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COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO)

This project is funded by the UK Government through the
UK Shared Prosperity Fund,
supported by Powys County Council

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From listening to action: what Community Conversations achieved

80 local action priorities were identified to drive future action and development
18 community projects across Powys were co-produced, developed and supported
32 people gained new skills and confidence through relevant training
35 new volunteering opportunities were supported to help people share their time, skills and experience

But the biggest change was not simply the number of activities delivered. It was the connections created between people and organisations, the confidence built within communities, and the evidence now available to help shape future decisions.

Community Conversations achieved this by:

1,232 people sharing their views through a Powys-wide survey
23,441 people reached through the wider project
18 roadshow events promoted support available for people in Powys and brought together residents, groups, councillors and public services to share their views

1. About this report

This report tells the story of the Community Conversations project, delivered by Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO).

It brings together what people told us, what communities chose to do, what changed, and what the project has taught us about planning for the future.

It is written for residents, community groups, local organisations, councils, public services and funders. It is also intended to be useful as a starting point for communities that want to run their own local planning conversation.

The report does not suggest that communities can solve every challenge themselves. Some issues need action from public bodies and other partners. A key lesson from this project is knowing the difference between what a community can act on now, what it can influence with others, and what needs wider system-level action.

The evidence base is substantial: 1,232 survey responses, engagement across 18 areas (based on the 18 main towns in Powys and their surrounding areas), 574 people attending Roadshows/Community Conversations, 510 people taking part in focus groups, and 18 practical community projects.

2. The project in a nutshell

Community Conversations was funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, supported by Powys County Council. Its purpose was simple: listen to people about what matters where they live, bring people together to explore those priorities, and support communities to turn some of their ideas into practical action.

Stage	What happened	Reach / result
1. Listen	A county-wide 'Shaping the future of Powys communities' survey, promoted online and face-to-face	1,232 completed surveys

2. Talk	Roadshows and facilitated Community Conversations across Powys	18 areas; 574 attendees
3. Explore	Follow-up focus groups helped communities test priorities and agree what could be done locally	510 participants
4. Act	Each area developed a practical project, with support and a small financial resource	18 projects developed and delivered

The project reached 23,441 people overall. It also supported 32 people with relevant training, 42 organisations with non-financial support, 35 volunteering opportunities, 33 organisations to take part in knowledge-sharing activity, and 18 project-related volunteering roles.

3. What people told us

The strongest message from the ‘Shaping the future of Powys communities’ survey was not that people disliked where they lived. Quite the opposite: overall people feel positive about life in their communities now. The worry is whether the things that make communities work today will still be there tomorrow.

People value access to nature, a sense of community, and local events, activities, and services. They also value the less visible things that services make possible: independence, social connection, belonging and opportunities across generations.

The issues are connected

- Transport and connectivity: repeatedly linked to access to healthcare, work, education, shops and social activities.

- Social connection: people are concerned about isolation, the loss of shared spaces and weakening community ties.
- Affordability: housing costs and the cost of living affect who can stay in a community and whether local services and amenities remain viable.
- Children and young people: access to schools, youth services and opportunities are seen as signs of whether a community can support future generations.
- Decision-making: people want local needs to be understood, decisions to be more visible and action to feel timely and meaningful.

The survey also showed that age, gender and place affect how people experience these issues. The core concerns are often shared, but their impact is not the same for everyone.

4. The numbers behind the story

Measure	Target	Achieved
Local events / activities supported	40	40
People reached	1,000	23,441
People supported through relevant training	25	32
Organisations receiving non-financial support	25	42
Volunteering opportunities supported	25	35
Organisations engaged in knowledge transfer	10	33
Project-related volunteering roles created	14	18

All project targets were met, with particularly strong performance in reach and local engagement, building on PAVO's existing relationships and trusted position within communities. The figure of 23,441 includes people reached through the project, including via social media, as well as those who attended engagement activities. It should therefore not be interpreted as 23,441 unique participants.

5. What the 'Shaping the future of Powys communities' survey found

The survey produced a very large evidence base. 1,232 people completed it: 24 in Welsh and 1,208 in English. The full analysis was undertaken by Barry Farrell, Organisational Psychologist who volunteered his time, and is a separate detailed report.

Finding	Evidence from the survey
Most persistent concern	• Transport and connectivity
Strong community assets	• Sense of community • Access to nature • Events and places to meet • Local services
Underlying concern	• Whether valued services, facilities and opportunities can be sustained

Clearly, community action can help with some gaps, but it cannot replace statutory health and social care provision.

Read the full report here:

pavo.org.uk/news/community-conversations-what-you-told-us/

6. What communities said locally

The Roadshows gave us a chance to test the county-wide findings against attendees's own experience in a Community Conversation focus group. Across 18 events, 574

people took part. The same themes appeared repeatedly, but each place described them in its own way.

Area	Headline priorities from the Community Conversation
Brecon	• Keeping essential services local • Making housing work for local people • Supporting young people • Better communication • Stronger community organisations
Builth Wells	• Better information and communication • Working together across the community • Supporting young people • Protecting local services and improving access • Building pride, participation and community capacity
Crickhowell	• Supporting young people and their future • Improving transport and local connections • Strengthening volunteering and community organisations • Protecting local services and community life
Hay-on-Wye	• Better communication and information • Creating opportunities for young people • Making better use of community buildings and spaces • Improving access to services and transport
Knighton	• Supporting young people • Improving communication and keeping people connected • Protecting and making better use of community spaces and local services • Strengthening volunteering and community capacity • Making the most of Knighton's tourism, nature and culture
Llandrindod Wells	• Supporting young people • Better communication and connection

	• Improving transport and access • Protecting local services, spaces and businesses • Valuing volunteers and building community capacity
Llanfair Caereinion	• Better transport and access • Better communication • Protecting community spaces • Keeping the community connected
Llanfyllin	• Strengthening volunteering and community involvement • Better communication and stronger community connections • Supporting young people and the future of the community • Better transport and access
Llanidloes	• Better information and communication • Sustainable community transport • Supporting and coordinating volunteers
Llanwrtyd Wells	• Supporting young people • Better communication and collaboration • Better transport and access • Protecting community connection and local services
Machynlleth	• Better information and communication • Giving people a greater voice • Supporting community capacity and connection • Better transport and access to services
Montgomery	• Supporting young people and families • Keeping the community connected and informed • Supporting community groups and volunteers • Better transport, travel and access
Newtown	• Better communication and information sharing • Bringing people together across generations

	• Creating more inclusive community spaces and opportunities • Supporting volunteers and community organisations • Supporting young people to have a voice and a future in Newtown • Supporting the town centre and local economy
Presteigne	• Supporting young people • Strengthening local services and connections • Building a stronger volunteering community • Improving transport, communication and access
Rhayader	• Better communication and community information • Supporting young people and their future • Keeping Rhayader connected and accessible • Building a stronger and more sustainable community
Talgarth	• Bringing people and organisations together • Keeping young people connected to Talgarth • Better communication across the community • Exploring local energy • Making housing work for local people
Welshpool	• Better communication and connection • Making volunteering easier • Keeping Welshpool and rural communities connected • Supporting a stronger town centre and local community • Supporting people, young people and community wellbeing
Ystradgynlais	• Keeping health and care services local • Better communication and more local information • Giving young people more opportunities • Protecting community spaces and local amenities

	Affordable housing, infrastructure and stronger communities
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7. From priorities to action

The follow-up focus groups were where the work moved from “what matters?” to “what can we do?” Smaller groups and more time allowed people to refine priorities, build relationships and separate local action from issues needing wider support.

8. The 18 community projects

Every area developed a practical project. The projects were intentionally different because they were designed around local priorities rather than imposed as a single model.

Community	Project	Lead organisation
Brecon	Banerî'r Bannau – flags representing the local community	The Muse Agency CIC
Builth Wells	Youth café / safe-space pilot	Play Radnor
Crickhowell	Youth engagement	Peak
Hay-on-Wye	Noticeboards at Hay Library	Hay Library CIC
Knighton	Youth outreach to understand local needs	Knighton & District Community Centre
Llandrindod Wells	Wellbeing sessions and community artwork	Celf o Gwmpas & Arlais
Llanfair Caereinion	Town guide and youth-room facilities	Llanfair Caereinion Town Council

Llanfyllin	Volunteer awareness events	Arts Connection
Llanidloes	Local newsletter	Llanidloes Town Council
Llanwrtyd Wells	Open-space youth provision for 11–16 year olds	The Dolwen Fields Committee
Machynlleth	Bilingual online diary of services and events	Taj Mahal Community Hub
Montgomery	Youth-space resource and support for the Montgomery Town Crier	Guiding in Montgomery
Newtown	Newsletter extending into surrounding villages	Open Newtown
Presteigne	Celebration of Youth	Presteigne Area Community Development Group
Rhayader	Newsletter and parking signage	Rhayader Town Council
Talgarth	Local engagement activities showcasing what is available	Talgarth & District Regeneration Group
Welshpool	Health & Wellbeing booklet showcasing local services	1940s Weekend & Welshpool Community Haven
Ystradgynlais	Noticeboards in key locations	Ystradgynlais Town Council

Read the detailed area reports here:

pavo.org.uk/news/community-conversations-what-you-told-us/

9. What this looks like in practice

Examples of the community projects developed through the programme.

Knighton: start with young people, then build from what they say

Knighton used its project to listen directly to 12–25 year olds. A youth worker used a survey and outreach in parks, on buses and at community events to gather the views of young people. The project also involved local clubs, businesses, the police, library and other organisations. The survey received 28 replies and the team spoke to more than 40 young people. Two half-term activities were held, and a final forum brought 22 young people aged 12–15 together, alongside a smaller 16–25 session.

The message was clear: young people wanted a safe place to meet and socialise. Suggested activities included a book club, music, sport, arts, cooking, drama and a regular youth club. The next steps identified locally included appointing a volunteer youth lead, establishing a youth committee with young people represented, building a wider volunteer team, starting low-cost activities, and using the contact list to keep young people informed.

Talgarth: map what already exists before designing something new

Connecting Talgarth brought approximately 48 people representing 31 organisations, groups and community interests together. The project identified more than 70 groups, organisations and activities contributing to local life. The value was not simply the event itself: people made new connections, strengthened existing relationships and developed a clearer picture of the community's assets.

The lesson for other communities is: before creating a new service, find out what is already happening, who is involved, where the gaps really are, and where organisations could work together.

Llandrindod Wells: small projects can create lasting connections

The project combined community artwork with wellbeing activity. A community mural was developed with local businesses and young volunteers, while wellbeing workshops included gardening and poetry. Four gardening workshop participants decided to continue as a self-managed group. Five people attended a poetry workshop, with participants expressing interest in continuing the group.

10. What changed beyond the projects

The most important outcomes cannot always be measured or counted. People who had not previously worked together built relationships. We also linked communities working on similar ideas so that they could share learning rather than starting from scratch. Communities were able to compare experiences and learn from one another. Individuals gained skills, confidence and experience that can support future activity.

This matters for funders as well as communities: A relatively small investment in bringing people and organisations together, facilitation and practical support created a platform for local leadership, collaboration and future funding opportunities.

11. A simple engagement approach communities and partners can use

The Community Conversations project suggests a practical cycle that communities and partners can adapt. It is not a prescribed model; it is a set of questions to help a community move from conversation to action.

- **Start with strengths:** What is already working? Who is already contributing? What buildings, groups, skills, networks and natural assets do we have?
- **Listen widely:** Ask residents what matters to them, including people who do not normally attend community meetings. Use a range of approaches, including surveys, conversations and community events, with opportunities for people to share their views both online and on paper.
- **Find the pattern:** Group what you hear into a small number of themes. Check how different groups experience the same issue.

- **Separate action levels:** For each issue ask: Can we act locally? Can we influence the issue through partnerships? Does it require a decision or investment from a public body?
- **Choose a small number of priorities:** Do not try to fix everything. Pick priorities where there is a clear need, people willing to help, and a realistic first step.
- **Turn priorities into a small project:** Define the outcome, who benefits, who will lead, what resources are needed, what can happen quickly, and what might need longer-term funding.
- **Keep people involved:** Tell people what you heard, what you are doing and what has changed. Make it easy for new people to join.
- **Learn and adapt:** Review what happened. Keep what works, change what does not, and use the evidence to strengthen the next funding bid or partnership conversation.

12. What communities should not have to solve alone

The project found clear issues that sit beyond the reach of a small local initiative. Health and social care provision, dentistry, access to primary care, mental health services, social care and transport challenges require action from statutory partners and other organisations. Community action can complement these systems, but it should not be treated as a replacement for them.

A healthy planning process therefore has two outputs: a local action plan and a clear evidence trail showing what needs to be taken forward at a wider level.

Read the full *Wider System Issues Identified by the Project for Public Bodies to Take Forward* report here:

pavo.org.uk/news/community-conversations-what-you-told-us/

13. Recommendations for the future

The ‘**Shaping the future of Powys communities**’ survey analysis identified seven priorities. They are:

- Design services around how people actually live and use them in different places.
- Put transport and connectivity at the centre of decisions about services and access.
- Strengthen health and wellbeing through prevention and focusing on the conditions that help people stay well day-to-day.
- Treat community buildings, shared spaces and other local assets as part of the infrastructure of resilient communities.
- Address affordability pressures, including housing and the cost of living, because they shape whether communities can retain people, services and businesses.
- Recognise that age and gender can change what people need from services and community life, and design accordingly.
- Make decision-making more visible, responsive and connected to what communities have told decision-makers.

Wider PAVO recommendations

- **Recognise the engagement approach as an evidence-informed approach that can be replicated in future Powys-wide consultation and engagement.**

The project has been successful in engaging people and supporting them to articulate what matters to them. The approach and learning from the project should be considered when planning future county-wide engagement and consultation.

- **Use the insight gathered through Community Conversations to inform future decision-making.**

The findings from the survey, set out in *What Matters to People in Powys – An Analysis of the Community Conversations Survey*, should be used to inform future decisions about services and infrastructure at a county-wide level. The insight gathered through Community Conversations and focus groups should also be used to inform decision-making at a local level.

- **Invest in sustained, skilled community development support.**

We found that community-led approaches work best when people have the time, facilitation, relationships and practical support they need to turn ideas into action. PAVO's existing relationships and trusted position within communities across Powys provided an important foundation for this work.

If communities are to play a greater role in shaping local services and solutions, continued investment in Powys' community and voluntary sectors will be important to build on the progress made through this work and create the conditions for communities to lead.

This approach is already being carried forward, with PAVO committing core funding to continue supporting the people and organisations delivering activities that began through Community Conversations.

If the Sustainable Powys Plan is to become a reality, building capacity for skilled community development will be essential.

14. Learning for future projects

- Trust takes time. The eight-month delivery period was ambitious; communities moved at different speeds and some needed more time to build relationships and reach agreement.
- Skilled facilitation matters. In some places, a neutral facilitator helped people participate more openly. Volunteers were more effective when supported to contribute rather than expected to run an entire engagement process.
- Inclusion needs to be designed in from the start. The survey was available in Welsh and English, both online and on paper, and outreach was used to reach a wide range of groups.
- Participation can fall as the process becomes more detailed. Smaller groups are useful for co-design, but projects need deliberate ways to keep the wider community informed and involved.

- Volunteer impact is valuable but difficult to measure. Future projects should find simple ways to capture contribution without creating unnecessary administration for volunteers.
- Small, tangible wins help. A practical project can build confidence, relationships and a track record that supports longer-term work.

15. What funders and partners can take from this

Community Conversations provides evidence that investment in community capacity can produce both immediate outputs and longer-term infrastructure for local action. The project exceeded its reach target substantially and supported practical projects in all 18 areas.

The next challenge is to convert insight into visible change. People need to be able to see that their contribution has influenced decisions, services, investment or future planning.

The project findings point towards further embedding of a partnership approach: communities identify and shape priorities; voluntary and community organisations help convene and deliver; and public bodies respond to the issues that sit beyond local capacity. This is the basis for a more resilient and sustainable Powys.

16. Conclusion

Community Conversations showed that people care deeply about where they live. They are not simply asking for more services. They are asking for communities that remain connected, affordable, accessible and able to support people through different stages of life.

The project has created a detailed picture of what matters to people in Powys - from the county as a whole to individual areas and communities. This provides an important resource for organisations working across the county.

The engagement has provided an effective way of listening to people and understanding what matters to them. The approach and learning from the project should be considered when planning future county-wide engagement and consultation.

The project also showed what can happen when people are given time, trusted spaces and practical support. People identified strengths, made connections, agreed priorities and developed local solutions. The 18 local projects illustrate how community-led action can begin with modest resources when the right conditions for collaboration are in place.

The success of the project has also been supported by PAVO's existing relationships and trusted position within communities across Powys. These relationships helped create the confidence for people to share their experiences, ideas and priorities. PAVO has committed core funding to continue supporting the people and organisations taking forward the activities that emerged from this project.

Looking ahead, if communities are expected to play a greater role in shaping local services and solutions, they will need the right support and resources to do so. Continued investment in Powys' community and voluntary sectors will be important in building on the progress made through this work.

Community Conversations is not an ending. It is an evidence base and a starting point. The next step is to keep the conversation going and ensure that what people have told us is considered in planning, investment and service decisions across Powys.

Further information and evidence

1: Area reports

Community Conversations took place across 18 areas, and each area has its own summary report.

The reports provide more detail on:

- what local people told us through the survey;
- the issues and priorities explored through Community Conversations and focus groups;
- the local priorities identified; and
- the community project developed in response.

These reports are a useful resource for community groups, local councils and partners. They provide local evidence that can support planning, partnership working, service development and applications for funding.

View the 18 area reports here:

pavo.org.uk/news/community-conversations-what-you-told-us/

2: Survey analysis

What Matters to People in Powys – Survey Analysis

The full survey analysis, What Matters to People in Powys, provides a detailed examination of the 1,232 responses gathered through the Community Conversations survey.

It explores what people value about their communities, the challenges they experience and the issues they believe need attention. It provides a substantial evidence base for

anyone involved in planning services, investment and community development across Powys.

Read the full survey analysis here:

pavo.org.uk/news/community-conversations-what-you-told-us/

3: Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to everyone who helped make Community Conversations possible.

This project was a collective effort involving all PAVO staff, trustees, community organisations, volunteers, partners - and the people who shared their experiences and ideas.

Special thanks go to Barry M. Farrell, Organisational Psychologist, who volunteered his time to analyse the Community Conversations survey.

Most of all, thank you to everyone who completed the survey, attended a Community Conversation or focus group, volunteered their time, shared their experience, or helped deliver one of the community projects.

If you need this report, or any of the additional reports mentioned in it, in another format, such as a hard copy or large print, or if you'd like further information, please contact:

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