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Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations
Cymdeithas Mudiadau Gwirfoddol Powys

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COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS:

Wider system issues for public bodies to take forward

Powys Association of Voluntary Organisations (PAVO)

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Wider system issues identified by the project for public bodies to take forward

1. Transport must be treated as a basic part of access to services

This is the strongest county-wide message.

Communities repeatedly raised:

- inadequate public and community transport
- poor links between villages and towns
- bus services that do not work around school, work or health appointments
- difficulty getting to medical appointments without a car
- high costs and volunteer pressures affecting community transport
- loss of bus connections and concerns about reliability
- inadequate walking and cycling infrastructure.

Transport and connectivity was the **most persistent and far-reaching concern**, affecting access to healthcare, employment, education, shops and social activities. Nine communities specifically identified inadequate public/community transport as a longer-term priority.

System action: Public bodies need to plan transport, health, education and other services together, rather than treating transport as a separate issue.

2. Access to health and care services is a Powys-wide concern

People are saying that some essential services are simply too difficult to access locally.

Issues raised include:

- access to GPs and primary care
- dentistry

- community hospital services
- mental health services
- social care and respite care
- long journeys for hospital services
- difficulty getting to appointments
- ambulance response times
- cross-border health issues
- concerns about services being reduced or withdrawn.

Communities can help with some practical support, but they cannot solve gaps in health and social care provision themselves. These issues were reported across Powys, not just in the most rural areas.

System action: PTHB and partners need to look at the pattern of access across the county and how services can be brought closer to communities, including mobile/visiting provision where appropriate.

3. Be much clearer about decisions to open, change or close services

There is significant concern about **how decisions are made**, not just about the decisions themselves.

People want:

- clearer explanations when services are changed or withdrawn
- better information about what is planned
- greater transparency about who makes decisions
- meaningful involvement before decisions are made
- evidence that community views have influenced the outcome
- less consultation that gathers information without leading to visible action.

This is particularly important as people expressed frustration with the **direction and pace of change** and whether communities feel they have genuine influence.

System action: Public bodies should make the link between “**you told us**” and “**this is what we did**” much more visible.

4. Housing and affordability need a stronger system response

Housing is not simply a planning issue. Communities linked it directly to whether places can retain families, young people and workers.

Issues include:

- shortage of affordable homes
- lack of suitable rental properties
- rents exceeding what people can afford
- lack of social housing
- planning/development constraints
- concerns that new housing development may not be matched by infrastructure and services
- empty public buildings potentially being brought back into use.

Five communities identified housing provision and affordability as a longer-term priority, while the county-wide survey also identified housing costs and affordability as a major pressure on community sustainability.

System action: Housing policy, planning, transport, education, health and infrastructure need to be considered together, particularly when new development is planned.

5. Protect the services and places that hold communities together

People value local services and buildings **even when they do not personally use them** because they provide connection, informal support and a sense of belonging.

Concerns include:

- community/day centre closures
- youth facilities
- community buildings at risk
- loss of local services
- lack of suitable spaces for activities and services
- pressure on voluntary organisations to take on services previously provided by the statutory sector.

System action: Community buildings and shared assets should be supported to be part of the infrastructure that keeps communities healthy and resilient, rather than as an optional extra.

6. Make prevention and community-based support real, not just an aspiration

The findings strongly support the direction of travel towards **prevention, community resilience and earlier support**.

Newtown, for example, identified the need to move towards preventative, community-based approaches and stronger links between community and statutory services. The wider report similarly calls for greater emphasis on prevention and on the conditions that support everyday wellbeing.

This means recognising that:

- social connection supports health
- accessible transport supports independence

- community spaces support wellbeing
- volunteering builds resilience
- early help can reduce later demand.

System action: Invest in the assets that keep people well and connected, not only in services that respond once problems have become acute.

7. Long-term funding is needed for community and voluntary organisations

Short-term funding is repeatedly identified as a problem.

Communities reported:

- short-term grants
- uncertainty about future funding
- volunteer capacity being stretched
- voluntary organisations increasingly filling gaps left by statutory services
- difficulty sustaining services and community assets.

Community resilience cannot be built across Powys without **greater investment in skilled community development capacity**.

System action: Move towards longer-term, flexible funding where community organisations are providing valued services or helping deliver strategic outcomes.

Area-level issues that need public-body attention

Specific issues which should be taken forward by public bodies and through partnerships rather than treated solely as county-wide policy.

Area	Issues requiring wider/system action
Brecon	Affordable/rental housing; access to services; travel distances and transport; transparency around service decisions; sustainable funding
Builth Wells	Local health provision and response times; rural transport/medical access; clearer information about statutory plans and services; clearer council roles
Crickhowell	Reliable links between surrounding villages and the town; local cycling connections; lack of NHS dentistry; sustainable funding
Hay-on-Wye	Cross-border health and emergency-service access; delays; local health information; education and rural skills; flooding
Knighton	Sustainability of community buildings/local services and awareness of available provision
Llandrindod Wells	Post-16 education; transport to health and activities; community transport arrangements; local business sustainability
Llanfair Caereinion	Connecting surrounding villages to public transport; improving community transport
Llanfyllin	Integrated transport; transport for outlying rural communities; affordable housing
Llanidloes	Transport was a significant issue in the wider conversation
Llanwrtyd Wells	Health treatment and access; ambulance/first responder response; medicines; transport to appointments; bus connections; education/apprenticeships; flooding

Area	Issues requiring wider/system action
Machynlleth	Transport and access to health services; possible mobile/visiting services; meaningful consultation and links between engagement and decisions
Montgomery	Transport/roads, active travel and parking; infrastructure; post-16 education; housing/cost of living
Newtown	Sustainable funding; coordination across services; poverty; community/statutory links; preventative health and wellbeing; inclusive services and spaces
Presteigne	Local health provision and recruitment; public transport; cycle routes; communication about public services
Rhayader	Long-term voluntary-sector funding; economic infrastructure; apprenticeships; affordable/rental housing and potential reuse of public buildings
Talgarth	Housing supply and affordability; planning constraints
Welshpool	Transport between town and rural communities; infrastructure and coordinated investment
Ystradgynlais	Access to health services; community/day-centre provision; public services; affordable housing and infrastructure capacity

The Powys-wide message

Six system-level asks:

1. **Make transport a central part of every decision about services.**
If people cannot get to a service, it is not truly accessible.
2. **Improve access to health and care closer to where people live.**
Look specifically at primary care, dentistry, mental health, social care and community services.
3. **Show people how their voice changes decisions.**
Be clearer about what is changing, why, who is responsible and what communities have influenced.
4. **Protect the foundations of community life.**
Treat community buildings, local services, youth provision and shared spaces as essential infrastructure.
5. **Join up housing, infrastructure and service planning.**
New homes need the transport, health, education and community infrastructure to support them.
6. **Invest for the long term in prevention and community capacity.**
Do not rely on volunteers and community organisations to absorb gaps in statutory provision without sustainable support.

Key longer-term challenge

Communities have done their part by telling us what matters. The next test is whether the wider system **acts on what it has heard** - particularly around health, transport, housing, cost of living and the way decisions are made.

Read the full report here:

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