



People, Culture, Skills

Evaluation Report

November 2024

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About the strategy

Active Essex launched their PCS (People, Culture and Skills) framework in April 2022, putting people at the heart of their initiatives. This framework accompanies the 10-year Sport & Physical Activity strategy, Fit for the Future, for Essex, Southend and Thurrock. Both frameworks are part of the broader Essex Skills Improvement Plan, aimed at boosting the Essex economy by aligning post-16 education with employer needs and training people to address the current and future skills gaps. The PCS framework focuses on enhancing the sport and physical activity by prioritising people development, nurturing inclusive cultures, and addressing skills gaps. Its mission is to make Essex, Southend and Thurrock a great place to work and volunteer in Sport and Physical Activity.

Although recent priorities have been focussed on filling immediate vacancies and providing training, a persistent, high staff turnover and significant skills gap remains. The Essex Skills Strategy (2018) and Training Needs Analysis (2021) stated that the labour market challenges and skills gaps remain the same despite significant investment. This has reinforced the need to look differently at the sector's people challenges, highlighting the need for long-term strategies to reduce workforce churn, incentivize growth, and create clear career pathways. This insight led to the development of the PCS framework, based around three guiding principles:

- **People:** Create a diverse, satisfied workforce with clear career routes and human-centred leadership.
- **Culture:** Foster supportive environments with effective policies and governance to ensure sustainable growth and safety.
- **Skills:** Partner with education providers to address skills shortages and utilize mechanisms like apprenticeships.

Using PCS, Active Essex aims to reduce churn, increase role satisfaction, and build resilient organizations with strong cultures. They will address economic pressures, organizational readiness, and sector-specific challenges by collaborating with partners and learning from other sectors.

The interviews and the survey undertaken for this report showed that Active Essex has accurately identified their challenges, such as issues with staff retention, long-term stability of organisations, maintaining operations and the level of understanding of leadership in running a stable organisation. Given these challenges, Active Essex is now testing a holistic approach (PCS), to support funded organisations, focusing on organisational development rather than just delivery. In order to do this, Active Essex will need to develop a range of targeted solutions.

About the interventions and work

This report was commissioned to briefly evaluate the implementation of PCS 2022-24 and the related interventions, including:

- Basic and Advanced Organisational Development Survey – Development, Collection and Analysis
- Individual Organisational Development Reports - Basic
- Group OD Report Summary – Key Trends in Essex Organisations
- Individual Organisational Development Reports - Detailed
- Individual Organisation Debriefs with OD Expert
- In-person and online OD workshops on themes such as psychological safety, retention
- Lunch and Learn Online Seminars on workforce development themes
- Access to Leadership and Business Mentors
- Support and mentorship to create OD plans and identify potential areas for funding
- Funding for execution of organisation development plans
- Pop-up OD sessions in existing Active Essex activities eg HAF pre-summer workshops
- Packages of Business Development Support

These interventions aimed to help Active Essex adopt a holistic approach to funded organisations, offering them support that focused on organisational development, rather than just delivery. The interventions

were designed to offer different ways of engaging with PCS, depending on an organisation's appetite for Organisational Development work. For the most "intensive"

work (individual reports, debriefs and plan support) - there was a selection process by Active Essex assessing an organisation's capacity, appetite and need. Although organisations were at different stages of their understanding of development, interviewed

organisations largely understood the PCS work and identified the following PCS actions:

- Capacity building and 1-1 conversations with relationship managers and advising how to grow
- Business Development Support
- Training – upskilling, workshops, mentoring
- Upskilling AE staff
- HAF onboarding
- Surveys
- Lunch and learn

“PCS is helping organisations to grow and be stable”

“PCS is trying to help organisations thrive and build as a community organisation/local employer and grow your workforce effectively”

For full methodology, please see Appendix 2.

Themes of impact

Interviews aimed to understand the impact of the interventions on organisations, revealing five key themes:

1 Making time and space for Organisational Development: The interventions provided organisations with the opportunity to consider their business strategies, which they often neglected due to their focus on immediate delivery. It gave them time to work on the business, not just in the business. Workshops allowed organisations time to think about their future development (looking internally) and their positioning, comparing themselves with other organisations in their sector to better understand their strategic direction (looking externally).

2 Improved understanding of Organisation Development and its role in business Strategy: The PCS interventions enabled organisations to step back from daily operations and focus on long-term planning and ambitions. This holistic approach helped them to recognise the importance and benefits of organisational development, leading to shift (or reconsideration) of business priorities. Normally focused on delivery, many organisations now recognise the value of dedicating more capacity to organisational development for more effective long-term outcomes. Respondents reported an improved understanding in two main areas: a) the concept of organisational development and why it is important, and b) the overall system, including funding, support, other organisations, and the community sport landscape. This enhanced knowledge has helped organisations navigate their environments more effectively.

“I know really understanding the offer that’s there, the programme and sharing it across the organisation”

3 Changed perception of workforce: The workforce plays a vital role in driving the quality of delivery and the broader success of an organisation, therefore it is essential that leaders spend their time and energy planning the retention,

“I understand more about what their [staff] priorities are, and what makes a good organisation, beyond if they answer my emails.”

succession and growth of the workforce. The PCS interventions influenced how organisations perceived their workforce, emphasising the importance of addressing workforce needs. This shift included: a) redefining their business building strategies, b) recruiting for values, not skills, and c) moving from a competitive to a collaborative mindset.

4

Relationships between organisations: Improved understanding and the change in workforce perception led to a more collaborative approach, especially thanks to the enhanced networking opportunities provided by the PCS interventions. Organisations began to see other organisations as potential partners rather than competitors, fostering a more collaborative, opportunities-based environment. This shift encouraged partnership working and a more integrated approach to achieving common goals. Organisations reported increased chances to connect with others, share challenges and opportunities, and build relationships that could lead to future collaborations.

“I’ve enjoyed the events where we’ve been able to see how to connect with others to get ideas.”

5

Relationship between organisations and Active Essex: Organisations reported a strengthened relationship with the Active Essex team thanks to the PCS interventions. Larger organisations particularly appreciated the dual perspectives offered by having two relationship managers available for support. This stronger

relationship with Active Essex led to greater empathy and understanding of the daily work of Active Essex staff. As a result, organisations felt more informed about local developments and opportunities, and experienced increased connectivity with others through a more joined-up approach, facilitated by their relationship with Active Essex.

“PCS has helped me to access and understand funding”

Themes of learning

In addition to the impact on organisations, the interventions have provided key learnings for Active Essex, categorised into four overarching themes:

1

Trust: Trust emerged as a key theme in the interviews. The PCS interventions has forced a change in relationships between Active Essex and organisations, fostering more open, transparent and candid interactions. Organisations reported that previously, relationships felt like a funder-recipient dynamic, with organisations always trying to present their best side. Now, there is a greater sense of openness, with organizations feeling comfortable sharing what is and isn't working and seeking advice from Active Essex. This has led to a better, more collaborative approach, which has strengthened relationships with Active Essex (and even other organisations),

“Now, we have confidence we are doing what they [Active Essex] are wanting us to be doing”

“Trust can be built through social proof i.e. reviews. Many organisations only started to trust it [PCS] when they saw other organisations going through it.”

making organizational development more effective. Alongside increased trust with Active Essex, it is also crucial with other organisations, promoting partnerships rather than competition among organisations, leading to stronger, collaborative growth.

“The biggest thing to mention is trust. Our organisation doesn’t worry about funding visits anymore because we’ve got confidence that what we deliver is good. We have such a level of trust now, that we comfortable to speak openly about challenges.”

2 Meeting organisations where they are: Interviews revealed that organisations already on the path of organisational development, but didn’t necessarily know how to do this, benefited the most from the interventions. Active Essex cannot transform organisations overnight but must meet them at their current stage e.g.

for organisations who are unfamiliar with organisational development or the benefits, Active Essex needs to start from the basics, explaining the concept and its advantages. This requires a flexible approach, ensuring workshops are pitched at the right level, at the right time and are tailored to the organisation’s size, type, and ambitions. Interventions must be adaptable and delivered at the appropriate time in the organisation’s development journey.

Understanding an organisation's maturity and the

distance they have travelled so far in their organisational development is crucial for the intervention to be as effective as possible. In doing this, organisations will be more willing to find the capacity and time to engage because they understand its benefits and will ultimately improve their relationship with Active Essex.

“I worry with lunch and learns they weren’t ready for them, or they are too generic and having to be sign-posted”

“There has been a lot of people going out of their comfort zone”

3 Understanding the challenges that organisations face: The PCS interventions have helped Active Essex to listen to organisations, identify their challenges and understand how these challenges impact an organisation’s staff. This better understanding has allowed Active Essex to provide tangible solutions to overcome these obstacles effectively. These insights are crucial for designing and adapting interventions that address these challenges effectively. Additionally, PCS interventions have given Active Essex staff a deeper understanding of the organisations that they work with, enabling them to build stronger relationships and meet organisations’ needs and expectations more quickly. By examining these challenges in more detail, Active Essex can start to develop strategies to overcome them, ensuring more targeted and impactful support. This knowledge and understanding is also an invaluable resource to inform wider Active Essex work and other initiatives.

4

Adopting an approach that promotes ownership: The flexibility of PCS interventions was vital and highly appreciated by the organisations. Each organisation is unique, with different capacities, understandings, and schedules, so a flexible approach encouraged buy-in and engagement, allowing organisations to attend sessions that fit their needs and schedules, self-selecting what was most relevant to them. In particular, the 1-1 sessions provided tailored assistance, maximizing the benefits for each organisation. Not only is this flexibility important in terms of types of session and timings, but organisations are given control over the extent to which they get involved and which elements of organisational development they would like to focus on.

“[I really appreciate the] support and guidance from AE - We wouldn’t be here otherwise, the community would have lost out without that support.”

Overall, these learnings emphasize the importance of a tailored, flexible approach that meets organizations where they are, understands their challenges, builds trust, and adapts to their unique needs. By incorporating these insights, Active Essex can enhance its support for organizations, fostering long-term development and stronger relationships.

Recommendations

Based on the feedback data, six key recommendations emerged:

1

Continue with PCS Strategy Implementation: The current strategy has several successful elements and a growing understanding of organisational needs and their relationship with Active Essex. However, a one-size-fits-all approach is insufficient. A more graduated process is necessary, as some tools did not reach a broad enough audience. There should also be a categorisation of organisations according to their size and status i.e. sole traders, large organisations, small businesses etc, which will help Active Essex to adapt their offer according to context, improving efficiency and efficacy. Additionally, there are more cost-efficient ways to build a better understanding with business leaders.

2

Role of Active Essex: With experience in delivering these interventions, Active Essex should consider its role in organisational development - whether as an “Accelerator/Catalyst” or a “Backbone/Enabler”. As an “Accelerator/Catalyst”, Active Essex would provide sessions to inform organisations about organisational development (OD) and its benefits, offering resources to guide them on this journey. As a “Backbone/Enabler”, Active Essex would act as a traditional funder, providing financial security and ring-fenced funding for OD. Being an accelerator is preferable, as it allows organisations to make informed decisions about engagement, benefiting those already on the journey.

3

Systemic Gaps: Active Essex should address systemic gaps that organisations cannot fill alone and where local partners or Active Essex may be able to collaborate and provide a multi-organisational, co-ordinated solution. For example, during periods of high delivery (e.g. summer holiday HAF), there is demand for short notice coaches or leaders to cover workforce absences or unexpected extra demand due to increased numbers or SEN attendees. Active Essex could develop a “coaching pool” to provide flexible support where coaches are available to move across organisations daily, as needed. Additionally, a gap was identified in the expertise and capacity to implement a Youth Leadership Programme. Such a programme could help young people gain skills in management, organisation, and coaching through rotations across different organisations, allowing them to gain diverse experiences in different contexts.

4

Programme Awareness (communication): Improving communication is crucial for Active Essex. Some organisations were unaware of session schedules and events. Active Essex should highlight the benefits and successes of their work to drive engagement and improve understanding. Initially reluctant organisations became more engaged after seeing the benefits others received from PCS. Enhanced communication should convey these messages and showcase success stories. It is important to improve awareness both externally and internally, as there was mixed awareness of PCS work among Active Essex staff.

5

Increase investment: To enhance the PCS strategy, it is recommended to increase investment to address the diverse needs of organisations at various stages of development. For instance, the requirements of a sole trader in their first year differ significantly from those of more established businesses. Improved categorization of organisations can help tailor interventions more effectively. While some interventions have been beneficial, certain issues, like the proposed apprentice academy, are too large for a single organisation to tackle alone.

6

Growing better practice: It is recommended that Active Essex and organisations review, communicate and adopt better practice in staff recruitment and test whether recruiting based on values rather than skills is beneficial. Early studies have shown that recruiting on values, rather than skills show better retention rates and growth of staff members. This might be something that Active Essex and organisations want to test.

These recommendations aim to refine Active Essex’s approach, ensuring it meets the diverse needs of organisations and fosters long-term development and success, building on the many successes of the first stages of PCS.

APPENDIX 1 - List of interviewees

Achieve, Thrive, Flourish – ATF

Faces UK or The Lighthouse

Camp for Champs

SCSS

Active Essex

Sport School

Changing Lives

APPENDIX 2 - Methodology

To understand and evaluate the impact of the interventions, we conducted interviews with 6-10 people for different organisations and Active Essex, and we also administered a survey. The data collected includes survey responses and six interviews. Despite some challenges in scheduling the last interviews, we were able to conduct all the interviews for a detailed analysis of the PCS interventions.

Data Collection

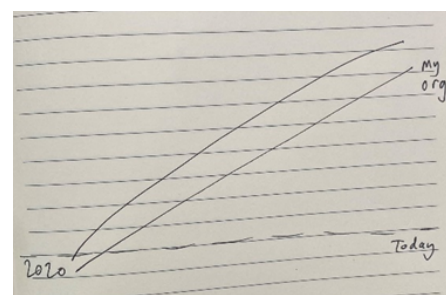
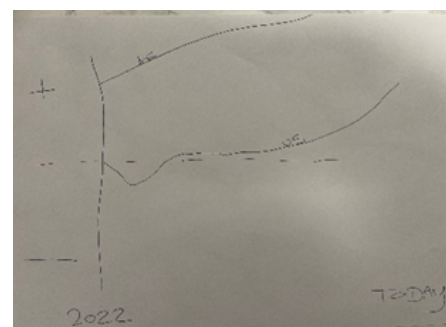
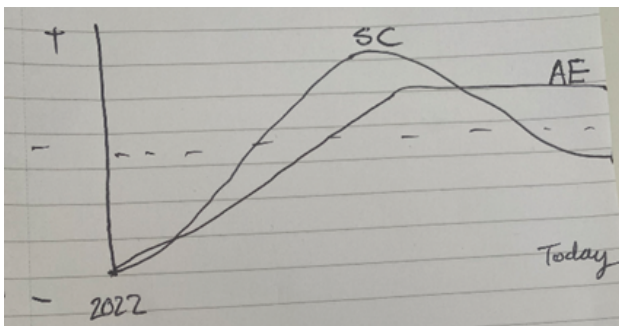
Interviews - Timeline Elicitation Method:

Interviews were designed to explore the experiences of the organisations with the new holistic approach. In each interview, individuals were asked to draw a timeline of their own organisations journey since 2022 and a timeline of their experience of, and relationship with Active Essex. (Those working for Active Essex were asked to draw a second timeline of their experience of, and relationship with the PCS strategy). This approach allowed the interviewer to understand the contextual journey of the individual and their organisation and gave the interviewer time to reflect on the last two years.

After the initial description of the lines, interview questions focused on:

1. Noting the peaks and troughs and influences of these
2. Discussing the impacts of these moments.
3. Evaluating the relationship with Active Essex as it changed
4. Identifying any unrealised benefits.

Peaks and troughs of PCS:

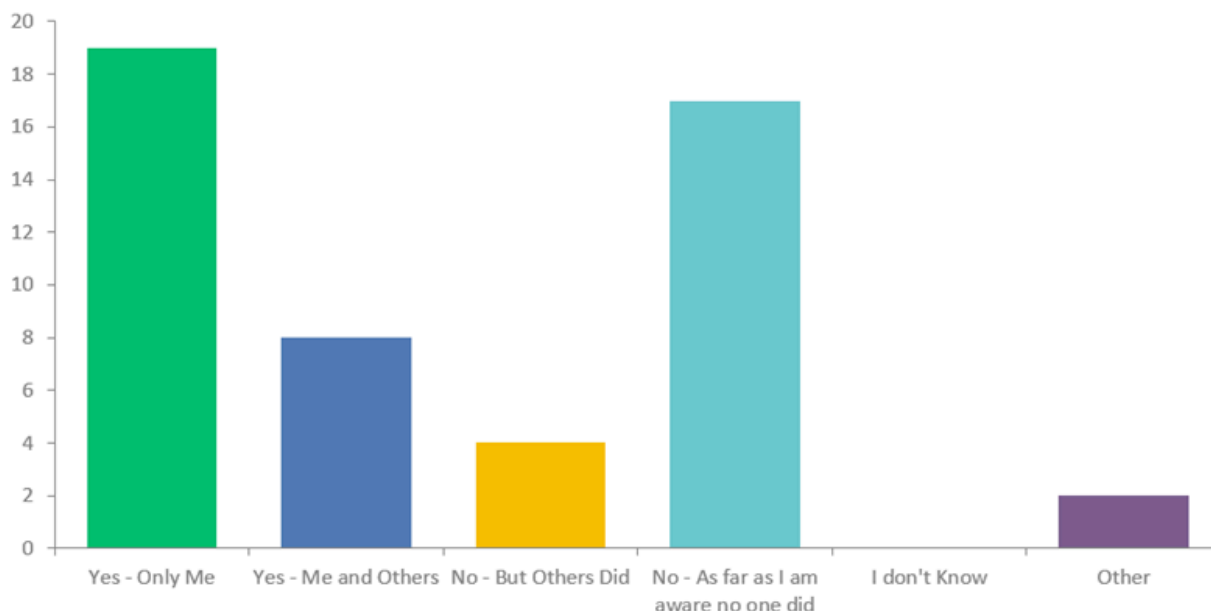


Survey:

The survey was used to gather quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of the PCS interventions. This approach allowed us to capture a wider range of opinions and experiences. The insights gained from the survey provided a good overview, which was further enriched by the detailed data obtained from the interviews. This combination allowed us to address any gaps and gain a deeper understanding of the overall impact of the interventions. The survey data in full is shared in Appendix 3.

APPENDIX 3 - Survey Results

Lunch and Learn Engagement - Did you and/or colleagues attend one or more Lunch and Learn sessions live or watch one or more session on recording between July 2023 and March 2024?



What Can Be Improved? Is there anything that would have made you or your colleagues more likely to attend or watch back more of them?

“Nothing can be improved, we just need more time in the day!”

“The session times meant it was really difficult to get anyone on them. We had far better experiences in the face-to-face sessions that had been previously available.”

“It would be better if sessions were on at the same time each quarter or bi-monthly. Sometimes there seemed to be too many.”

“The ideas/concepts and support are extremely beneficial. In terms of support, as with any training or support sessions for us or Staff, we would prefer if sessions were recorded so we could watch them back. Would it be possible to signpost people to recorded sessions so we can watch replays and fit them into a busy schedule?”

“In our case it's down to staffing and timing”

“Have a larger variety of days/times. Sessions were usually on a Tuesday.”

“Sometimes everything comes at once, so it can be hard to keep track, or attend all.”

“It felt like the sessions were more suitable for sports organisations or small businesses which wasn't applicable for us.”

Please tick all session you or a colleague attended or watched back

Session	Responses	No. of attendees
July - Introduction	45.00%	9
September - An introduction to leadership & management in small organisations	55.00%	11
September - Guest - Nana Badu - Badu Sports	0.00%	0
October - Workforce Engagement & Voice	10.00%	2
October Guest - Donna Nugent - England Netball	20.00%	4
November - Strategic Leadership & Planning for small organisations	45.00%	9
November Guest - Rusell Findlay - Speakers Trust	5.00%	1
January - Skills & People for the Future	30.00%	6
January Guest - Dr Ollie Holt - CIMSPA	10.00%	2
February - Designing & Delegating Roles	20.00%	4
February Guest - Lizzie Stanton - Extra Mile	10.00%	2
March - Coming & Going - Recruitment, Onboarding & Leaving	35.00%	7
March Guest - Helen Killingley - Access Sport	10.00%	2
TOTAL		59

How likely is it you would recommend a Lunch & Learn to a friend or colleague?



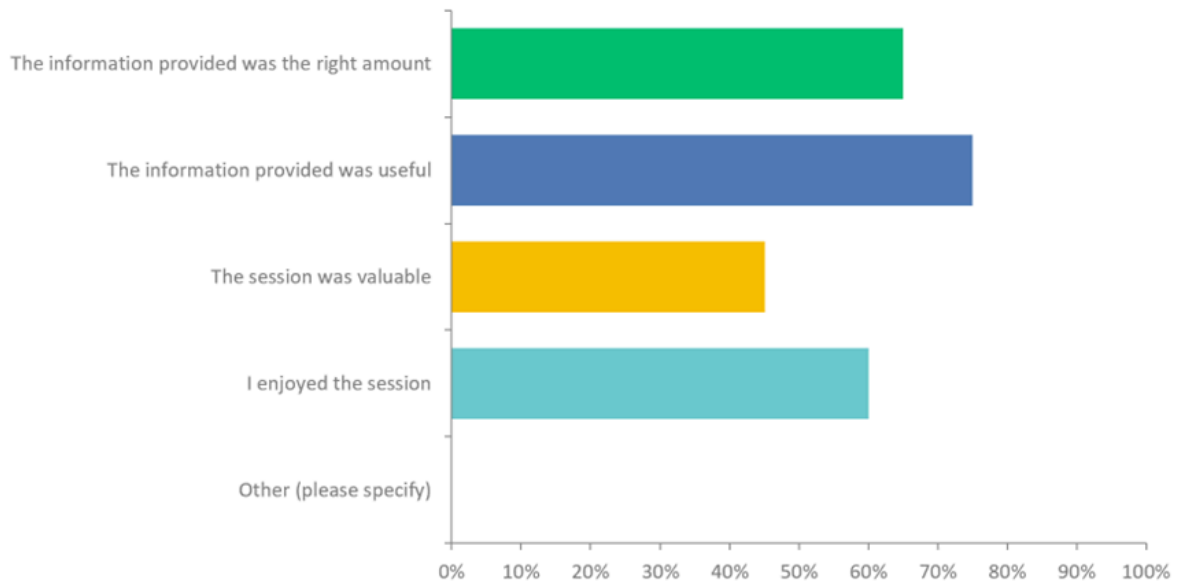
81/100 Average Score

How likely is it you would attend a new Lunch & Learn yourself?



77/100 Average Score

Please share you and your colleagues' experiences and tick all that apply



What Can Be Improved? Is there anything that would have made you or your colleagues more likely to attend or watch back more of them?

“Have more flexible timings. Sessions were always held at lunch which is a busy time of day”

“For us, it’s time. We don’t have much spare time during the week. I understand these sessions are extremely valuable and I would like to be able to attend them in the future”

“Provide more information about content prior to the sessions to make sure it is relevant”

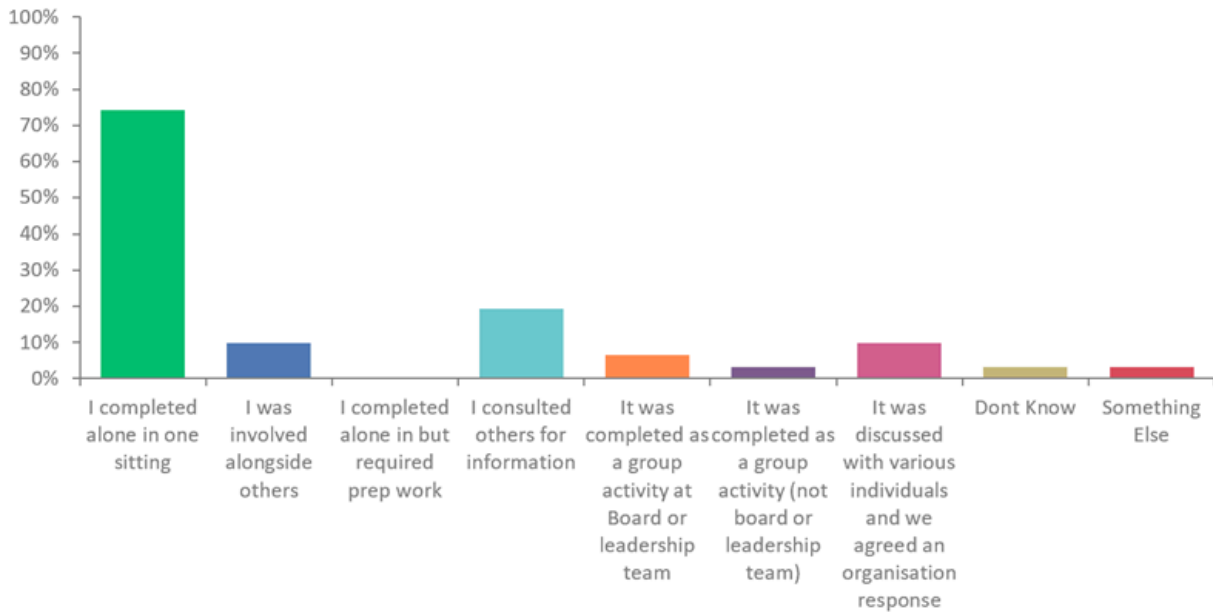
“If people cannot attend the lunch and learn, links to repays should be sent for them to watch. The links should be provided weeks later so attendance does not decrease.”

“Have access to recording as these were not shared for those unable to attend lunchtime events.”

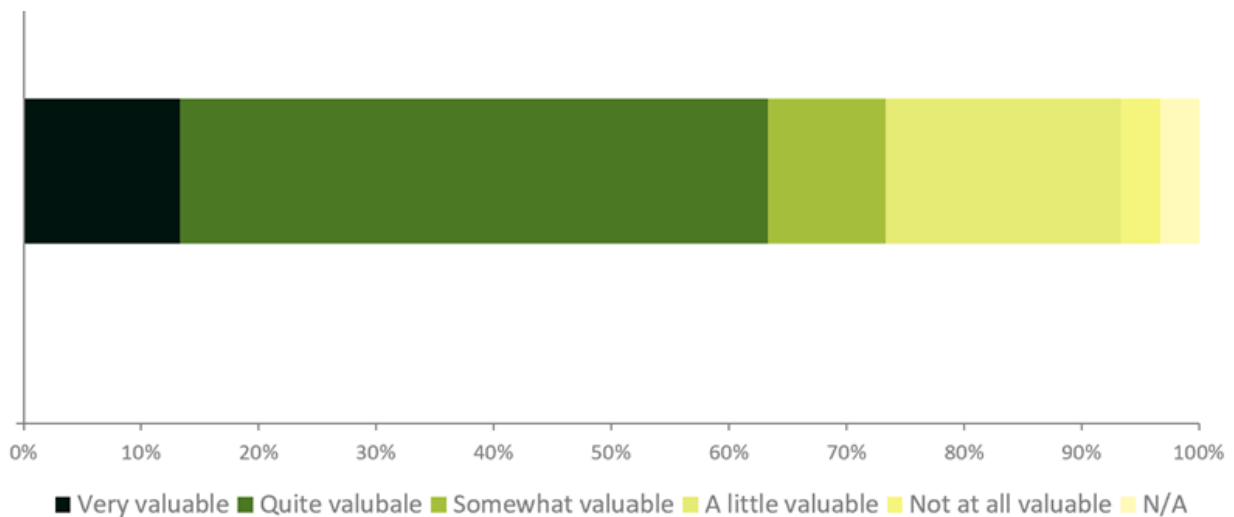
“The sessions were pitched perfectly”

“Our issue is timing due to recent success. The sessions are great, however our business needs operationally have become time intensive”

**Completing the Survey (1) How did your organisation approach completing the survey?
Please tick all that apply**



Completing the Survey Some organisations reported that the process of completing the information helped them or colleagues to reflect on their organisation's development. How valuable did you find completing the survey for your organisation?

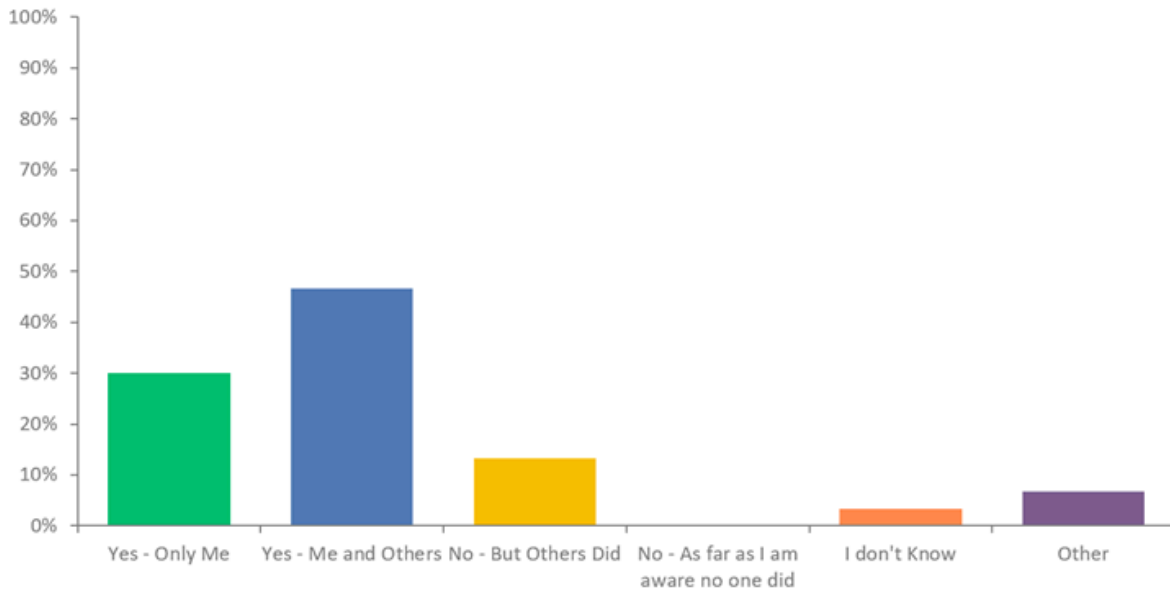


“External guidance has helped up progress our fundamental processes which in turn has greatly improved our business as a whole”

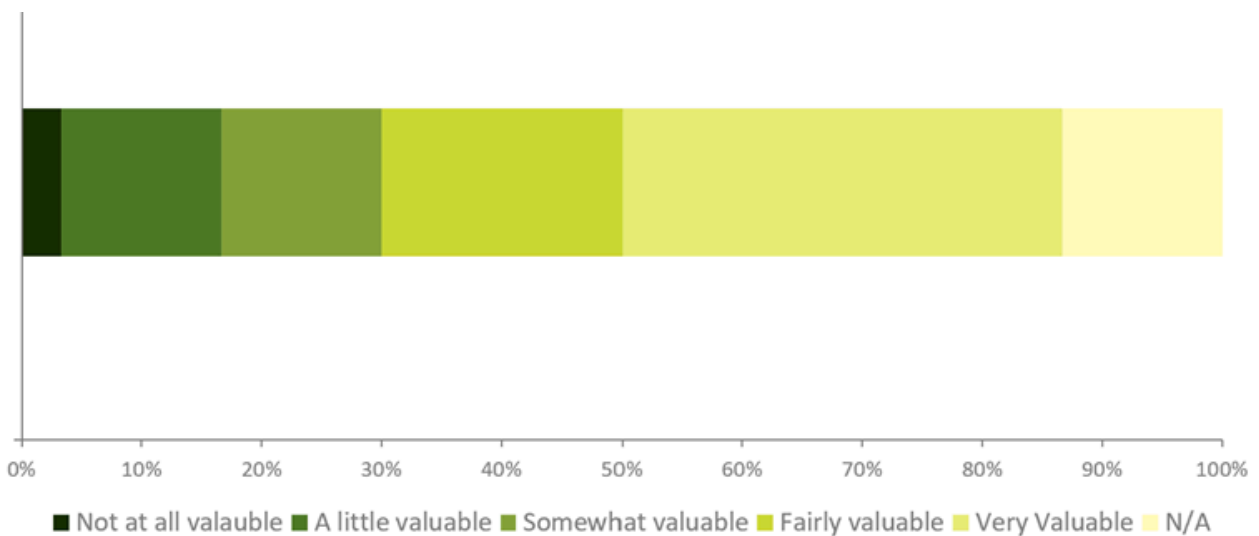
“It’s made me think of future activities”

“This would be a great way to share and highlight best practices among us and others in the network!”

Reading the Report - Did you and/or colleagues read the report you were provided about your organisation?



Was the Report Valuable? Some organisations have told us reading the report has helped them. How valuable did you or colleagues find reading the report for your organisation?



“Helps us better understand areas to develop going forward”

“Useful to look at my organisation, especially to consider aspects I may not have thought of”

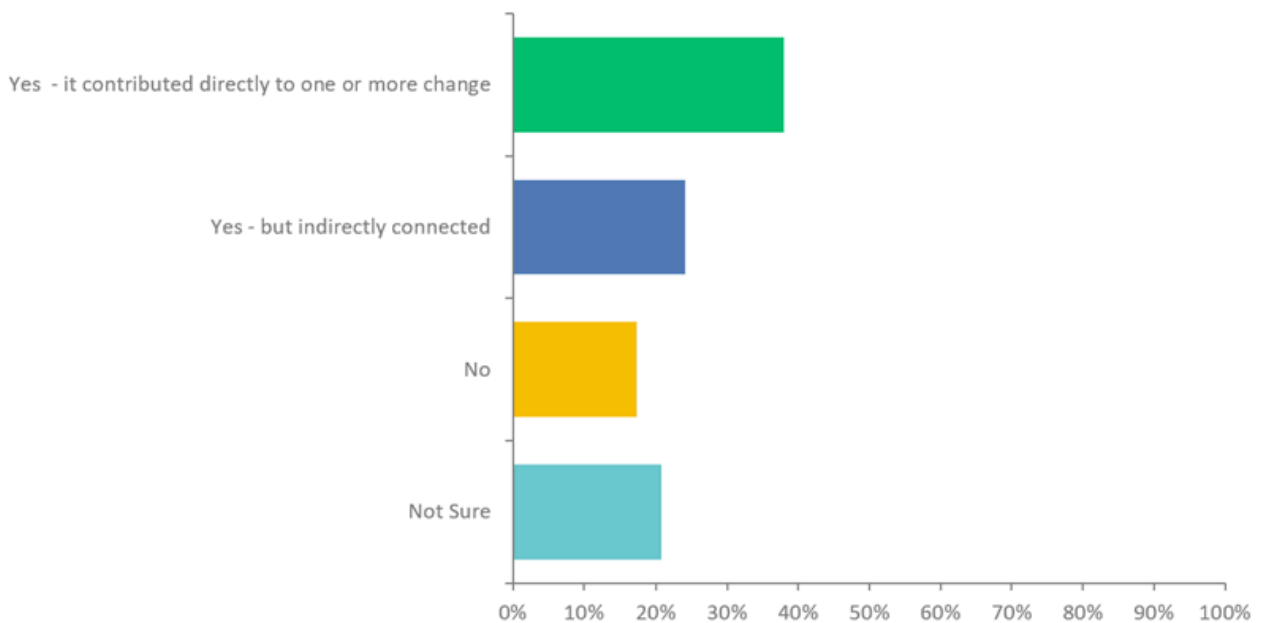
“They understood the funding better”

“We want to hear the feedback and learn how to improve and develop”

“Survey not really suitable for small organisations like us it was tailored towards bigger ones”

“It’s always good to hear feedback as we are always looking to improve our service”

Organisations Making Change - Some organisations have told us the whole process has contributed to them making changes or taking action in some form. Has your organisation taken any action after participating in the survey and receiving a report?



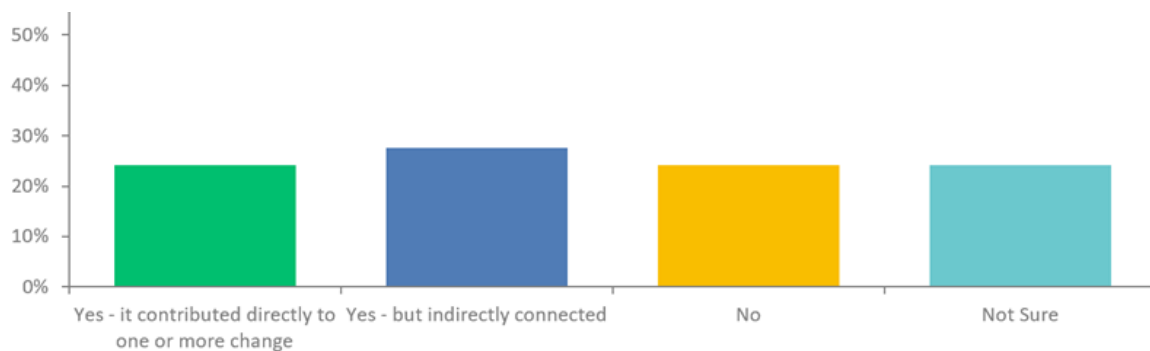
“Changes to our provision has been directly and indirectly as a result from the sessions both online, as a hatchback recording or face to face”

“We over-delivered on the funding that was received. This year we are being more cautious and distributing funding fairly”

“Staff organisation”

“We have reviewed our sessions and will adapt for the summer”

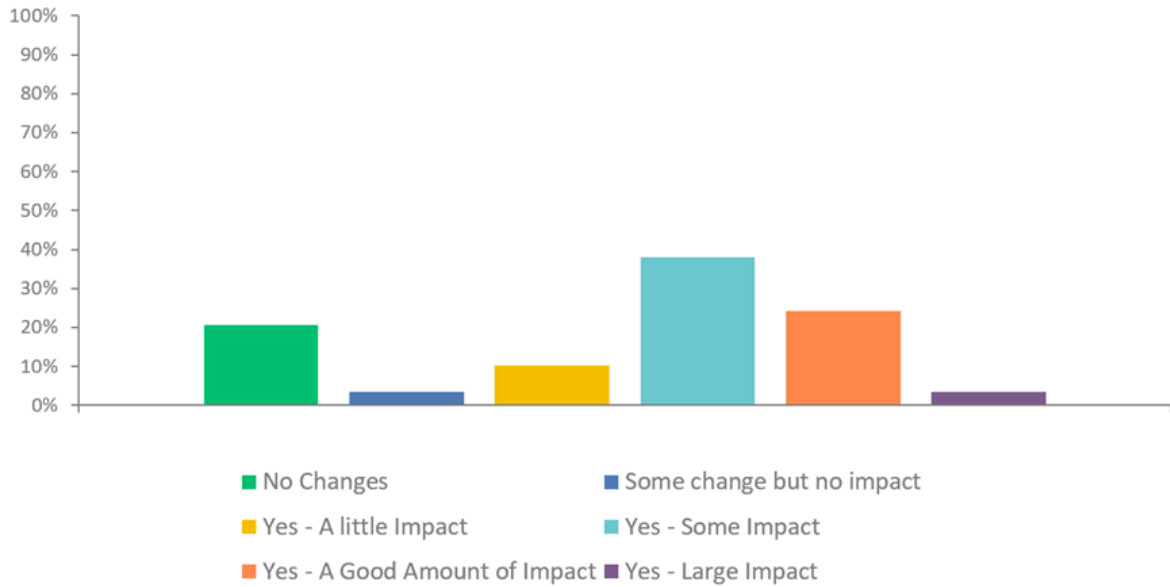
Change for Individuals - Some individuals have told us being part of the process has contributed to them making changes or taking action in some form. Have you or any individuals taken any action after participating in the survey and/or receiving a report?



“Staff recruitment, induction and retention”

“We looking to add in cooking lessons”

Impact of Changes Made- Thinking about any individual or organisational changes made, what has the impact been on the organisation, workforce or individual?



“In general we are always looking to improve delivery and processes. Having dedicated staff attend sessions that are in the workforce has been very positive and has seen the staff in question develop a deeper understanding and better level of expectation during the booking, delivery and shut down phases.”

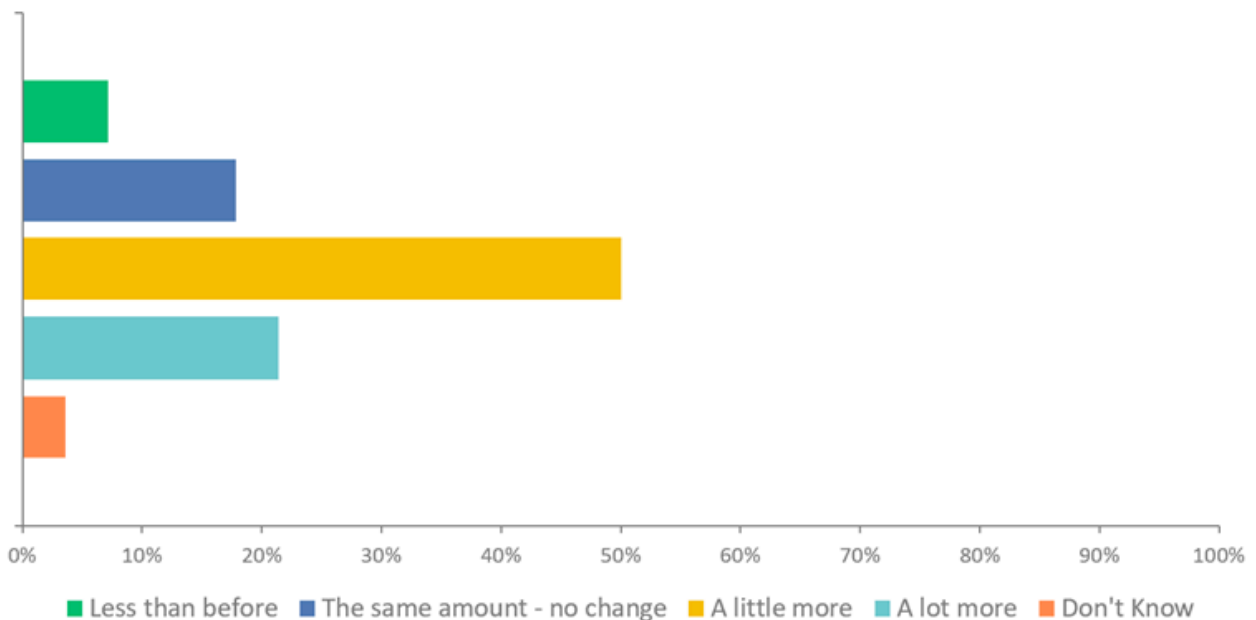
“Funding distributing fairly amongst service users”

“Staff better informed. Working environment improved. Staff attitude improved”

“More structured support as a leadership team and delivery team.”

“We are preparing for our new activities”

Have you engaged more with Active Essex since you started the process?



“We have been working on partnership development with other organisations.”

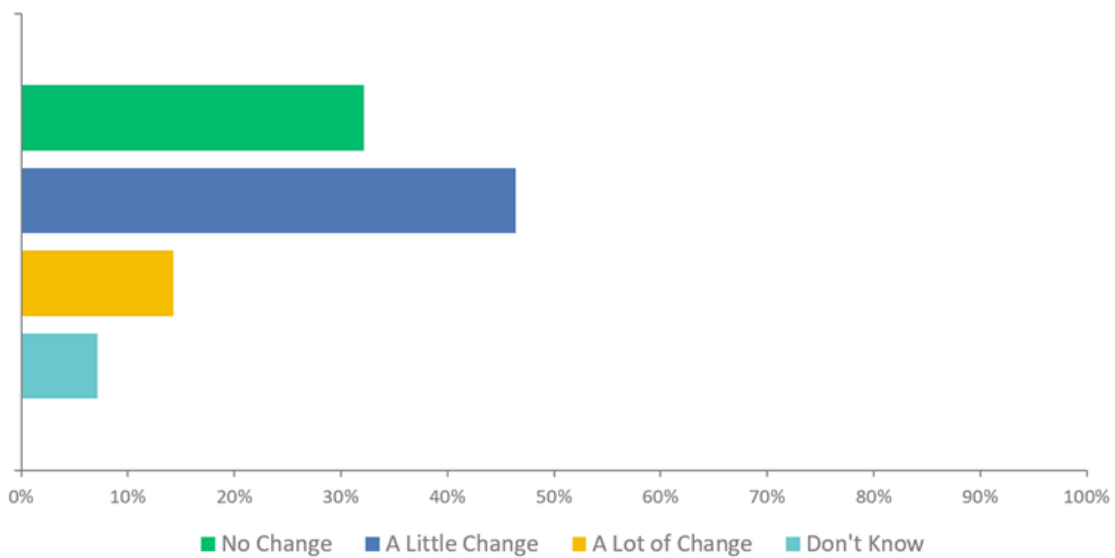
“Much better communication with area rep and supporting players for other initiatives. Also lots of great recommendations for the activate team”

“I speak to my area managers a lot”

“As a company we try to stay current with Active Essex now”

“Attended sessions and training events”

Has engaging with this process changed your relationship with Active Essex in any way?

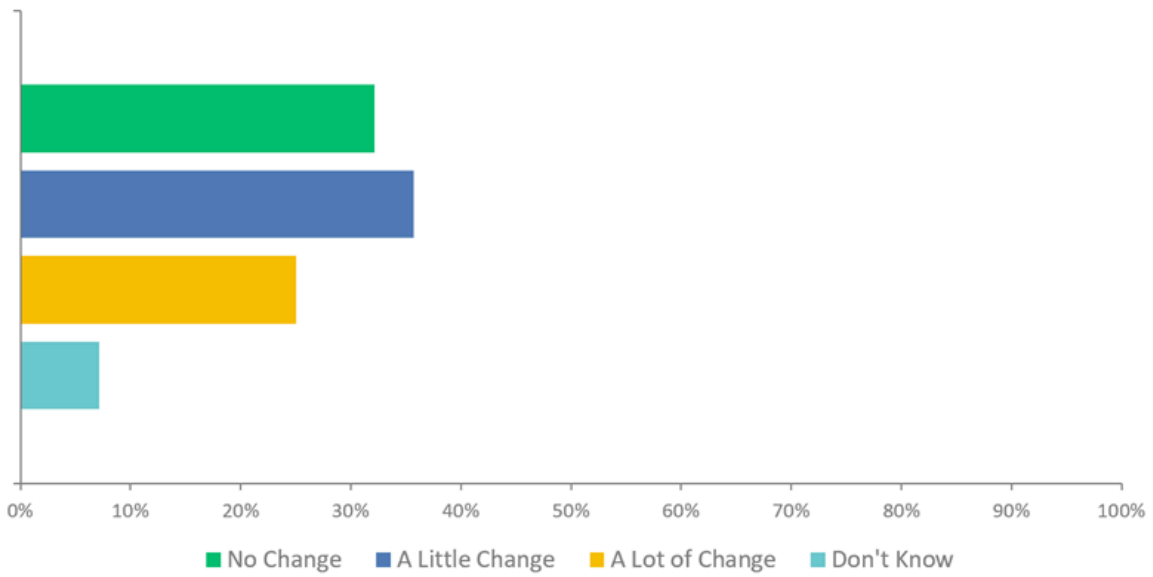


“Because we have delegated some meetings to our workforce, we feel they now have a greater respect and understanding for all aspects of the provision”

“Knowing the correct people or departments to speak to”

“More understanding around Foundation but we need to find more time to engage with the team beyond funding.”

Has engaging with this process changed your awareness and/or understanding of Active Essex and their role in any way?



“The process has helped our staff have a better understanding of what happens in the background to help progress the provision”

“Aware of the amount of research and reporting that is done in order to improve”

“We are more aware of the impact reports and target audience.”