

Consultation Results – Strengthening our Relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector

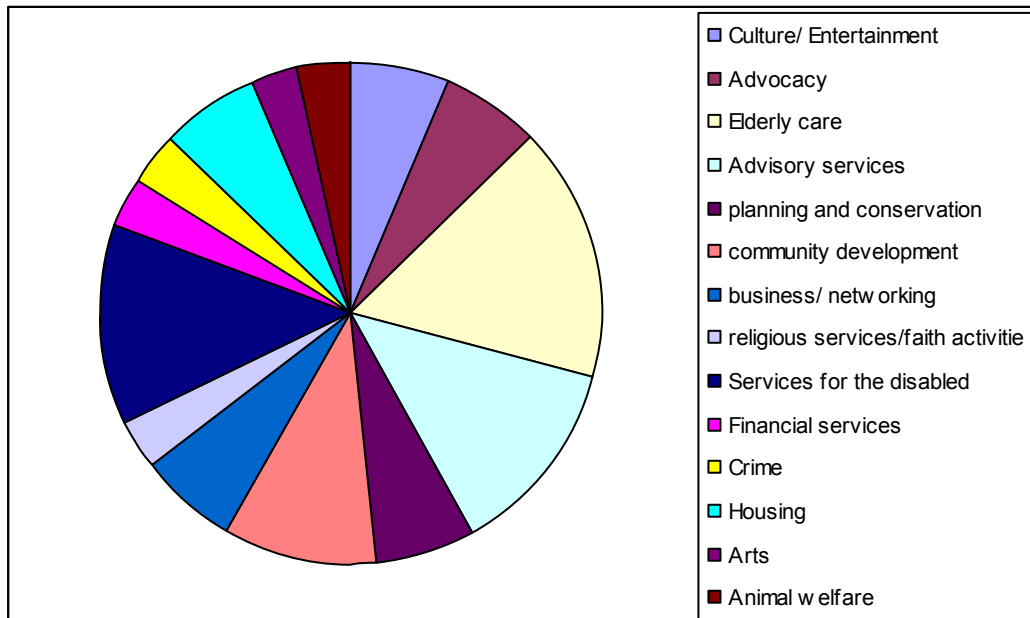
Information

These results are based on workshops and discussions from the consultation event on 6 July 2013 as well as questionnaires received from other organisations that could not attend, and conversations with other groups.

Response Information

The event was attended by 51 people, representing 40 voluntary and community organisations that worked within Lewes District Council. The event was also attended by councillors and senior officers from Lewes District Council. Questionnaires and emails with information from people who could not attend the event were received from a further four organisations.

The chart below represents the type of organisations represented in the consultation.



Present Relationship with Lewes District Council

Many groups were happy with their working relationship with the Council, but some groups were not happy and would like to develop a better relationship. Many groups are focussed on funding, but almost all would like better communication with the Council. The main issues that arose were:

- The lack single point of contact at the Council for organisations
- Lack of information on the Council's website
- Groups felt that they would "ping-pong" between departments when trying to find out information.
- Bureaucracy at times got in the way at the Council
- Need more information about funding
- Council and funding seemed like a closed club sometimes
- Council not returning emails/phone calls.
- Need to know what is going on at LDC (events etc) – could join up

- Lot of change at LDC, better website could keep groups up to date
- Need better contacts at LDC

Present Concerns of voluntary and community groups

The main concern of most groups was funding, and concern about the sustainability of their groups. Staff and volunteer recruitment was also a high priority, as well as the ability to train staff. Other costs such as publicity costs, bills and insurance was a worry.

There were concerns that reduced funding at councils would lead to more pressure on the third sector to deliver services. At the same time groups were concerned that they were not always accepted as being legitimate.

A further concern was who they could go to for help and who groups should contact at the Council. They felt that there should be no wrong door as the public don't know or care about differences between LDC/ESCC etc.

Communications

Some groups had a good relationship with the Council, but many felt that the communication between them could be improved. Groups mostly still used leaflets, word of mouth and external publicity to promote their groups, but wanted to link more to websites and social media etc. Suggestions were made regarding how communication could improve, such as:

- Better information on the Council's website
- More events, like the consultation event
- A dedicated officer in the Council to work with groups
- Named contacts within the Council that groups could ask for information
- More information generally about how the Council runs
- Information about councillors
- Two way information – Council also should learn from the third sector.
- Space in LDC publications

How the Council and groups can work better together

Groups were really keen to work more closely with the Council, and a number of suggestions arose in order to ensure this, such as:

- Shared space in council or other buildings
- Help with marketing (funding and expertise)
- Dedicated officer support
- Use of Council meeting spaces
- Help with accessibility
- Help with experienced officers at council (legal/equalities/minutes/agenda prep etc)
- Less red tape for groups at the Council
- Help with volunteer training
- Joint up working – work together leads to less duplication
- Be part of a one-stop shop

- Expansion of staff voluntary scheme to groups.
- Cheaper access to purchasing equipment etc
- Facilitate shared training etc between groups
- Space on website
- Need help with statistics about the District.
- Regular third sector briefings
- Re-establish LSP
- Third sector have safe space to speak the truth
- Advice about running businesses, training etc

Possible Areas for Recommendations

The following are a list of possible areas for recommendations that Councillors may wish to consider:

- That the Council helps voluntary and community groups publicise their groups, through internal and external publications.
- A mechanism is set up within LDC for groups to communicate with Lewes District councillors
- Dedicated officer support at LDC is offered to the third sector.
- There are named contacts in departments within the Council for groups.
- A mechanism is set up to ensure that better information is given to the third sector about how the Council runs.
- An annual event across the District takes place between groups and the Council.
- The staff volunteering scheme is widened at LDC so staff can help groups with their expertise, such as design, event planning, minute writing etc.
- A mechanism is set up and run by the Council so groups can have cheaper access to purchasing equipment etc
- Groups are invited to Council run training as a reduced cost, or free if there are spaces.
- The Council looks at re-establishing the LSP.
- The Council examines whether the new buildings will have shared space for groups to work in.
- Meeting rooms are offered at the Council to groups for free.