

East Sussex Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector Alliance

Dear ESCC colleagues,

**Re: ESCC funding gap consultations**

I write on behalf of the East Sussex VCSE Alliance, in response to your consultation on the funding gap the council is facing. Firstly, thank you for the information you have provided about the financial position, and the open dialogue that you have maintained with the third sector through the consultation process and key vehicles such as Partnership Plus.

We recognise the significant financial pressures that ESCC is facing, along with the legal duty to meet your statutory obligations and balance your budgets by addressing the £55m funding gap for 2025/26. Whilst acknowledging the financial challenges ahead, we have significant concerns about the impact of the proposed savings on local people and are requesting further clarity on several points. We understand that there are no easy choices and are aware that ESCC officers recognise that changes to service delivery at this scale will bring unintended but known consequences in both the medium and long term. Alliance members are also concerned about likely *immediate* impact on vulnerable service users. We have noted that statutory duties under the Care Act will be honoured, however our members wish to better understand how some of the most vulnerable local people will be supported to maintain dignity and choice in care.

We have noted that the council intends to implement mitigations to the impact of the proposals. What preventative measures are in place, or envisaged, should the proposed cuts to service delivery go ahead?

The Alliance is also keen to ensure that any opportunities the proposals might provide to communities are not overlooked. An example of this could be to explore, as part of the SPACES programme, asset transfer of affected buildings from the public to the voluntary sector. This support and ownership could enable VCSE organisations to develop new services to support affected communities. It would also support sector resilience by enabling VCSE partners to reduce rental outgoings, which might mitigate some of the potential cuts to funding, as well as the financial pressure facing our sector as a result of minimum wage and employers' National Insurance Contribution increases.

We are wholly committed to continuing to work in partnership with ESCC, including coproducing solutions to support local people throughout the extremely financially challenging time ahead. That said, we must be transparent about the voluntary sector's likely future landscape and capacity, which will not be sufficient to pick up the shortfall and increased demands that will follow as a result of the proposed cuts. We welcome commitments made across the system to work together via Partnership Plus to understand the impact of the proposed changes, and hope that we can coproduce some innovative solutions and opportunities for investment to mitigate the risk to East Sussex residents.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jennifer Twist', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jennifer Twist  
Chair – East Sussex VCSE Alliance