

Shropshire Housing Support Involvement



## **Shropshire Housing Support Group and People2People Big Conversation Project Evaluation**

**March 2017**

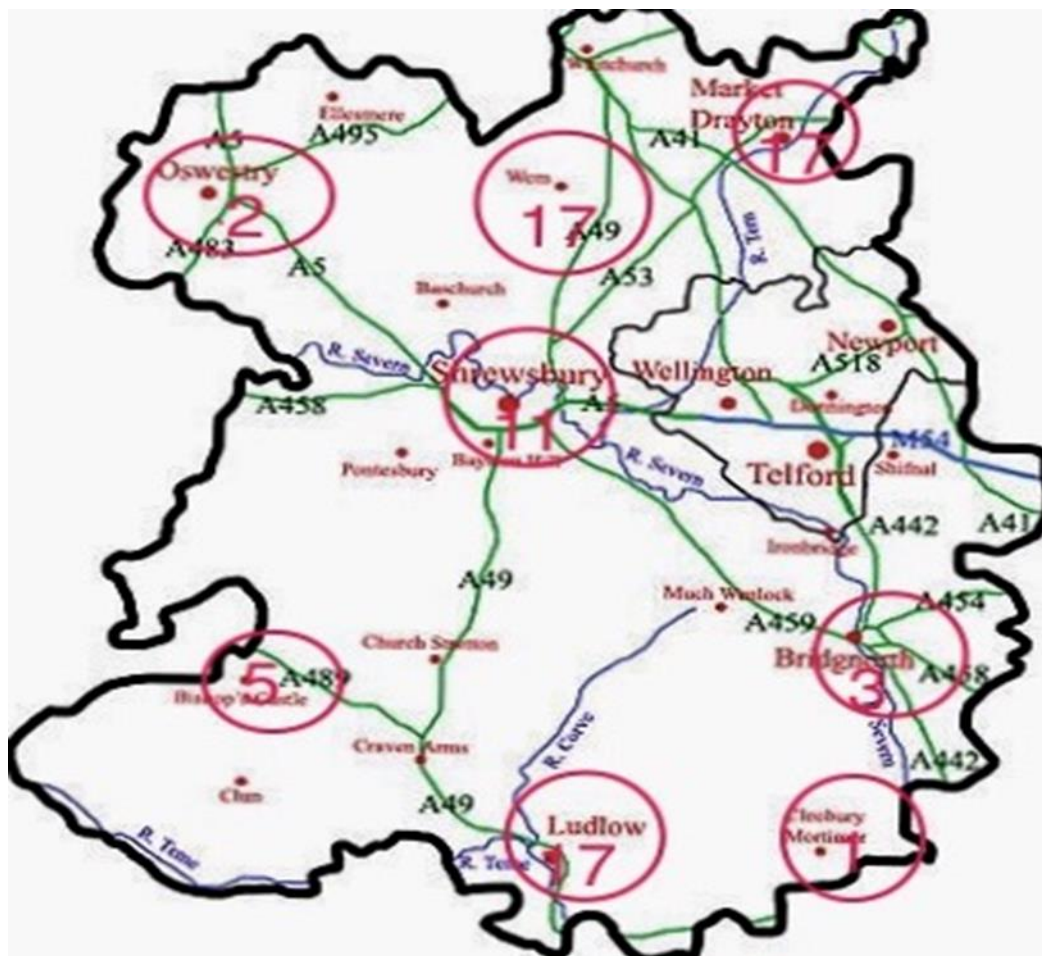
### **Introduction**

Shropshire Housing Support Group and People2People worked in partnership for the Big Conversation consultation project. We covered a wide range of services in Shropshire and engaged with many different client groups, covering the whole of the County.

The focus of our work was to engage with people who do not have the skills and equipment to complete online surveys, people on lower incomes (such as those in supported accommodation and social housing) and people on lower incomes who would find the self-funding of services difficult.

We designed a simple, easy to understand questionnaire (enclosed) and held 10 Focus groups around the County. During the Four week period of this project we engaged with 73 citizens in Shropshire.

The map below shows the number of people we spoke to in each given area.

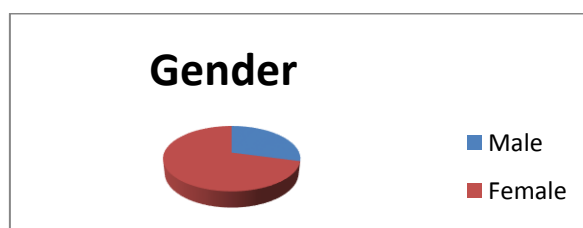


We organised our own focus groups and attended other meetings to consult with people. We talked people through the Big Conversation project and used the survey questions as a guide for our consultations. Groups we attended were as follows:

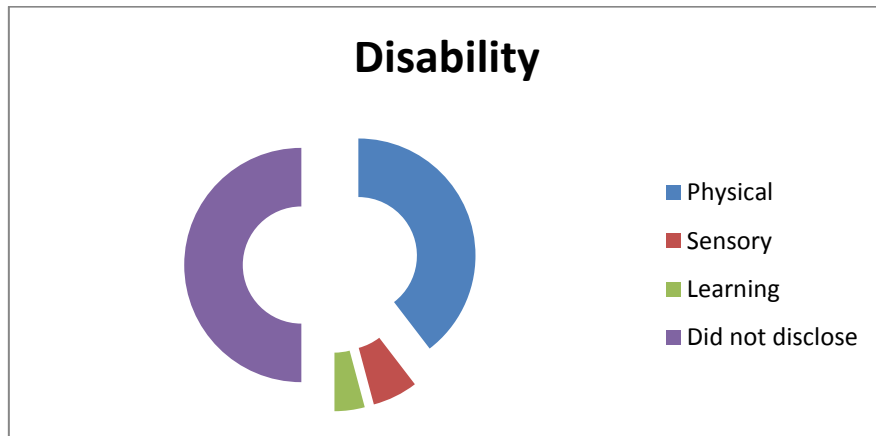
Making it Real groups (North, Central and South), The Ludlow Foyer which is a young Persons accommodation Hub in Ludlow, The memory Group, Shropshire Housing Support Group meeting and various sheltered housing schemes across the county.

### Equality and Diversity

We spoke to 51 females and 21 males and completed 54 out of 73 equality and diversity monitoring forms.

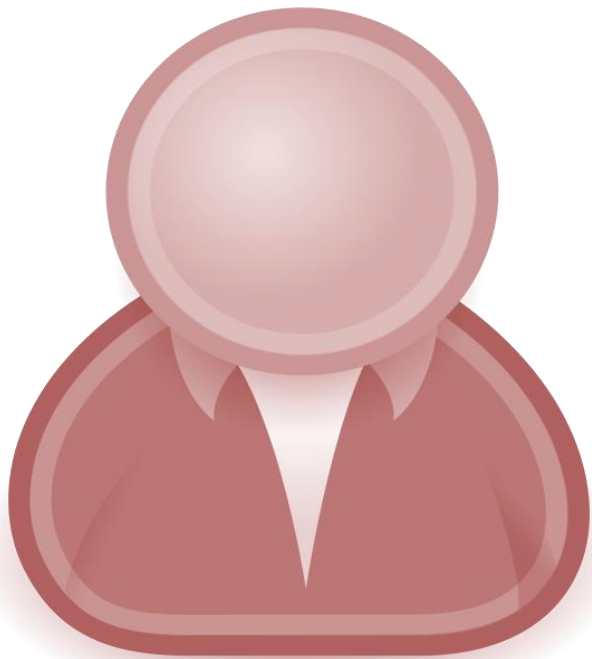


Analysing these monitoring forms, 19 people disclosed they had a physical disability, 2 had learning disabilities and 3 had sensory disabilities.



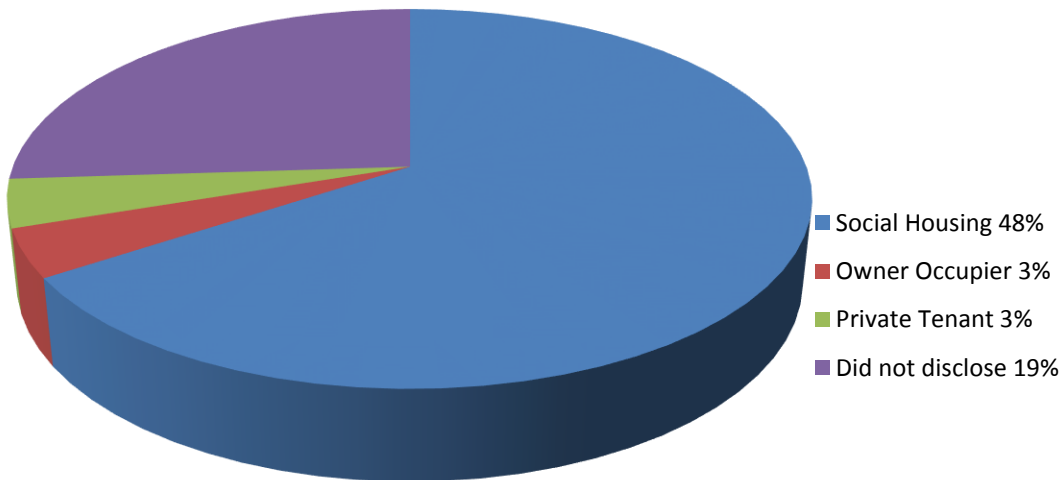
Only 6% of people we spoke to had heard of The Big Conversation  
(5 out of 73)

Only 15 out of 73 people we spoke to had computer access. Of those 15 people, only 3 said they would be likely to complete the questionnaire online (4%)



The below diagram shows the housing status of the people we spoke to:

**Housing Status**



**Important Issues and Key Findings**

We spoke to a range of people aged from 18 to 91 years old. Their issues differed significantly.

**Young People:**  
young people

living in support accommodation said apprenticeships could be difficult to gain and there are not many opportunities in Ludlow and more rural areas. Getting transport for apprenticeships can be difficult too, especially if the place of work is in a rural area, you need to be there early and are not able to travel by bike due to carrying tools etc so wheels to work scheme could not help. Buses

usually travel main routes and some small firms who run apprenticeships are more rural, making access very difficult. Many residents go to Shrewsbury College and go on the collage bus – they find this experience good.

**Substance Misuse:** Changes to substance misuse services have been for the better. The service is now called The Shropshire recovery partnership includes the substance misuse team, Nacro and Aquarius. This is a much more streamlined service now as you can have access to all services with less waiting time. A housing support group member describes the services as ‘excellent’ in Shrewsbury -has helped with is recovery after a life long battle with substances. He is looking to get life back on track and turn his fortunes around. This Recovery Partnership and his housing support officer have been invaluable and helped get his life on track. He feels more publicity of the support service is needed.



**Mental health and learning disabilities:** more people with mental health issues and learning disabilities are being accommodated in Sheltered Housing schemes across the County. The schemes are now known as Independent Living schemes as some schemes has limited support, some with only visiting support staff (2 days a week). Staff also cover a number of schemes in some rural and small scheme areas. Residents’ feel more support is needed on site, especially for those with mental health issues and learning disabilities.

**Asylum Seekers:** Recently two asylum seekers were living in Ludlow Foyer. They had to leave Ludlow because the local college could not provided ESOL ( English lessons) they would have had to travel to Hereford and as asylum seekers do not have any benefits are not entitled to work. As they were between 16 and 17 they were entitled to child in need status which allowed them to get some help from social care. There were language barriers however, the Foyer staff and residents welcome them and enjoyed learning about their culture. They both had been through very harrowing experiences but finding them help such as counselling was very difficult because they did not speak

the language. They feel that Shropshire Council could look at how it supports asylum seekers in Shropshire and what funding is available. The entitlement to remain in the UK is also a long process.

**TRANSPORT:** transport seemed to be an issue for a number of people. Some people generally found transports hard to access due to difficulties walking to the nearest bus stop. Especially when needing to go food shopping. Older people found carrying shopping difficult when on public transport. Wheelchair users are not guaranteed an accessible bus – they may wait for a service from Cleobury for example and then when the bus arrives, may not be able to access it and will have to wait for the next one.



Bus routes had recently changes in Bridgnorth and no consultation had taken place with users. This resulted in much confusion.

**Library services:** a great deal of people we spoke to value the services of the library and would not want their service to change.

***Library computers are a 'lifeline' – not only for finding out about 'what's happening' and taking part in things e.g. online survey but also for maintaining relationships 'virtually'. It is important that facilities are in full working order and available when people need the.***

**Lack of supported housing for young people in Shropshire.** 4 young persons' services have closed since 2010 and another one is closing April 2017. Leaving only the Foyer and two smaller schemes left in the County. Resident really value the Foyer and the support they get from the staff. For example, attending the Job centre. The nearest job centre is in Leominster. Many residents are not local to Leominster so if they got the bus, they wouldn't know where the job centre was in Leominster. Attending the job centre can also be a bit daunting, so staff wherever possible transport and attend job centre appointments with residents. if residents attend on their own after this they have to find the train fare of £6.70 upfront and for most this is a lot of money to find upfront.

**Rough Sleepers:** many people we spoke to thought Shropshire council needs to help more rough sleepers aged 18 + as they have no duty to help them. Two recent residents slept rough for nearly a year before the rougher sleepers team could help and they moved the Foyer. Sleeping rough means you have no fixed abode, no washing facilities. One resident was forced to keep his contact lenses in as he had no where to clean to change them. He now has permanent eye damage as a result.

**ACTIVITIES AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES** Most communities rely on a small number of 'key' people to arrange and lead community activities. If we want communities to 'do more' for themselves we need to identify, acknowledge and support these key people (vulnerable to being taken advantage of and at risk of 'burn out') as well as try and encourage larger numbers/different community members to take more interest.

There is a fantastic initiative in Bishops Castle where resident has set up a **Meals on Wheels** service for the local residents. The project is just getting started but already has people interested. The



community missed meals on wheel when it finished years ago and the Wiltshire farm foods are not the same. People also missed the company of someone calling with the meal as some residents are house bound. The new meals on wheels will be freshly prepared and homemade using quality ingredients. This should be replicated throughout the County but relies on volunteers.

People living on sheltered schemes generally have a range of activities organised. These are open to all in the local community. They can include Boccia, bingo, fish and chips events, lunch clubs, coffee mornings and more.

**Changes in Services and funding services:** sheltered scheme residents in April 2016 had to decide if they were going to keep their community alarm service or pay for it. Shropshire Council stopped the funding for community alarms. Older people felt that they were being expected to pay for more services which they used to get funded or for free. Many people we spoke to said they were expected to pay for things and they would find funding services such as support care services almost impossible.

#### **Green spaces and Wellbeing:**

Shropshire is lucky to have quite a lot of 'green space' in Shropshire

Shropshire Council need to 'make the most' of this space e.g. provide 'green gyms' and host local activities/community events that encourage people to be more active. This is an important of well being and should be better utilised. The Quarry is an excellent space



It is vital that this is accessible to all e.g. wheelchair accessible

Other key issues and finding of our research with our client group include:

- The material that The Local Authority produce needs to be in an 'easy to read' format. People do not understand long complex documents and questionnaires that are produced. This is a barrier to any kind of engagement with the public.

- The welfare benefits system is very complex and the process of claiming and appealing the process is very demanding for vulnerable people. People with Learning Difficulties and mental health issues are struggling with these complexities, including filling the in forms and the language used is very difficult to understand.
- There is a lack of housing and Shropshire Homepoint system only allows one bid on a property per week. People need to be homeless (literally on the streets) before being helped.
- There is a reduction in legal aid help. People have to travel to bigger cities to get the help. Support officers are to accompanying customers to appointments – due to customers lack of confidence to travel alone, mental health issues, learning difficulties, issues with reading and writing and agoraphobia.
- Other sources of help are over subscribed e.g. long waiting lists or have changed eligibility criteria due to high demand. For example Citizens Advice Service
- More people have multiple and complex needs e.g. risk of suicide/suicide prevention, substance misuse issues, self harm, rent arrears, issues with benefits, domestic violence, debt
- Issues with mobility and accessibility of properties can be difficult for people.
- People who use support services often have chaotic lives and find time keeping hard and help with needed with this from Support Staff. Public services need to be more aware of their needs.
- Form filling and dealing with companies is complex and need exert help with this. There are a large number of people in Shropshire who have learning difficulties or cannot read and write and do not like to ask for help.
- There are issues for people who are attempting to move e.g. since coming out of prison, who have got rent arrears. This is impossible for people on benefits to pay off and means they are 'blocking' temporary accommodation services.
- The effect of the 'bedroom tax' on customers is hitting hard. People are being told to move into 1 bed properties but there are very few available.
- There is lack of housing in Shropshire. There are difficulties securing private housing for people on benefits.
- More people in Shropshire need help and support. Support services are full and oversubscribed. More people need housing, are in debt and are struggling with benefits.



- Affordable and effective heating for people on a low income and older people is very important. Storage heaters are not effective particularly in Sheltered Housing and it is very expensive to run and does not provide effective heating in the evenings.
- There are long housing waiting lists for people, even on Gold band with Homepoint (the housing register for Shropshire).

### **Conclusion**

We have thoroughly enjoyed conducting consultations about the Big Conversation for Shropshire Council. We wholeheartedly believe that without our involvement a large number of people would never have engaged in the survey. We feel we have connected with some hard to reach groups and have spoken to people who do not usually engage with this type of consultation (only 4% of people we spoke to said they would be likely to complete the survey online).

The issues and findings of our work are wide ranging and complex. Rurality and issues around transport are always going to be a major find when talking to people in rural Shropshire.

Issues around housing, welfare benefits, debt and support needs are important findings and feel that the Local Authority should factor these into future planning of services.



Faith Jones Price