

County Local Forum Review, Consultation Feedback

This document sets out responses from members gathered through the seven informal area-based Locality Sessions held in July and August 2022 and through an online (anonymous) survey. Attendance at the Locality Sessions and response rates to the Survey are set out below. In the analysis of responses provided, some of the figures may not sum as all questions were not answered.

Overall attendance/response rates:

Area	Total no. of members	Locality Session attendance	Survey response rate
Adur	5	4	1
Arun	12*	7	3
Chichester	10	6	2
Crawley	9	7	7
Horsham	12	5	2
Mid Sussex	12	9	2
Worthing	9	7	1
Total	69*	45 (65%)	18 (26%)

* One vacancy

Overview/summary of responses regarding the future of CLFs:

Responses	Locality Sessions	Member Survey	Total
Make CLFs permanent, based on the pilot arrangements (7 CLFs meeting 3 times per year)	3	6	9
Cease CLFs, make savings and support members to use other mechanisms for engaging with residents	16	6	22
Other (a range of different options were suggested, as set out in para 7 below)	22	6	28

Question responses

1. Have CLFs provided an effective approach for you to engage with residents/ hear about relevant local issues?

a) Locality Session feedback

CLF Area	Feedback
Adur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mixed views: the first two CLF meetings weren't very successful. The final meeting, although challenging (dominated by a high profile/contentious local issue) felt more engaging and drew a larger audience. General feeling that residents only attend CLF if they have a very specific issue/reason/need to ask a question, and that some of these questions have been 'repeat' questions that keep coming up and don't seem to have

CLF Area	Feedback
	been resolved. Would be more effective if there were topics on the agenda of interest (rather than just being a Q&A).
Arun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who attend are engaged, often get something positive out of it.
Chichester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLFs are useful in terms of providing an overview of the locality and making members aware of wider issues within the district. The networking element works well and is valued, but it's recognised that residents may not be inclined to travel to CLFs when they are already familiar with more local mechanisms.
Crawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most issues raised (such as highways) were ones members were already aware of and liaising on. The same people attend, but now CIF is gone we lose the new people. It has been a useful exercise in discussion, not sure it had added value as there was other means for residents to get their issues dealt with. A good place to learn from others in room and get support.
Horsham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a useful/effective mechanism for engaging with residents. They don't represent good value for money or good use of time either for members or those residents who have attended.
Mid Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLFs not eye catching enough and have too much bureaucracy. They are just a 'talking shop'. People would attend CLCs for information – whereas only attend CLF for Q&A.
Worthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as effective as they could be. Emails are effective and timely, which CLFs are not always (why wait for the next CLF when you can raise an issue immediately through an email). Issues often relate to just one member, so aren't relevant to others. • Newer members felt it useful to listen to how more experienced members dealt with issues. Often the best part is networking with community before and after meeting. Issues could be dealt with through other means (email etc). Would be better if more about meeting residents, more informal and demystifying local government.

b) Survey feedback – have CLFs provided an effective approach for you to engage with residents/hear about relevant local issues?

Yes	8
No	9
Don't know	1

2. What has worked well/less well with CLFs?

a) Locality Session feedback

CLF Area	Feedback
Adur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLFs have been too constrained in their format of just being a Q&A: people only attend with a burning issue – they haven't

CLF Area	Feedback
	<p>attracted a more general audience who might have been drawn in by a theme or topic with a presentation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members aren't able to answer all the different questions raised: need senior service officer attendance at meetings to help answer questions. Also need officer representation from the district council, as the public don't know the difference between county/district and just want an answer to their issue. Many questions raised don't get resolved: we need to show that we've dealt with issues (even if the answer isn't always what people will want to hear).
Arun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General agreement that the whole district area is too large, the previous joint committees were better because they were more local. Those who attended the CLF have felt it has been useful, but there has been low attendance overall. If they continue, councillors should have more opportunity to influence the agenda. • Lots of planning matters raised, very complex, hard to do justice to at a CLF and mostly not in the County Council's control. The public don't understand what different councils do, so a CLF aimed at County Council matters can be confusing to residents. Sometimes members are reading out an officer's answer, without taking ownership, which doesn't look particularly good.
Chichester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General agreement that the district area is too large and diverse. • The date of the written question deadline should be advertised rather than just 'five working days' - this could remove any confusion and minimise the number of late questions received. Written questions could be emailed to the 'Talk With Us' inbox at any time outside of a CLF round and progressed for a response in the same way - less incentive for residents. • Unless double hatters, members' participation is limited when no residents from their divisions are in attendance to pose questions. • County Hall can appear intimidating and perhaps a deterrent for some people. Mixed views about alternating the venue between the north and south of the district. County Hall is a good halfway point to reduce travel but has led to city central focus - i.e. precinct pavement issues. Continuing to alternate the venue would vary the type of matters raised and potentially boost attendances through a significant issue of shared interest.
Crawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would like to see a more diverse range of groups/people. Need better engagement. Not worked well, attendance is low. Get better engagement outside of CLFs. Could be better online, allow a wider geographical area to attend but could exclude others. Need better advertising - wider poster distribution. • More input from different council services - information about Safe/well visits from fire and rescue service for example.

CLF Area	Feedback
Horsham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a good way to meet residents. Lots of the questions raised weren't for the County Council and the main/most significant Council services don't get raised at CLFs, where the focus tends to be on potholes. For some members, residents attending CLFs weren't from their divisions and there weren't questions for them to answer. Already have good mechanisms for meeting town/parish councillors, so CLFs aren't useful for this. • The last CLF meeting at the library was better attended and more positive. CLCs were better, with an agenda and clear purpose.
Mid Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Area is too large and ineffective compared to CLC regions. CLFs spend a large amount of time not on County Council issues (planning). Written responses have been too 'staged' and lack personal approach from councillors. Not clear on accountability. Lack of highways officers attendance has not helped. Virtual meeting was not effective. Mixed comments on effectiveness of informal seating. • CLFs have been useful for difficult issues for residents to engage with each other and wider councillor input to share advice.
Worthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better in person than virtual. Found CLCs more valuable – more engagement. Better when Community Initiative Fund was available.

b) Survey feedback

Feedback	Comments
Worked well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents can bring their concerns to CLFs face-to-face at the Q&A. • More engagement with a wide range of people. More themed meetings needed. Meetings are better now they are less formal. • Online resident engagement helps with wider engagement. • One member commented that they publicised the CLF meetings and encouraged their residents to attend, which led to good attendance from their division. • The formal questions with written answers do take up a lot of time. The difference with all other engagement methods is that residents get officer responses. They also get to air their views in public and the response is not personal but there are other residents and councillors present to hear the answers and the discussion. This is quite different to a private email exchange. The documentation on the website and the record keeping by the officers also elevates this sort of engagement to another level. • The CLFs in Arun were well attended. • CLFs have been useful for difficult issues for residents to engage with each other and wider councillor input to share advice.

Feedback	Comments
Worked less well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four members mentioned low public attendance, with some members having no representation from their divisions; one member commented that CLFs aren't understood by the community and another that they aren't eye-catching enough, have too much bureaucracy and are just a 'talking shop'. • Six members felt that CLFs didn't attract a wider audience with new issues: the same people tend to attend these meetings, raising issues that are already known/being dealt with. • Three members commented that virtual meetings weren't as effective as in person meetings. • Three members mentioned that CLFs cover too large a geographical area – people won't travel far for this kind of public meeting. • Four members felt that reading out written answers to questions provided in advance does not add value, with one member commenting that 'written responses have been too staged, lack a personal approach from councillors and are not clear on accountability'. • Three members commented that questions were asked about issues that aren't the County Council's responsibility and two mentioned that meetings were dominated by Planning matters, with one member commenting that the chairman had a role to play in managing this. • The CLF seems to be mostly used by opposition councillors and single-issue protest groups. • Two members commented that it would be useful to have a highways officer in attendance. • People would attend CLCs for information – whereas only attend CLF for Q&A. CLCs were good but this has given no authority to councillors. • One member commented that 'we should not seek to perpetuate meetings that we would like to be big, but which in reality will always be small and lacking in cost-effectiveness and reach. The era of routine community public meetings is past'.
Areas for improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would be better as themed sessions (e.g. highways); this might encourage people to travel further if it is a subject of interest. • There were mixed comments on the lay-out of meetings, with some liking the informal approach whilst others found the lack of structure and formality unhelpful. One suggested that there should be a top table structure. • Combine CLFs with the district/borough council as people are very unclear about who does what and it would be helpful for them to see a joint approach. • Try holding some meetings during the day and do more in between meetings to update members. Engage with local community groups, which could attend to represent

Feedback	Comments
	residents. Residents need to hear resolutions of their problems. Useful to know what other CLFs are doing; more updates across West Sussex.

3. What other mechanisms and tools do you use as a county councillor to engage with your residents?

a) Locality Session feedback

CLF Area	Feedback
Adur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surgeries and the other usual forms of engagement – dealing with casework and liaising with residents.
Arun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Several members organise local surgeries, sometimes with other local district/parish councillors. These get better, local attendance. Some members felt that CLF issues are more easily raised by contacting a councillor direct. People want local engagement with their local councillor.
Chichester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members largely agreed they are already very accessible to residents through living/working in the area, attendance at town/parish council meetings, appearing in public places and via social media etc.
Crawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Struggle with how many different means they are to engage (social media/email etc), this is hard to manage and not to miss anything. Would like to narrow this. Need to explore what incentivises people to engage. Get more written correspondence now, would like to be able to talk more as best outcomes are through meeting people face-to-face, people appreciate your time. Miscommunication over email/social media is easy to do.
Horsham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attending residents/ neighbourhood meetings and attending town/parish council meetings: which also work well as way of engaging with residents. Monthly surgeries (including joint surgeries with the district and parish council).
Mid Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> General agreement that lower tier meetings such as parish council meetings are very effective for engagement. High use of email and social media. Also engagement with pressure groups, leafletting, street surgeries and door knocking. Also local media such as connections and parish magazines.
Worthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to use the right medium for the audience. Emails most useful – and a follow up visit face-to-face. Face-to-face always works well – can have a proper discussion and often see the issue being discussed. Attendance at local community groups and resident’s associations and other local events. Popup street stalls/surgery. Social media – but always needs a follow up and need to be careful of privacy.

b) Survey feedback

Mechanism/Tool	Used by	Rated as effective by
Social Media	15	9
Regular events/meetings with (and getting to know) residents' groups/associations	12	5
Regular events/meetings with town/parish councils	11	4
Newsletters	4	1
Leafletting/door-knocking	4	1
Surgeries and pop-up drop-ins	4	
Face-to-face/direct contact, including local casework, meeting residents, on-site meetings	3	5
Living/working in the division	2	
Email	2	
Telephone	2	
Community events / noticeboards	2	
Consultations (paper/online)	1	

Other comments (member survey):

- Three commented on the effectiveness of social media: it reaches a wide audience and has growing reach; it is easy, free and can be tailored in different ways to different audiences; it breaks down barriers to contacting councillors. However, two others commented that they preferred talking face-to-face rather than on social media and whilst it's a useful tool, other mechanisms are as important (e.g. regular events and meetings).
- It isn't easy to find good/appropriate locations for surgeries.
- It's important to reach residents through different mechanisms, not just the few who turn up to meetings.
- There is no method that is the most effective as you need to use all media/means to contact residents.

4. Are there any different mechanisms for listening to/engaging with residents you think the Council should consider?

a) Locality Session feedback:

CLF Area	Feedback
Adur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more collaborative/joined-up with district/borough councils in engagement.
Arun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More localised sessions might work but recognised that this would have a financial implication.
Chichester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested that sub-meetings are held in the city, north and south of the downs.
Crawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment.
Horsham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint sessions with district/borough councils (and possibly town/parish) so that the full range of residents' questions can be answered (although there could be a problem with this as

CLF Area	Feedback
	<p>there are a lot more district and parish councillors than county).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some kind of zoom seminar for members, officers and residents.
Mid Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No comment – Members felt lower tier meetings and general resident engagement was 'business as usual'.
Worthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use council tax bills – these are sent to every resident and can be used to engage with more residents.

b) Survey feedback:

- Four members did not feel that there was anything else the Council should be considering, with one commenting that members who are not proactive should 'not be spoon fed by the council' and another that residents already have other options.
- Others commented on ways for the Council to be more outwardly focused and engaging with residents. Whilst some felt there should be more use of social media (and other forms of virtual engagement), it was recognised that face-to-face engagement is also important. Specific suggestions made were:
 - Carry out annual surveys
 - Hold single issue public meetings/consultations
 - Have a standard place and time for people to meet councillors (e.g. at a council building), but also for councillors to engage with residents where they are, rather than expecting them to come to us (town centre, markets, supermarkets etc)
 - Councillors to attend parish council meetings
 - Hold a public question time at full council and committee meetings
 - Use the free Borough Council newsletter to provide updates on county councillor activities, including a Q&A and hotline for people to call
 - Provide a Disability/Equality/Diversity officer to ensure the views of more hard-to-reach communities are captured
 - Different departments to have their own subpages on the website with the ability for residents to communicate/make contact through these.

5. Is there anything else could the County Council do to support you in your local councillor role?

a) Locality Session feedback:

CLF Area	Feedback
Adur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the local member is involved/communicated with appropriately by service officers on issues affecting their division.
Arun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No suggestions.
Chichester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No suggestions.
Crawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and support increased dramatically, feel very supported. Somewhere to hold a surgery.
Horsham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ways to engage with community groups (as opposed to individual residents, who generally find their way to councillors on their issues/questions). Potential for Area Highways

CLF Area	Feedback
	Manager to attend some town/parish council meetings to provide updates/answer questions.
Mid Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Posters in libraries showing who councillors are, maps of areas they represent, what they can help with and how to contact. Ensure officer availability and assistance with information and also local meetings/resident visits. Improve disconnect with resident and County Council on day-to-day issues such as short notice road closures. Ensure councillors are made aware of all consultations so that can help with public engagement.
Worthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would have been useful to have a local member induction and an induction to locality.

b) Member survey feedback:

Training in social media	4
Engaging with town/parish councils	4
Engaging with other partner organisations	8
Providing a venue for local surgeries	8
No/nothing (able to engage with residents without any additional support from the Council)	7
More support from officers to provide information, assist with local meetings/visits and help answer residents' questions	3

Other comments (member survey):

- One member commented that more support was needed to help with feedback reports to town/parish councils (e.g. a way of tracking issues by parish - such as highways work or Section 106 monies).
- Conduct local surveys using independent market research interviewers, giving a more impartial result than those conducted by elected members or officers.
- CLCs were a good method of engagement and helping charitable organisations with small grants. Crowd funding method was useless and costly.
- Posters in libraries showing who councillors are, maps of areas they represent, what they can help with and how to contact.
- Improving disconnect with residents and the County Council on day-to-day issues such as short notice road closures.
- Ensure councillors are made aware of all consultations so that can help with public engagement.
- County councillors' individual pages on the County Council's website to be more meaningful so residents could see a map of the Division, details of next surgery, issues their councillor is dealing with.

6. Preference for the future of CLFs:

	Make permanent	Cease	Other (details at para 7)
Adur	0	0	4
Arun	2	2	1
Chichester	0	0	6

	Make permanent	Cease	Other (details at para 7)
Crawley	1	1	4
Horsham	0	3	2
Mid Sussex	0	9	0
Worthing	0	1	5
Locality Sessions Total	3	16	22
Member Survey Total	6	6	6

7. Other preferred options:

a) Locality Session feedback:

CLF Area	Feedback
Adur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A more collaborative, joined-up approach involving district council (and other partners, depending on the agenda). This wouldn't require administrative-type officer support but would need relevant service officer support and input. As well as a Q&A, include a theme/topic for discussion, so that the relevant County/district officers can be present to answer questions and provide presentations. There are a lot of significant, challenging issues coming up in the Adur area, so it will be important to ensure there is engagement with the community on these involving both tiers of government. • Take a flexible approach: there may be different options/approaches for different areas: what suits Adur may not work for other parts of the county.
Arun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Something more local, possibly at parish level, organised by parishes, more member involvement in agenda, advertising to contact the Council. Members continuing to organise things in their own divisions is also felt to be a good method of engagement.
Chichester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members were in favour of CLFs continuing based on an adapted format. Themed CLF meetings on a specific service area is the preferred approach to drive the agenda – supported by a service officer. A substantive presentation followed by networking opportunity was suggested by two members without a formal question time item. • One member suggested CLFs should be geared towards promoting WSCC activity to improving public perception of its corporate functions and responsibilities.
Crawley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run as surgeries for councillors – however some felt this should not be one size fit all. • Engage younger age group. • Joint work with Borough council may be more useful, as residents are often confused between councils. • Have local community groups advocating for wide range of residents – help us to reach a wider group of people.

CLF Area	Feedback
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A year is not long, continue trial for a longer period.
Horsham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two members expressed support for local devolved decision-making and would have preferred to see a strengthening of local decision making (as used to happen at CLCs) rather than watered down (i.e. the CLF approach). • One member suggested themed CLF meetings (e.g. schools, highways etc) with a focus for discussion might have encouraged more public attendance and interest (although it was pointed out that CLCs tried this and it was a challenge to generate interest).
Mid Sussex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not support any other option (all agreed that CLFs should cease)
Worthing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less formal and more relaxed; take out need to register and email questions in advance. Better and more relaxed communications. More networking time. Move locations, not just be held in library. Have a short all-member panel, then break into divisions for networking. • Need a strong purpose and focus.

b) Member Survey feedback – other options:

- **Improve CLFs:** Five members suggested ways to improve CLFs, including better engagement with residents and with district/borough councils; having a theme for each meeting to make them more focused and interesting, but also do some outreach to residents on current issues of interest so that these could also be covered; change the location to the library (for Chichester CLF), but also move the venue around the patch to better engage and be less insular; publish an agenda based on local issues rather than allowing the Q&A to set the agenda and have councillors, officers and invited experts present on that matter (with presentation followed by Q&A on that subject); make CLFs more area specific (e.g. Chichester CLF is a big area, need to split north and south of the Downs).
- **Continue CLFs:** one commented that CLFs should be continued, but with a regular review.
- **Cease CLFs:** four made negative comments about CLFs, including that they are a waste of time, that nothing productive comes from them and that they are just used by people to raise issues that their county councillor is already aware of and trying to address. One commented that it was unfortunate that CLFs had been used to make political points and by protest/lobby groups, but that without these 'loaded' questions there would have been very few matters left to consider. Other comments included that the CLF is the only forum the public have to ask questions of the County Council, that residents like the opportunity of meeting with all the local county councillors (who can put forward ideas to help solve problems), that in person meetings make residents feel heard and that new councillors benefit from the input of the more experienced councillors. another member commented that if CLFs are abolished, some other slightly more formal mechanism for residents to come to meet their councillors should be developed.
- **Introduce public question time:** one member suggested this for full Council and other committee meetings.