

Your community - your say

Summary of findings from Ross-on-Wye

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 Ross-on-Wye event, which was held at The Larruperz Centre on 20 September, was attended by 24 local people the majority of which were over 45, with just under 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 four areas as priorities for residents in the Ross-on-Wye locality for making somewhere a good place to live:

- 1. Health services**
- 2. The level of crime**
- 3. Education provision**
- 4. Affordable decent housing**

There was general consensus that the QOL results were generally reflective of priorities for the Ross-on-Wye area but care for the elderly, public transport, broadband and sport and leisure provision were also identified as being priorities.

1. Health services

- We should be investing more in preventative services and looking at overall wellbeing, this could save money in the long term.
- We should ensure everyone has access to free dental check ups.
- The cottage / community hospital is important and valued, particularly in terms of the excellent service, free parking, same day appointments and access by older people. The ageing population will make this an increasingly important service.
- Support for independent living should be maintained.
- Safeguarding adults and children is everybody's responsibility.

2. The level of crime

- The perception of crime is greater than actual crime.
- The retention of the police station was seen as important.
- Race hate crime was raised as an issue and the generally low numbers of BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) individuals in the area. It was felt that more should be done to encourage better integration of ethnic minorities.

3. Education provision

- There is a need for better vocational education provision across the county.
- Lack of adult education and training locally, with a perception that it is mainly delivered in Hereford.
- It was felt that Herefordshire would benefit from a university.

4. Affordable decent housing

- There is an affordable housing shortage in this area and some felt this should be higher up the priority list.

- There is a need for more affordable housing for single people and developers should not be able to replace single / small units with large executive homes.
- Empty houses should be put back into use and possibly used to house the homeless.
- Affordable rental properties are needed as well as affordable properties to purchase.
- Affordable housing is important in terms of attracting and retaining younger people. It was also felt that younger people were needed to support older people.
- There is a need to identify suitable parcels of land for development that are currently not used including use of brown field sites. It was recognised that this is very central in the Town Plan.
- A policy from Herefordshire Council is needed that releases council land for development without the need for making a profit.

Additional priorities

5. Public transport

- See pages four and five for full details.

6. Broadband

- This was seen as particularly important for home workers and attracting and retaining business in the local area.
- There is a promise of improved broadband for the county but there is no sign of anything changing. Residents need better information and communication is needed so that people are informed of progress.

7. Sport and leisure provision

- The swimming pool was seen as important to Ross-on-Wye and support for the retention of existing leisure facilities was expressed.
- Participants said that they would like to see increased public access to school sports facilities. For example, in Monmouth there is integration of public sports facilities with the school.
- It was felt by some that all leisure facilities locally could be run by a Community Interest Company (CIC).
- The importance of sport and leisure provision to encourage good health and the links with the preventative agenda were recognised.
- There was some support for the idea of local sports champions.

8. Care for the elderly

- There are lots of elderly people in the Ross-on-Wye area, therefore services for this group should be a higher priority.
- A local residential home had recently been lost which means there is a need for local provision.

- Participants reported receiving a poor service by some care agencies and the primary issue is lack of continuity of service delivery, which is very disruptive for service users.
- Support and services for carers were felt to be excellent in the local area.
- There was a perception that there are a lack of social workers and that they are being spread too thinly.

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 Ross-on-Wye 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**

There was general consensus that the QOL survey results were generally reflective of the priorities for the Ross-on-Wye area.

1. Road and pavement repairs

- Potholes were seen as one of the biggest issues on the roads locally, with routine maintenance being required.
- It was perceived that HGV's cause much of the road damage.
- Narrowness and lack of pavements cause problems for people with mobility scooters.
- Traffic congestion was not seen to be too much of a problem locally.
- Amey services were seen as unsatisfactory and it was felt that Herefordshire Council should not renew the contract with Amey. It was also felt that there needed to be better communication over road repairs.
- Pavements and drains are often blocked with weeds which cause localised flooding.
- The number of salt bins in the area need to be increased, which will enable local people to help themselves more.

2. Public transport

- A lot of the vehicles are old and need replacing and should be replaced with smaller and eco-friendly buses.
- There is a need to ensure bus services are better connected with other routes such as community transport and National Express services.
- Transport for younger people is an issue, especially evening travel.
- We should be making better use of vehicles that are only used periodically, such as school mini buses.

- The bus service between Ross-on-Wye and Hereford needs to be more frequent, while people also felt the service between Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye was poor.
- It was suggested that the Park & Ride should be extended all year round, for example like Norwich's scheme.
- There was some support to set up car pools locally, although incentives would be needed such as free parking for pool cars.
- The Fownhope bus service could be replicated as a local solution to transport problems.
- Ross-on-Wye would benefit from a railway station.
- Greater investment in cycle ways is needed.
- Public transport needs to be more affordable. A suggestion was that it could perhaps be subsidised for people just starting a job.
- There is potentially a greater role for parish and town councils in relation to public transport, particularly traffic management, car parking and signage.
- People were against increases in car parking charges and an issue was raised concerning people who work taking up free street parking spaces.

3. Job prospects

- Improvement of public transport would lead to an improvement of job prospects.
- There is a need to create more low tech jobs to kick start employment and the economy.
- More support and initiatives to help young people and disabled people into employment are needed.
- Those people who are jobless should be encouraged to volunteer, which links with community self help.
- There is a need to work with schools and colleges to improve basic skills.
- More work experience opportunities are needed to enable people to gain basic skills and the level of paperwork is currently a deterrent for businesses.
- The live / work units at Harewood End were thought to be a positive development which could be replicated in other areas.

4. Affordable decent housing

- There is a perceived need to increase provision of affordable family accommodation.
- Housing generally is thought to be too expensive in the local area.
- Social housing should be the priority.
- Planning rules should be relaxed and the planning system made more efficient.
- Accommodation above shops should be brought into better use.

- The infrastructure to support housing development must be in place.
- House sharing should be encouraged for younger / single people.
- There was a suggestion to expand Ross-on-Wye rather than Rotherwas to exploit the road network.
- More self-build should be encouraged such as the Stroud self-build.
- There is a need for single storey sheltered flats for older people.

Additional improvements

5. Support for businesses

- Businesses would benefit from a reduction in business rates, which could stimulate growth.

6. Other service related comments

- People generally felt that residents should be more involved in influencing how services were delivered locally to ensure local needs were met and local solutions found.
- There was general agreement that communities could take on the running of some services but in order to do this, more skilled volunteers would be needed to manage and facilitate activity. People's skills could be better used to set up community services such as recycling.
- There was a perception that views given in previous consultations have been ignored.
- Some people valued the local Partners And Communities Together (PACT) meetings.
- There is a need to take an entrepreneurial approach to reviewing services. For example a day centre was turned into a community centre and is now used by 60 different groups.
- People felt that street lighting could be turned off or reduced, which would help address light pollution. There was a question about whether there is evidence that links reduction in street lighting with increased crime? See page 7 for the answer.
- Generally people felt that the parish council could take over responsibility for the maintenance of footpaths and bridleways.
- People felt that the library service should be enhanced rather than cut at the expense of 'reading' services.
- There were mixed views on how well public toilets were currently used. Some people were in support of retaining current provision and extending the opening hours in the evening, while others felt that people could be charged for using them.
- Youth services provision is generally felt to be adequate in Ross-on-Wye, however more volunteers are needed.

- There were mixed views on whether the replacement of seats in Ross-on-Wye town centre was required and given the current economic climate, expenditure on elaborate street furniture was seen to be an extravagance.
- High levels of satisfaction relating to waste disposal and recycling were expressed and people particularly liked having one bin for recycling. It was felt by some that if people want additional bins or bags they should pay for them, while some people would like extended tip opening hours.

7. Other general comments

- There is a need for greater transparency by public bodies, particularly in relation to finances and expenditure.
- The view was expressed that the Chief Executive and council officers are being paid too much.
- There was a perception that councillors were paid too much in expenses, although others felt it was important that expenses were covered.
- Council tax has consistently been above inflation.
- The view was expressed that people don't want to pay more council tax.
- There needs to be better publicity for these types of events. For example notify parish councils. See page 7 for the answer.
- Efficiency internally within Herefordshire Council is very important. For example staffing levels and subcontractors.
- It is important to be able to vote at a local polling station and either more local stations are needed or there should be more choice about where people can vote.
- Employment opportunities for people from different backgrounds including ethnic minority groups are needed. The Herefordshire Council employment scheme which guarantees interviews for disabled people should be replicated for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) applicants.
- Specialist advice centres could be set up, particularly for BAME groups.
- The welfare rights department which is aimed at elderly and / or disabled people should be extended to include people from BAME communities.

Questions

Q: Is there evidence that links reduction in street lighting with increased crime?

A: We are looking into this question and will provide an answer shortly.

Q: Why weren't these events better publicised by using parish councils?

A: All of the YCYS events were promoted through Herefordshire's town and parish councils.

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 are very broad with health services coming out as the most commonly recorded service, while street furniture, street lighting and public toilets were most commonly cited in terms of things people 'could do without'.

In terms of what people felt we 'could do differently', the most common suggestions were parish and town councils could take over responsibility for certain services such as street cleaning, car parks and parks and open spaces. Street lighting could be reduced, people could pay for using public toilets or we could make better use of shop / cafe facilities and there should be more wildflower planting in 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 or other health related services such as hospitals were most commonly noted as the top priority, while other top priorities included education, policing, social services, business support, housing, fire services, libraries, clean streets, streets and pavements and jobs. The areas which people felt were less important included car parking, public toilets, parking enforcement, access to nature, trading standards, aggressive weed control, footpaths, the Edgar Street Grid (ESG) in Hereford, public health services and seats in the town centre and parks. Other comments noted on these cards which were less of a priority were to give playgrounds and car parks back to Ross-on-Wye and highly paid executives.

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.

Some of the comments included:

"I liked the focus on what we can do without and should be doing ourselves."

"The fact that Herefordshire Council is trying to take a pro-active approach."

The things that people commonly said they didn't like included the DVD of Cllr Jarvis in particular the background music, people who dominated the discussions and the lack of attendees.

Some of the other comments included:

"We the public are hopeless!
We don't turn out to give our views we just moan afterwards – Ugh!"

"Too subjective."

The things that people said they most wanted to see happen next were action to be taken as a result of the consultation, greater transparency, more information about how the council currently spends money and the integration of the Town Plan with the consultation.

A few of the comments made included:

"An active dialogue about devolving services to the local community."

"Better communication back, more transparency."

"There should be full integration of the Ross town plan into the process."

"Tell us in more detail how much money is being spent on services provided."

Feedback

Must have	Nice to have	Could do without	Could do differently
<p>Road and pavement maintenance</p> <p>Leisure facilities</p> <p>Public toilets</p> <p>Youth services (targeted in areas of need)</p> <p>Health services (including community hospitals)</p> <p>Parks and open spaces (but make them more wildlife friendly)</p> <p>Play areas run by parish and town councils</p> <p>Environmental health (including food standards and hygiene)</p> <p>Social housing rather than affordable housing</p> <p>More childcare provision in school holidays for those employed but on low incomes</p> <p>Recycling</p>	<p>Seats in Ross-on-Wye town centre to replace ones that were removed</p> <p>Better footpaths, bridleways and cycle ways</p> <p>Cultural facilities</p> <p>Environmental health (noise control affects local economy)</p> <p>Resources to address fly tipping</p> <p>Reduce the number of full time manned fire stations</p> <p>Support for employers to ensure manning of fire stations by volunteers</p>	<p>Street lighting</p> <p>Street furniture</p> <p>Parking enforcement (less of it)</p> <p>Reduce bureaucracy</p> <p>Solar panels for public buildings</p> <p>Repair of old buildings instead of building new ones to house statutory services</p> <p>Planning (too many interventions are not consistent)</p> <p>Trading standards</p> <p>Private companies to provide building control</p> <p>Flower beds</p> <p>Precepting for Community Support Officers (CSOs)</p> <p>Money spent on consultations</p> <p>Less councillors</p>	<p>Clean streets (this role could be taken on by the town council)</p> <p>Street lights (reduce hours, stagger lighting, reduce level of lighting, convert to LED and solar powered)</p> <p>Youth services (could be run locally by volunteers)</p> <p>Public toilets (engage businesses and get people to pay for this service)</p> <p>Public transport (could more be run voluntarily)</p> <p>Pest control (give to local firms)</p> <p>Young people should be encouraged to live at home rather than go on to the housing list</p> <p>Increase car parking charges where people have other options</p> <p>Give control of the car parks back to the local community (gives the local community an opportunity to improve)</p>

<p>Cycle paths</p>		<p>Less council officers</p> <p>Herefordshire Matters</p> <p>Traffic wardens</p> <p>New Herefordshire signage</p> <p>Rights of way department</p> <p>Clean streets</p>	<p>the local economy)</p> <p>Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks (facilitated by the council to encourage self help)</p> <p>Nurseries could be run by mothers if regulation is decreased</p> <p>The town precept is unfair on town residents (locality should also make a contribution to facilities in Ross-on-Wye and the tax area should reflect the locality)</p> <p>Better placing of bins to avoid clearing litter (bigger bins to reduce the number of collections)</p> <p>Hand over parks and open spaces to local communities / town council</p> <p>Ground maintenance of public areas (could be more wildlife friendly)</p>
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