



THIRD SECTOR  
Dumfries and Galloway

# JOINING THE DOTS



## Summary Report

## Aim

Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway commissioned a research project to review the involvement and support offered by TSDG in relation to community planning. The main part of this project was to ascertain whether the needs of the wider third sector were being met whilst at the same time gaining an insight into their perspectives and perceptions. The work was undertaken by Sleeping Giants over the Winter months of 2017/18.

## Methodology

This research draws upon information from locality-based focus groups, one-to-one interviews and an online survey. A total of 69 responses were received, 45% of these were regional and 26% were from national third sector organisations. The online survey respondents were anonymous.

## Current picture- Key themes

### Knowledge engagement and influence in community planning

From the research, it appears there was a low level of perceived knowledge and awareness of community planning policy drivers. With low levels of perceived engagement and influence at a strategic level -this was inclusive of community planning groups, forums and plans. However, the research affirmed that the sector is making an influence through various formal and informal mediums, for example, political lobbying and networking.

### Barriers and enablers to influencing at a strategic level

Respondents faced personal barriers to being heard, these were defined as a lack of confidence and knowledge, accessibility issues and burnout. Bureaucratic barriers were revealed such as addressing matters about who to contact, capacity problems and unsuitable times and locations of meetings. The research also revealed a lack of value and parity placed on the third sector by public sector organisations. However, elected members were identified as the main enablers offering peer support and good communication methods.

### The use and effectiveness of Third Sector Representatives

Third Sector Representatives are individuals who sit on community planning groups and offer a representative voice for the sector, they sit on key strategic groups coordinated by the public sector bodies. The main issues of concern for the representatives were difficulty in gathering the voices of hard to reach groups, lack of capacity and the support/feedback mechanism from TSDG.

### Experience of TSDG in supporting the third sector in community planning

Negative comments were surrounding issues of communication, not being representative, staffing issues, a lack of follow-up and feelings of competition. Whereas the positives were surrounding the organisation and facilitation of events, general support from the staff team and ongoing correspondence.

## Moving forward – key themes

### Giving the third sector a voice

There was a clear indication that third sector organisations want to be involved in community planning but some had reserves about their capacity to participate. The third sector had an interest in influencing the Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP), health and social care, housing, economy and poverty. In doing this, it must be with a solution focussed, joined-up approach that is inclusive of the community and harder to reach groups.

### What needs to change

Community planning meetings and the engagement process were recognised as areas of change. The National Standards of Engagement were recommended as a good practice guide. To enable active participation, the third sector's capacity needs to be increased. TSDG was identified as the key driver for this change.

### What can TSDG do

Improved multi-directional communication, promotional activities, regular consultation with the sector, multi-directional feedback, create connections and provide training and capacity building. In addition to this, it was highlighted, the Third Sector Representatives should advocate and support the sector. There is also a need for upskilling both in terms of the Third Sector Representatives and TSDG staff.

### Strategic Forums

There was agreement that thematic, cross-sectoral and cross-locality forums facilitated by TSDG that feed into community planning and the LOIP would be valuable. The purpose of the forums would be to allow for networking, information sharing, showcasing the work of all third sector organisations along with training and development, including time for consultation with Third Sector Representatives.