

Social Infrastructure Report: Officer consultation and feedback

Context and feedback:

- A consultation workshop with senior council officers was held in December 2023, attended by officers from Strategy, Education, Commissioning, Culture and Heritage, and Public Health. Colleagues noted that awareness of local VCSE groups had increased because of the work of the current social infrastructure contract provider, that funding has been brought into the borough that wouldn't have otherwise been available, for example, £70,000 into the culture and heritage function. Colleagues also noted an increased recognition of Barking and Dagenham as a place that is embedding innovative and exciting work into practice.
- Officers noted several challenges in working with the VCSE that may be brought into focus in the new contract from July 2024. Noted was a tension between the provider's role and that of the CVS. There was also a lack of clarity around the best ways to engage with the provider and what was acceptable to ask for. A clear description of outcomes and deliverables will be required to mitigate against this confusion in the next phase.
- To build trust and partnerships in the next phase, more information was requested from council officers about what is in scope and the role of the VCSE sector, as well as consistency of meetings with VCSE representatives. These desired outcomes can be achieved by more joint meetings between sectors to share knowledge and increase understanding.
- To improve the relationship between the VCSE and council, officers expressed preference for a representative role of the provider on behalf of the VCSE, to engage organisations and to help council officers understand the borough's communities.

Questions used:

1. What has gone well in working with the VCSE/BD Collective over the last few years from your perspective?
2. What obstacles have you faced in working with the BD Collective or VCSE in the past few years, and what could improve that?
3. How can we continue to build trust and effective partnerships with our VCSE partners? What would support this?
4. Are you aware of Discourse? Have you or your staff used it, and if so, have you found it effective?
5. What role(s) would you like the provider to play in relation to the relationship between the council and the sector?