

East Sussex Local Government Reform

User Voice Groups – Supplementary engagement

Summary

As part of the ongoing engagement process, council officers attended four distinct service user voice groups held in July 2025. These sessions were designed to gather insights and feedback from diverse communities across East Sussex.

Each group provided valuable perspectives on how the proposed changes may impact their communities. The feedback was thematically analysed and cross-referenced to identify common concerns and priorities.

Thematic analysis of the feedback from the four service user groups

Youth Cabinet (6 July 2025)

Key Themes:

- **Identity & Representation:**
 - Young people do not strongly identify with "East Sussex" as a place.
 - Concern that local identities (e.g., Bexhill, Seaford) may be diluted in a larger authority.
- **Youth Voice & Participation:**
 - Strong concern about lack of youth involvement in the restructure.
 - Recommendations for structured youth representation (e.g., local youth groups feeding into a central youth council).
- **Equity & Rural Inclusion:**
 - Fear that rural areas will be overlooked in funding and service provision.
 - Emphasis on tailoring services to diverse local needs.
- **Funding & Services:**
 - Concerns about insufficient funding for youth services, especially in rural areas.
 - Desire for increased investment in youth engagement and services.
- **Communication & Accountability:**
 - Need for two-way communication between young people and decision-makers.
 - Suggestions for feedback loops and ongoing engagement.

The findings highlight a disconnect between young people and the broader East Sussex identity, alongside strong concerns about being excluded from decision-making processes.

There is a clear call for more inclusive, locally tailored services, especially in rural areas, and for structured youth representation to ensure meaningful engagement and accountability.

East Sussex Seniors' Association (ESSA) Health and Community Care Group (11 July 2025)

Key Themes:

- **Access & Local Contact:**
 - Worry about losing local points of contact and representation.
 - Importance of physical hubs for older people who may not be digitally connected.
- **Equity in Service Distribution:**
 - Concerns about fair distribution of resources, especially in rural areas.
 - Fear that centralisation could exacerbate existing inequalities.
- **Health & Integration:**
 - Questions about how the new structure will align with NHS services.
 - Desire for services to be based on proximity and need, not just administrative boundaries.

Citizens' Panel (11 July 2025)

Key Themes:

- **Digital Exclusion:**
 - Strong concerns about increased reliance on digital services.
 - Many residents lack access or skills to engage online.
- **Loss of Local Voice:**
 - Fear that local improvements and representation will be lost.
 - Emphasis on preserving local access and visibility of services.
- **Efficiency vs. Equity:**
 - Hope that restructuring could bring efficiency and cost savings.
 - But only if it draws on best practices and ensures alignment across systems.
- **Learning from Others:**
 - Recommendation to study other councils' experiences with unitary transitions.
 - Importance of maintaining or improving service quality.

Migration Partnership Board (10 July 2025)

Key Themes:

- **Continuity of Engagement:**
 - Concern about the future of the Partnership Board under the new structure.

- Desire to ensure ongoing engagement with migrant communities.
- **Inclusion of Marginalised Voices:**
 - Emphasis on ensuring lesser-heard voices are included in LGR discussions.
 - Follow-up from partners requesting continued involvement.

Cross-Cutting Themes Across All Groups:

Theme	Summary
Local Identity & Representation	All groups expressed concern about losing local identity and representation in a larger authority.
Equity & Inclusion	Rural areas, older people, youth, and migrants were all highlighted as at risk of being overlooked.
Access to Services	Physical access (hubs), digital exclusion, and tailored services were recurring concerns.
Voice & Participation	Strong calls for meaningful engagement and structured feedback mechanisms.
Funding & Resources	Concerns about fair distribution and adequate funding, especially for vulnerable groups.
Learning & Best Practice	Desire to learn from other councils and build on existing strengths.