

2020

COVID AND BEYOND:

**SURVEY OF
VOLUNTARY
ORGANISATIONS,
COMMUNITY GROUPS
AND SOCIAL
ENTERPRISES IN DERBY
& DERBYSHIRE**

Executive Summary

There is little doubt Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on Derbyshire's voluntary, community, and social enterprise sector (VCSE). This survey however, undertaken during the first two lockdown periods, revealed both detrimental effects and positive developments.

Key Positives

- Sector resilience: nearly 80% VCSE continuing to provide support during lockdown
- VCSE agility and responsiveness
- Distinct commitment of volunteers and staff, including micro-volunteering
- Ability to make swift changes to service provision, particularly maximising ICT
- VCSE knowledge and understanding of community & service user needs
- VCSE reach, particularly the most vulnerable in society

Key Concerns

- Uncertainty, leading difficulty preparing and planning for the future
- Longer term economic, environmental, and social impact of the pandemic
- Short-termism, project-based funding, continuing focus on C19 funds
- Securing funding and winning resources in the longer term
- HR challenges
- ICT investment
- Maintenance of building and facilities

The response of the sector was swift and effective. Established groups and new Covid-19 support groups provided help with shopping, food deliveries, collecting medication, offering telephone and online befriending, emotional support and welfare calls.

Like other sectors, groups embraced ICT as a way of maintaining contact with their service users, and partners and funders. Nonetheless, there were apprehensions about a lack of skills and up to date equipment, both among staff and volunteers as well as service users, which raised barriers to participation. Larger organisations, however, were able to change the way they worked relatively easily. Many activities shifted virtually relatively easily when organisations quickly moved services to telephone and online support. For smaller community groups this proved more difficult, with challenges around equipment, policies and reduced capacity due to staff and volunteers self-isolating.

New "mutual aid" groups (9%) offered vital services to their local communities with some groups expecting to become formalised and to carry on their services post-Covid-19, whereas others expect to disband. The VCSE has introduced new ways of delivering services, however many can't be delivered or accessed remotely, or serve all beneficiaries, often the most vulnerable, being unable to afford the necessary equipment or connectivity. For everyone, safeguarding and maintaining confidentiality were prime concerns.

Whilst the majority reported taking on no new volunteers (66%), volunteering, particularly micro-volunteering, came into its own during the first lockdown, with local people registering to volunteer and help during the lockdowns: 121 VCSE groups recruited 2484 new volunteers since the first lockdown. Note this includes volunteers recruited via the Derbyshire Community Response Unit which were referred on to local VCSE; 1054 people were recruited of which 264 were still active as at October/November.

In this survey alone, 78,029 people were supported by VCSE organisations and groups during March to October.

"Foodbanks are currently feeding around 3000 people per week; 120 key workers have received a bicycle. We are now also supporting community groups to cook around 5400 meals per week."

CEO, Rural Action Derbyshire

However, some struggled to manage the number of enquiries, particularly at the beginning of the lockdown following calls to support the NHS; some are still awaiting DBS clearance.

"We have had a number of enquiries from potential volunteers, however, have not been able to carry out the face to face interview and training day that is part of our standard recruitment process. Therefore, we have only been able to take on 1 volunteer to trained and available to help."

Age UK Derby and Derbyshire Befriending Service

National data shows the impact of COVID on BAME communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, however a limited number of respondents describe themselves as BAME organisations. National data¹ shows differences in the risk and outcomes from COVID, 'replicating existing health inequalities and, in some cases, increasing them.'

Facilitated by Links, the Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Council for Voluntary Service and Action, the BME Forum is attended by representatives of some of the key BAME network groups in the county. During October Links discussed with each of the BAME groups involved in the project some of the key issues that they have experienced. Overall, it is fair to say that all BAME groups, like other community groups, have had to adjust enormously in finding ways to support their service users, however there remains a need to find about more about the impact and support required going forward from the BAME VCSE sectors.

Several VCSE organisations were successful in applying for Covid-related funding, however nearly 42% state their funding has decreased substantially because of the pandemic. 2% state their income has increased substantially. Many groups are concerned that long-term funding was going to be harder to find, with many funders only focusing on Covid and impact of the pandemic. Given the likely long term social and economic crisis² the county is going to face and the vital role that VCSE groups play, now and in the future, sustainable funding is going to be necessary.

Overall Derbyshire has shown a strong resilience and ability to respond to the crisis. Resources are stretched, however and managing the response to the crisis – as well as planning for the longer term – is a challenge for many VCSE groups and organisations. Urgent conversations need to be had with them about how to manage this process. That said, the 3D partnership is well positioned to address these challenges, nurturing and building upon the positive response so far.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-understanding-the-impact-on-bame-communities>

² <https://www.jrf.org.uk/society/coronavirus>

1. Methodology

this piece of work funded by Derbyshire County Council Public Health and disseminated to frontline VCSE groups via a wide range of partners and networks. The survey was widely promoted to VCSE organisations across Derby & Derbyshire via local VCSE infrastructure organisations and other partners. The survey opened in July initially, and was extended to November 2020.

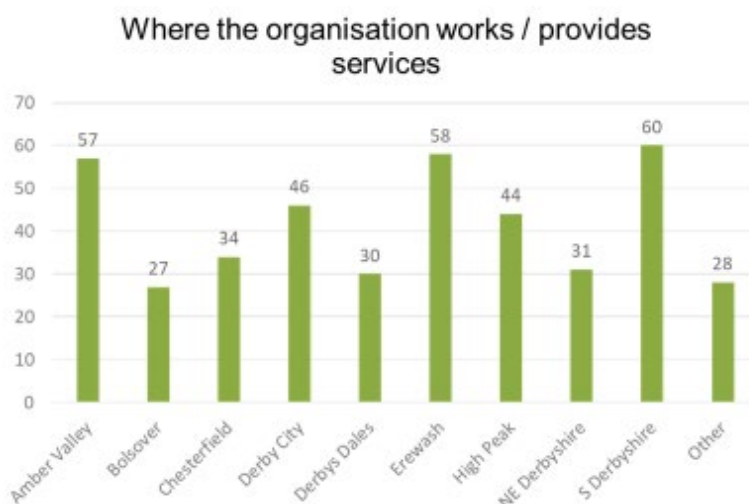
Respondents answered 42 questions across 5 sections:

1. Intro
2. Organisation
3. Covid Response a) & b)
4. Covid Impact
5. Resilience

270 respondents spent an of average 13 minutes; we received 177 full answers (64%) who spent 25 minutes to complete 21 open ended questions. Of the 270 organisations responded, there was a fair spread across the focus area and general

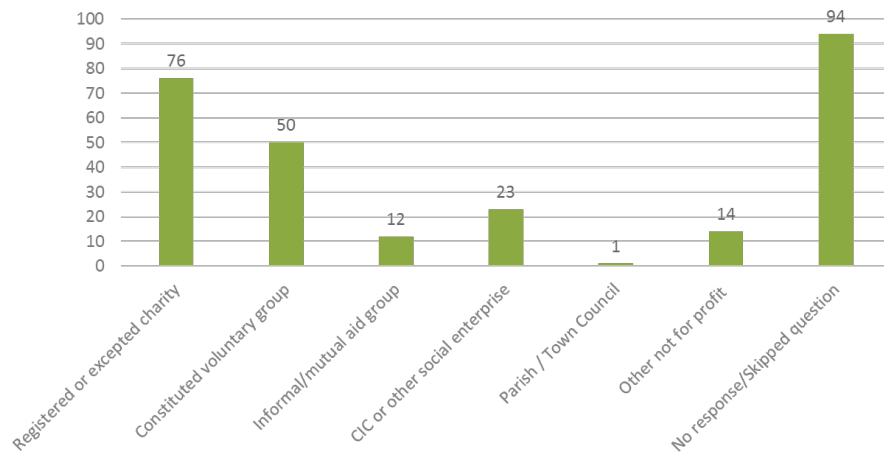
parity of geographical spread, however the south of the County received a higher number of respondents (>33%) working in South Derbyshire, Erewash and Amber Valley, with a quarter working in Derby City and High Peak.

Geographical Spread



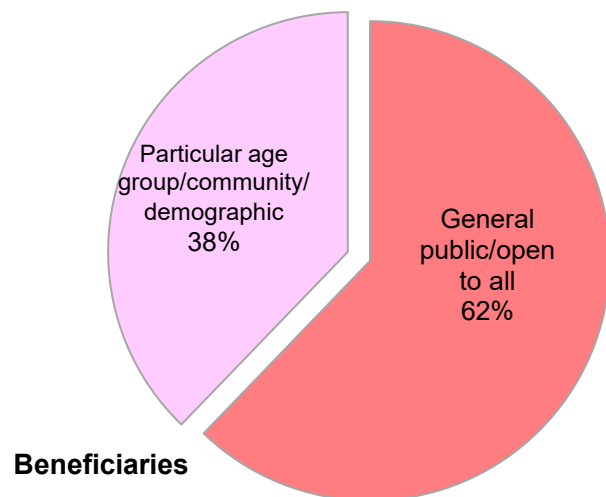
Most (71%) are registered charities and those with formal constitutions, 13% were CIC's or social enterprise and nearly 7% described themselves as informal Mutual Aid Groups. One Parish Council responded, however gaps in BAME VCSE organisation responses are a concern.

Organisational Type Breakdown



174 respondents told us who they worked with: 62% work with public overall, whilst 37% focus on specific groups or issues. These can be broadly grouped into those working with:

- People with a disability, including mental health conditions
- Children & Young people
- Older people
- People with long term conditions
- LGBTQ+ community
- BAME community



Organisations addressing specific purposes or offering specific activities (for example sports) can be grouped together:

- Health & Social Care
- Housing & Homelessness
- Sports/Community Buildings
- Community Development & Wellbeing
- Youth Groups
- Anti-Poverty organisations
- Crime & Community Safety
- Environment & Transport

Most respondents who answered questions about income can be grouped into one of two groups: small (under £10,000) or medium sized (£100k), however many respondents chose not to answer this question (110).

The detailed responses enabled us to gather intelligence about the impact of the Covid-19

pandemic, on their response to the pandemic and its impact or their operations, as well as measure confidence for the future.

This information will be used to inform how 3D can best support them in the coming months, informing also, the support necessary from other key stakeholders and partners for the sector.

2. The VSCE's Response to the COVID 19 Pandemic

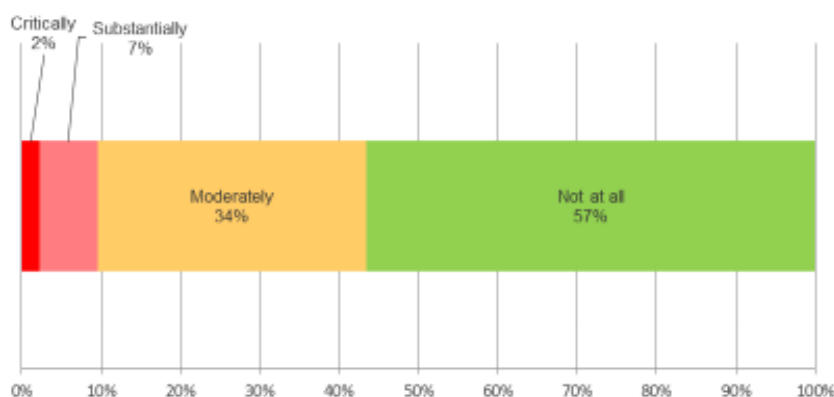
Resilience

There is no doubt that the pandemic has had a considerable short-term impact on most respondents, creating many threats for the VCSE sector, however not all organisations are being challenged in the same way.

Most organisations reported being confident that they can endure the crisis (57%), but critically, nearly 10% are concerned about closure in the next twelve months. 73% of organisations expect a loss of income due to the C19 crisis and, 42%

already seeing a substantial reduction. Having only just come out of dealing with significant impact of austerity, many report an expectation of sustained pressures from an anticipated ensuing recession.

Do you consider your organisation to be at risk of closure?

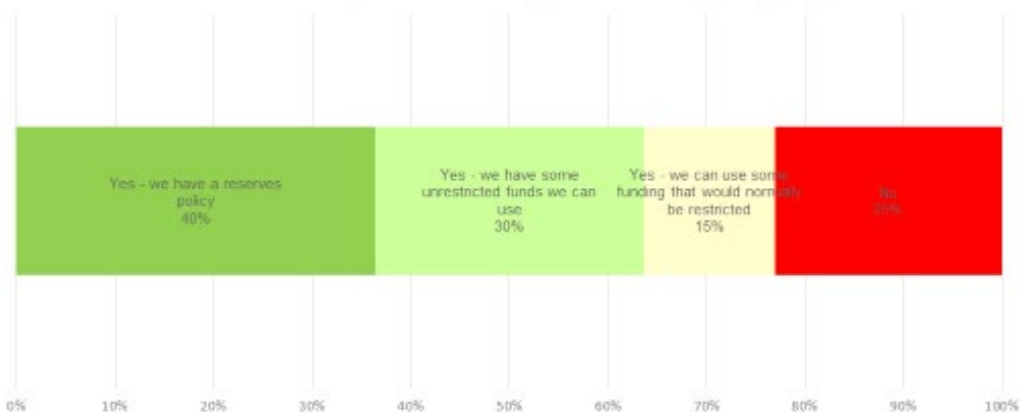


*"The **only** income is from the sales in our community shop, this doesn't cover the bills. We are **using up our savings**, there isn't a lot in that account. If there is another lockdown, the centre will really struggle to stay open at all."*

Trustee, Community Hall (July)

Only 40% of those who responded have a reserves policy in place, and whilst many hold reserves (30%), over a quarter do not. Of those that do, 51% have unrestricted funds to rely on to maintain services in the medium term. Having a reserves policy, that is, maintaining unrestricted funds, leads to confidence in survival (69%), compared with those not having a reserves policy, who are twice as likely to consider themselves critically at risk of closure.

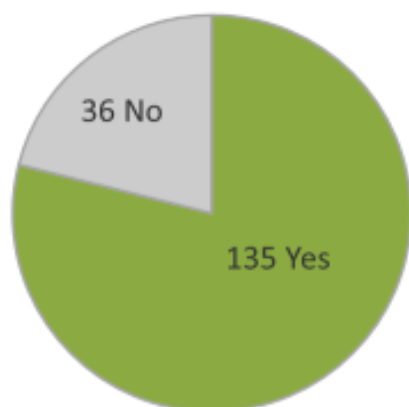
Reserves: Do you have funding that can keep you going?



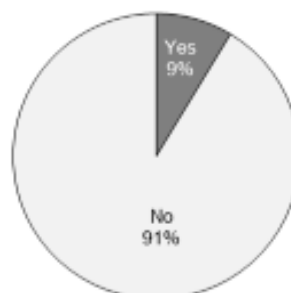
Despite this, the VCSE sector is maintaining support (78%), actively helping the most vulnerable affected by COVID including 8% of the respondents specifically setting up in response to the pandemic. Much of the sector is adapting well (64%) to virtual and home working, with the majority providing virtual activities, telephone & online support, as well as using social media to raise awareness of their work.

Covid Response: Service Delivery

Have you been providing support to people affected by Covid 19?



Are you a new group set up in response to COVID?



"We set up as a network that covered each house in Willington - we divided the village into 6 with a coordinator in each to manage the area volunteers. Each of the 1500 households received a leaflet with a phone number to offer assistance. The Facebook Group was updated daily to link people to local businesses and resources."

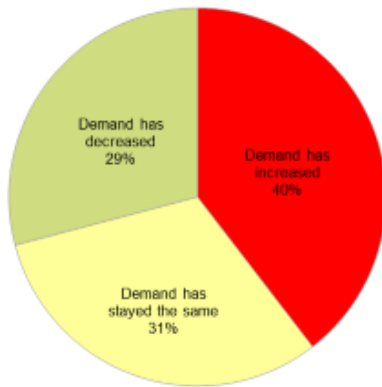
Willington Community Group for Covid 19

Some however, due to low staffing levels, not having the right equipment, skills or policies, are not adapting very well. Many VCSCE services do not lend themselves to remote delivery and 20% of respondents are not providing support during

COVID, even though demand is still high. Capacity reduction has however been offset by new ways of working, the development of new services, repurposing, and by new mutual aid organisations set up within communities.

Organisations involved in anti-poverty, food insecurity, welfare rights and health and care work have seen a sharp rise in demand, and only some are confident that their reserves and contingency planning will be enough to see them through to recovery. Others, in the sporting arenas for example, have seen demand fall just as sharply.

Levels of demand for services



*"Absolutely we have **seen massive increase** & change in users: primarily before Covid, it was typically people on benefits with a low income, since Covid we have been providing to people from all walks of life, people who have been furloughed and more working families in need."*

Volunteer Organiser & Cook, Oscari

Those that expect their work and income to increase post-Covid-19 are those most likely to be addressing specific consequences of measures to halt the spread of the pandemic, such as those

responding to Domestic Violence, mental health and isolation, and supporting people with Learning Disabilities, for example.

"We are looking at sustainability at this present time as there remains a need for our services and the development of new ones."

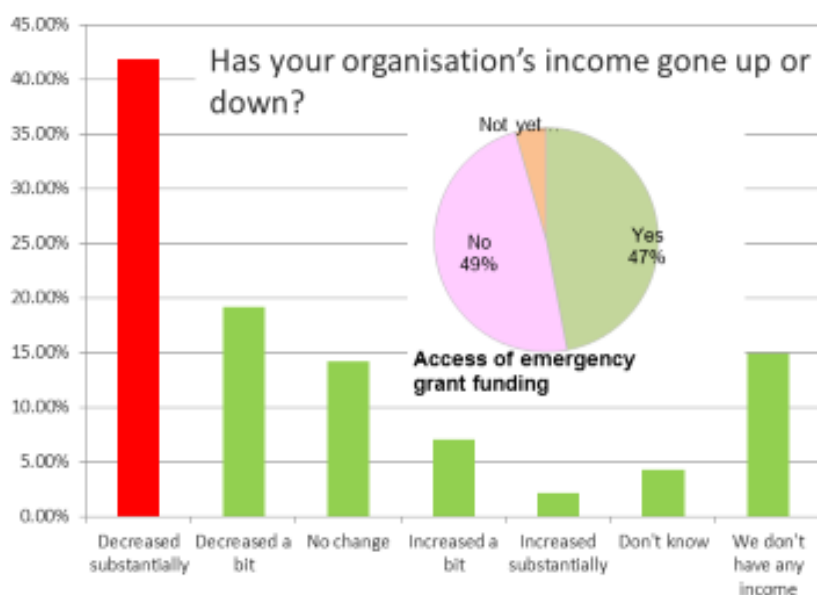
Coordinator, Buxton Street by Street

3. Income

In answering questions about the impact of COVID on income, the data shows a significant detrimental impact, with 61% seeing a reduction in income; 42% seeing a substantial reduction.

Even those confident of short-term revenue income, including the 48% in receipt of Emergency Grant Funding, a significant number are concerned about the longer-term impact on funding sources (76%) expecting long-term funding to be harder to find. Many funders are only focusing on Covid and impact of the pandemic; this coincides with VCSE organisations who are also currently focused on the current

crisis, but they do expect a long and deep recession afterwards, with resulting increases in demand and many fear long term reduction in income and capacity. Given the likely long term social and economic crisis the county is going to face and the vital role that VCSE groups play, now and in the future, sustainable funding is going to be necessary.



*"Covid-19 has **seriously impacted** on the ability to **find funding to cover core costs**. As many funders have focussed on Covid-19 it has made it harder to seek further funding and implement new exciting services that we had earmarked in our business plan. We are currently **using our limited reserves to top up** the limited funding we get."*

Service Manager, CamTAD Hearing Support

Those charities that rely on income from their activities, such as sport facilities and community buildings and those that rely on public fundraising such as events, have been hardest hit by the pandemic and while some have effectively 'been saved' by support from Government and other sources, they anticipate it may not be enough in the longer term. Confidence is also affected by how much an organisation can look forward to recovery: while so many organisations are in survival mode, they are potentially less likely to be carrying out long term planning or focusing on long term sustainability, kicking this can down the street risks delaying considerable issues in the future.

"We are a simple business structure we rent out rooms and the income is used to pay our fixed costs and our staff - we have lost £21,000 income so far and many of our hirers are exercise classes and larger groups so losses will continue - we have sent out a questionnaire to all our hirers to see who will return but it is clear we will continue to loose income."

Chairman, Hilton Village Hall

Lessons learned during previous economic declines³ show the VCSE sector can expect to see a further drop in its income over the next 12-18 months, from almost all sources. Public fundraising (including membership subscriptions, trading and events) is expected to be the hardest hit due to uncertainty over when and how restrictions might be lifted and the likely economic hit on the statutory sector, as well as donors⁴.

Only 48% have receipt of Emergency Grant Funding and only 4% said they intend to apply.

COVID restrictions have also meant that many sources of public fundraising are not currently available to the sector. CAF research suggests ⁵'more than half of charities (53%) reported a drop in donations.' Many groups report anecdotally in the survey, that fundraising events and activities are being cancelled.

Grant making trusts and foundations are seeing more applications than ever and the competition for such funds is likely to increase⁶. Nevertheless, some larger organisations argue the COVID crisis has presented a change in how sectors are working together, coalescing around Covid-19 needs, with statutory partners and funders working at a very encouraging pace. Some VCSE report feeling more engaged at a strategic and

operational level in a way that it is hoped will continue post COVID; others remain frustrated about the lack of access to opportunities to participate in consortium or partnership joint initiatives and bids. Consideration to the potential for 3D and the wider sector to maximise opportunities to address weaknesses⁷ in local commissioning should be taken now.

"We have not been able to do many of our normal fundraising activities but villagers have been fairly generous with donations to ensure our charity is able to function."

Treasurer, Church Broughton Village Hall & Playing Field Committee

Likewise, income through service activities, entrance fees and membership subscriptions has been drastically hit. Resilience in the short term, for many respondents, was dependent on lockdown, and the subsequent tier restrictions coming to an end; whether they can reopen and operate safely; and whether there is a market for their activities: many anticipated that such uncertainty will impede recovery planning.

"Planning for the future, considering how we can deliver services more economically, how we will raise income [with reduced capacity]"

Anonymous

Funding currently being diverted towards COVID responses will at some point return to wider priorities, however the subsequent economic decline threatens the required growth in such funds, and there is a risk that they will be unable to meet the anticipated rise in demand.

³ https://www.ncvo.org.uk/images/documents/policy_and_research/funding/financial-sustainability-review-of-the-voluntary-sector-july-2015.pdf

⁴ <https://ciof.org.uk/events-and-training/resources/research-impact-of-coronavirus>

⁵ <https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/research/coronavirus-and-charitable-giving>

⁶ <https://www.acf.org.uk/news/acfs-response-to-coronavirus>

⁷ <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-providers/coronavirus-covid-19/commissioning/future-of-commissioning-social-care>

Commitments from statutory funders have meant that income from statutory grants and contracts (one third of voluntary sector income) has been relatively unaffected, at least in the short term. VCSE organisations cited valuable communications with commissioners and a welcome flexibility in contract rules and regulations.

“Our funders were happy for us to change our service provision during the initial Covid issues, but we have no guarantees how long this may last. Ongoing funding is being sought.”

Centre Manager, South Derbyshire Mental Health Association

Almost 70%) report concern over loss of income in the longer term, most recipients of COVIC Recovery Grants site funding lasting until March; after this period, respondents face an uncertain future.

“We have secured emergency Covid funding for 6 months from the NLCF. However, our 3 year NLCF bid which was due to be heard at the 2nd panel stage in April has been paused. Without it we will only have sufficient funds for 40% of our service.”

Manager, Home-Start Erewash

Smaller VCSE organisations and those that rely on volunteers expect income to be unchanged. These describe either being closed until the crisis passes thus incurring no or low running costs or are completely volunteer run with minimal overheads. Those expecting to lose all their income are comprised of groups that rely on income such as community buildings, sports facilities that rely on room hire or regular subs.

Over the last decade good practice counselled the VCSE sector to make inroads diversify their income streams and reduce their reliance on one source. Paradoxically, organisations that have successfully diversified their income away from statutory sources have been most affected by the COVID following reductions in earned income and public fundraising.

“We have gained COVID grants so are secure in the short term but are mostly supported by the trading of our hub supplemented by specific grant-funded projects (20-25% of income), so are worried about the long term if our trading cannot break even anymore.”

Director, Monkey Park CIC

Those reporting a shortfall are mitigating their losses by reducing overheads, furloughing staff, cutting hours, and making redundancies, or spending reserves.

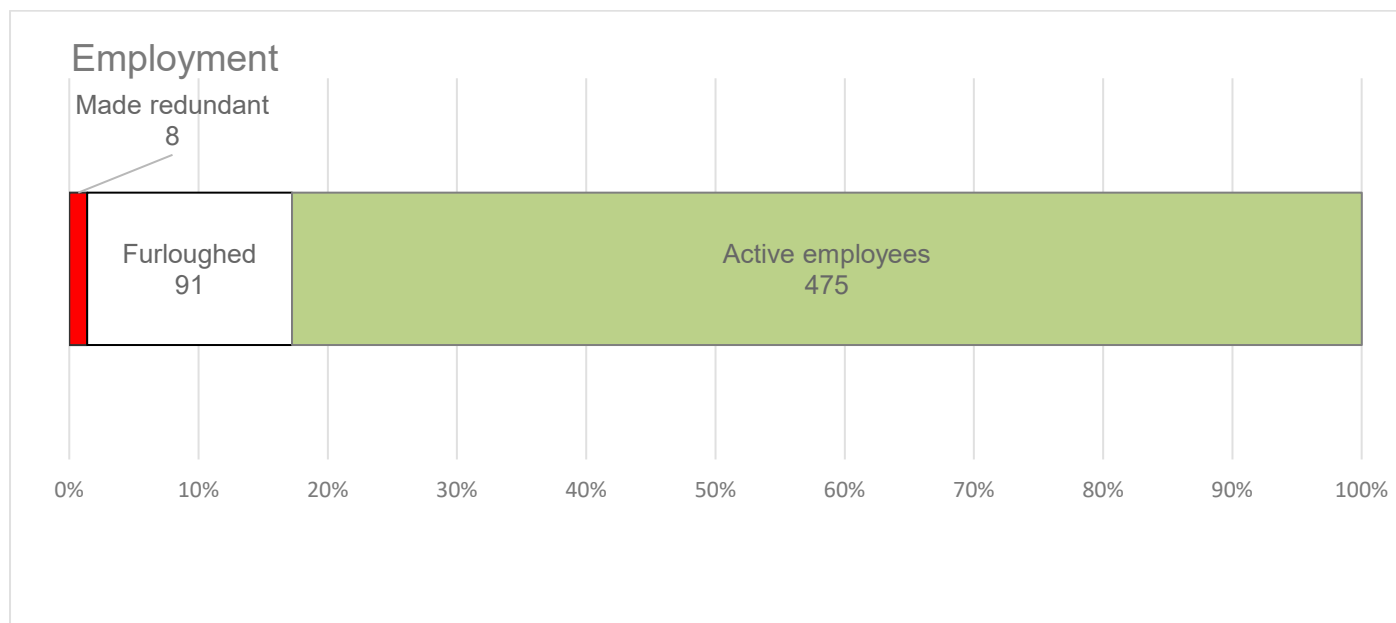
Proposals

- **Specialised, in depth, expert support to navigate the wider spectrum of fundraising:** from raising funds from the public, social investment (through borrowing or equity), full engagement in commissioning as well as tendering to win contracts and resources as part of an overall ‘recovery/development’ plan.
- **Investigate market for online training workshops** aimed at helping groups to identify their funding needs, prioritise appropriate funding opportunities and increase groups’ understanding of meeting eligibility criteria such as demonstrating evidence of need, user involvement etc.
- **Utilise new networks** to continue to gather member views to feedback on the challenges and the need for long-term funding to key funders & commissioners at the local, regional and national levels.

4. VCSE Workforce

The UK's Covid-19 economic support response includes the Coronavirus Jobs Retention Scheme where employers hit by the pandemic and who would otherwise have to make staff redundant, have been able to place staff on furlough, with 80% of the staff member's salary being paid by the Government. The scheme did not however apply to those who have secure income or publicly funded organisations.

Whilst most of the respondents do not employ any staff, of those that do (39%), 21% have furloughed at least some of their staff with 40% of those furloughing at 1/3 of their employees; 15% had furloughed all staff. Smaller organisations that employ staff, have been less likely to furlough them, having less capacity to do so: 12% of such organisations are accessing the scheme.



Derbyshire's VCSE sector are keen to retain staff, so some are using reserves to retain staff, others (10%) have made some posts redundant or cut hours to maintain services. As a consequence of maintaining small staff numbers there are significant HR challenges around illness & self-

isolation absence, poor mental health and management of remote staff working from home. New training and ICT needs have already been identified and half of those spoken to during interview envisage this being a future priority post COVID.

Anecdotal Insights

- Concerns about access to HR support being raised, specifically managing a multitude of new HR concerns, including managing staff effectively over telephone or video conference, service developments and subsequent change management.
- Specific HR Legal support for managing redundancies.
- Develop resources addressing new training needs for staff (and volunteers) unfamiliar with digital technologies.
- Look into accessing statutory support available for managing employees' physical and mental health during lockdown, including anxiety, stress and bereavement.

4. Service Delivery

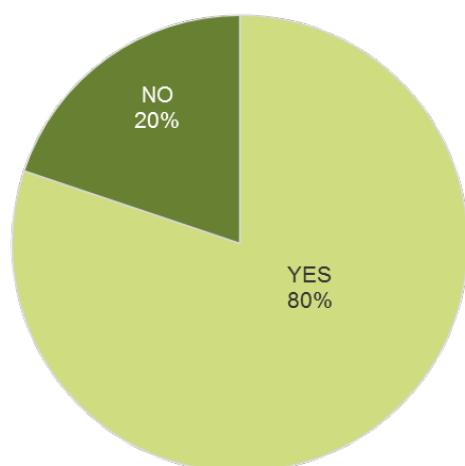
Many VCSE groups reported moving to offer telephone and online support including using WhatsApp Groups, Teams and Zoom video conferencing.

Those organisations have not explored providing online support, (15%) state concerns that their own skills are not adequate or those of their service users, opting for telephone contact instead.

Organisations with existing digital services (37%) adapted very quickly to the changes in service delivery and were able to grow some of their existing online support, including introducing new

online workshops or sessions and even grow attendance with great success. Feedback from participants has been positive with people finding it easier to join activities online, especially during the week, being easier to fit around work and family life commitments. However, some organisations that were able to move to online support (16%) did not see it as a long-term replacement for face-to-face services.

Have you developed or changed what you normally offer, in response to COVID?



Groups who reported difficulties in adapting to online service delivery revealed the reasons for these issues were due to a lack of equipment available within the organisation, service users not having access to IT equipment or internet, particularly among older people, and low-level skills among both staff and clients. A number of respondents expressed concern about safeguarding protocols for vulnerable clients, for example, services offering support to those recovering from domestic violence felt that

*"[We're expecting a] different way of working, more use of digital platforms **but must not lose the human connection.**"*

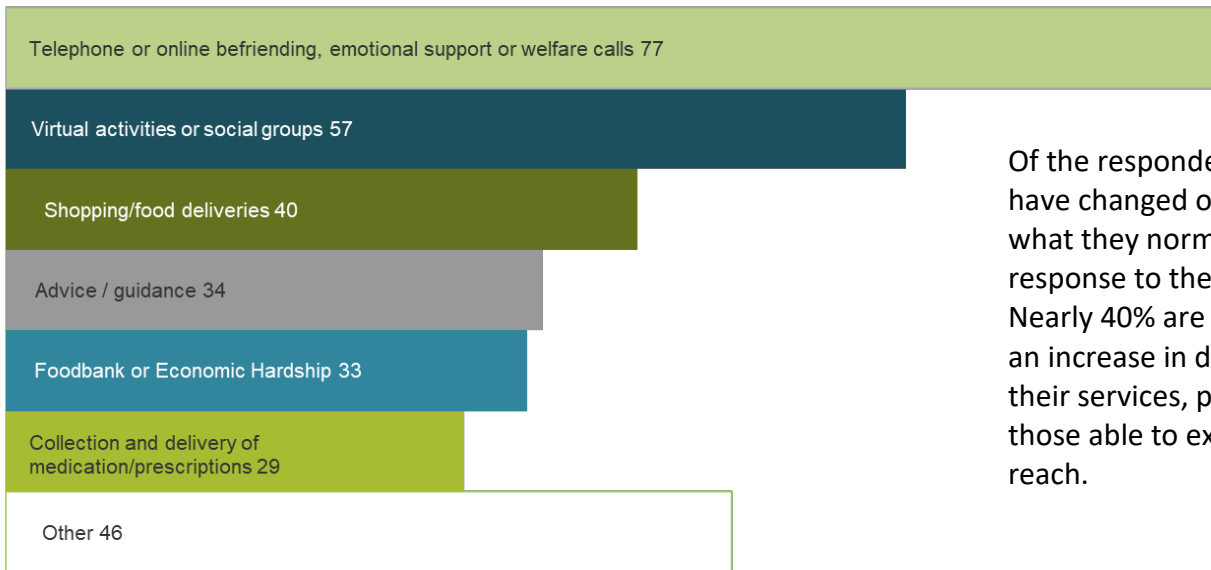
***Service Manager,
Derbyshire Recovery and
Peer Support Service***

delivering support online via a platform such as Zoom or Teams would not be a safe option for their clients, as they might not have a safe place with internet access where they could access such a service. There was also a concern around GDPR and lending out equipment to service users or volunteers and ensuring that software was only used for its intended purpose. Those who had invested in new technology over the longer term found the transition the easiest.

"We had previously made the investment into offering secure video consultation under our choice programme before Covid-19 which enabled us to move quickly during lock down. We will continue to learn from the pandemic and share this with our partners including what else we can learn to ensure that we can remain agile and representative to the people who come to us for support."

CEO, First Steps ED

What kind of support have you been providing?

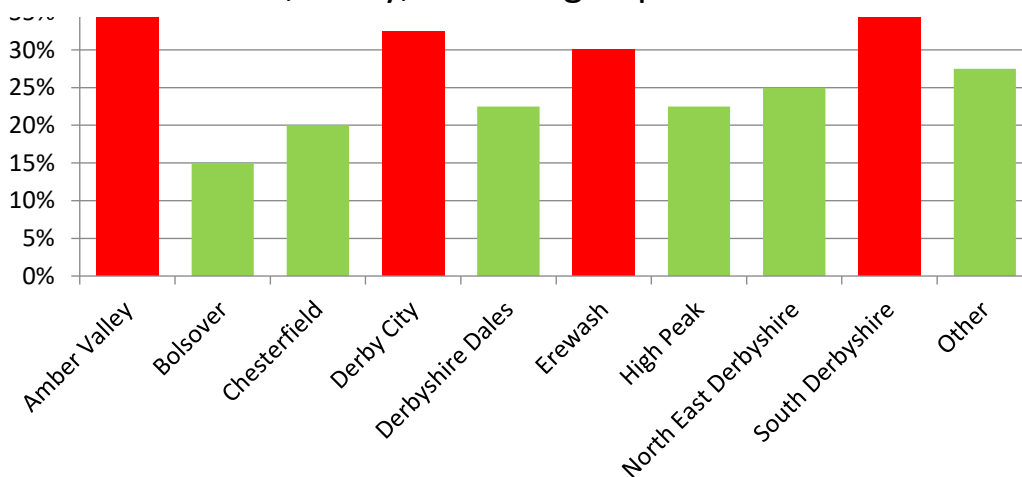


Of the respondents 80% have changed or developed what they normally offer in response to the pandemic. Nearly 40% are experiencing an increase in demand for their services, particularly those able to extend their reach.

"As we run primarily outdoor projects that could currently offer activities to people, we are being told by referrers that the service is in demand."

Director, Grow Outside C.I.C

Which localities, if any, are being impacted more than others?



Capacity has been maintained or increased in specific areas in the County because of greater need, specifically in Amber Valley (40%), South Derbyshire (35%) and the City (32%) and Erewash (30%).

"Although we mainly cover Swadlincote and district we have taken referrals from external agencies in Derby City and Erewash."

Minister, Hill Street Baptist Church Clothes Bank & Community Hub

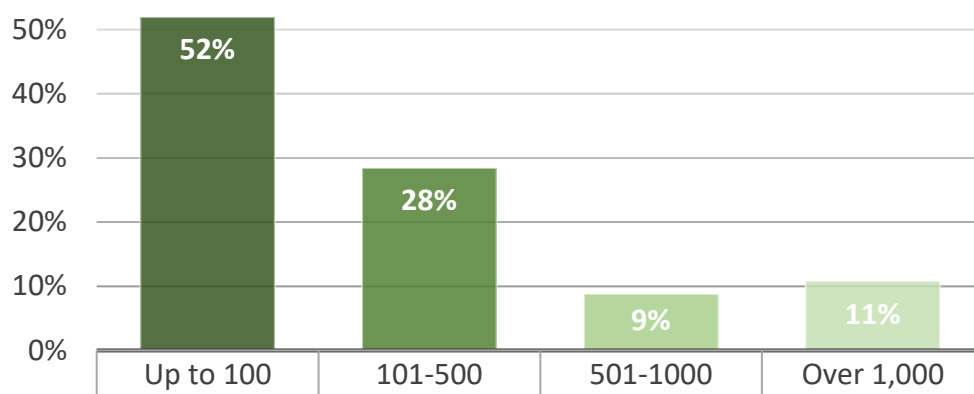
Most VCSE organisations who responded cited devising new ways of delivering their existing services, for example moving face-to-face delivery to virtual meetings. Some have broadened their range of beneficiaries to allow more people to access their services during the pandemic.

Many organisations mention developing new services to replace or supplement their usual services. Many other organisations, volunteers and local helpers worked together with statutory services, communicating more effectively so as not to leave anyone in need.

"We have always supported the food bank and social eating projects but by working with other agencies we have incorporated the hot food delivery service because people cannot get to our social eating groups."

Chair, Churches Together in Swadlincote and District

Covid Response: Numbers Supported



The numbers of people supported during the period of the survey ranged from 3-25,000.

Respondents report that most of their members, service users and clients are responding well to the new ways of working, but not all, and some are struggling to access the tools needed to deliver remotely.

"Because we use our process to help people who have suffered trauma, abuse, bullying and anxieties we expect our demand to rise considerably. This is due to the general anxiety around COVID itself and when children eventually return to school there will be a rise in separation anxiety. We expect that parents will also have worries around allowing children back into the classroom. There has been a reported rise in Domestic Violence from the media due to people being furloughed from jobs and possibly being made redundant."

Co-Manager, FAB Project Swadlincote

However, nearly 30% of respondents tell us they have seen a decrease in demand; clearly not all services lend themselves to a virtual alternative, for example sports and cultural organisations, or those working out of hired facilities (40%) which have closed.

A range of wider issues affecting communities has also been cited as evidence of increased demands including an increase in domestic violence, significant need for welfare rights advice, employment, housing support and mental health and wellbeing needs.

"Mental health has decreased, and many members have regressed to pre group health."

Chair, Fibro Active

There are positives however, with digital services extending reach, outdoor groups recruiting more members and volunteer organisations seeing an increase in offers of support.

"Lots of people [are] cycling for the first time & discovering our community bike workshop. We've also been doing free servicing & £50 bike vouchers for key workers."

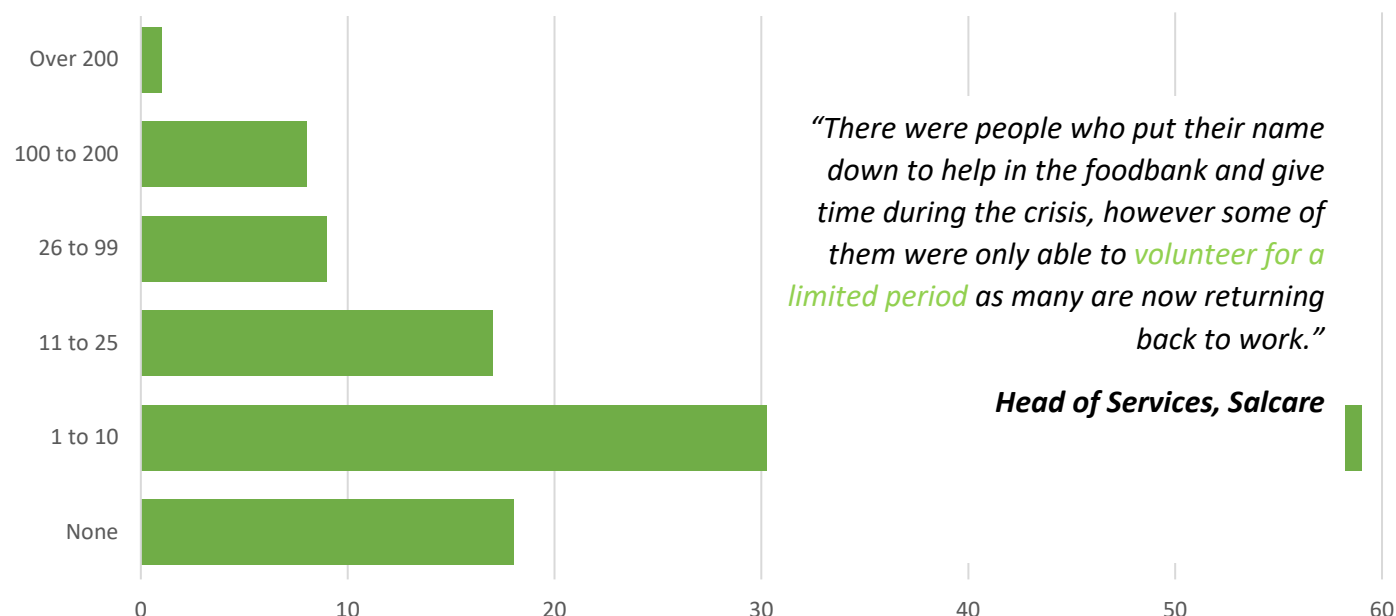
Director, Monkey Park CIC

Nevertheless, many groups expect further challenges as lockdown eases, anticipating the longer-term impacts as well changes in response to the 'new normal.'

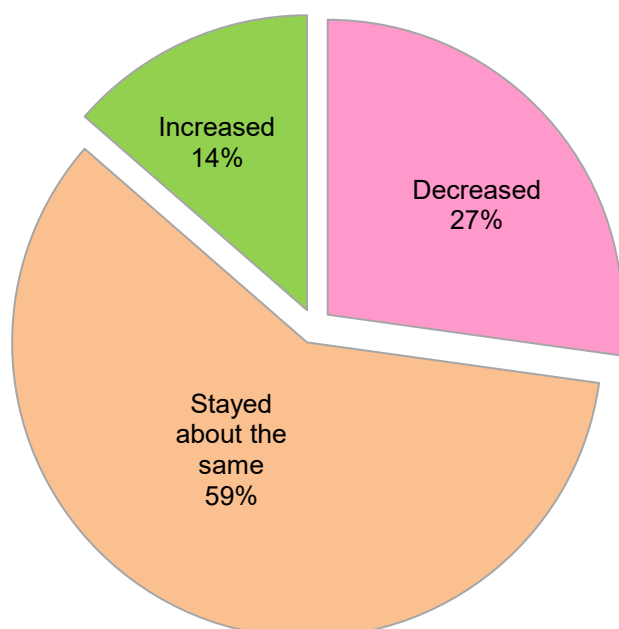
5. Volunteering

Volunteering, particularly micro-volunteering, came into its own during the first lockdown, with local people registering to volunteer and help, particularly those classifying as informal and mutual aid.

Number of volunteers



Impact on active Volunteer numbers



121 VCSE groups reported taking on 2484 new volunteers since the first lockdown. Despite this, a significant number state active volunteer numbers remaining the same (54%) and a quarter reported a decrease in active volunteers (24%); charities and groups with a constitution report the greatest decrease and these were more often sports organisations and community buildings.

At the beginning of the lockdown most (49%) of the existing organisations report focusing on managing current volunteers and supporting them to transition to the new, adapted ways of delivering services. There was actually a limited demand for new volunteers among established

service providers; some who employ Volunteer Organising staff report that existing staff were extremely busy but there was limited capacity to vet, induct and support new volunteers. During lockdown however organisations did report using new volunteers.

New Volunteers Recruited



Those using volunteers also set out a number of issues post COVID, including losing some who may not return, the time it will take to re-engage or recruit new volunteers, impacting on activities and services and even re-opening times in some cases. Recruitment methods may need to be adapted and enhanced training provided all of

which has substantial financial and time implications. PPE equipment for safe working and reviewing workstations will come at a cost; safeguarding and generally updating policies and procedures that staff receive clear guidelines will take time if these are not already in place.

Anticipated challenges include:

- CV19 safety and distancing limiting activities or numbers
- Delays and restrictions in recruiting and training new volunteers
- Older & vulnerable volunteers absent due to risk and may or may not return
- Reviewing what we offer
- Groups reluctant to restart, fear of risk and social mixing
- Fundraising impacting on delivery
- Premises not available
- Hope gradually to return to normal once restrictions are lifted / vaccine is in place

- Having to work harder, exhaustion
- Limitations of space, facilities, desks, equipment
- Volunteers returning to work
- Not able to return / restart at present as services or activities are on hold
- Retraining of staff and volunteers
- Remotivating volunteers after a long absence
- Uncertainty "We are not sure; we are just going to roll with the punches"

Considerations could be given to:

- **Wider sharing of best practice** on re-engaging & recruiting new volunteers including adapting recruitment methods.
- **Enhanced Volunteer training**, extending digital information services on key issues including safeguarding policies and procedures, GDPR, fundraising practices in line with The Fundraising Regulator.
- **Resource development** that addresses new equipment and training needs for staff (and volunteers) unfamiliar with digital technologies.

6. Challenges

There remains much confusion as to whether lockdown restrictions ease or not and the remaining uncertainty, citing 'poor national leadership', leading to some concerns about a 'broken VCSE sector'. Regular updates and clarifications on the 'variable rules for different age groups, and whether people are shielding or not' is also required.

There is recognition that the number of people 'living in poverty, joblessness and destitution' will increase, as will the number of people needing mental health support. This will certainly lead to an increased need for support and 'securing sustainable income' was the most often reported issue, ergo, fundraising help, in all its forms, is the most reported challenge.

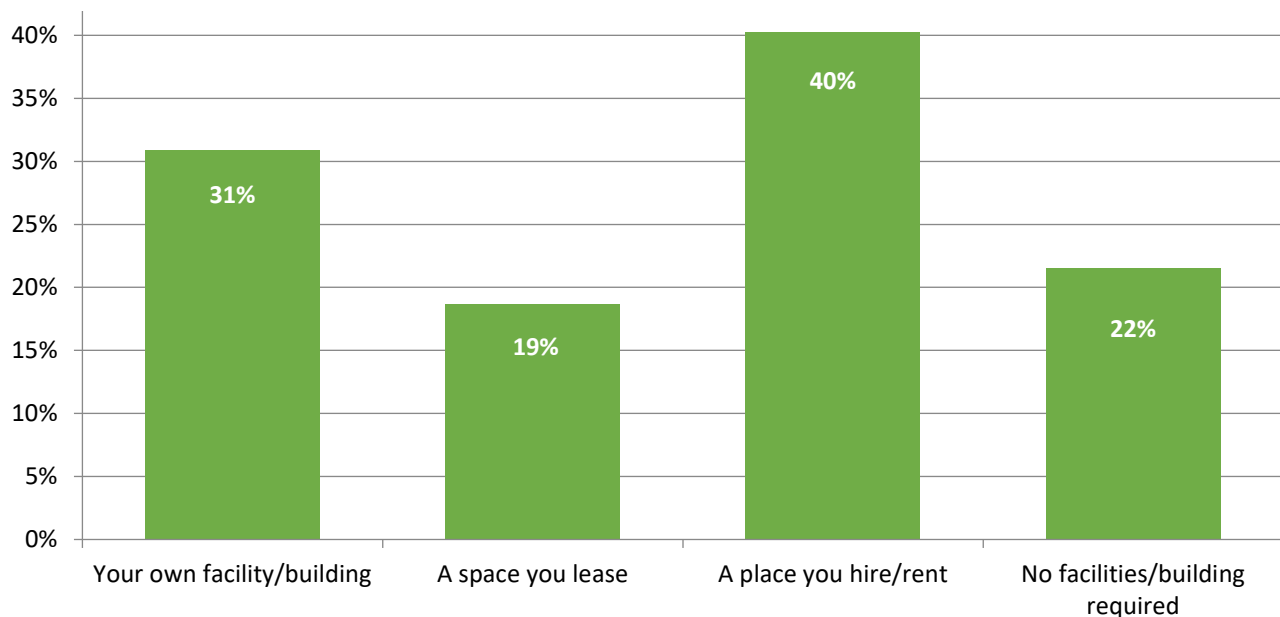
Sustainability and all that it entails, is a major concern for small to medium sized organisations: many respondents justifiably reporting fears

'building up business again', recognising it will be 'a slow process which is having an impact on our finances'. Planning for the future, considering how to deliver services 'more economically' or how to raise income 'when people begin to lose their jobs' was expressed in many ways.

The need for business planning support, workforce development and volunteer management, funding strategies, risk assessment support and governance were all named as important challenges for the future.

The need for continued short term additional including changes to buildings, additional support in providing IT equipment, training and robust safeguarding policies to account for the changes to supporting clients online are all 'big issues'. 'Safely bringing our service back to 'normal levels' and 'getting buildings ready, with the correct adaptations', so that they are fit for purpose, safe and yet still welcoming, is imperative to the sector and the communities it serves. Reopening in 'a COVID compliant way' was also an issue for sports organisations, community buildings, cultural and community services, cafes and local community hubs

Asset Use



The need for continued short term additional finances to ensure effective COVID management including changes to buildings, additional support in providing IT equipment, particularly for the 31% who own their building.

There are concerns that (especially smaller) services may require assistance with adapting to social distancing guidelines. The key areas of concern include having knowledge of PPE and providing clear guidelines on using PPE to provide safe environments for staff and clients.

Support with accessing up-to-date information on how to re-open, particularly for activities indoors, in a way that complies with the government guidelines and help navigating through different guidelines for different types

of activities, which one group reported as an 'obstacle course' is vital.

The fear of certain demographics returning to 'normal' or 'getting back together' is another major challenge.

Many people within the shielded category have experienced severe loss of confidence in terms of social contact and a prolonged isolation. Some older people may continue facing this in the longer term, as many of their usual groups and services are not able to re-open. They will also be particularly vulnerable to further disengagement and lack of social contact in the case of post-Christmas outbreak and further lockdown. Working to mitigate and address this should be one of the key priorities. Contingency planning is still lacking, and COVID fatigue is a real risk.

ICT and digital support is also a common thread: for both the sector itself themselves (their kit, practices, staff and volunteers) or their clients and service users. Groups require simple, user-friendly resources and hands-on support which offer them ways to survive, tools to help them adapt and strategies to thrive. Some clients, particularly older people, need ICT equipment to engage in online services, as well as training and support to gain skills and build confidence.

7. Positives

Remarkably, 122 organisations still felt able to focus on the many positives that have resulted from the COVID pandemic and there are many. It has highlighted many strengths within the VCSE: its agility, responsiveness and ability adapt and to act quickly in a crisis. Being part of the sense of community 'has kept people going.' A recognition of the sectors' creativity in service development, extending reach and responding to new challenges to stay in contact with members, service users, staff and volunteers, as well commissioners and funders, responding quickly to requests for flexibility. Many groups have recruited new members through initial offers of support.

The commitment and loyalty of staff, trustees, management committee members and volunteers, to service users and each other, created a real sense of camaraderie. Groups reported this amongst those using services too.

'People have learned more about each other, are closer' and many groups remarked on the pride being involved in 'communities that pull together, talk to each other, and support each other.'

Almost half organisations who spoke to us are focusing on the **positives**



Others commented on people being 'more engaged with their locality, especially nature' and it seems opportunities have opened to bring benefits to the environment, with 'more people enjoying that and appreciating nature more as a local asset' resulting in 'people realising how important green space is for mental health.'

New ways of working, particularly opportunities to improve work life balance by being at home more, building an online presence, and, not insignificantly, 'a renewed satisfaction being able to give more time to our clients', conversely due to more freedom and flexibility and different ways of working, including working from home offering online and telephone support. Better use of technology is also seen as a positive, reducing travel and producing much more effective meetings.

Technology has also extended and widened groups reach, particularly through social media, with one respondent relaying increased digital confidence – ‘in business and in the community, people have adapted and now it's embedded in our practice.’

Others refer to maximising the ‘free time’ to finish construction projects, using the time to redecorate and refurbish premises.

Working across different agencies, sharing expertise and working together is another positive felt by many groups, particularly those working in homelessness, domestic violence, mental health, considering themselves now in a ‘potentially better place than earlier in the year’.

Many spoke of a ‘new energy and enthusiasm to improve community life’ and importantly a ‘belief - that if we get on and do things, we can make a difference to people's lives,’ leading to a greater ‘awareness of what life is really like for people who are isolated and alone’ leading to direct action to connect and support.

Overall many groups report a new sense of confidence, despite the challenges the sector faces ahead – ‘a sense of ‘we can do this’ at community level’ is seen as strong ‘evidence – through data and stories – as demonstration of what's possible when communities get together and take action (e.g. Mutual Aid) for the greater good.’

8. Future Infrastructure Support Needs

In addition to the insight and proposals suggested throughout this report, 133 groups prioritised the support and resources that they would find the most useful, to help them address the challenges they now are facing.

Funding & Fundraising

Unsurprisingly finding and applying for long term funding topped the table for smaller organisations with 62% asking for more help and

27% wanting help finding or applying for crisis funding urgently. A further 25% also needed help evidencing and communicating impact.

Community Engagement

Engaging & supporting local communities came next, with 33% expressing an interest in doing this better, more often.

31% would like more help with finding volunteers and a further 25% would appreciate guidance on supporting staff/volunteers.

Connecting the VCSE

Help connecting with others in the VCSE was the fourth most requested support.

28% wishing to network and learn from each other by linking up with other groups and through peer support.

Getting Started Up Again

A quarter of groups who wanted help, asked for practical COVID compliance advice (e.g., on hygiene or social distancing). Recovery planning was a priority for 19% and a further 11% wanted

help on legal structures/charity registration; interestingly, 15% of which were Mutual Aid Groups.