

The Big Conversation Shropshire Compact Briefing



Shropshire Compact

What is the Big Conversation?

The overall aim of the Big Conversation is to engage with individuals, communities and stakeholders across Shropshire, to better understand perceptions of service spending priorities, ways to make savings, and increase local involvement in delivering services. The Big Conversation has been designed to gather feedback and encourage the involvement of all those with an interest in the work of Shropshire Council: local people, local businesses, community groups, voluntary organisations, town and parish councils and public sector organisations.



Why do we need a Big Conversation?

Shropshire Council (like other local authorities) is experiencing a series of Government cuts which in five years' time will leave Shropshire Council with approximately one quarter of the current funding that pays for over 150 services. By 2020/21 the Government's £44m revenue support grant (money that is paid to councils each year to help provide services) will end. By the time this grant ends, it is estimated that Shropshire Council will be a further £77m worse off due to the combination of inflationary increases in costs, particularly in adult social care, and further cuts in Government grants. The Council's forecast budget for 2020/21, published in the Council's Financial Strategy, is estimated to be £188. £163m (87%) will be allocated to core services such as adult's and children's social care and safeguarding, domestic waste disposal, concessionary travel and school transport. This will leave just £25m (13% of the overall budget) for the remaining 150 plus services the council currently provides. This is a reduction of 75% from the £100m the local authority currently spends on these services. This means the council will have to stop delivering some services, and make the remaining resources it has go further.

How is feedback gathered?

The Big Conversation is a 5 year programme. It was launched in November 2015 with a phase one action plan ending in March 2016. To help us design and deliver Phase 1 of the Big Conversation we appointed an independent expert (Pye Tait) able to provide an external and objective view of what Shropshire people are telling us. Pye Tait helped our in-house team to use research methodology and survey tools to deliver a range of activity including:

- A Big Conversation Survey - The survey was conducted via an online survey of individuals, businesses and other groups, as well as an on street survey with local people aged 16 or over and closed on the 6 January 2016.
- Big Conversation Events
- Big Conversation Focus Groups (small group discussions)
- Big Conversation discussions at local events (such as Local Joint Committees, Area Forums, business meetings, local voluntary sector meetings etc.)
- Reports and detailed analysis of the feedback

Phase 2 of the Big Conversation will work to bring together, and make the best use of, existing feedback mechanisms and also improve feedback where needed, through the use of new tools.

What is the feedback so far?

The survey achieved 2,271 responses and many more people (over 250) were involved in events, workshops and focus groups. The results of Phase 1 of the Big Conversation have been published and are available on the website but the key results include:

- 62% of respondents generally agree that Shropshire Council should protect some services and cut back others in order to make savings, while 17% disagree.
- Vulnerable children services are considered the most important to protect from reduction in spending, followed by education services and older people and vulnerable adults services.

- Over three quarters (77%) of respondents generally agree that Shropshire Council should combine services with other Councils and join up with other public sector organisations locally.
- A small majority (53%) agree that the Council should invest in IT to increase productivity and reduce staff costs, with just over a fifth (21%) disagreeing.
- Six in ten (61%) of respondents agree to some extent that Shropshire Council should make more use of local residents and volunteers to deliver services in order to make savings, whilst 22% disagree.
- Respondents report the highest level of agreement in relation to enabling communities to do more for themselves in order to make savings (71% are in general agreement, 12% disagree).
- Six in ten (61%) respondents indicate that they participate in volunteering or community activities, whilst 39% do not participate.
- 56% of respondents agree with introducing or increasing fees for some services so that the costs of services are largely paid for by the direct user, whilst a further 27% disagree.
- Increasing Council tax in order to create new revenues was a less popular action. However the proportion that agree (49%) still outweighs those who disagree (34%) with this course of action.
- Respondents were asked how the Council can make further savings. Initial analysis reveals the common responses are:
 - Avoid duplication of services;
 - Set up commercial partnerships;
 - Sell redundant assets;
 - Increase efficiencies and operate more like a business; and
 - Increase Council tax.
- Feedback from our Big Conversation discussions with town and parish councils and voluntary and community sector organisations highlighted themes under which more detailed suggestions have been made. Some common themes included:
 - Better understanding the support that groups and organisations may need/ infrastructure support for VCS groups and organisations and parish councils.
 - Improved information sharing/gathering and sharing local and specialist knowledge.
 - Training and development.
 - Delivering services in partnership.
 - Models of funding services, pooling resources and generating income.
 - Volunteering support, volunteer management and generating social action.
 - Sharing physical assets and resources and making the best use of local assets.

How can I get involved?

There are lots of different ways you can feedback to Shropshire Council:

- Email: bigconversation@shropshire.gov.uk
- Telephone: 0345 678 9077 (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday)
- Post: Big Conversation, Commissioning Support, 2nd Floor, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY2 6ND.
- Tweet @Shropcouncil using #Shropbc
- Message the Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/shropshirecouncil/>

You can also give your ideas to your local councillor. Visit the Big Conversation website for full details of how to get involved. The site will host any open surveys and promote other feedback opportunities.

How do I find out more?

Visit the Big Conversation website

<http://shropshire.gov.uk/big-conversation/>

The Shropshire Compact

For more information about the Shropshire Compact use the details below:

 **Website:** <http://vcsvoice.org/the-compact/>

 **Email:** VCSAssembly@shropshire.gov.uk

 **Telephone:** 01743 252740

