



Invitation to tender: Harpur Trust & Bedford Giving State of the Borough Community Consultation 2026

1. Introduction

We are looking to commission an innovative partner to conduct a community consultation in Bedford Borough and bring together the findings in a publication on the needs and strengths of our community.

In 2022 the Harpur Trust published a new, 15-year strategy, "Together For Bedford"¹, working for a generation to tackle the cyclical relationship between disadvantage, lack of opportunities, poor educational outcomes and future poverty. Fundamental to that strategy was the creation and ongoing hosting of a new movement for children and young people in Bedford, Bedford Giving.²

Four years after the strategy launch, The Harpur Trust and Bedford Giving are joining forces to understand whether local needs and perception of needs have changed, and whether our strategy is beginning to have an impact on the issues originally identified.

Our strategy was developed using publicly available data, close analysis of significant local issues by University of Oxford postgraduate researchers and an extensive public consultation. Much has changed since that initial exercise and it's now time to talk to our communities again.

2. Who We Are - About Bedford, The Harpur Trust and Bedford Giving

Bedford is a place which has been identified as "every town"; in the middle of rankings for deprivation, disadvantage and ethnicity, partly urban and partly rural, with pockets of affluence and poverty. It has significant social issues including homelessness, child poverty and educational underachievement.³

Since our original research took place in 2021, we've seen some of the changes here affecting communities nationally and globally. There is growing polarisation and inequality on both sides of the Atlantic with divisive narratives around immigration and

¹ [Our Strategy - The Harpur Trust](#)

² [Home - Bedford Giving](#)

³ [Local authority gaps - Education Policy Institute](#)

asylum. The cost of living continues to increase. Almost 900 Bedford households are in temporary accommodation (double the England average).

Young people, the focus of Bedford Giving, are particularly vulnerable with 1 in 8 not in education, employment or training at November 2025. A quarter of these cite long term sickness or disability as a barrier, with mental health issues casting a long shadow. 80% of young people on the universal credit health element cite mental health or neurodevelopmental conditions as a barrier to work. For those young people in work, often working from home, isolation and loneliness are growing.

Here in Bedford, the imminent arrival of East West Rail⁴, Tempsford new town⁵ and the Universal Theme Park⁶ offer hope and opportunities for some and increase anxieties for others.

About the Harpur Trust

We're here for everyone in Bedford - every child, every family, every community, every generation. Founded in 1566 we are a major local grantmaker, making grants of circa £1.2 million a year, and an educational provider, sponsoring a Multi Academy Trust servicing areas in the 20% most deprived in the country, and operating four independent schools with a 3 million pound bursary programme for disadvantaged children.

As part of our strategy "*Together For Bedford*" we run the Accelerator Programme⁷, a primary education programme aiming to reduce the attainment gap between Pupil Premium children in Bedford and other children. The attainment gap in Bedford has been persistently higher than in most other parts of the country.

We host Bedford Giving, funding staffing and core costs and as a partner, contribute to project funding. The Trust is also involved in the provision of supported housing (almshouses) and a range of other initiatives to support the community.

About Bedford Giving

Launched in 2022 and hosted by the Harpur Trust, we're a network of people and partners from across Bedford, united with a single goal - to inspire and empower the next generation to realise their true potential.⁸

We're here to:

- **Use our independent voice** to raise awareness of the things that matter to our children and young people.
- **Mobilise our collective resources** - people, money, ideas and time - for the benefit of our next generation.
- **Make a difference** to young people's lives by identifying and delivering breakthrough projects with lasting impact.

⁴ [East West Rail - Bedford to Cambridge and Western improvements - Project information](#)

⁵ [New Towns Draft Programme - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Works starts on-site at Universal in Bedford Borough | Bedford Borough Council](#)

⁷ [Support for Local Borough Schools & Early Years - The Harpur Trust](#)

⁸ Partners include bpha, St John's Hospital Trust, Lousada plc, Connolly Foundation, Gale Trust, Worshipful Company of Founders, Panacea, Bedford College

Give, Get, Grow is the ethos that unites us. We're building a movement that will enable everyone to:

- Give their energy, experience and cash to support collective action.
- Get the right support in place to help our children and young people.
- Grow the ambition and achievement of our local community.

3. Consultation objectives

The consultation will ultimately enable both the Harpur Trust and Bedford Giving to answer the question "are we deploying our assets in the most effective and impactful way possible?", and thus inform ongoing development of our strategy.

It will enable the Bedford Giving Board to make informed decisions on whether to continue existing programmes, and what new programmes to develop.

It will help the Harpur Trust to understand the impact of the strands of our community strategy on community perceptions of the Trust.

4. Core Consultation Questions/What we are looking to learn

There are overarching questions which both Bedford Giving and the Harpur Trust would like to explore, and some separate specific questions and issues relevant to the individual organisation/movement. A set of more detailed questions will be provided on appointment.

Bedford Giving has a specific focus on questions for adults, children and young people and professionals on the issues affecting children and young people. The report should triangulate findings to bring out similarities and differences in the responses from these groups.

Bedford Giving questions should focus on the following key areas:

- Experiences of growing up in Bedford
- Aspirations
- Barriers
- Intergenerational understanding

The Harpur Trust has a whole community approach covering the following questions:

- What are the most important needs of our community and how have they changed since our last community consultation?
- What are Bedford's strengths? Have they changed?
- Which of those needs can the Harpur Trust and Bedford Giving best help to meet? Are we focusing on the right issues?
- What impact do members of the community think our work has had since we last consulted them
- Is the Harpur Trust's community strategy having an impact on how the organisation is perceived within the community?
- Do the public understand the difference and the connections between Bedford Giving and the Harpur Trust?

- How aware are the local community of the Harpur Trust's community programmes?
- Who should be involved in making positive change in Bedford?
- What helps and hinders collaborative approaches to meeting community needs?

The agency appointed will engage with a wide range of external stakeholders and the general public. Consultation with people with lived experience and underserved, seldom heard voices will be required.

The agency will challenge and encourage reflection in respondents, enabling them to see their views and perceptions in a wider context. The agency will need to be aware of responses which are coloured by involvement with or advocacy for a particular issue.

5. Consultation methodology and output style

The agency should suggest suitable research methodology, for discussion and finalisation with the Trust and Bedford Giving. The agency will produce a written report including case studies. Ownership of the report lies jointly with the Harpur Trust and Bedford Giving, who may publish this material or sections of it for consumption by different audiences. The appointed agency will work closely with members of the Harpur Trust's Community Programmes Group, particularly the Community Programmes Director, Director of Bedford Giving and Research and Communications Adviser.

The consultation will engage equal numbers of adults and children and young people.

There will be some consultation with identified stakeholders and key partners.

6. What We Are Looking For

We welcome tenders from organisations which:

- Have extensive experience of community consultation
- Have experience in the charity and education sectors
- Are able to use consultation feedback to identify trends and draw independent conclusions which could be used to inform strategy and improve programmes.
- Are willing and able to travel to Bedford to conduct in person consultations.
- Are willing to work with people where they are.
- Have substantial experience of engaging children and young people and underserved communities whose voices are seldom heard.

7. Timings

The suggested timescales for the consultation are as follows but are open for discussion and agreement with the appointed agency.

Date	Activity
9 September 2026	Agencies respond to brief with specification, price & delivery schedule
14 -18 September 2026	Online interviews with shortlisted agencies
21 September 2026	Agency appointed

Inception Meeting - October 21	Detail of research brief agreed between agency and Trust.
October - November - 2026	Consultation
End December 2026	Report submitted
15 January 2027 and 29 January 2027	Presentations to Presentation to Bedford Giving Board/Harpur Trust Community Committee if required

8. Responding to the brief

Please respond to this project specification with a fully costed proposal (maximum 10 pages including CVs and budget) including information outlining the relevant knowledge, skills and experience of your team. Please include information on the following:

- Timelines, including when you would be able to start and finish the project.
- Details of your proposed approach
- CVs of project team
- Examples of your previous consultation work, including links to reports you have written
- Experience of place-based working
- Evidence of experience of gaining the confidence of children, young people and underserved communities.
- A budget including staff time by role/day rate, estimated days, travel etc up to a maximum of £30,000 including VAT.
- Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Procedures.
- Contact details for two previous clients from whom we can seek references
- Disclosure of any reputational issues or complaints in the last five years.
- Written confirmation that there is nothing you know of that could put the reputation of Bedford Giving or the Harpur Trust at risk if we were to work with you.

Please submit your proposal to lbardner@harpurtrust.org.uk by midday on 9th September 2026, with the subject line "State of the Borough Consultation - Tender".

Harpur Trust/Bedford Giving Contacts:

- **Lucy Bardner, Community Programmes Director** lbardner@harpurtrust.org.uk
tel. 01234 369503
- **Dr Peter Thwaites, Research and Communications Adviser**
pthwaites@harpurtrust.org.uk

The decision on provider will be made on the basis of evidence of the ability of the partner to meet the specification, an assessment of the delivery, operational and reputational risks involved, and on quality and cost effectiveness.

9. Budget

We appreciate that there will be differing levels of response available at different prices. We would expect the project to come in between £20,000 - £30,000 including VAT.

10. Resources that will be made available to you

We will make documents and statistics available for analysis including:

- All relevant research compiled by our Research and Communications Adviser, Dr Peter Thwaites.
- Other locally provided research e.g. Schools and Students Health Education Unit survey for Bedford

Ongoing support will be available from the Community Programmes group to include:

- Practical support – for example arranging meetings
- Access to Community Programmes staff as required
- Space in Bedford to meet stakeholders

11. Governance

A contract for this project will be a legal agreement between the provider and The Harpur Trust.