KCC Draft Voluntary & Community Sector Policy - Consultation Report

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Background

- Kent County Council's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Policy is intended to set out aspirations for KCC's future relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

- Consultation on the draft policy took place between March 26th and June 18th 2015.

- Consultees were invited to submit their views on the policy via an online consultation and/or at one of three face to face events.

- KCC ran the consultation in association with Facts International, an independent research agency, to ensure an open and transparent process and the gathering of unbiased feedback.

- A key objective of the consultation was to explore the views of a range of organisations, including both those who already have a funding relationship with KCC and those who do not receive any KCC funding currently.

Online Consultation

- Publicised via KCC networks, Inside Track newsletter, Kent CAN website and tweets from KCC and Kent CAN

- Mix of closed ended (yes/ no, multiple choice) questions and open questions with opportunity for a free response

- 127 respondents, including:

Answering on behalf of a VCS organisation	101
Answering as an individual	21
Answering on behalf of another body (e.g. town/ parish council)	5

The following slides summarise the key messages emerging across the online consultation and consultation events. Further detail on the points raised at the events is set out in the Deliberative Events Summary Report, included at Annex 2.
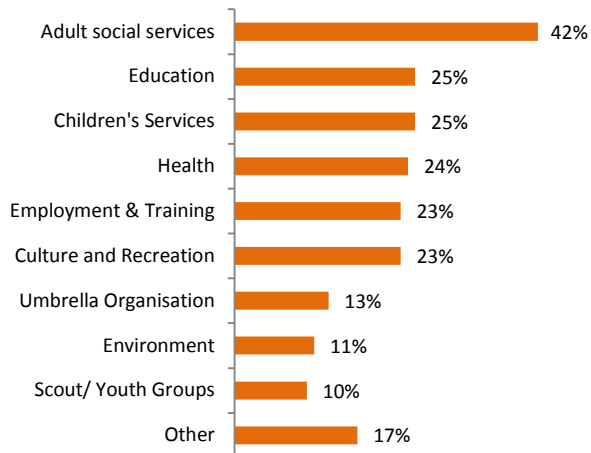
Consultation Events

- 3 identical events run in Maidstone, Ashford and Canterbury. 81 participants in total:

Location	Date	No. of participants
Maidstone	Thursday 5th June	31
Ashford	Wednesday 10th June	33
Canterbury	Friday 12th June	17

- A range of organisations and roles (including both volunteers and paid staff) represented.

- Each event lasted 2 hours and included facilitated small group discussions plus whole group plenary sessions.

- Event invitations were sent to those expressing an interest in attending via the online consultation, plus those finding out about the events through emails or phone calls from Facts International (using KCC's database), from publicity via the Kent CAN website or newsletter, from Inside Track or via Twitter.

FACTS International

A diverse range of organisations participated in the online consultation e.g.:

Note: This was a consultation exercise with organisations given the opportunity to 'opt in' to give their views. It was not intended to be a representative survey of the sector. Participants were not required to answer every question.

Primary area of activity

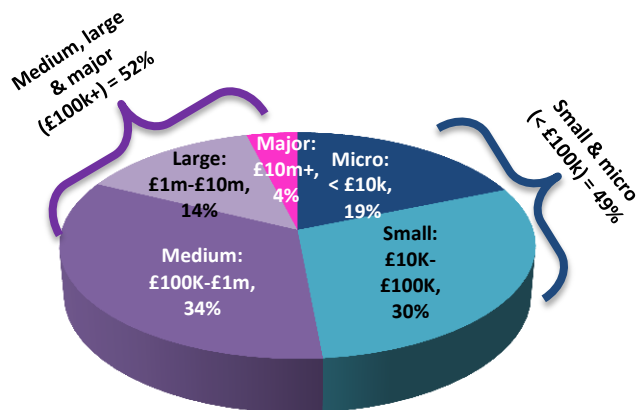| Area	%
Adult social services	42%
Education	25%
Children's Services	25%
Health	24%
Employment & Training	23%
Culture and Recreation	23%
Umbrella Organisation	13%
Environment	11%
Scout/ Youth Groups	10%
Other	17%

Base: 100 respondents completing on behalf of a VCS organisation (Multiple responses possible)
From Q3: Which activity does your organisation primarily undertake?

Size band by annual income level

Medium, large & major (£100k+) = 52%
Small & micro (< £100k) = 49%

- Major: £10m+, 4%
- Large: £1m-£10m, 14%
- Medium: £100K-£1m, 34%
- Micro: < £10k, 19%
- Small: £10K-£100K, 30%

Base: 101 respondents completing on behalf of a VCS organisation.
From Q4: Which income band does your organisation fall within

Funding relationship with KCC

Any = 63%

	%
Grant	39%
Contract	15%
Both	10%
Neither	37%
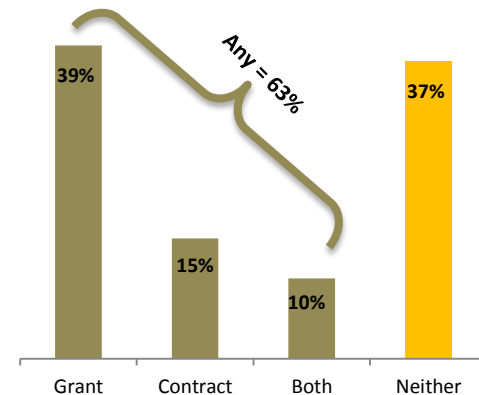
Base: 101 respondents completing on behalf of a VCS organisation.
From Q5: Is your organisation currently in receipt of KCC funding?

- The range of organisations completing the online survey is sufficient to enable attitudes across different groups within the sector to be compared.

- However, there are organisations that remain "off the radar" for KCC e.g. the NCVO data tool* suggests that larger organisations are over-represented among survey respondents:

It should be noted that larger organisations cover a greater number of end users and potentially have greater scope to engage with KCC. Small organisations without a relationship currently may not necessarily want one.

	Kent VCS Organisations (NCVO estimate)	Survey respondents
Micro	44%	19%
Small	41%	30%
Medium	13%	34%
Large	2%	14%
Major	-	4%

- Larger organisations participating in the survey are more likely to be in receipt of KCC funding:

Micro organisations stand out with less than 1/3 receiving KCC funding

	Micro	Small	Medium	Large/ Major
No KCC Funding	68%	33%	29%	22%
KCC Funding	32%	67%	71%	78%
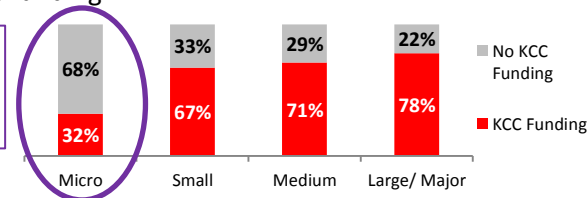
- Contracts are particularly rare among micro/ small organisations:

	% with contracts with KCC
Micro/ small	10%
Medium/ Large/ Major	**50%**

Bases: Micro = 19 respondents, Small = 30, Medium = 34, Large/ Major = 18

*Source: NCVO Kent Data Tool. Based on charities where income is known.

Will the draft policy help your organisation to meet its objectives?
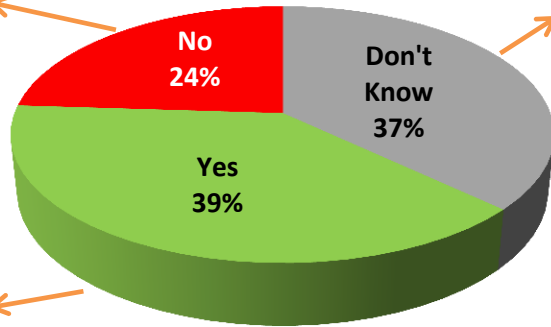
Just under **¼** feel the draft policy will not help with their objectives

But just under **4 in 10** are unable to say what the impact might be

No 24%

Don't Know 37%

Yes 39%

Just under **4 in 10** organisations believe the draft policy will help them

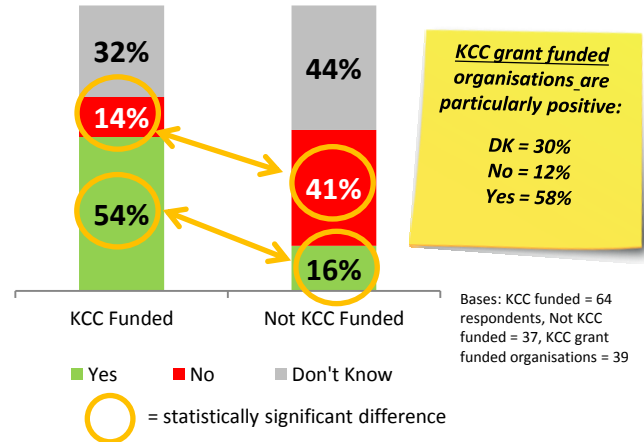This reflects a feeling that it would be helpful for the Policy to include more *detailed information*

Base: 82 respondents answering
From Q12: Will the draft policy help your organisation to meet its objectives?

Attitudes do not differ by organisation size – but are influenced by current receipt of funding or support - *"Outsiders"* not currently in receipt of funding or support are less positive:

Will the draft policy help your organisation to meet its objectives? – by funding relationship

KCC grant funded organisations are particularly positive:
DK = 30%
No = 12%
Yes = 58%

KCC Funded: 32%, 14%, 54%
Not KCC Funded: 44%, 41%, 16%

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know

◯ = statistically significant difference

Bases: KCC funded = 64 respondents, Not KCC funded = 37, KCC grant funded organisations = 39

"I hope that by having a fair and open process there will be opportunities for organisations like us to be able to make a case for the positive work we deliver in Kent and apply for funding rather than relying on ad-hoc arrangements."
Small culture & recreation organisation KCC grant funded

"You will give more grants to organisations that you already favour and work with, this will create laziness and complacency and will create a system of one size fits all services, when we all know that this does not work."
Small community organisation not KCC funded

Note: Not all grant funded organisations are positive. Some are concerned about the continuation of their funding

"The proposed policy will mean that we cannot expect a regular annual grant and will have to look elsewhere for funding or pass on the increased costs to our users."
Small health organisation KCC grant funded

"It's a good mission statement but may need some "polishing" before going live."
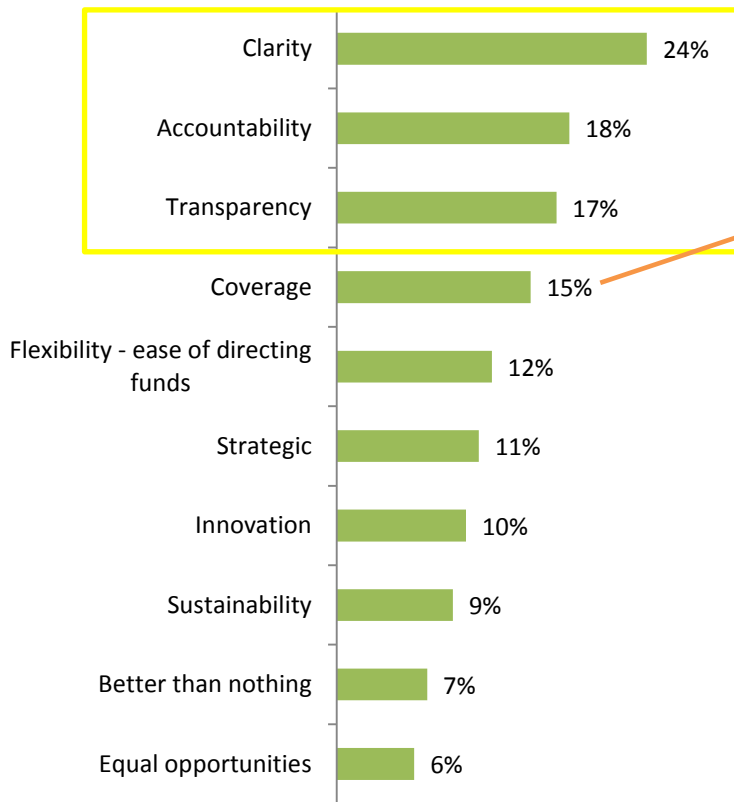**Small culture/ education organisation not KCC funded**

Key Message:

Some organisations, particularly those without a funding relationship with KCC, need to be further *convinced* that the Policy will help them to meet their objectives.

- Providing additional information is likely to help organisations to resolve areas of uncertainty and to anticipate a positive impact

- Event participants suggested that the policy should include/ be accompanied by a fuller grant framework document and/or grant prospectus.

Key Benefits of the Draft Policy

Positive feedback centred around the themes of **clarity, accountability** and **transparency**. The wide **coverage** of the policy and the commitment to grants was also praised.

Top 10 benefits identified in the online survey

Benefit	%
Clarity	24%
Accountability	18%
Transparency	17%
Coverage	15%
Flexibility - ease of directing funds	12%
Strategic	11%
Innovation	10%
Sustainability	9%
Better than nothing	7%
Equal opportunities	6%

Also Mentioned: New initiatives/ provision, Support, Reflection, Self Reliance, Simplicity, Accessibility, Growth, Recognition

Base: 99 respondents answering.
Coded responses to open question – multiple responses possible.
From Q11: What are the benefits of the policy?

Key benefits identified at Deliberative Events

- Bringing **clarity** and **transparency** to the relationship between KCC and the VCS Sector and to the grants process
- Acknowledgement of the key role played by a diverse range of VCS organisations
- Commitment to the sector and recognition of its importance
- A clear **commitment to grants**
- A catalyst for collaboration

"It will provide a framework upon which to place or develop organisations uniformly and fairly and will guide the voluntary sector as to where we will best fit in and support the statutory authority in its aims."
Small adult social services organisation KCC grant & contract funded

"It seems to be quite straightforward and user friendly for people to understand."
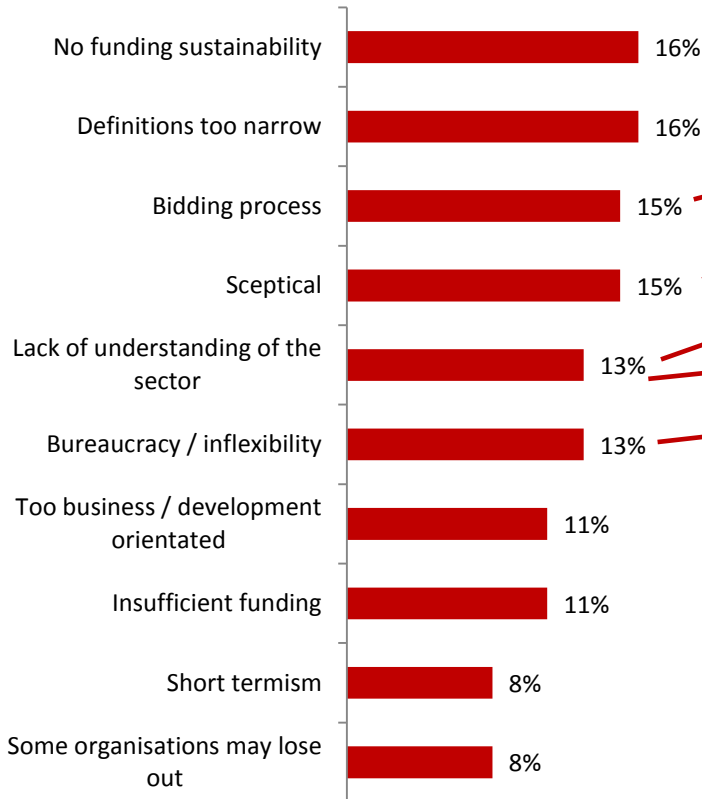**Parish Council**

"If implemented correctly there will be considerable benefit to the sector allowing for the development of viable service providers that currently find it difficult to raise seed funding."
Micro employment & training organisation not KCC funded

"It seems to set out your agenda from the beginning and encourages organisations to be less reliant upon your funding. Accessing KCC grants has sometimes been a mystery to me, so the transparency aspect is a benefit."
Medium children's services organisation in KCC contract funded

6

Identified Risks of the Draft Policy

Identified risks tend to relate to the **appropriateness of proposed funding structures** especially grant timescales. **Scepticism** that the promise of the Policy will translate into reality is also a key theme.

Top 10 risks identified in the online survey

- No funding sustainability — 16%
- Definitions too narrow — 16%
- Bidding process — 15%
- Sceptical — 15%
- Lack of understanding of the sector — 13%
- Bureaucracy / inflexibility — 13%
- Too business / development orientated — 11%
- Insufficient funding — 11%
- Short termism — 8%
- Some organisations may lose out — 8%

Also Mentioned: Favouritism, Too complicated, Lack of Commitment, Monitoring Issues, Portal/ Website issues, Duplication

Base: 93 respondents answering.
Coded responses to open question – multiple responses possible.
From Q13: What do you consider to be the risks of the policy?

Key risks identified at Deliberative Events

- Timescales given for both Innovation Grants and Strategic Grants may be too short to allow them to have a real and continuing impact
- Funding mechanisms identified in the policy may not be the most effective approach
- Opportunity/ promise set out in the written document may not translate into real benefits
- The diversity of the sector may not be fully considered/ accounted for
- Language and tone of the policy may not be seen to reflect the true value of the sector
- Inappropriate focus on "tick box" outcomes
- Continued confusion surrounding KCC's position
- Insufficient focus on building relationships with sector organisations

"Policy is one thing….delivery is another."
Small multi beneficiary organisation not KCC funded

"Accessing such funding then monitoring and evaluating can be very time consuming - this may mean that smaller organisations miss out. ."
**Small umbrella organisation KCC grant funded**

"If the grants are only given for a year is this risking the continuation of innovative projects? I see there is a clause for max 3 year funding but its not clear who will be eligible."
Medium children's services organisation KCC funded

"Narrow definition excludes smaller niche organisations from participation."
Small adult social services organisation in KCC grant funded

Availability and Accessibility of Grants

Will the proposed grant definitions and framework ensure that grants are accessible to a range of organisations?
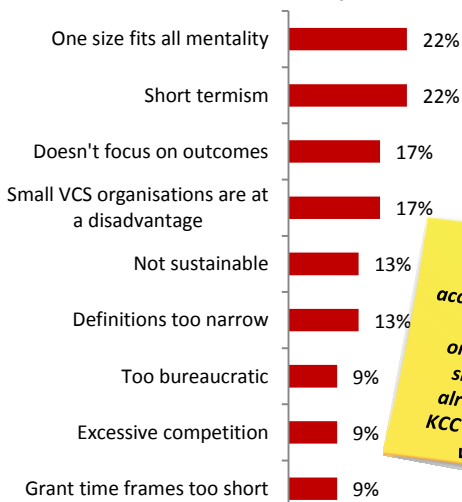
Around **¼** are unable to answer this question, reflecting an appetite for more information on the *detail* of the grants to be made available

Don't Know	26%
Yes	53%
No	21%
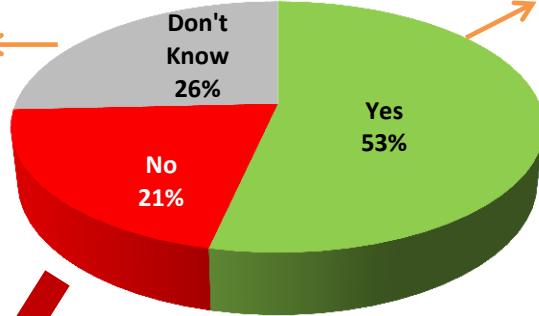
More than ½ of respondents think that grants as proposed will be accessible – but this differs by organisation type with those not receiving funding currently least likely to agree

Base: 121 respondents answering
From Q10: Will the proposed grant definitions and grant framework (on page 9 of the draft VCS Policy) ensure that grants are accessible to a range of organisations?

Why not?
(most common responses)

One size fits all mentality	22%
Short termism	22%
Doesn't focus on outcomes	17%
Small VCS organisations are at a disadvantage	17%
Not sustainable	13%
Definitions too narrow	13%
Too bureaucratic	9%
Excessive competition	9%
Grant time frames too short	9%

Base: 23 respondents not believing that the grant framework and definitions will ensure accessibility to a range of organisations. Coded responses to open question – multiple responses possible
From Q10: If you have answered "no", please tell us why

Note: Concerns around the accessibility of grants to smaller organisations are shared by some already funded by KCC as well as those who are not

"It does not seem to consider the constraints of Micro/Small VCS organisations. These organisations rely on relatively few volunteers to run their core activities. As such they do not have paid staff who would be able to project manage and monitor grant spending, putting increasing pressures on trustees/governors (also volunteers) to do this."
Small youth organisation not KCC funded

"Many organisations, especially smaller ones, will not be skilled in writing this sort of funding bid. Money will end up going to larger organisations, or those who prioritise spending money on bid writing consultancy over direct services for users. Services which provide great user value because of this will lose out."
Small adult social services organisation KCC grant funded

Will the proposed grant definitions and framework ensure that grants are accessible to a range of organisations? – by funding relationship
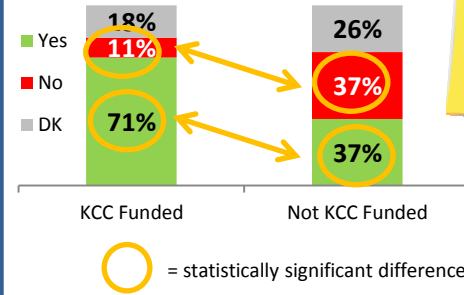
KCC grant funded organisations :
DK = 19%
No = 5%
Yes = 76%

	KCC Funded	Not KCC Funded
DK	18%	26%
No	11%	37%
Yes	71%	37%

Bases: KCC funded = 62 respondents, Not KCC funded = 35, KCC grant funded organisations = 37

◯ = statistically significant difference

Suggestions for ensuring availability and accessibility of grants from Deliberative Events

- Ensure that application processes are proportionate and as simple as possible
- Provide help and support for potential applicants where needed
- Ensure that grants are well publicised
- Effectively communicate what KCC are looking for from applicants

Key Message:

Feedback suggests a need to communicate further detail on the proposed grant landscape and to ensure that smaller organisations face appropriate bidding and evaluation procedures, with the ability to access support if they need it.

Over **1/2** of organisations participating in the online consultation are **not currently accessing any support.** Those not receiving KCC funding are less likely to be accessing support

Does your organisation currently access any support?

Note: Support is interpreted as both funding and infrastructure support

Don't Know
4%

Yes
43%

No
53%
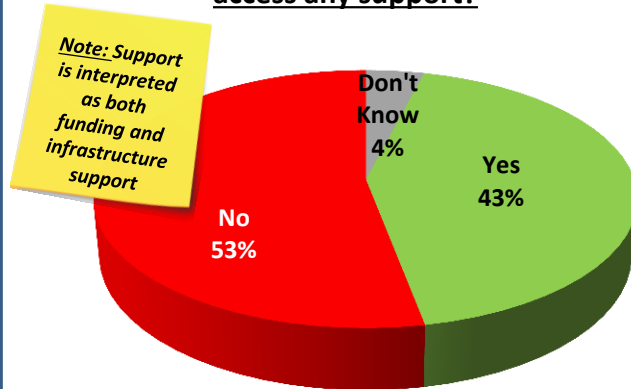
Base: 81 respondents answering on behalf of an organisation
From Q8: Does your organisation currently access any support?

"We are the only charity to specifically support those bereaved by suicide. The unique thing about the charity is that it is run, led and attended only by those similarly bereaved. We have no funding or support from the public or private sector, and therefore grants, and advice on fundraising would be extremely useful, as would networking and getting ourselves known to all appropriate agencies."

Micro health support organisation, not KCC funded

- Organisations which have a funding relationship with KCC are much more likely to currently access support such as training, STAMP, networking events and mentoring than those which do not have a funding relationship with KCC (see next slide)
- This supports the findings from the deliberative events that there are many VCS organisations which are 'under the radar' of KCC and are not connected to the infrastructure support they need
- These organisations have the potential to deliver services and to receive funding for them, but lack the infrastructure support which could help them to access funding and to operate as effectively as possible

61% of those receiving KCC funding are

accessing support compared with **16%** of those not funded by KCC

86% of those accessing support are

receiving KCC funding

25% of organisations taking part in the online consultation are neither KCC funded nor accessing support

- Organisations of this kind represent a key "off the radar" group, who could potentially benefit from the VCS policy

"I'd like to see more focus on support for small groups. We signed up to a scheme last year only to find that we were too small for the scheme & much of the assistance to work for us"

Micro organisation, wide remit, not KCC funded

Funding and **training support** are the key support areas for those currently accessing this – but the existing support offer could potentially benefit more organisations

- Access to and use of support services varies widely across the sector. At the deliberative events it became clear that this access depended on many factors, such as: geographical location, sector, history, personal contacts and knowledge. Many participants identified a lack of leadership in the VCS support arena in Kent making it more difficult for organisations to access the appropriate support they need.

- In the deliberative events, the existing STAMP programme was praised by some, but it was suggested that this could be opened up to a wider range of organisations. Some participants perceived that the STAMP events and advice had become expensive and questioned the value of their relevance and appeal.
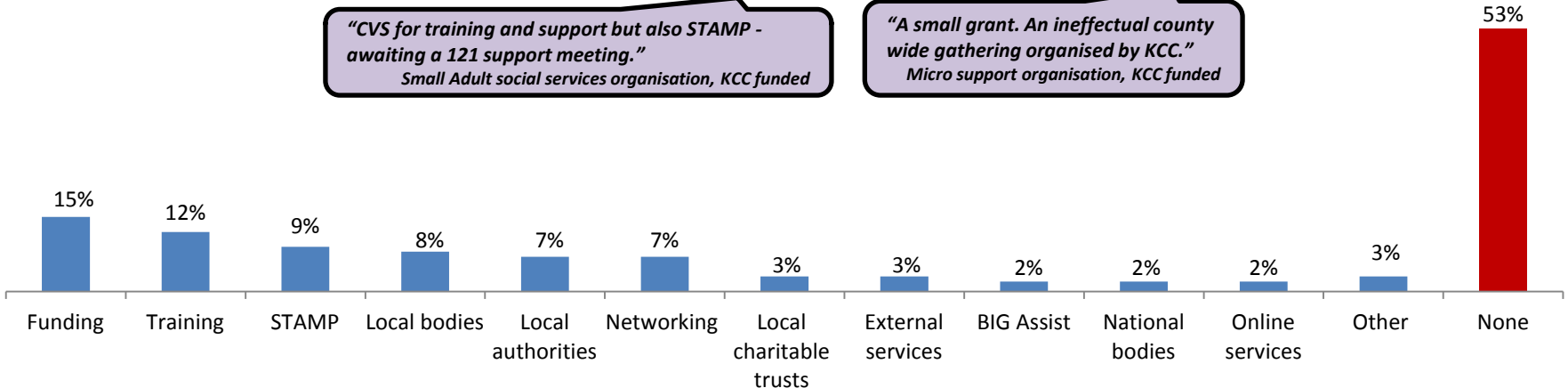
What support do you access?

"We get a newsletter from the KCC external funding unit via other organisations."
Micro Culture and Health organisation, not KCC funded

"STAMP programme and various voluntary sector forums."
Small multi-beneficiary organisation, KCC funded

"CVS for training and support but also STAMP - awaiting a 121 support meeting."
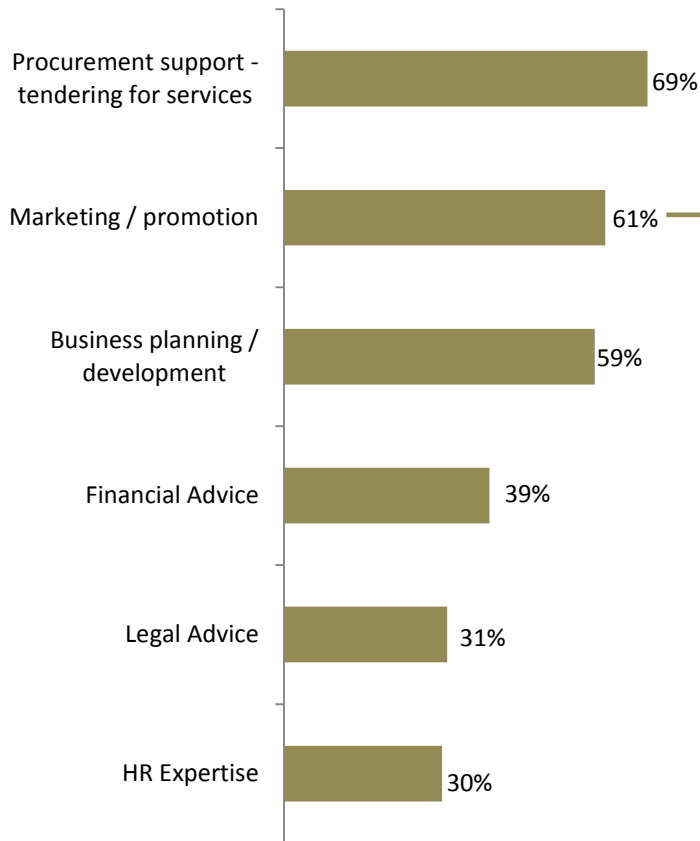*Small Adult social services organisation, KCC funded*

"A small grant. An ineffectual county wide gathering organised by KCC."
Micro support organisation, KCC funded

Category	Percentage
Funding	15%
Training	12%
STAMP	9%
Local bodies	8%
Local authorities	7%
Networking	7%
Local charitable trusts	3%
External services	3%
BIG Assist	2%
National bodies	2%
Online services	2%
Other	3%
None	53%

Base: 101 respondents answering on behalf of an organisation
From Q8: Does your organisation access any support and 8a: What support do you access?
Coded responses to open question – multiple responses possible

Future support needs to aid service delivery

In the context of service delivery, VCS organisations want **tailored** support that will help them to win funding and promote and develop their services

What do you believe are the future support needs of the sector in relation to the delivery of services?

Support need	Percentage
Procurement support - tendering for services	69%
Marketing / promotion	61%
Business planning / development	59%
Financial Advice	39%
Legal Advice	31%
HR Expertise	30%

Base: 123 respondents answering

From Q6: A proportion of the Voluntary and Community sector helps us to achieve our strategic outcomes and objectives through the delivery of public services. We recognise that these organisations may be facing challenges within an increasingly competitive market and we want to ensure that the sector can build its capacity to deliver services. What do you believe are the future support needs of the sector in relation to the delivery of services? Respondents were prompted with a list of options – multiple responses possible.

These priorities were reflected in the deliberative events:

- Participants **universally wanted support to help secure funding**. This was particularly important for smaller organisations who lack the specialist teams and resources of larger organisations, and for whom the procurement/grant application process is often onerous and challenging.

- A common theme at the events was that **many VCS organisations are social businesses**, and as such they would benefit from support to help them grow and develop. Marketing/promotion and business planning/development support would deliver this. However, to be useful it needs to be **flexible and tailored** to the needs of the organisation – not one size fits all. **Small organisations with the greatest need for support often found this hard to access**, as did growing organisations, including those transitioning from operating on an entirely voluntary basis to employing a first paid staff member.

- Most importantly **infrastructure support needs to be delivered by organisations that are genuinely supportive of the sector** and not competing for funding for delivering services.

"Review the Kent Business Portal and website. Provide us with funded positions so that experts in funding, bid writing, tender writing, HR etc… can be tapped into by small charities."
Ashford event participant

"Infrastructure for the VCS must be seen as essential support for community based services and for local engagement."
Ashford event participant

"Include more emphasis on the Care Act 2015 in terms of practical support to independent voluntary organisations who have specialist skills"
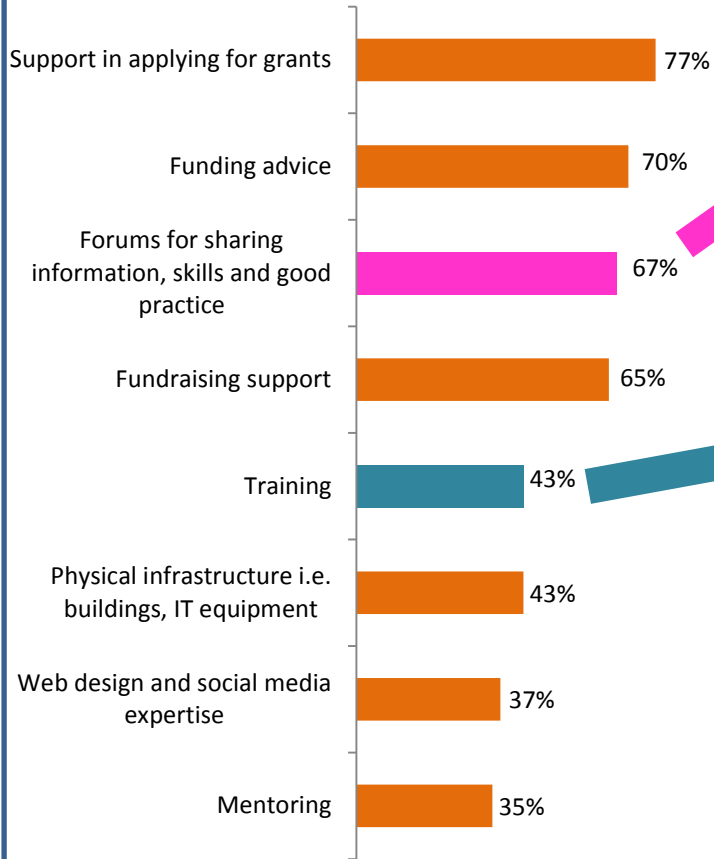**Maidstone event participant**

"Support all voluntary sector organisations with becoming business focused"
Maidstone event participant

FACTS International

Again, respondents identified the priority future needs of the sector to be **accessing funding and fundraising support.** This reflects the critical importance of financial support in enabling the sector to function. The next most commonly identified need was **forums for information sharing, skills and good practice**.

What do you believe are the future support needs of the wider VCS in Kent?

Support need	%
Support in applying for grants	77%
Funding advice	70%
Forums for sharing information, skills and good practice	67%
Fundraising support	65%
Training	43%
Physical infrastructure i.e. buildings, IT equipment	43%
Web design and social media expertise	37%
Mentoring	35%

Base: 125 respondents answering
From Q7: What do you believe are the future support needs of the wider VCS in Kent?
Respondents were prompted with a list of options – multiple responses possible

Participants at the deliberative events felt that information sharing across the sector is currently patchy. Organisations would value more help and support to make beneficial connections with others:
- Networking must have a purpose; combining networking opportunities with filling an information need could be particularly successful, especially events related to accessing funding
- Mapping the sector and matchmaking organisations who can learn from each other
- Encouraging connections outside of the sector – e.g. with the business community
- Encouraging connections/ sharing with those outside of Kent

Future training needs

Training need	%
Business training	18%
Good / best practice	18%
Legal issues - legislation	18%
Management	16%
Leadership	13%
Practical skills	13%
Access to free training	13%
Governance	11%
Development	11%

Base: 38 respondents answering Training – please specify
From Q7: What do you believe are the future support needs of the wider VCS in Kent?
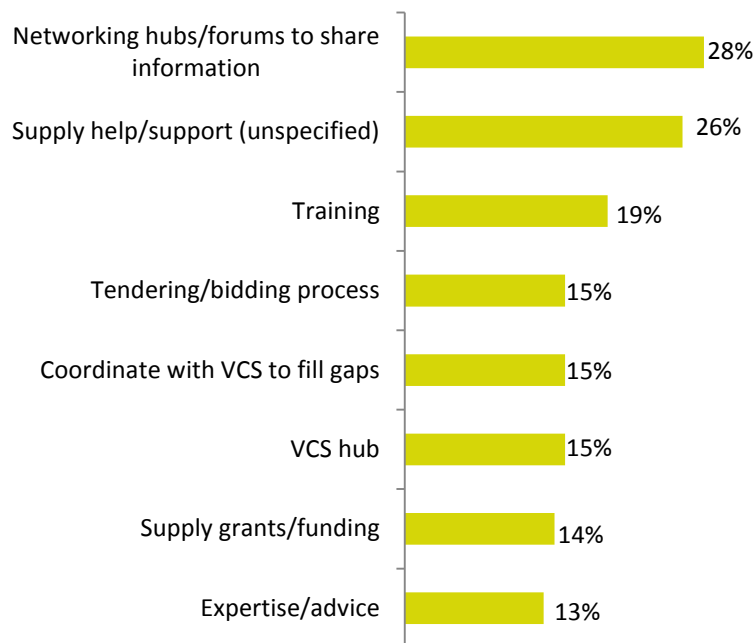Coded responses to open question – multiple responses possible

"Helping the VCS to collaborate and form consortia to ensure that richness and diversity of skill, talent and local knowledge is nurtured. Evidence shows that with consolidation of supply chains the small and micro organisations don't get a look in.. There are key champion organisations in Kent that cover networks of like minded group that could help with this. If we ignore this opportunity we do it at our peril in terms of the grass roots talent."

Small Arts organisation, not KCC funded

Kent County Council
kent.gov.uk

Online Consultation: How can KCC meet the support needs of the VCS?

There is **clearly an appetite for KCC to take a strategic leadership role in supporting the VCS in future**. Whilst KCC may not be able to deliver this wishlist, the needs identified highlight the current gaps in support provision.

Please briefly describe how you think KCC can meet the future support needs that you have identified
(Most common responses)

Response	%
Networking hubs/forums to share information	28%
Supply help/support (unspecified)	26%
Training	19%
Tendering/bidding process	15%
Coordinate with VCS to fill gaps	15%
VCS hub	15%
Supply grants/funding	14%
Expertise/advice	13%

Base: 108 respondents answering
From Q9: Please briefly describe how you think KCC can meet the future support needs that you have identified
Coded responses to open question – multiple responses possible

Summary of suggestions from the online consultation

1. **Expertise provided by KCC: "one stop shop solution" to help the sector identify and support their needs**
   - Specific KCC department to work with the voluntary sector
   - Structured, consistent approach to meet VCS needs
   - Practical support in terms of meeting facilities, secretariat

2. **Provision of forums and networking opportunities**
   - Forum so that the voices of the VCS are heard
   - Forum for skill sharing opportunities, best practice, networking
   - Networking opportunities – getting "on the radar" of all appropriate agencies

3. **Help with accessing grants and funding**
   - Helping with applying for grants, particularly for smaller organisations who lack the knowledge and capacity to do this
   - How to write bids
   - More transparent tendering process to give smaller organisations greater opportunity to tender to provide services
   - Single website where all funds are listed to help organisations save time etc.
   - Annual funding fair free to attendees

4. **Training and capacity building**
   - Workshops to develop key skills
   - Mentoring provided by independent organisations

"Practical help to make funding bids. Actually seeking and completing funding bids on the behalf of the small organisations who do not have the capacity or expertise to do this and deliver their services."
Small Adult social services organisation, KCC funded

"KCC only supplies support to infrastructure organisations to provide general support. To be effective, organisations need specialist support and, in order to provide long-term sustainability, these organisations need to be mentored through the various processes to cover all their requirements in order that these groups will have the skills, knowledge and confidence to be able to meet future needs."
Small employment & training organisation, not KCC funded

"Whilst there are a great many small charities that could benefit from things such as training, web design etc., we mustn't forget that there are also charities that have all the necessary framework to move forward but are limited by physical size and capacity."
Small culture and education organisation, not KCC funded

"Identification of existing networks and training providers who are set up to support VCS organisations. Support and promotion of wider VCS activities through existing channels including social media. Advice and guidance available through online channels."
Small youth organisation, not KCC funded

"By having a department established to work with the voluntary sector, by regulating and supporting poor performance and encouraging good results, by reporting on successful outcomes and connecting all organisations to facilitate sharing of skills, by funding organisations such as EKVAS to run funded training programmes for trustees and volunteers, etc."
Small Adult social services organisation, KCC funded

"We'd like to meet with commissioning officers to get a real understanding of the needs of specific sectors and have a chance to share some of our concerns. We are now competing for funding alongside major charities with large marketing teams and would like ring-fenced opportunities to show what grass roots provision can really do"
Small education, employment & training organisation, KCC funded

"The policy should include an aspiration to raise awareness amongst its own staff of the role of the VCS, require that thought is given to how their functions can usefully engage with the sector, and widen potential for volunteering and volunteering opportunities. It would be helpful for KCC to act as a strategic lead and work with all other layers of local government to provide a shared approach to the sector and an easier way to navigate between, and communicate with, them."
Small other services organisation, not KCC funded

There were mixed views at the events regarding the extent of KCC's role in meeting VCS support needs. However, **all participants wanted KCC to increase its engagement with the sector** and demonstrate its long-term commitment to understanding the sector better

- Some participants thought that **KCC should play an active role in facilitating information, skill sharing and engagement** across the VCS and that this would demonstrate commitment to the sector.
- However**, others believed that this was not the place of the local authority** and it should leave the sector to take this forward alone without interference.
- There was also a suggestion that KCC could help by offering access to organisational resources, leadership training and HR support.
- The general feeling was **that KCC's involvement in some capacity may be useful**, either through funding forums or events or through "in kind" support such as the provision of venues.
- Participants were asked to write a message to KCC at the end of each event. The full list is included in the Annex. The following verbatim comments encapsulate participants' key views on KCC involvement and support.

"Please get officers and Cabinet members out to meet with the sector."
Maidstone participant

"That KCC listen more to the people on the ground who understand the needs of the community better."
Maidstone participant

"Learn from successes and failures outside of Kent and celebrate/support great work done by the VCS here… especially where you have been part of the mechanics that has helped create these positives!"
Canterbury participant

"Keep talking to the sector, there are some people with fantastic ideas already operating that you could learn from."
Maidstone participant

"Support all voluntary sector organisations with becoming business focused. Encourage those organisations to take responsibility and not expect KCC to give, give, give."
Maidstone participant

"Does KCC fully understand the scope of the sector from volunteer-led organisations, professional niche organisations, and social businesses? Do KCC know which parts, or parts of the hierarchy it wants to commission and how they work together?"
Ashford participant

"Consider grants to be an investment not a 'hand out'. An investment in creating a better community. An investment in preventing people needing statutory services."
Ashford participant

1. The language used for the policy needs to better reflect the partnership between KCC and the VCS

- A less paternalistic and more respectful tone which overtly recognises the professional, expert, committed nature of the VCS and the value investing in it brings to KCC, not just in financial terms but in terms of Social Value.
- Overtly recognising the importance of Social Value itself and how the policy will help KCC to deliver on its Social Value objectives.
- Demonstrating that KCC understands the diverse scope of the sector from volunteer-led organisations to professional niche organisations and social businesses, meaning that one size does not fit all; KCC's approach to interacting with the sector and awarding grants needs to reflect this complexity.
- Explaining how this policy fits with other existing policy documents such as the Compact.

2. The policy should recognise that contracting, tendering and bidding processes create a competitive environment and outline how KCC can help to mitigate any negative impact this may have on partnerships and consortiums amongst the VCS.

3. The policy needs to set out more clearly how KCC sees grants (investments) fitting within its wider relationship with the sector

- How grants fit with contracts and the strategic commissioning process.
- Whether grants are complementary to contracts; how they fill the gaps and what the relationship is between them.
- How these are segmented; by size, value, purpose?
- Demonstrating that KCC understands which parts of the sector it wants to commission and how they can work together.

4. The Grants framework section of the policy should be revised so that the grants (investments) available fit more closely with the needs of the sector

- Grants that offer longer-term funding (with in built review points), thereby helping the VCS to be more sustainable in light of the challenges involved in maintaining momentum and expertise on projects.
- A commitment to a Grants framework document which is clear to understand, sets realistic deadlines, and enables access through a dedicated and informative, easy to access and user friendly portal (involve the VCS in the creation of this to ensure it is fit for purpose).
- A consistent, professional approach to awarding grants using a panel of experts who have a deep understanding of the most pressing needs to be addressed in local communities (Opportunity for Kent Community Foundation to possibly be involved in part of the grants awards process).
- A simple, proportionate grant application and monitoring process which explains what and how outcomes are measured.
- A commitment to publishing grants that have been awarded.

5. Infrastructure support needs to be flexible and relevant to a wide variety of organisations' needs

- Relevant for different sizes and types of organisations; particularly small charities and community groups.
- Developing business skills, providing practical support, providing support from experts in bid writing, tender writing and HR processes.
- Infrastructure organisations need to be genuinely supportive of the sector and not competing for funding for delivering projects.

6. The policy will be a success if:

- Strategic commissioners are experts who fully engage with the sector and are able to judge accurately what is needed and why in terms of funding.
- It is dynamic and has a life beyond the page – it adapts to changing circumstances in the sector and funding environment.
- KCC listens more to the people on the ground who understand the needs of the sector and who can share learnings.
- KCC senior management and Cabinet members participate in ongoing engagement with the sector.
- Strategic commissioners are less risk averse about using the VCS to deliver public services.
- KCC actively develops relationships with the whole of the sector.

Engaging the Sector

1. There is huge appetite from the sector for more engagement between KCC and the VCS. The sector expects an ongoing dialogue with KCC.

2. KCC should seize this opportunity to forge stronger links with the sector which will help the authority further develop its knowledge of the contribution the sector can make

- Mapping the sector is hugely important.
- KCC could revisit the work which was completed under the Comprehensive Area Assessment in 2009.

3. There is opportunity for genuine partnership working, especially between the sector and KCC strategic commissioners who make the decisions about what is needed and how to meet that need through grant (and contract) funding.

4. KCC could build upon the conversation which has begun through the consultation by:

- Conducting regular information sharing events at which KCC strategic commissioners are present.
- Producing an annual Grants Prospectus and holding events to present/publicise the contents and answer questions from prospective bidders.
- Providing an online portal for two-way information sharing between the VCS and KCC.
- Sharing information from grant beneficiaries who can share best practice with other VCS organisations.
- And throughout, continuing to build its database of the VCS to ensure that KCC reaches as many relevant VCS organisations as possible with its engagement and communication activity.

5. Some practical suggestions from VCS participants for improving future events are:

- Starting after 9.30am,
- Allowing sufficient structured time for networking,
- Allowing sufficient structured time for answering questions,
- Circulating an attendee list to all participants to help improve sector networking and connections,
- Ensuring that any KCC officers or Councillors who attend at the beginning of an event stay for the whole event, otherwise their absence (and implied disinterest) is noticed by the sector.

Additional key messages for KCC outside of the policy scope

1. KCC needs to pay organisations on time.

2. KCC should celebrate the many great successes of the VCS in Kent.

3. KCC should learn from successes and failures in other parts of UK in terms of local authority involvement with the VCS.

4. KCC should recognise and foster greater links between not just the public sector and the VCS but the private sector too.

5. Public health grants should be available especially for issues that affect certain communities.

6. KCC should consider appointing an independent third party organisation to administer grants

Annexes:

Additional Information

Profile of respondents answering as an individual

21 respondents participated in the online consultation as an individual. Their characteristics, where stated, are set out below:

	No. of respondents
Affiliated to a VCS organisation or volunteer for one	15
Not affiliated or volunteering	6

Total answering: 21 respondents

Age	No. of respondents
25-34	1
35-49	6
50-59	6
60-64	1
65-74	1

Total answering: 15 respondents

Disability	No. of respondents
Yes – Physical Impairment	2
Yes – Long standing illness/ heath condition	1
Yes – Prefer not to say	1
No	9
Prefer not to say	3

Total answering: 15 respondents. Multiple responses possible

District	No. of respondents
Shepway	3
Ashford	2
Canterbury	1
Dover	1
Maidstone	1
Tonbridge & Malling	1
Tunbridge Wells	1
Out of County	1

Total answering: 11 respondents

Ethnic Group	No. of respondents
White English	11
White other	1
Asian or Asian British Indian	1
Other ethnic group	1
Prefer not to say	1

Total answering: 15 respondents

Religion	No. of respondents
Christian	8
Hindu	1
Other	1
None	4
Prefer not to say	1

Total answering: 15 respondents

Gender	No. of respondents
Male	7
Female	7

Total answering: 14 respondents

Orientation	No. of respondents
Heterosexual/ Straight	10
Gay man	1
Other	1
Prefer not to say	2

Total answering: 14 respondents

Annex 2:

KCC Voluntary & Community Sector Draft Policy

Deliberative Events Summary Report

19th June 2015

Background

- Kent County Council's Policy and Strategic Relationships team launched a public consultation on the draft Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Policy on 26 March 2015 for 12 weeks.

- The policy sets out aspirations for KCC's future relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

- The consultation was primarily aimed at VCS organisations. Consultees were invited to submit their views on the policy via an online survey and at three 2 hour events in Ashford, Maidstone and Canterbury.

- KCC commissioned Facts International, an independent research agency, to arrange and facilitate the events and to analyse and report on the results of the consultation. This is intended to ensure that the consultation process is open and transparent and that the feedback gathered on the draft policy is unbiased.

- Facts International was responsible for planning the three events and recruiting participants, including a spread of organisations that KCC has a funding relationship with and those that it does not.

- Around 230 organisations were emailed with an invitation to take part in the consultation. This included all those expressing an interest in event attendance as part of the online survey, plus others wishing to attend after finding out about the events through emails or phone calls from Facts International (using KCC's database) or from publicity via the Kent CAN website or newsletter, from Inside Track or via Twitter.

- 81 representatives from a broad range of organisations attended the three events. Some were employed by a charity while others were volunteers, reflecting the diversity of the sector:
    - Maidstone, Thursday 5th June – 31 participants
    - Ashford, Wednesday 10th June – 33 participants
    - Canterbury, Friday 12th June – 17 participants

- The events were well received. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to find out more about KCC plans directly from KCC, as well as sharing views with colleagues in the sector, and appreciated that KCC was actively listening to their views and intended to act upon them.

Introduction

- This report summarises the feedback shared across all three events.

- Participants views were explored and captured via facilitated small group discussions plus whole group plenary sessions. They were also invited to write a postcard to KCC expressing their key messages and thoughts in their own words.

- Each event followed an identical structure. The main topics covered included feedback on the draft policy itself, plus suggestions around supporting activity that would benefit the sector:
    - Benefits of the draft policy
    - Risks of the draft policy
    - Maximising availability and accessibility of grants as defined in the policy
    - Infrastructure support
    - Facilitating information, skill sharing and engagement

- The report sets out the key points made in relation to each of these areas, followed by conclusions and recommendations for KCC around revising the policy and engaging with the sector in light of the feedback gathered.

Key messages to KCC from the Voluntary & Community Sector: Ensuring its voice is heard

At the end of each event, participants were encouraged to write down a key message to KCC. Here is a selection of these messages. The full list is included in the Appendix.

Great opportunity to share views and give input
"Please listen"

Ashford

KCC must recognise the social value of the Voluntary / Comty / Sector
£1 supporting the VCS results in £8 benefit to volunteers / service users / the local authority / health service
The Policy and the Authority needs to recognise this

We are not a cheap alternative – we are fabulous value for money!
Professional, expert, committed and dedicated people in the VCS sector – support them properly.

Key Messages
Please ensure this is a dynamic strategy.
Build in review process that responds to changing circumstances & needs.
Have you consulted with other stakeholders? – Borough / District Councils, CCG's, Police etc.

Key messages to KCC from the Voluntary & Community Sector: Ensuring its voice is heard

Diversity is everything — one size DOESN'T fit all. Keep it simple and as local as possible.

Make sure the people who decide who gets funding have all the information — panels make better, more accountable decisions than one person in isolation.

Very informative meeting.

Funding must be people led. Relevant to all needs to large & small Charities

Funding needs to be publized

Grants for more than 1 year.

KCC — to look at other counties

KEY MESSAGE

ENSURE THAT INFRASTURE SUPPORT MEETS ALL THE NEEDS OF THE WIDE RANGE OF COMMUNITY SECTOR PROJECTS BY PROVIDING SPECIALICIST SUPPORT.

Key benefits of the draft policy

1. **The development of a policy suggests a commitment to the sector and recognition of its importance**
   - The concept of formalising KCC's approach in a single policy document was welcomed.
   - The policy's existence gives the sector formal recognition and potentially greater prominence within KCC.
   - The policy was seen by many as a positive step because it provides an opportunity for the VCS to better understand KCC's position.

2. **The policy acknowledges the key role played by a diverse range of VCS organisations**
   - It outlines the valuable work done by the VCS in Kent (although many felt that it could go further in emphasising the sector's contribution more strongly).
   - Some participants were pleased with the recognition of the diverse nature of the VCS e.g. it includes organisations of a variety of sizes and structures, it extends beyond the health and social care arena and includes organisations who are "doing their own thing" without necessarily being aligned with KCC's agenda (however many wanted this diversity to be more strongly stated in the policy).

3. **The policy will bring clarity and transparency to the relationship and the grants process**
   - Participants mentioned advantages around a standardised approach, consistency, openness, fairness and accountability.
   - This was felt to have been lacking to date and there was optimism that the policy could lead to a more "level playing field" giving more opportunities to a greater number and range of organisations – including smaller organisations that have not as yet been able to access KCC funding (not just "the big boys" or "the usual suspects").
   - Participants hoped that the policy would change the current limitations of a system where access to KCC grants could be "more about who you know, rather than what you do".

4. **The policy includes a clear commitment to grants**
   - Many participants believed that KCC was intending to move away from the provision of grants entirely. They were relieved to see a continuing commitment to grants made explicit within the policy.

Some believed that the policy may act as a **catalyst for collaboration** within the sector – but this view was less widespread than those outlined above

Identified risks of the draft policy (1)

1. **Risk that the opportunity/ promise set out in the written document may not translate into real benefits**
   - Participants emphasised that a written policy can only go so far – this must be backed up with action if the relationship is to realise its full potential, rather than being a corporate document that merely "pays lip service" to the sector.
   - It was felt that involving the sector in the development and implementation of the policy was key to ensuring its success – the consultation process was praised as an important starting point in this.
   - The hope that the policy would result in broader interactions with the sector and a more level playing field was felt to involve quite a radical change to the status quo. Some participants feared that KCC might not be brave enough to see these changes through to fruition.
   - If the policy is to have an impact, it needs to secure buy in from all relevant parties; the whole of KCC (including strategic commissioners), the sector, and other stakeholders such as District Councils.

2. **Risk that the diversity of the sector is not fully considered/ accounted for**
   - While the diversity of the sector is mentioned in the policy, there was a concern that the scale of differences between different types of organisation may not be fully appreciated (e.g. a small volunteer-led organisation will face very different challenges and constraints compared with a national charity with a large paid workforce). Some participants felt there was a risk that diversity may be overlooked in an attempt to develop a "one size fits all" approach.
   - Small organisations are likely to need help if they are to benefit from the opportunities potentially open to them in light of the policy. There will be a need for proportionate grant processes to truly achieve an "opening up" of grants to smaller organisations without a history of working with KCC (see subsequent section on Grants).

Identified risks of the draft policy (2)

3. Risk of inappropriate focus on "tick box" outcomes

– There was concern that the funding system described by the policy would place undue focus on outcomes as evidenced by counting/ measuring/ numerical analysis, rather than benefits which are more difficult to measure and the Social Value of any given activity. Preventative impact was considered particularly likely to be overlooked and there was a call to ensure that appropriate emphasis was placed on soft outcomes.

– It was suggested that the sector and KCC need to work together to develop an effective and objective model for measurement of Social Value. More personal interaction between strategic commissioners/ evaluators and VCS organisations was also seen as key to improving holistic outcome measurement.

– There was also a view that the system outlined in the policy may encourage organisations to target their activities towards KCC funding priorities, rather than towards areas of genuine need within the community.

4. Risk that the funding mechanisms identified in the policy may not be the most effective approach

– There was support for adding to the policy an explanation about the relationship between contracts and grants from KCC's perspective. Some participants feared a move towards commissioning of services, rather than grant funding, could have an adverse impact on organisations reliant on grants and unable to generate income in any other way.

– Some participants expressed concern that the Strategic and Innovation grants described in the policy merely replicated current grant funding available from other providers both in terms of their parameters and their timeframe. They wanted KCC to be more bold in devising grants that would fill a gap in funding availability, such as grants for capacity building and staff development. They recommended that KCC should ensure that its grants would genuinely respond to a need in the sector rather than duplicate existing funding.

– The concept of Innovation Grants was generally welcomed, particularly for smaller organisations, although it was felt to be equally important to ensure that tried and tested schemes which work well are able to access from KCC the funding they need to continue.

Identified risks of the draft policy (3)

5. **The timescales given for both Innovation Grants and Strategic Grants were considered too short to allow them to have a real and continuing impact**
   - There was concern that the 1 year and 3 year timeframes could lead to an abrupt end to successful programmes before they had the chance to become sustainable, leaving beneficiaries without the support they had come to rely on.
   - Participants drew particular attention to the limitations of a 1 year Innovation Grant. Taking into account time for project set up, this was considered a very short period for any actual activity which would have a genuine impact. Furthermore, it was felt that true innovation could sometimes be a more long term endeavour – more akin to R&D in the private sector, which can take several years to pay off.
   - There was very limited recognition of the draft policy statement that grants would "not normally" exceed 1 year for Innovation Grants or 3 years for Strategic Grants and this was considered too vague to provide any real reassurance.
   - With respect to health and social care in particular, concern was expressed around the potential impact on smaller local organisations if the commissioning approach outlined were to lead to consolidation within the sector – e.g. with contracts and support being focused on a small number of large players without understanding of the local context. It was felt that requirements for a consortia approach may help to secure continued involvement of small local suppliers, but that these would need to be managed carefully to ensure that smaller organisations are not disadvantaged.

6. **Risk that the language and tone of the policy did not reflect the true value of the sector**
   - Some participants felt the policy contained too much jargon and "local government speak". There was also concern that the tone of the policy could be seen as patronising and paternalistic.
   - Many participants called for the policy to more overtly recognise the professionalism and value of the sector.
   - Some participants highlighted that "sustainability" of the sector was essential and that reliance on funding should not be depicted as a "dependency" issue, rather that KCC should make a commitment to ensure that success within the sector is sustainable.
   - Some participants were concerned that the policy did not recognise the fact that many VCS organisations are social businesses.
   - Some participants suggested that greater VCS involvement in re-drafting the policy would ensure that it communicated more clearly to the sector.

Identified risks of the draft policy (3)

7. Risk of continued confusion surrounding KCC's position

- Although the policy was praised for bringing greater clarity and transparency about KCC's approach, participants identified some outstanding areas of uncertainty that the policy left unresolved:
  - The definition of "Strategic" and "Innovation" grants and the distinction between grants, contracts and service level agreements – not just the technical differences but also the rationale for the use of the different mechanisms in different circumstances
  - How the policy differs from and fits with the Compact
  - What the grants will look like, including the likely value of the "grant pot"
- Many participants felt that there was not enough information on the detail of the anticipated grant offer and processes. They wanted the policy to include or be accompanied by a fuller grant framework document and/or grant prospectus.
- In the absence of information on this, there was some concern that while some grants will continue to be offered, grant funding may be "tokenistic" in nature.
- There was also some element of uncertainty around whether the landscape envisioned by the policy would exacerbate drivers of competition between players within the sector (considered to be unhealthy), rather than fostering collaboration.
- The policy does not contain a definition of what the VCS is.

8. Risk that the policy does not place enough focus on building relationships with sector organisations

- Many participants felt that the policy needed to be more explicit about the value of building a stronger relationship between KCC and the sector, as well as the mechanisms for doing so.

How can KCC ensure that grants as defined in the policy are available and accessible to a wide range of organisations? (1)

1. Ensure that grants are well publicised

– It was felt that, to date, knowledge of the grant funding available from KCC was patchy, and that disseminating this knowledge more widely was vital to achieving the aim of greater transparency in the funding system.

– Organisations would like to have a full picture of the funding opportunities open to them and to be made aware of these opportunities in sufficient time to allow them to make an effective application.

– It was suggested that an annual grant prospectus, setting out the detail of the grants to be offered across the year, would be particularly useful in allowing organisations to target their applications towards those opportunities where they are likely to have most chance of success and to plan for application deadlines well in advance. A prospectus of this kind has been successfully developed in East Sussex.

– The importance of partnership working in sharing information about grant opportunities was highlighted. Making use of organisations such as Kent CAN or the Community Foundation was considered a key way for KCC to avoid replication of effort and to reach a wider range of organisations.

– The possibility of collaboration with other funders was also mentioned. Helping Kent VCS organisations to find out about and access other funding sources was considered to be an important role that KCC could play, alongside direct funding provision.

2. Effectively communicate what KCC are looking for from applicants

– A lack of detailed information on exactly what KCC would be looking for in terms of grant applications was identified as a weakness of the policy. Having a clear understanding was considered vital to allow organisations to make an informed decision about whether they should bid and to ensure they are able to put forward an effective business case as part of their application.

– Publication of information/case studies about previous successful bids would be a useful tool to help with this.

How can KCC ensure that grants as defined in the policy are available and accessible to a wide range of organisations? (2)

3. Ensure that application processes are proportionate and as simple as possible

– Complex application procedures were identified as a key barrier potentially discouraging smaller, less experienced organisations from applying for grants.

– Participants called for the process to be made as easy as possible, with clear language and transparent instructions around the requirements to be met and evidence to be submitted.

– Proportionality of application processes in relation to the scale of funds available was considered vital. Overly arduous procedures for small pots of money were considered unnecessary and off-putting. This was also felt to be true of evaluation/ reporting at the end of any funded project.

– The KCC website and Portal were not considered fit for purpose in terms of making it easy to apply for grants, with a suggestion that something more tailored, for example a separate site or specific sign-posted area, would be more helpful. The website was felt to be difficult to navigate while the Portal was identified as too complicated and not user-friendly. It was suggested that a downloadable application form may be more appropriate than the need to submit applications via the Portal.

– It was suggested that appointing an independent third party organisation such as Kent Community Foundation to administer grants could be beneficial.

4. Provide help and support for potential applicants where needed

– Many participants, particularly those from smaller organisations, highlighted the need for guidance and support around applying for funding successfully. Identified needs include training/ mentoring as well as resources such as step by step guides to the application process.

– It was suggested that fostering an environment of more open dialogue between the sector and KCC staff/ commissioners could be very helpful e.g. if this meant that organisations could easily check their understanding of application criteria or "sound out" a KCC representative for an initial response to any ideas before committing to a full application (considered particularly important for Innovation grants).

How to ensure infrastructure support is fit for the future?

1. Try to overcome the "market failure" issues affecting the provision of infrastructure support

- Many participants recognised that the effective provision of infrastructure support will involve overcoming some difficult issues. The organisations most in need of this support (generally those who are smaller or newly formed) can be unable or unwilling to pay for it, meaning there is no commercial market for these services. This makes providers reliant on funding to deliver this support but also often in need of other grants or contracts to be sustainable, which can make smaller organisations wary and reluctant to engage if they see them as competitors.

- It was suggested that to be fit for purpose, infrastructure support needs to be impartial and that it would be beneficial to separate out the delivery of infrastructure support from other competing activities. There were calls for a "clean hands" organisation to take the lead on this in order to ensure full trust in partnership working and support.

2. Encourage the provision of specific, tailored support

- Areas of identified need include help with accessing funding and making grant applications but also "business support" type activities in areas such as HR or payroll. More strategic support around business planning was also mentioned. Small organisations with the greatest need for support often found this hard to access, as did growing organisations, including those transitioning from operating on an entirely voluntary basis to employing a first paid staff member.

- A Business Link style organisation to support the VCS was suggested. There was also a suggestion that KCC could help by offering access to organisational resources, leadership training and HR support.

- It was felt that generic, "one size fits all" support was not always appropriate. Support needs to be relevant, flexible and worthy of the time commitment required to engage with it. Mentoring is considered a desirable support mechanism, with advantages in terms of its tailored nature and the sustainability of learning delivered in this way.

- The existing STAMP programme was praised by some, but it was suggested that this could be opened up to a wider range of organisations.   Some participants perceived that the STAMP events and advice had become expensive and questioned the value of their relevance and appeal.

- Some participants mentioned that they would like more choice in terms of the infrastructure support available to them.

How to facilitate information, skill sharing and engagement? (1)

1. Information sharing across the sector is felt to be important but currently patchy

- This was seen as an area where improvements could be made. There was an appetite for more sharing of information but a feeling that there were challenges to overcome around the fragmented nature of the sector and historic pressures fostering an atmosphere of competition rather than collaboration.

- There was a suggestion that the principles of clarity and transparency outlined in the policy could help to address some of these issues.

2. Networking must have a purpose

- While networking is considered important, small organisations in particular can find it hard to justify spending time on this. Therefore, potential attendees must be confident that they will get something out of any networking activity or forums if they are to participate.

- It was suggested that combining networking opportunities with filling an information need could be particularly successful, with events related to accessing funding considered likely to be particularly popular.

- The most valuable events were considered to be those giving the opportunity to meet previously unknown new contacts. There was considered to be potential for innovative ways to bring sector groups together, perhaps on a thematic basis. However, meeting those with a different perspective (e.g. operating a different model or serving different beneficiaries) was in some cases felt to be of particular use.

How to facilitate information, skill sharing and engagement? (2)

3. Making connections

– Organisations would value help and support allowing them to make beneficial connections with others, including:

- Mapping the sector – to give a picture of the other organisations that are in existence (currently felt to be lacking)
- "Matchmaking" – e.g. bringing together small new organisations with large experienced players they may be able to work with or learn from
- Encouraging connections outside of the sector – e.g. with the business community. There was a feeling that the public, private and VCS sectors should come together more and that the private sector should be encouraged to do more in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility
- Encouraging connections/ sharing with those outside of Kent (although the unique nature of the county should be borne in mind)

4. Mixed views regarding KCC's role

– Some participants thought that KCC should play an active role in facilitating information, skill sharing and engagement across the VCS and that this would demonstrate commitment to the sector. However, others believed that this was not the place of the local authority and it should leave the sector to take this forward alone without interference.

– The general feeling was that KCC involvement in some capacity may be useful, either through funding forums or events or through "in kind" support such as the provision of venues.

Messages to KCC from participants

All participants were invited to write a key message to KCC at the end of each event. Here are their messages:

Message to KCC: Maidstone participants (1)

- Full marks for undertaking this
- Read the feedback document thoroughly and listen to what the volunteer sector has to say
- That the final document reflects the "partnership" and is worded appropriately – and it is not seen as a dictate
- Include more emphasis on the Care Act 2015 in terms of practical support to independent voluntary organisations who have specialist skills
- That KCC listen more to the people on the ground who understand the needs of the community better
- Support all voluntary sector organisations with becoming business focused. Encourage those organisations to take responsibility and not expect KCC to give, give, give
- As well as the feedback from consultation groups see if there are any other policy documents in any other areas that have been produced to compare
- The devil is in the detail – look forward to seeing how it is implemented
- Importance of on-going flexible support for small/community/local groups
- Stop creating artificial markets
- Keep grants and maintain infrastructure support
- Thank you for the time and consideration given to host this event. Please don't let this just be tokenistic but have an impact for those communities it really effects
- Be brave! Be bold! Effective change is sometimes painful. Outsource all grants admin to KCF
- I would like to see more info about how KCC sees Social Value objectives in VCS
- Please get officers and Cabinet members out to meet with the sector
- Keep talking to the sector, there are some people with fantastic ideas already operating that you could learn from
- Many policies/strategies overlap and there is a knock on effect to others. Please ensure all organisations have an opportunity to comment on every strategy and not just those relevant to their organisation

Message to KCC: Maidstone participants (2)

- Engagement should include beneficiaries, e.g. in sharing best practice with other areas
- You can sometimes learn more from organisations who are not related to your area than from those who do a similar thing to you
- Very informative meeting. Funding must be people led. Relevant to all needs of large and small charities. Funding needs to be published. Grants for more than 1 year. KCC to look at other counties.
- Continue to invest in the Third Sector
- Diversity is everything – one size DOESN'T fit all. Keep it simple and as local as possible. Make sure the people who decide who gets funding have all the information – panels make better, more accountable decisions than one person in isolation
- Funding innovation is important but so is funding what works and 1 year funding is OK for pilots but 2-3 year funding should be considered with built in reviews
- Keep infrastructure support for volunteers and volunteering
- Please ensure this is a dynamic strategy. Build in review process that responds to changing circumstances and needs. Have you consulted with other stakeholders? Borough, District Councils, CCGs, Police etc

Message to KCC: Ashford participants (1)

- Please take on board, listen, and act on the comments and feedback these sessions have provided
- Treat us fairly, professionally, and with the respect that we deserve. KCC needs to get its own house in order first to support us adequately
- Does KCC fully understand the scope of the sector from volunteer-led organisations, professional niche organisations, and social businesses? Do KCC know which parts, or parts of the hierarchy it wants to commission and how they work together?
- 1) Plan what service you need, 2) Put it in writing, 3) Go out to tender, 4) Be consistent in your approach, 5) Be professional
- The contracting and tendering processes are forcing organisations into competitive silos. Lead partnerships / consortiums in the future will be affected by these barriers. Think carefully!
- Set realistic deadlines for grants and contracts (and stick to them) so that all organisations are able to apply – whilst also doing the day job
- KCC must become proactive deliverers, not reactive. Money will be an issue.
- Brilliant response about culture change that is happening in relation to Social Value Act. Happy to engage/hear more.
- Good opportunity to discuss the policy. Hope what was said is acted on.
- Concerns regarding the ability of KCC's future strategic partners being able to provide a large proportion of services themselves. This will reduce capacity and diversity within VCS.
- Remember the true value of the voluntary sector – we are not just a 'cheap' solution!!
- It really doesn't have to be so complicated and time consuming. Review the Kent Business Portal and website. Provide us with funded positions so that experts in funding, bid writing, tender writing, HR etc… can be tapped into by small charities.
- Thanks for organising this, lots of wisdom and experiences in the groups – if policy is tweaked accordingly it would be great.
- Great opportunity to share views and give input "Please listen"
- Application/mentoring process needs to be proportionate to grant awarded. Process needs to be simplified – portal is difficult to access
- **Continued…**

Message to KCC: Ashford participants (2)

- Thank you for the opportunity for an open discussion and debate. But how do we keep the conversation going over the years

- With the advent of KCC becoming a Strategic Commissioning Authority it is my view that commissioners need to be less risk averse about using the Third Sector to deliver public services

- More emphasis on developing relationships. Involve the whole of the sector (e.g. religious and other groups)

- Need to understand clearly in advance of grant applications both: what outcomes are measured and importantly how they are measured

- Procurement and payment must be on time – not late as can be the case. Infrastructure for VCS must be seen as essential support for community based services and for local engagement. Access to grants, KCC and other funding to be simplified and not over monitored

- KCC must recognise the Social Value of the Voluntary/Community/Sector. £1 supporting the VCS results in £8 benefit to volunteers/service users/the local authority/health service. The policy and the Authority needs to recognise this

- Take into account the value of the Voluntary Sector when commissioning services

- Language – talk about investment in the VCS NOT the cost to KCC in documents

- Consider grants to be an investment not a 'hand out'. An investment in creating a better community. An investment in preventing people needing statutory services

- We are not a "cheap" alternative – we are fabulous value for money! Professional, expert, committed and dedicated people in the VCS sector – support them properly

- Glad KCC are having these conversations. VCS still has a way to catch up whether it admits it or not. Having just joined the statutory sector after 10 years with the VCS there are definitely lots of potential partnerships and collaboration to develop and build upon

- Very positive meeting in terms of quickly unearthing key issues and honest input. Would get more benefit from following up with specific requests for comments after reflection, than, 'please feed in your thoughts'

Message to KCC: Canterbury participants

- Joint commissioning of the VCS with health. Public health grants especially for issues that may affect certain communities more than others e.g. HIV
- The policy needs to be clear about your plans re grants vs contracts
- Thank you – useful event. I hope that key points will be actually carried through.
- (1) Need to see relationship context: Grants: commissioning, Complimentary? Filling the gaps?
    - (2) Anxiety over commissioning toolkits: can have the best toolkits in the world, but if we aren't culturing [?], expecting 'intelligent' commissioners, evaluators….
    - (3) It's worth revisiting some of the earlier stuff "the baby that went out with the bathwater" 2010, from some of the really excellent stuff developed for key line of enquiry with CAA
    - (especially re: CVS – "Where life value approach" (not cost) (I looked at this when working as a programme manager for the National SPC Group)
- Learn from successes and failures outside of Kent and celebrate/support great work done by the VCS here… especially where you have been part of the mechanics that has helped create these positives!
- I think the elected members need to get more involved to understand what is happening.
- A more strategic approach to the VCS as a business sector
- To clarify the grants system, service level agreements and contracts. Is it by size, value, purpose?
- Please make the portal easier or train us how to use it
- If you ask for innovation there has to be space for successful innovation to be measured and developed
- Don't tell us in your language, listen to us in ours
- Venn diagram of Public, Private and VCS
- The STAMP events have been arranged for the VCS but there has been a hefty charge! It is quite unacceptable that we have been invited and then asked to pay. No doubt there was a poor attendance from the VCS as a result.

Appendix

Event invitation circulated amongst the sector

Invitation email

Share your views with Kent County Council – Come and shape the development of a new policy for the VCS sector

Dear Colleague,
Kent County Council are currently developing a new policy for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in the county and would like to invite you to a consultation session to allow you to share your views on the draft policy as well as on the support the sector will need in the future to ensure that it is self-sustaining, that it continues to thrive and that your organisation can continue to achieve its aims.

Three identical sessions will be taking place as follows:
Maidstone (Hilton Hotel) – Thursday June 4th, 2PM-4PM
Ashford (International Hotel) – Wednesday June 10th, 9AM-11AM
Canterbury (Christchurch University, Hall Place Campus) – Friday June 12th, 9AM- 11AM

Facts International is an independent market research company. We are working with the Council to arrange and facilitate these events to ensure the feedback gathered on the draft policy is unbiased and to aid open and transparent engagement.

If you would like to attend one of the events, please use the following link to register your interest:
http://survey.euro.confirmit.com/wix/p1843718197.aspx

Spaces are limited but if there is a place available at your chosen event we will contact you to confirm and send you further information about the events and venues.

We are aiming to get feedback from as many VCS organisations in Kent as possible, from small community groups to larger constituted charities. Therefore, if you know of any associates who may be interested or if you have a colleague who you would like to attend on your behalf, please forward this email to them and encourage them to register.
An online survey is also being conducted to gather feedback on the draft policy. This can be found here: www.kent.gov.uk/vcspolicy and should take around 10 minutes to complete. The online survey will be open until June 18th.
The consultation exercises we are undertaking will inform Kent County Council's final VCS policy and the Council's future relationship with the sector. Engagement in this process will play a vital role in ensuring that the policy truly reflects the crucial part the sector plays in achieving strong and resilient communities and in supporting KCC to achieve its outcomes for the residents of Kent.

We do hope you are able to make one of the events and really appreciate your contribution to this valuable consultation. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or queries at all or if you experience any problems with registering for an event.

Kind Regards