was general support for some services being devolved a number of concerns were also raised. Residents felt there was a significant risk associated with local people talking over the running of services, such as a lack of experience and knowledge, overcoming red tape and recruiting and retaining local volunteers.

9. Other general comments

- A request was made for future public consultation events to be advertised through the parish magazine network and local websites.

- Representatives from Wellington raised the issue about their village being in the wrong locality, as they feel they have more synergy with villages like Weobley than Hereford.
- A concern was raised around internal communications within the council, as it was alleged that Councillor Mark Cooper had not been briefed about the Your community - your say process.
- It was suggested that Herefordshire Council's customer services needs to be improved and that better standards of face to face contact are required.

Questions

Q: How will the new enterprise zone benefit people in the Weobley locality?

A: We will provide a response to this question shortly.

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

The services allocated as 'must have' are very broad and range from health services to public toilets with road maintenance and education coming out as the most commonly recorded service closely followed by social services.

Public health services were commonly cited in terms of things people 'could do without'. There were many suggestions about what we 'could do differently', with a particular focus on reducing subsidies for sports and cultural services, targeting resources more efficiently at those in greatest need and getting local people to take more responsibility for maintaining the local area, such as clean streets, footpaths and open spaces.

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.

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 health related services were most commonly seen as the top priority, with cultural facilities and services being most commonly noted as less of a priority.

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, the facilitation and the openness of the discussions.

Some of the comments included:

“I liked the way we were encouraged to give our views, friendly facilitators.”

“Learning about the differences in need / priority for different parishes.”

The things that people commonly said they didn't like included the fact that the attendees were mainly from Weobley, so not representative of the locality and trying to make decisions without access to more detailed information.

Some of the other comments included:

“Some of the questions were open ended and were focussed on a national level rather than on Weobley.”

“It's not even representative of Weobley village, a 'social' subset is here and the diversity of local people are not represented.”

“We lacked domain knowledge to properly address lots of areas.”

“Could have closer related to priority / high cost areas.”

The things that people said they most wanted to see happen next were positive action as a result of the consultation and feedback on the findings and outcomes of the consultation.

A few of the comments made included:

“There needs to be a full response to the parish council on the feedback and findings.”

“Would like the parish to be kept informed about the thinking of the council and the topics discussed.”

“Much more detail about where the money is spent.”

Feedback

Must have	Nice to have	Could do without	Could do differently
<p>Health services</p> <p>Public transport</p> <p>Road repairs</p> <p>Education</p> <p>Environmental services</p> <p>Social services, including meals on wheels</p> <p>Emergency services</p> <p>Clean streets</p> <p>Carer support</p> <p>Community Support Officers</p> <p>Children’s services</p> <p>Cultural services</p> <p>Tourism</p> <p>Sports and leisure services</p> <p>Planning</p>	<p>Cultural facilities</p> <p>Support for carers</p> <p>Health services</p> <p>Public transport</p> <p>Environmental services</p> <p>Sports and leisure facilities</p> <p>Activities for teenagers</p> <p>Footpaths and rights of way</p> <p>Affordable decent housing</p> <p>Public toilets</p> <p>Open spaces</p>	<p>Community development support</p> <p>Access to nature</p> <p>Public health services and preventative health services</p> <p>Parks and open spaces</p> <p>Trading standards</p> <p>Paying people for jobs that volunteers could do, although schemes do need co-ordinators</p>	<p>Planning should be simplified and done differently</p> <p>Access to nature should be done locally</p> <p>Affordable housing</p> <p>Clean streets could be done by volunteers</p> <p>Public toilets</p> <p>Car parking</p> <p>Business services</p> <p>Preventative health services</p> <p>Activities for teenagers</p> <p>Cultural facilities and leisure facilities should have less subsidies</p> <p>Trading standards</p> <p>Road repairs should be done locally</p> <p>Environmental services should be done locally and differently</p>

<p>Community development support for the parish council and volunteering</p> <p>Broadband</p> <p>Business and employment services</p>			<p>Give people the option between a bus pass or subsidised taxi fare</p> <p>People would forego their bus pass rather than lose the service</p> <p>We need to target resources to those which need them, as older people don't necessarily need them</p> <p>We could have smaller buses, which focus on need, are demand led and link the villages</p> <p>Herefordshire Council must facilitate delivery not directly deliver</p> <p>We would be happy to pay more for some services</p> <p>We need to be more joined up with neighbouring counties</p> <p>The timings for street lighting could be different</p> <p>Car parking signs should be better for tourists</p> <p>Social services</p> <p>Parks and open spaces</p>
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