

Civil Society Strategy Consultation Report

Introduction

In 2019, Kent County Council made a commitment to adopt a new Civil Society Strategy (CSS), this was presented to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee in November 2019. The first iteration of the strategy was open for formal consultation in February 2020, however due to the Covid-19 pandemic, further activity on the document was paused. In 2021 the existing draft was revised, using the analysis and feedback from the previous consultation and this was published for consultation in September 2021.

The Civil Society Strategy will replace the Kent Partners Compact, which was last revised in 2012 and sets out KCC's future relationship with the Civil Society and the "social sector", voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) as a core part of that.

For the purposes of the strategy, the term "Civil Society" relates to *"all those individual, informal, and formal groups and organisations that operate outside of state control and for the primary purpose of social good."*

The Strategy sets out the objectives and intentions for KCC's future offer of infrastructure support to the VCSE, the funding agreed for this is £2.1M over the 3 years of the strategy and will be allocated against the priorities and framework set out in the strategy.

Additionally, the strategy will revise KCC's current grant framework which was developed in 2015 and has been updated based on feedback from the past 6 years of operation. This is intended to create consistency and clarity in the way we award grants to the VCSE across the Council.

This will be a supporting strategy to the Interim Strategic Plan and longer term, to the new Strategic Statement for the Council.

Consultation Process

A 9-week formal consultation was undertaken during the development of the draft strategy in 2020 alongside early engagement, which took place through VCSE networks and representative bodies.

A VCS Recovery Cell was established during the pandemic as part of the Kent Resilience Forum architecture; the impact assessment and action plan developed by that group of VCS representatives (facilitated by KCC and Medway officers) was used to revise the strategy.

We undertook a shorter period of formal consultation of 4 weeks to revise the draft strategy and this took place from the 6th of September - 3rd October 2021. For both consultations we undertook an Equality Impact Assessment and alternative formats were made available to ensure a wide variety of responses.

We have kept the VCS Strategic Partnership Board updated on all stages of the creation of the strategy and circulated the consultation link to our key contacts within KCC and partner organisations (NHS, District Councils and VCS organisations) once it was live.

The Strategy has been discussed at a number of internal KCC meetings including Management Team Meetings for relevant directorates and it has been shared more widely through engagement forums

such as the Joint Kent Chief's meeting (District Council representatives). We have worked alongside the new VCSE Steering Group made up of representatives from across the VCSE, to inform the development of the revised draft in addition to formal consultation.

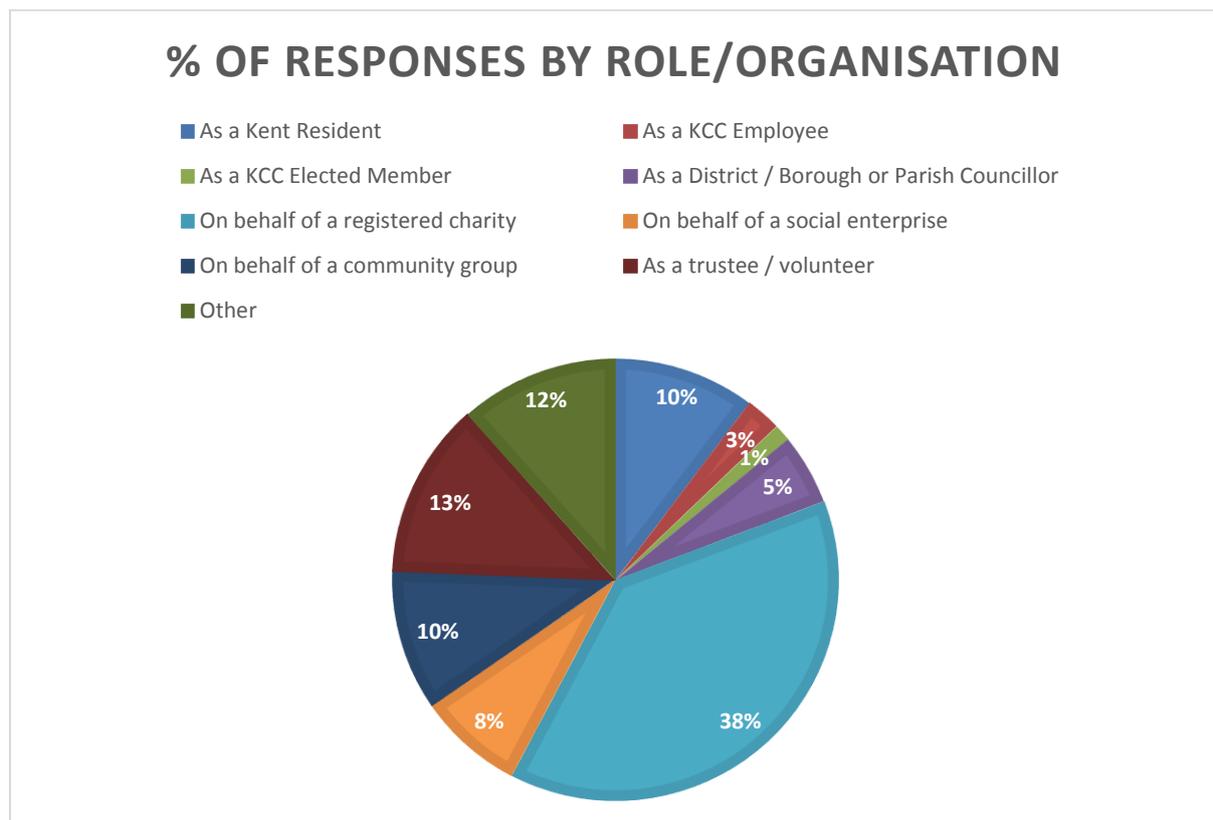
The consultation has also been widely distributed across KCC's social media channels, where we received 7555 impressions on Twitter over the course of the social media campaign with 49 clicks through to the consultation link.

Previously a high-level outline of the strategy structure was taken to Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee on 8th November 2019. A report outlining our intention to revise the draft went to Cabinet on 24th June.

Respondents

Over the course of the two formal consultations a total of 78 individuals across a number of different areas of the sector have responded. This does not include the engagement undertaken with the VCSE Steering Group.

The below graph shows the distribution for the responses received in relation to their role/organisational capacity. As the graph shows, the majority of responses (69%) were either responding on behalf of a VCSE organisation or were a trustee/volunteer.



Equality Analysis

Responses to the consultation did not raise any concerns relating to protected characteristics.

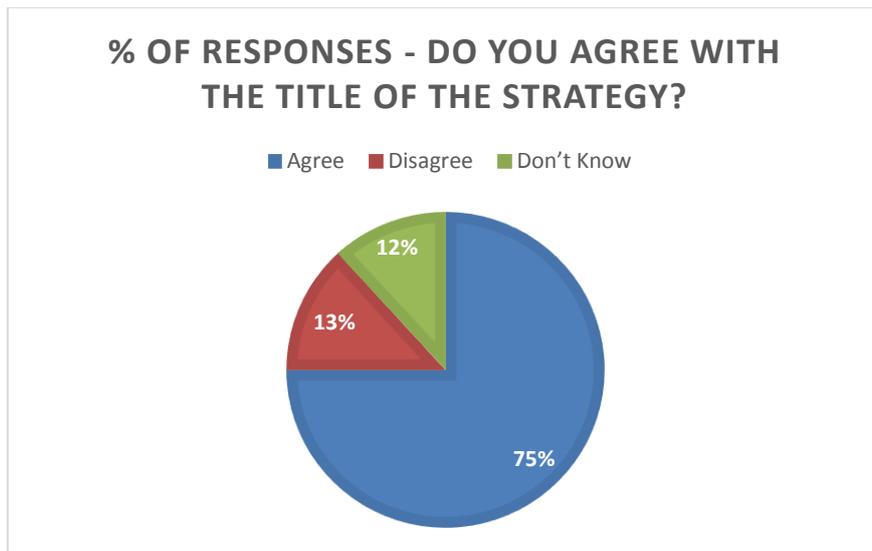
How your views helped shape KCC's Civil Society Strategy - "You Said, We Did"

We asked for views on the strategy, in particular the future support needs of the sector and whether the strategy captures the challenges facing the sector following the Covid-19 pandemic.

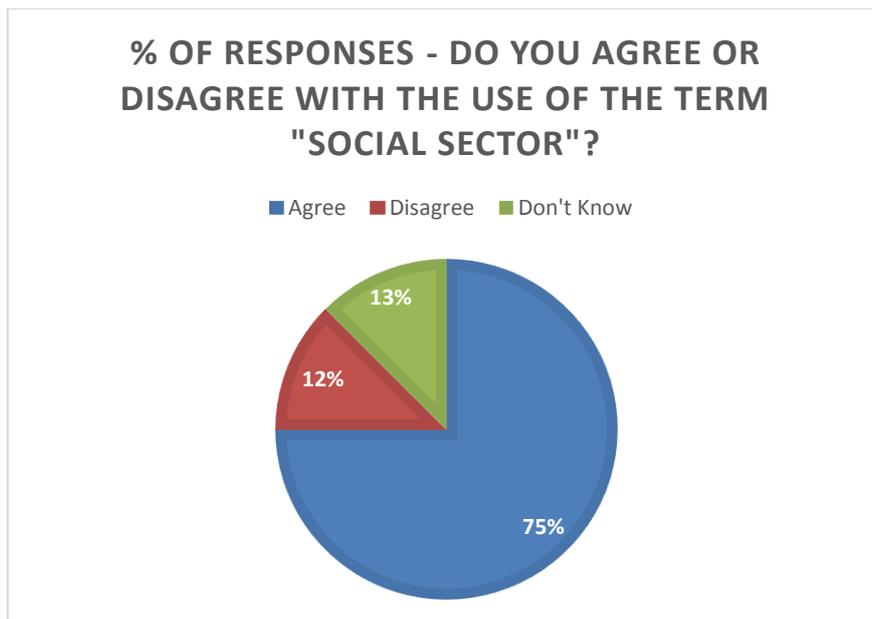
Your feedback has been used to change the strategy and in particular, the tables below highlight our response to key data we received during the consultation process.

Terminology

In round 1 of the consultation, 75% respondents agreed with the title of the strategy, and this was consequently carried forward to the revised draft of the document.



In both rounds of the consultation, respondents were asked their view on whether they *“agreed or disagreed with our use of the term social sector”*, the majority agreed with this change in shared terminology.



You Said	We Did
It was felt the term “voluntary” sector can undervalue the economic contribution the sector makes to the local economy and can give the impression the sector can exist on little or minimal funding.	We have used the terminology ‘social sector’ in the strategy based on discussions with the sector particularly over the last year.
You felt it was difficult to define what is meant by a “Civil Society” and that the “social sector” is not a term everyone is familiar with.	This use of terminology was supported by the consultation responses, with the majority of respondents across both consultations supporting the move to a ‘civil society’ strategy however we added a section on terminology to ensure our message was clear.
You felt the strategy lacked detail on how it will be implemented and the amount of funding available alongside targets and timescales.	We have outlined in the strategy the measures of success, which will be used to monitor our progress against the strategy frameworks. A 3-year budget is agreed as set out in the strategy and will be used to deliver the support offer set out in Chapter 3. The accompanying Executive Summary provides a concise summary of what KCC will do to implement the strategy.

Challenges and opportunities facing the sector post Covid.

The majority of respondents agreed that the strategy captures the opportunities available to the sector post Covid; the strategy recognises the considerable impact the sector has had during the pandemic since it began in 2020; with the increasing role of volunteers in supporting our communities.

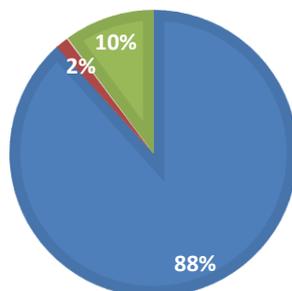
You Said	We Did
Some respondents felt that opportunities to work more collaboratively could be further emphasised.	Building on our work with the VCSE Steering Group and through our support offer we will be addressing wider engagement with the sector and the strategy now recognises more explicitly the need to work with partners such as district councils and the NHS, as we look at how we can facilitate engagement and collaboration at the local level.
You said there should be more encouragement to the sector to work in collaboration with KCC to come up with innovative solutions to social issues	We have set out in the strategy our commitment to working more collaboratively with the sector through our engagement and in our commissioning approach.

Support to the Sector

In round 1 of the consultation, 88% of respondents agreed that *“access to the right business support is important to the social sector to help organisations to grow, be sustainable and diversify”*.

DO YOU AGREE THAT ACCESS TO THE RIGHT BUSINESS SUPPORT IS IMPORTANT TO THE SOCIAL SECTOR TO HELP ORGANISATIONS TO GROW, BE SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSIFY?

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't Know



We developed this further for round 2 of the consultation and respondents were asked to rank several “business support options in order of their importance for Voluntary Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations”. The majority felt that financial advice, including how to access different funding, income generation and financial planning was the most important area of focus for the sector with Board development/training to support organisational strategy being of the least importance.

You Said	We Did
You said access to grants for small organisations in order to support their core mission was the most important area in which KCC could support VCSE organisations over the next 5 years.	Since the consultation in 2019 we have developed and delivered our Crowdfund Kent pilot, supporting local projects and community organisations. This will be evaluated and the findings from this used to inform future support to community organisations and activities.
Financial advice was felt to be the most important area for business support but accessing this was impacted by lack of funding	Through the introduction of the Strategic Recovery Fund, organisations will be able to access funding to help develop their business support needs. This will be reviewed and developed following the pilot round so KCC can identify what additional support will be needed for future years
You said that Time and access to funding to gain business support was highlighted as key areas of importance for the sector that prohibits them from accessing the support they need	We have developed the Strategic Recovery Fund for 21-22 to enable organisations to access grants to buy in support and expertise, recognising that funding and time is a barrier for some.

Volunteering

We asked whether respondents have “in the past accessed support to recruit volunteers or for volunteer brokerage (matching people into volunteering opportunities)?”, the majority replied that they had not however they did have concerns about recruiting and retaining volunteers in the future

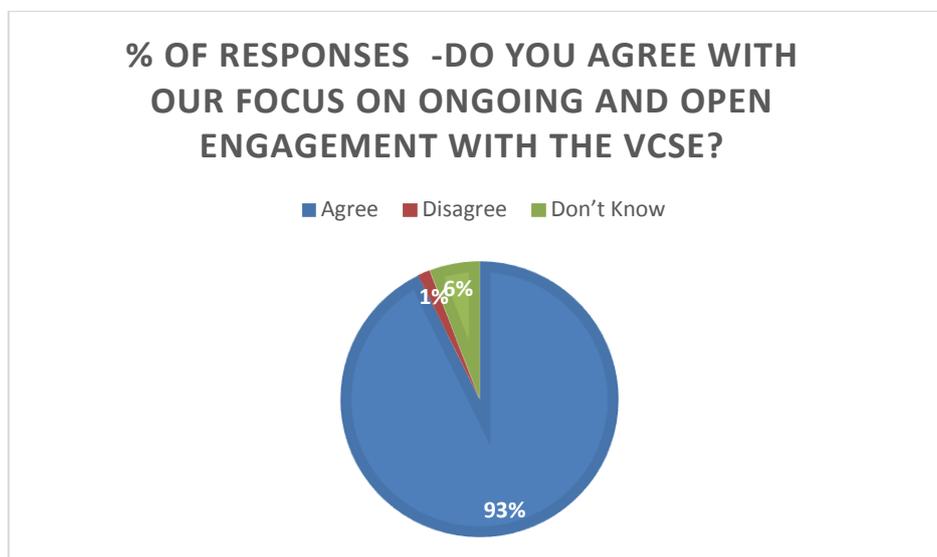
and that they would welcome additional advice and support on this issue. This area was welcomed by the responses

In response we will be launching the Volunteering Support Pilot alongside colleagues from the sector to help create a better resourced and more co-ordinated volunteering network across the County; this was also highlighted in the VCS Recovery Cell action plan which was developed in response to Covid.

You Said	We Did
You said that access to support for volunteers was the most important outcome of promoting and supporting civil activity within the community.	We are creating a pilot to support the sector in creating a sustainable model of volunteering to develop multiple funding streams or creating revenue. Good quality advice and support will be available through the pilot for organisations to access training and guidance on recruiting and retaining volunteers.
It was felt that the Strategy’s emphasis on volunteering was welcome as volunteers are essential to many VCSE organisations.	We recognised the importance of volunteers and have revised the strategy; accordingly, we will be building on this with the introduction of the volunteering pilot.

Engagement

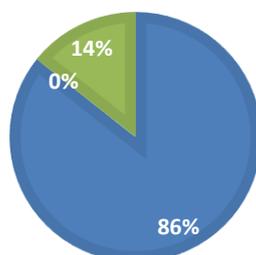
In our initial consultation, the majority (93%) of respondents agreed that a more open dialogue, beyond that of commissioning and funding, was needed by the sector. Since then, we have developed the VCSE Steering Group as the beginning of establishing a more coordinated and engaged relationship with the sector.



Following on from the second consultation, the majority (86%) of respondents felt that the changes we had made were a positive step in the right direction however more engagement mechanisms were required and to ensure that the sector are aware of the Steering Group and that it is accessible to more of the sector.

DO YOU THINK THERE IS A NEED FOR MORE ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT COLLABORATION IN THE SOCIAL SECTOR?

■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Don't Know



You Said	We Did
You said that KCC creating an open and ongoing dialogue with the social sector was important to you, rather than engaging solely through commissioning.	We have created the Strategic Partnership Board, with member representation from the District Councils, Voluntary Sector and NHS. The VCS rep on the Board chairs the VCSE Steering Group, which is made up of individuals from several organisations who can share key issues and discussions with a representative from KCC in attendance.
You agreed that the VCSE Steering Group should have a more formalised membership however raised concerns about whether a rotational membership would be appropriate.	As part of our offer of support we will look to evolve the Steering Group and its role alongside the Chair in order to ensure that we have the right representation to provide an effective engagement channel. This is an important forum for KCC and indeed partners, wanting to meaningfully engage with the sector and we recognise that whilst a starting point, the model can be improved. The challenges of a rotational membership are recognised and will be addressed as we develop the future model.
You said that each district should have local forums to enable the local VCSE organisations to respond to what is happening at a local level.	We are working with District Colleagues to ensure that we can regularly share information about the social sector and the support we have collectively put in place. This will include how we can work with the established local engagement forums to improve collaboration and ensure we can engage with local organisations.
You said that regular communication and consultation with the sector as a whole was important. You also felt that monitoring of our success could be fixed on existing networks which may disregard other areas of the sector.	We will be reviewing the VCSE Steering Group to ensure the membership is more reflective of the sector in Kent. the membership of the VCS Strategic Partnership Board cuts across public sector partners and the VCSE and we will be using insight and intelligence gathered from different channels via that Board to inform our success

	monitoring. This will include surveys of the sector undertaken by sector representatives, where available. We will also use feedback from the Strategic Recovery Fund and the evaluation of the Volunteering infrastructure pilot, to build our understanding and insight.
You asked for a key designated person within the council with the power to make and implement change.	We have a Key Officer and team designated to delivery on this Strategy with a KCC Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services who holds responsibility for this activity.

Conclusions and Next Steps

A final draft of the strategy informed by the consultation is due to go back to the KCC Policy and Resources Cabinet Committee in November before being formally adopted by Cabinet in December. The final strategy and the consultation report will be available on Kent.gov, once agreed.