

Proposal: Town-Wide Community Consultation on Future Services and Council Tax Implications

Purpose of the Report

On 5.12.25 Finance Committee made the following recommendation:

“to recommend that a town-wide consultation on local services to be carried out during 2026-27 is approved by full council.”

The purpose of this report is to progress this recommendation and seek a decision from Members whether to undertake a town-wide community consultation. The aim will be to gather residents' views on the future role of the Council, particularly in relation to taking on or supporting services and the potential impact this may have on council tax.

The consultation is intended to explore how people feel about possible changes to local services, including the financial implications of them. It would also look at community priorities for investment and the value residents place on key local facilities such as the Swimming Pool, Town Hall and other recreational facilities.

Background

It is anticipated that the Town Council will in the next financial year be asked to take on new services or financially contribute to the running of existing services by Shropshire Council. In addition request from local organisations seeking financial support to help run key facilities in the Town are also increasing. In Wem, this is especially relevant in relation to library services and street cleaning, which are currently provided by Shropshire Council but could be transferred to the Town Council.

Other councils, including Shrewsbury and Oswestry, carried out town wide consultation in 2025 to help guide decisions about future service delivery and funding.

Reason for Consultation

A consultation of this scale would give a clearer picture of what matters most to residents and how far they are willing to support services financially. It would help inform decisions about whether the Council should take on additional responsibilities and provide stronger evidence for future budgeting and funding applications.

Given that any changes could have a direct impact on council tax, it is important that all households have the opportunity to contribute their views.

Suggested Key Areas of Focus

Library Services

- Importance of the library to residents.
- Views on local support for funding if services were at risk

Street Cleaning

- Satisfaction with current standards, identification of poorly maintained areas.

- Willingness to support local control if services were devolved.

Wem Swimming and Lifestyle Centre

- Importance of the facility to residents.
- Views on continued financial support from the Town Council.
- Willingness to contribute through council tax to sustain the facility.

Town Hall

- Awareness and use of the Town Hall
- Perceived importance as a community venue
- Support for continued financial support

New Projects (e.g. Pump Track, Inclusive Play)

The consultation would also test appetite for new projects, such as a pump track or inclusive play facilities and give residents the opportunity to suggest other ideas and indicate priorities for future investment.

Alongside all of this, there would need to be clear information about current Town Council responsibilities and finances. Residents would be asked for their views on potential council tax increases to protect existing services, take on new ones or invest in new facilities, including how they would approach trade-offs if necessary.

Consultation Approach

A town-wide approach is essential to ensure everyone can take part. Outlined below are options for how to deliver the survey

Paper Survey - The delivery of a full paper survey to every household, with returns via post or local drop-off points. This would be highly accessible, particularly for residents without internet access, and may encourage higher response rates among older age groups. However, it would come with significant printing and delivery costs, as well as additional administration and manual data entry.

Online Only – An online survey would be the cheapest option but the least inclusive and would come into criticism by those who are not confident using the internet.

Letter and online survey - This approach, used recently in Shrewsbury, would involve sending a letter to each household explaining the reasons for the survey and including a QR code which would link to an online survey. This would reduce costs and allow for faster, more efficient data collection. Details of how to access a paper survey option will also be highlighted in the letter and made available to households without internet access.

Survey Question Development

It is recommended that a working party considers the survey questions and presents them to a future Council meeting. If a hybrid approach is agreed, the working party would also need to choose the best online platform for the survey questions.

Marketing

Strong communication will be key to ensuring a good response. The survey will need to be written in plain English, clearly explaining the context and the financial implications.

Promotion would include use of social media, the Council website, and local press, supported by posters in key locations and direct engagement with community groups and organisations.

It will be important to emphasise throughout that no decisions have yet been made and that residents' views will play a direct role in shaping future decisions.

There is also a risk that the financial implications are misunderstood, so supporting information will need to be clear and straightforward. Expectations will need to be managed carefully by making it clear that the consultation will inform decisions, rather than determine them outright.

Analysis and Reporting

The results of the consultation would need to be analysed by the working party and brought back to Council for consideration. This report would include response rates, an overview of who responded (where possible) and a summary of both the quantitative results and key themes emerging from comments.

There would also be specific analysis of the main service areas, including the library, street cleaning, the swimming pool and the Town Hall.

Timeline and Resource Implications

The overall cost will depend on the approach taken. Key factors include printing and delivery, postage or collection arrangements, any online survey platform costs along with officer time for administration and analysis.

Using a hybrid model would help to manage costs while still ensuring the consultation is accessible to as many residents as possible. There is no actual budget other than service support for this project so an allocation may have to be made from either general reserves or the service support ear marked reserve.

It is recommended that a survey is prepared by a working party and then considered at the June meeting. The survey should be run for 6 weeks from Mid July to with an extraordinary meeting be held in September/ October to consider the results in time for budget discussions

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- 1. Approve the undertaking of a town-wide community consultation.**
- 2. Consider and agree the preferred consultation methodology.**
- 3. Establish a working party to draft the consultation questions .**