

Big Conversation 2016/17 Summary Partner Feedback



Context

Shropshire Council sought the help of project partners to help explore feedback on the Council's priorities and direction set out in the Corporate Plan (2016/17 to 2018/19), and to better understand the likely impact of service change. Previous Big Conversation work undertaken in 2015/16 was successful in achieving a broad representation from across Shropshire but further engagement, to accompany the 2016/17 Big Conversation survey, was desired with:

- Children and young people under the age of 25.
- Carers and people using services likely to be most impacted by service changes (including those over the age of 75).
- People who either do not have the skills and equipment to complete online surveys or who choose not to engage online.
- People with a disability making the completion of online surveys and engagement more difficult.
- People on lower incomes likely to find the self-funding of services difficult.

The engagement activity was to include focus on face to face and/or telephone conversations and include:

- Communicating feedback from the Big Conversation to date.
- Explaining the work now taking place to respond to what people have told us.
- Using the Council's Corporate Plan to highlight planned developments and initiatives.
- Understanding need and the potential impact of service losses or changes.
- Making use of questions to find out more about the views of local people and suggestions for delivering services differently.
- Collating the feedback.

Four project partners were selected to engage with the target groups as follows:

1. Carers Trust 4All (carers).
2. Shropshire Council's Community Enablement Team with the Council's Business Design Team (young people aged under 25).
3. Shropshire Housing Support Group with People2People (people on lower incomes and who would find self funding services or taking part in online surveys difficult).
4. Taking Part (people with a disability).

Introduction

722 residents took part in the partner Big Conversations across the County. This took the form of online and paper easy read questionnaires, telephone discussions, 28 focus groups, attendance at existing groups and meetings of which:

- 35 were carers
- 188 people had a disability (inclusive of physical, learning, mental or other disability)
- 456 were children and young people aged under 25
- ages spanned 10 to 91
- residents from across Shropshire took part



Note: This map does not include children and young people participants from whom postcode information was not requested.

This document summaries the reports of the project partners providing their key findings by the priorities set out in the Council’s Corporate Plan and by each of the four demographic groups.

Key Findings by Priority

Resilient Communities

Positives

- There are active volunteers within the community (shops, coffee shop, library, Fordhall Farm, local council meeting).
- People actively raising money to support their own group; examples provided included sponsored row, fairs, raffles, donations.
- People commented on examples of individuals setting up their own schemes/activities to replace those that are no longer available
- Those engaged say Shropshire is a good place to live generally.

Areas of concern

- A small number of key people organise events - it’s felt these people need acknowledgment and support as well as more people being encouraged to help out.

Healthy People

Positives

- The importance of good health and how to achieve it is well recognised.
- Generally people are physically active, visit the gym, go for walks, take part in a wide range sporting activities and clubs.
 - *The exception are carers for whom finding time for themselves is difficult and have health issues that prevent them from being as active as they’d like.*
 - *Carers also reported issues with managing stress, sleep and diet.*
 - *Some groups note that there are fewer activities in rural areas*
- Being able to socialise and learn new skills was highly valued.
- People eat well (although sometimes those involved in the discussions said they forget) and get information about food from staff, apps, the internet.

Areas of concern

- Within the discussions there was a request for information on disabled facilities at Market Drayton swimming pool.
- People commented that they would like more information from the local authority about healthy eating.
- It was reported that GP services in Whitchurch and Market Drayton proving difficult to access (appointment waiting times and public transport) causing concern for personal safety and welfare.
- Money is seen as important in making it easier to achieve good health e.g. sugary snacks are considered cheaper than healthier options.
- Whilst there are plenty of opportunities for physical activities in towns, people with a disability commented that there aren't so many opportunities to take part in activities rural areas.

Prosperous Economy

Positives

- People value their local towns, shops and services and say they really miss shops/services when they close.
- Shropshire's green spaces are valued but people feel that their potential could be further maximised (comments that people should make the most of local green spaces).

Areas of concern:

- Broadband speeds are too slow, and services are patchy.
- Public transport is an issue for all groups.
 - Lack of services in rural areas
 - Lack of wheelchair accessible buses
 - Irregular services
 - It means accessing work, support meetings, health services, sporting activities, training and courses, food shops and socialising with friends is difficult. It is a lifeline.
- Local business could do more to encourage people with disabilities to shop locally.
- Young people believe that they'll need to leave Shropshire when they're older (for education/jobs/lifestyle/spread their wings).
- Affordable housing/rental and paying bills is a concern.
- Comments on rough sleepers included the need for more timely support and that the Council should do more to address the issue.

The Council

Positives:

- Comments on service improvements with the Shropshire Recovery Partnership.
- People comment that the young carers service has improved.
- Library services are mentioned and praised amongst most groups.
 - Libraries are seen as important as sources of information about what's going on, for accessing online services and keeping in touch.
- People believe asylum seeker services are well meaning but more thought is needed where asylum seekers are placed – need to be able to access language courses easily.

Areas of concern:

- Use of computers is low among the groups targeted for engagement (children and young people are the exception).
- People comment that the welfare system is complex (system and language) for people with learning disabilities and mental health issues – support is needed.

- Information from the Council should be accessible:
 - easy to read
 - hard copies available in public places – popular places to gather information are libraries, Whitchurch Civic Centre, Festival Centre Market Drayton.
- Service cuts worry people:
 - They have seen negative changes to services such as services closing, funding reductions, loss of support staff, reduced services (street lights, gritting).
 - The impact of cuts have a negative impact on feelings of safety and loss of social interaction.
 - People have mixed feelings about paying for services:
 - Being able to afford to pay for services
 - Being asked to pay for services that currently receive for free
 - Potential to contribute depending on potential charging rates
 - Concern that if unable to pay then they would lose their independence.
- The Council needs to do more to lobby Government for more funding (taking into account Shropshire’s rurality, low wages, high levels of need and older population).

Key Findings by Group

People with a Disability

- People had not previously heard of the Big Conversation.
- Around a third of people say they use a computer.
- Praise for the Shropshire Recovery Partnership
- People with a disability comment on being very active:
 - They take part in a range of activities such as volunteering, fund raising, sports (such as football, Zumba, cycling, rock climbing, fishing, darts), theatre, church activities and voting. But are still keen to do more (archery, trampolining, tap dancing, swimming, going on holiday). It was noted that whilst there are lots of activities in towns there are not so many in the countryside.
 - 43% have a job or a voluntary role.
- Lack of public transport (particularly in the North and South of the county) has a negative impact on a range of issues:
 - being able to meet up with friends or network with others
 - ability to access basic health services
 - being able to access sporting activities
 - being able to access courses and training
 - transport needs to be on time
 - wheelchair users find buses are not always wheelchair accessible.
- Feedback was that more onsite support is needed for people with mental health and learning disabilities living in Independent Living schemes.
- They said local businesses could encourage their custom by offering friendly support, wheelchair friendly, making goods accessible (not stacking high), offering local deliveries, by being a part of Safe Places.
- Claiming and appealing within the welfare system is demanding due to the complex system and language used. People with learning disabilities and mental health issues struggle.
- They said that communication and information was important and that the Council needs to make it easier for them get information, and not rely on online resources.
 - Leaflets are suggested at information points (library, Festival Centre Market Drayton, Civic Centre Whitchurch). These locations are important for finding out what events and activities are happening.
- People are worried about future service cuts.
 - 59% have seen negative changes to services as a result of cuts
 - charitable services closed

- loss of networking / meeting up with friends
- Funding for courses has been cut
- Loss of support staff (e.g. driver so days out are cut short, support to do exercise has gone)
- Street lights switched off – don't feel safe at night
- Not gritting streets – don't feel safe
- There is a sense of loss of services in Bridgnorth (Council Office, information centre, CAB, limited opening for registry office).
- Friends unable to get bus passes
- People are generally unwilling to pay for some services that are currently free (e.g. libraries, bus fares) because of the issues of having a limited income and uncertainty of potential charging rates. There is mixed opinion on paying for leisure activities and care/support. There is a fear that they would lose their independence if they couldn't afford to pay.
- They said that the Council needs to do more to lobby Government for more funding taking into account Shropshire's rurality, low wages, high levels of need, and older population.

Carers

- Only a small proportion (around 11%) had heard of the Big Conversation.
- 80% use a computer.
- The majority of carers say they take part in some sort of community or health activity from flower arranging to walking, from yoga to volunteering. However a number of people did say they have no time for themselves or that there's nothing for them locally. The person they care for is always their priority.
- Carers have seen a negative impact from service changes, for example less care provided for their loved one, reduced library hours, local services cut altogether. Some carers reported no impact or a positive impact (young carers).
- Quality of personal health was mixed with some carers saying they generally led a healthy lifestyle. However, a fair number said they had difficulties with managing stress, sleep, diet and exercising. They said barriers to them were time and opportunity (both relating to their caring role), money and existing health issues.
- Affordable housing and paying bills is an important issue some struggle with.
- The high cost of care and support was highlighted.
- Carers say they already pay for much of the carer support they receive. Those with bus passes said they would make a contribution for bus transport. (There were comments about lack of transport).

Children and Young People

- 100% use a computer:
 - This is parent controlled amongst younger children
 - Most described some sort of patchy service (factors such as mobile phone signal, and broadband speeds).
 - Most do not use the Shropshire Council website.
 - The internet is very important to young people who use it every day using varying devices such as smartphones and games consoles.
 - They use a range of apps to communication with Snapchat and Instagram being the most popular. Facebook is not used widely and Twitter was not mentioned at all.
- Young people are very active in their local area, taking part in 2 or 3 different clubs on average (from gardening to martial arts).
 - Local facilities such as skate parks, sports clubs, swimming pools, libraries, churches and youth centres are important to them.

- They value being able to spend time with friends, express themselves and learn new skills.
- They value local festivals recognising the cultural and financial value they bring to the market towns.
- Shops and local businesses are missed when they close down.
- Public transport is a lifeline to older young people:
 - It helps them to get to college, leisure/social activities and part-time work.
 - Those living in more rural areas have to rely on lifts from family/friends as public transport is less frequent,
- Affording to get on the housing ladder is a concern for the older age groups.
 - Homelessness was an issue that young people felt should be being tackled.
 - 5 of 8 supported housing services for young people have closed across the county. They value the support they receive from staff, for example, who organise transport and attend job centre appointments with them (in Leominster). Without this support they couldn't afford the fares nor know where to find the job centre.
- Have respect for older people and feel that care for the elderly is important.
 - Older young people talked about how older people viewed them negatively.
- Thoughts on future career paths are clearer amongst younger children but get hazier as they get older.
 - Older young people say there are not enough apprenticeship schemes, particularly in rural areas.
 - There is a perception that the bright children go to university, if you're not as clever you don't.
 - The idea that you need to leave Shropshire is common.
 - Some talk about following a parent's career (where parents are in a trade or own a business).
- Young people are heavily influenced by their family and their peers on many issues from community to careers.
 - This influence leaks into negative opinions parents hold (such as noisy neighbours, litter, migrants).
 - But other positive influencers include grandparents, teachers, scout leaders, youth club leaders).
 - Family and friends are the first port of call when young people need help, although a large number say they manage themselves (not asking anyone for help.)
- The green spaces of Shropshire are valued although as they get older, young people say that this is restrictive both socially and culturally.
- Good health (physical and mental) is a familiar issue to young people and all recognise its importance and how to achieve it.
 - Money is seen to be important in making it easier to have good health (they understood that having money doesn't equate to having good health).
 - Some have health apps or have looked up health information online.

People on lower incomes and those lacking skills/equipment to access online survey

- Very few had heard of the Big Conversation
- 21% of people use a computer (but people who don't have access to computers were encouraged to take part in the Big Conversation so this result is not unexpected).
- They take part in community and social activities:
 - Various activities organised for people living in sheltered schemes (e.g. Boccia, bingo, lunch clubs, coffee mornings).
 - A small number of key people organise events. Those involved in the discussions commented that these people need acknowledging and need support; and that more people should be encouraged to help out.

- Residents are setting up schemes to replace those they miss – e.g. Meals on Wheels in Bishops Castle.
- Praise for library services. These are important as sources of information about what's going on, for accessing online services and keeping in touch.
- Green space is acknowledged as an asset.
 - But people think more should be done to make the most of it e.g. green gyms and more local community events.
- Support for asylum seekers is well meaning but there are comments that:
 - Support is limited by language barriers (e.g. ESOL not available locally, can't access counselling services).
 - Not able to access funding so can't pay for transport to get to courses
- Council information needs to be in an easy to ready format, not long or complex.
- Public transport is an issue in rural areas when you don't have a car.
 - It impacts on ability to get to work.
 - Walking to nearest bus stop may be difficult (e.g. carrying food shopping).
 - Routes change causing confusion (also comments that no consultation with users has taken place).
- Rough sleepers had found themselves without help from Shropshire Council for one year. Without an address they can't access many services/work. People want the Council to do more to help rough sleepers.
- Some residents have already been asked to consider paying for services they previous got free of charge (Community Alarm service for sheltered scheme residents). They are concerned about their ability to pay for support care services.

Contact Us

For more information concerning the Big Conversation results please contact Shropshire Council's Commissioning Support Unit.

🖥️ **Website:** <https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/big-conversation/>

✉️ **Email:** bigconversation@shropshire.gov.uk 📞 **Telephone:** 01743 258524