Feedback report: Community strategy engagement

Executive summary

This was a targeted engagement, rather than large scale open engagement, aimed to get quality insight, rather than a lot of quantitative data. Responses were received from all categories in the first question, except visitors, although it was not an even split. There were 39 responses, almost half from residents.

There was strong support for most needs identified and little disagreement. No particular area/sector had opposing or much stronger views than another. There was also a positive response when asked if respondents could work collaboratively to deliver the strategy's ambitions. Nineteen people/groups/organisations have provided contact information so they can remain involved.

It was felt that all needs were being addressed to some extent already. In some cases this might suggest the strategy is not the most appropriate place for the need to be (e.g. formal consultation) or it could be that rationalising who or how some are adressed would result in a more focussed service and better value/funds for other things (e.g. funding information).

Some further needs were identified, primarily relating to removing barriers and improving inclusion for all.

Themes are listed alphabetically in the body of the report for ease of reference. There are seven main areas, ranging from business and community collaboration to volunteering and support, plus a breakdown of comments regarding a joint vision. Most themes are linked to the 13 needs identified, but have been 'coded' during analysis to show interconnects between them.

There were some general concerns relating to the strategy disadvantaging those with protected characteristics. There were always more positive impacts than negative impacts identified for all. In fact, with two exceptions (pregnancy/maternity and religion), at least twice as many respondents felt it would have a positive impact on each group than a negative one. This was closer to four or five times more respondents thinking there would be a positive impact, on age (37:10) and disability (33:7), than a negative one.

Introduction, including background and context

The corporate plan was launched in 2020, which included commitments to residents, visitors and businesses. To support its delivery, a number of strategies and processes are being developed with crossovers and linkages between them all.

The community strategy is one such document. It will rely on improved partnership working, co-design and co-delivery to make it a success and achieve the best outcomes for people in Lincolnshire.

Over a number of years feedback has been gathered on needs, aspirations and contributions made by people in the county. During that time, discussions have taken place regarding how to ensure public funding to voluntary sector infrastructure organisations achieves the best value it can. In addition, amid the launch of the corporate plan, the Covid-19 pandemic has seen communities pull together to help one another in a way not usually seen in 'peace time'.

Methodology, including pre-engagement

Prior to a period of targeted engagement, regarding needs identified through local intelligence, conversations with colleagues and priorities from across Lincolnshire, a set of draft proposals were presented to a number of voluntary sector partners to test the council's thinking.

An equality impact assessment (EIA) was conducted to identify whether the strategy might have a negative or positive impact on people with protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act) and other groups, such as people living in poverty or those providing unpaid care to loved ones.

Findings were incorporated into the draft strategy and engagement commenced. In line with the customer and digital strategy drafts, comments were invited over a three week period. This was not a large scale, open engagement, but targeted at those who might be best placed to support the strategy's delivery.

Infrastructure bodies (with an offer to pass on to their networks), including representative bodies for people with protected characteristics, town and parish councils and members of the public who have expressed an interest in county council services were informed directly of the opportunity to participate.

People were offered an alternative means of participating if they were unable to access the online survey, but no request was received for alternative means of engagement beyond the digital offer. A further conversation was held with voluntary sector organisations and information was shared via the county council Facebook

page when the survey was available and a reminder to take part before it closed. The information was available in the county council engagement directory online.

A review of the results so far was collated two weeks into the engagement and a small number of additional responses were received as a result of a reminder to respond by Friday 9 July. The survey closed at noon on this date and results collated in SNAP software.

Quantitative data

Respondents

Almost half of all respondents described themselves as residents. A smaller proportion of other categories were represented. The number of community groups and town/parish councils in particular do not reflect numbers across the county.

In the chart below, the Y axis shows the number of respondents and the data label above each column shows this as a percentage of all respondents.
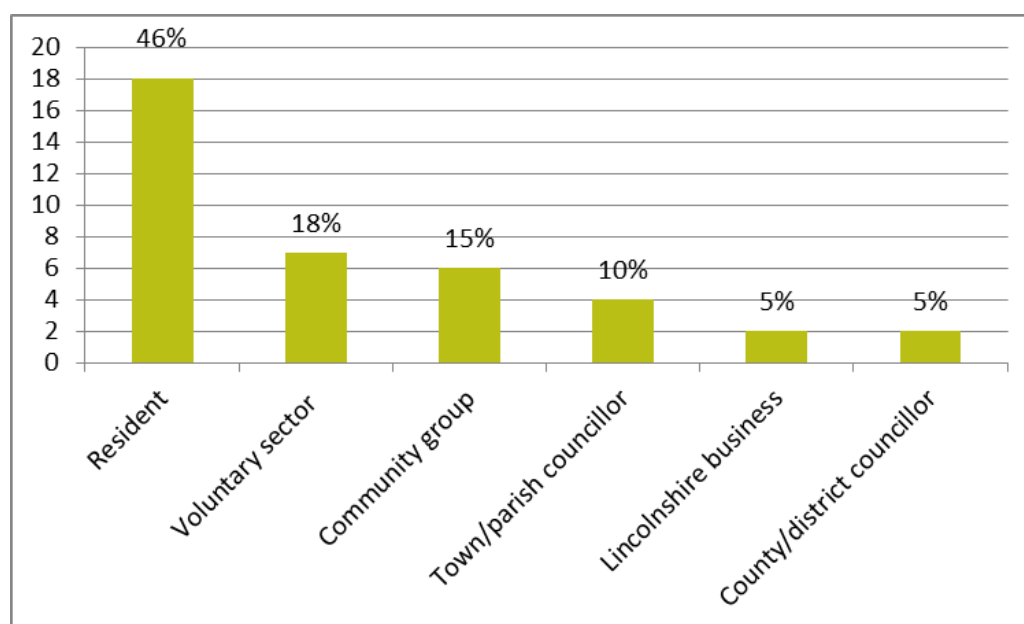
The chart below shows the district people said they live / work / are based in (10 respondents did not answer this question)
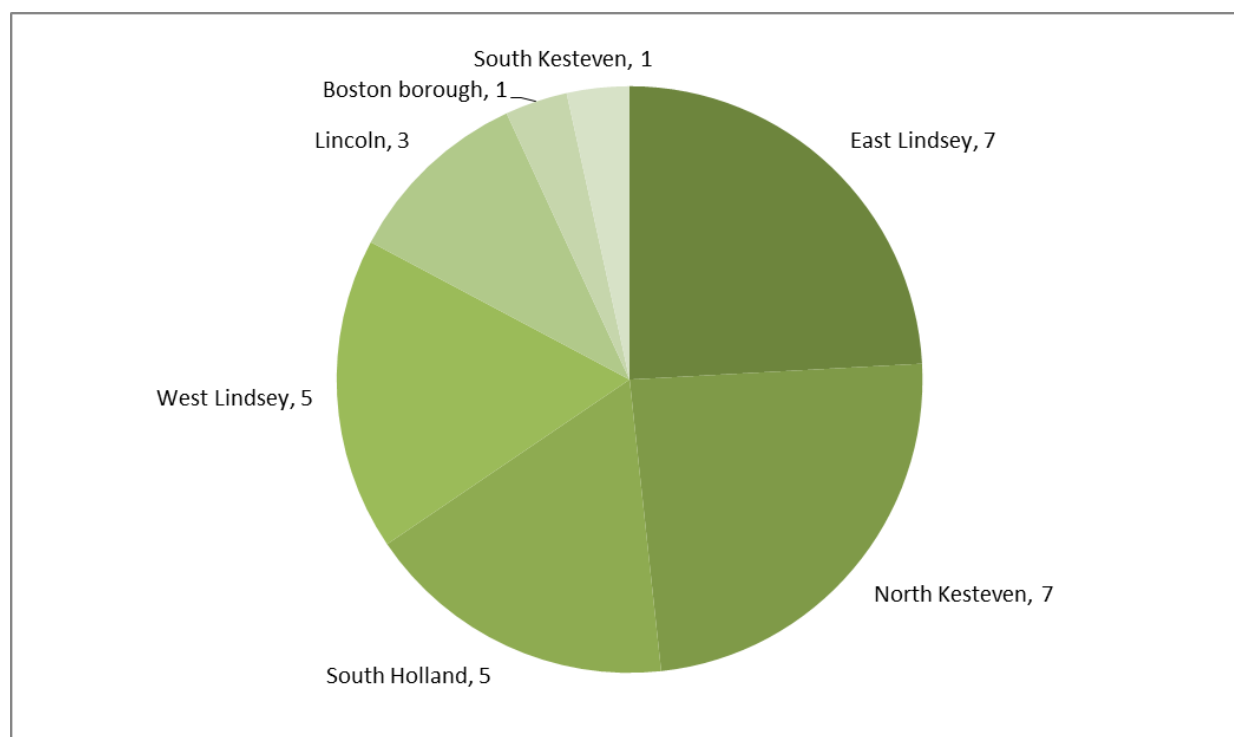

Needs proposed

There was overwhelming support for the needs identified in the draft proposals, as seen in the chart below. There was no pattern that indicated a particular geographic or respondent category split, but some very strong individual feelings identified through very positive or negative quantitative responses and comments.

The highest response received highlighted that respondents strongly agreed (97%, 35 respondents) that community groups should be aware of funding available to them. A further three respondents agreed and only one person disagreed (they felt it was already the case that information exists). However, when asked whether this was already being adressed and would not expect this to be a need within the action plan, 12 (31%) respondents felt it was. Similarly, 32 (82%) respondents strongly agreed and 6 (15%) agreed and no one disagreed that funding provided to communities and groups should deliver maximum impact and offer value for money.

Just over one in 10 (12%, 4 respondents) disagreed that there should be an increase in the alignment or promotion of volunteering opportunities for those working in, or with Lincolnshire County Council. Similarly, 12% (4 respondents) either strongly disagreed (1) or disagreed (3) there should be a shared vision and purpose developed. There were seven comments related to the difficulty of agreeing such a

broad/multi-faceted agenda, but two felt it was a good idea and two felt that commonality would be a good place to start.
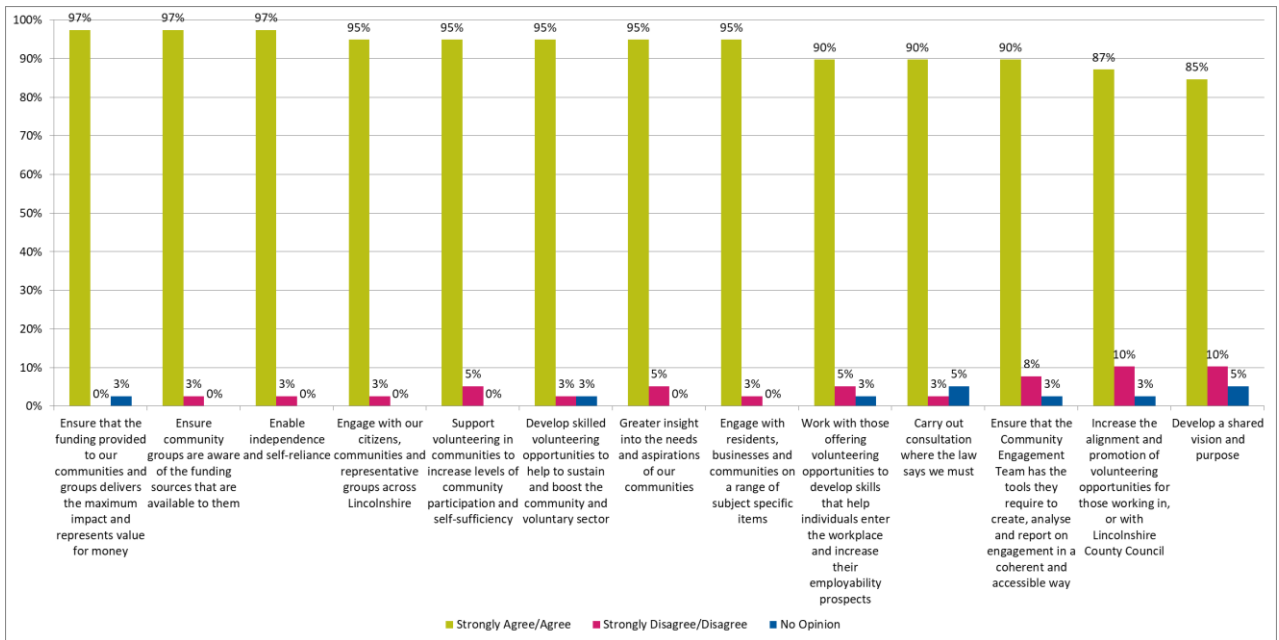
Already being addressed

Respondents were asked if they felt any of the needs identified were already being addressed and would therefore not expect to appear in the action plan.

At least five respondents felt each of the needs identified were already being addressed, as shown in the chart below. The highest number of respondents who felt this way was 17 (44%). This was in relation to consultation being carried out when the law says it should be (i.e., the county council has a statutory duty). The lowest number (13%) related to independence and self-reliance being enabled.
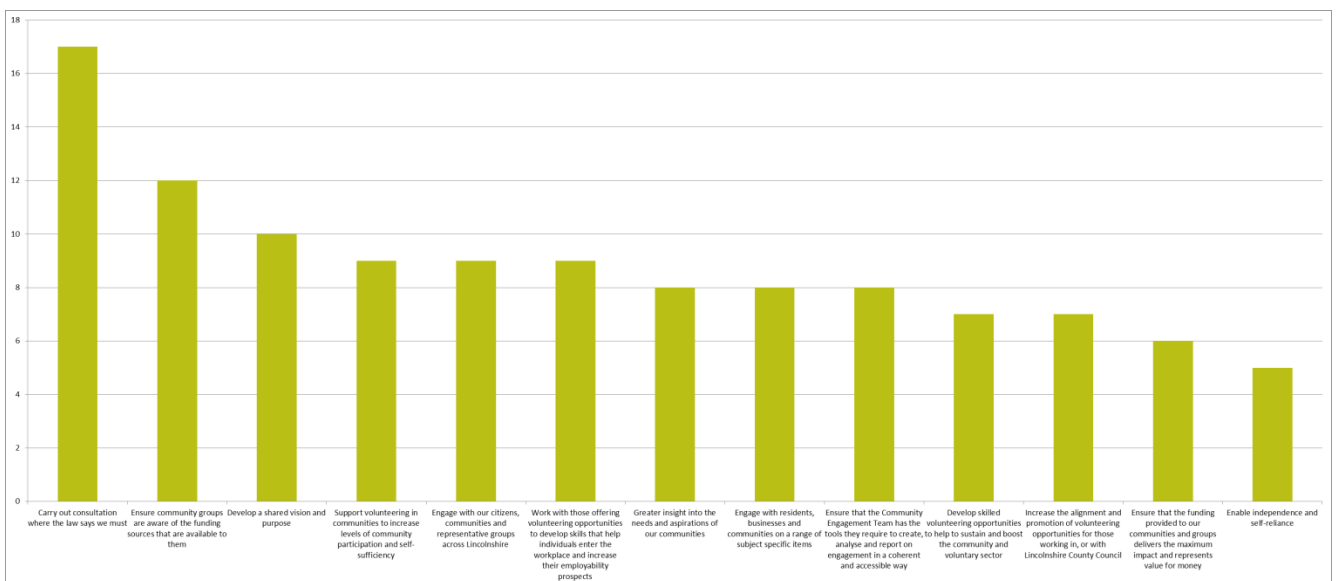
Working together

A minimum of seven respondents felt able to work collaboratively to address the needs identified in, and deliver the ambitions of the strategy. A further minimum of five felt they might possibly be able to. The most positive response came from residents where one in three felt able to help. This is a potentially great basis for genuine co-production.

The area most felt able to work collaboratively was sharing insight into community needs and aspirations. Some respondents commented that they are local/based/work within communities so are well placed to impart intelligence.

The needs fewer people felt able to work collaboratively on were those where very specialist knowledge is required, such as statutory consultation and skilled volunteer opportunity development. Conversely, the area with most 'yes' responses was to support volunteering in communities to increase levels of community participation and self-sufficiency.

The chart below shows the number of respondents who said yes (green) and those who said 'possibly' (in blue). The Y axis shows the total number of positive responses overall. Some (19) have provided contact details so they are able to remain informed and involved.
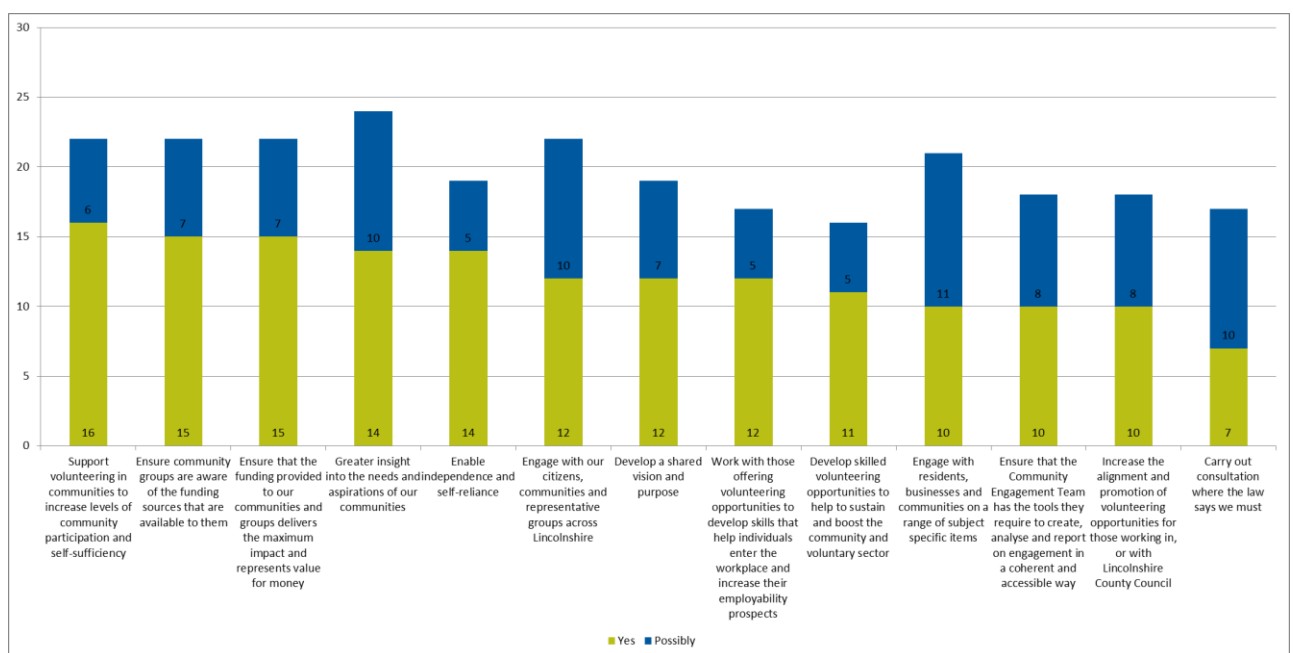
Themes

A number of recurring elements and themes were identified among the comments on each question. They are summarised in the chart below, which indicates if comments were positive, negative or neutral/observations or ideas.
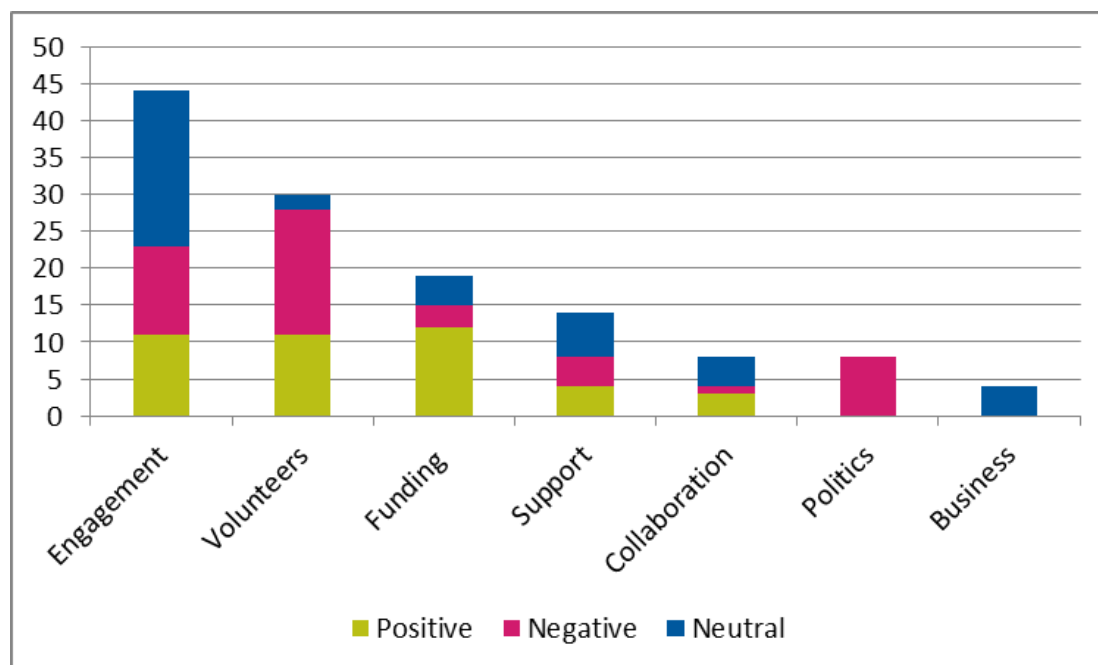
Engagement and communications (44)

More (21) were observations and ideas. Highlighting a need to return to different methods of engagement, post-Covid, to improve inclusivity; being less LCC-centric and ensuring good promotion of opportunities to participate were recurring themes.

There was an almost equal number of negative views (12 – primarily relating to how things are currently done) compared to positive ones (11 – primarily relating to how things could/should be done).

Volunteering (29)

Comments were more likely to be positive about volunteers and volunteering than negative. Conversely, there were more concerns than positive remarks overall about perceptions of the roles volunteers play (what could be paid roles, how people who cannot afford to volunteer can do so without risking their already low income) and how the system works and the most frequently made individual comment was that this should be done in partnership with the voluntary sector.

Funding (19)

There were more positive (12) than negative (3) comments overall with praise for access to information and a need to continue funding the sector, but concern that there needs to be greater co-ordination and promotion across the board. Examples of organisations working together were cited throughout.

Support needs (14)

Most comments were observations (10) and there was an equal positive and negative split (four each, two neutral). There was positivity about co-ordination and quality to help communities thrive, but negativity relating to quality and availability in some places. Local knowledge and support for those who support communities and those in most need were highlighted (geographically, financially and inclusively).

Collaboration (8)

Working together was identified as a key part of the draft strategy engagement. There are different levels of collaboration and partnership and different people/ organisations will need to be involved in different elements of need. Co-production was raised as a potential solution to a number of challenges, including how to ensure funding achieves maximum impact and value for money.

Politics (8)

All eight comments were negative. They related to a lack of clarity in the council's role within communities to accusations of self-interest being prioritised over doing good for and promoting the needs of local people.

Business (4)

All four comments related to the business sector needing help and support or for organisations not used to operating businesses to be supported to be more business-like.

Inclusion (8)

The need respondents felt was missing was inclusivity, i.e. not disadvantaging some groups because of circumstance or using incorrect methods of engagement. Avoiding giving greater opportunity/voice to a 'noisy minority' was mentioned twice. Those specifically identified are highlighted in the EIA and protected characteristics section below and included people living in poverty/on low incomes, the young and old, rurally isolated, physically isolated, e.g. people in homes for older people or people with mental health issues.

Vision (13)

Nine comments relating to creating a shared vision were negative. Whilst there is a general appetite to work together, it is not necessarily supported by a united vision. Most comments related to the difficulty of achieving this when the strategy and county and its communities are so diverse.

There were only four positive remarks. Two of which simply stated this was a good idea and two that offered a simple proposed focus/theme for a vision; resilience and commonality.

Negative comments about the concept of a shared vision
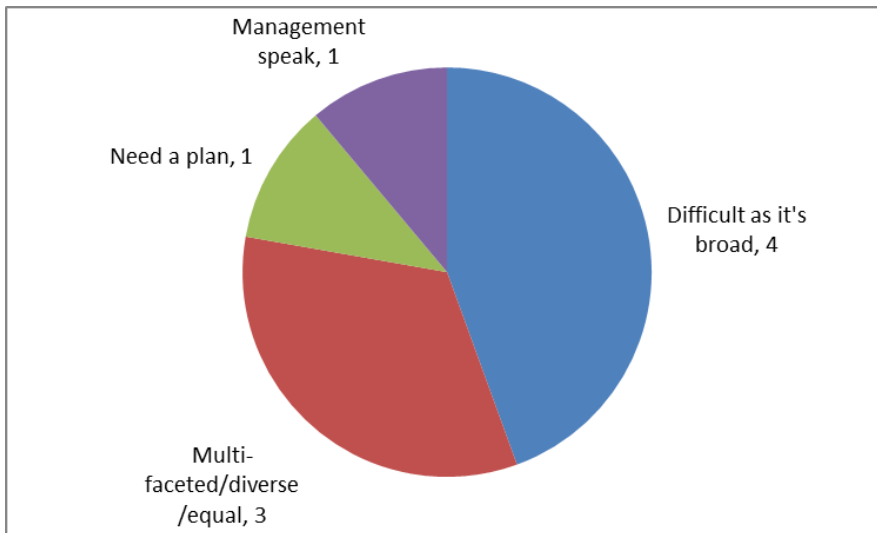
Positive comments about the concept of a shared vision
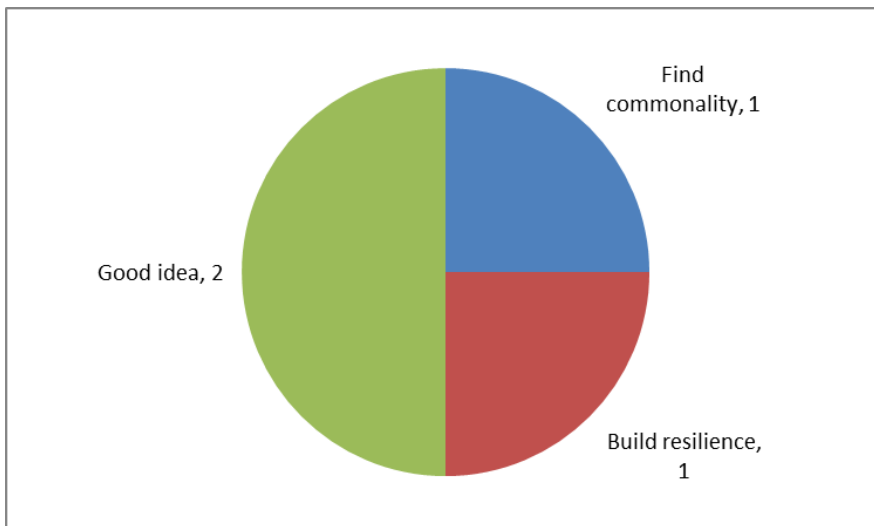
Equalities

The chart below shows the percentage (identified numerically at the top of the positive and negative columns) of respondents who believe there will be a positive or negative impact on those with protected characteristics.

The largest proportion of respondents did not feel they could comment or had no opinion. They are on the chart in blue, but percentages are not highlighted as data labels. On average, around seven in 10 felt they couldn't offer an informed opinion.

Almost four in 10 (37%, 11 respondents) felt it would benefit people because of their age, conversely 10% (3) felt they would be disadvantaged because of it.

Four respondents (14%) felt this would disadvantage people because of their religious beliefs and only just over one fifth (21%, six respondents) felt they would benefit because of their beliefs.

Two of the 18 residents (11%) felt the strategy would have a negative impact on all groups with protected characteristics. One explaining that they felt there was a general lack of focus on inclusivity.

The group likely to see the smallest difference in impact (three percentage points or one response difference between positive and negative impacts) is those who are pregnant or with very young families.

With the exception of pregnancy/maternity and religion, at least twice as many respondents felt the strategy would have a positive impact on each group than a negative one. This was closer to four or five times more respondents thinking there would be a positive impact, on age (37:10) and disability (33:7), than a negative one.

Other groups identified as potentially being excluded are carers and low income households, particularly in East Lindsey and Lincoln. In other questions rurally isolated individuals/businesses and the digitally excluded are identified as at risk of being left behind by the approach proposed. This reflects EIA desktop research.
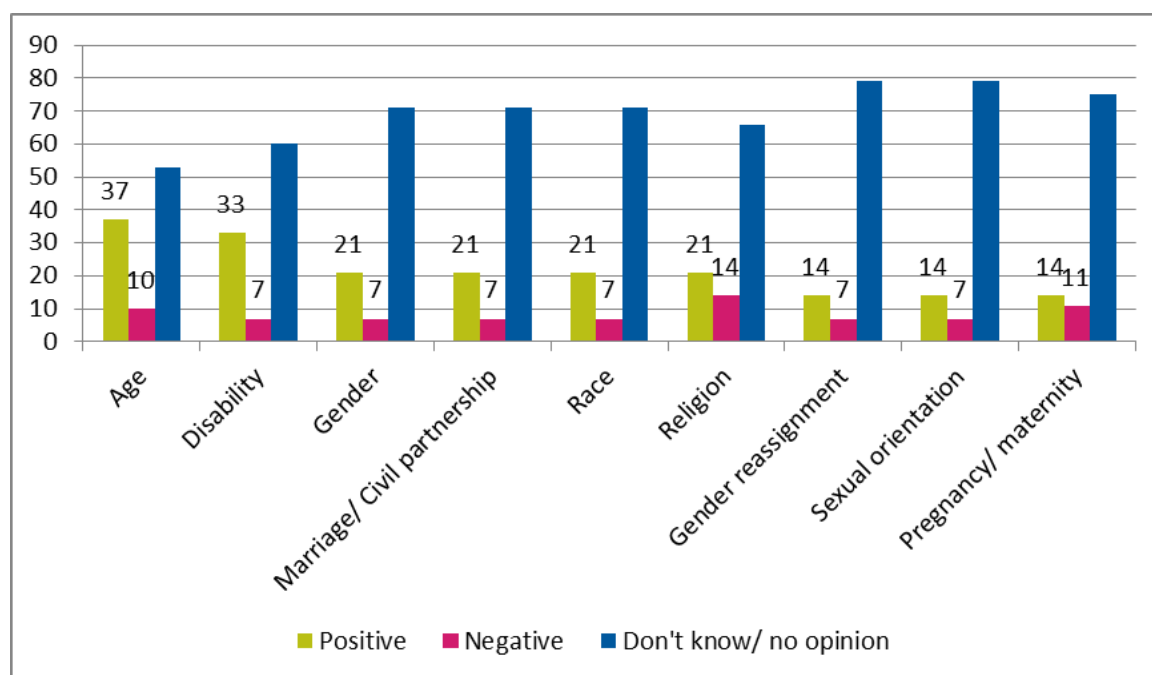
Conclusion and recommendations

There was not an even spread of representation from all categories responding to this survey. This could be said to further evidence the need for a database of voluntary and community sector groups or could be a reflection of the timeframe used for engagement. It did not allow for a whole cycle of town/parish council meetings to take place in order that the clerk could raise the matter before it closed.

Agreement with the needs identified in the proposed strategy was overwhelmingly positive. There was no pattern that indicated a particular geographic or respondent category split.

At least one in 10 respondents felt all needs were already being addressed and were surprised to see them in the action plan.

This does not mean they should be removed or should not continue to be addressed, but there appeared to be confusion regarding why carrying out statutory consultation was included when, by its nature, the law demands it.

Perhaps more surprisingly, three in 10 respondents felt that making groups aware of funding was already being addressed, when this was the matter which received most strong agreement in the previous section.

Recommendation: Consider if this strategy action plan is the correct place for all 13 needs identified to be included or if some are 'business as usual' or need refinement/rationalisation, rather than removal.

There was a positive response to people working collaboratively with the council, particularly among those identifying themselves as residents.

Recommendation: Use momentum from this positive response to work collaboratively. This is a potentially great basis for co-design, co-delivery and even genuine co-production when opportunities arise.

The positive impacts on those with protected characteristics outweigh the negatives in every case and reflect the assumptions made in the draft EIA.

Recommendation: Update the EIA to reflect findings. Consider further engagement of some representatives where positive impacts do not far outweigh negative ones or there is an assumption they might be excluded to establish how to overcome barriers.