WARWICKSHIRE & SOIHULL CAVA

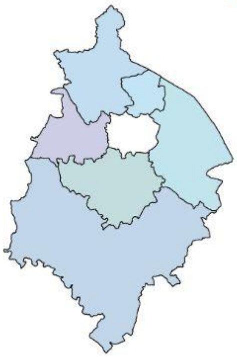
WARWICKSHIRE & SOLIHULL
CAVA
COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY ACTION

STATE OF THE VCFSE SECTOR

SURVEY

FINAL REPORT

WWW.WCAVA.ORG.UK



MARCH 2026

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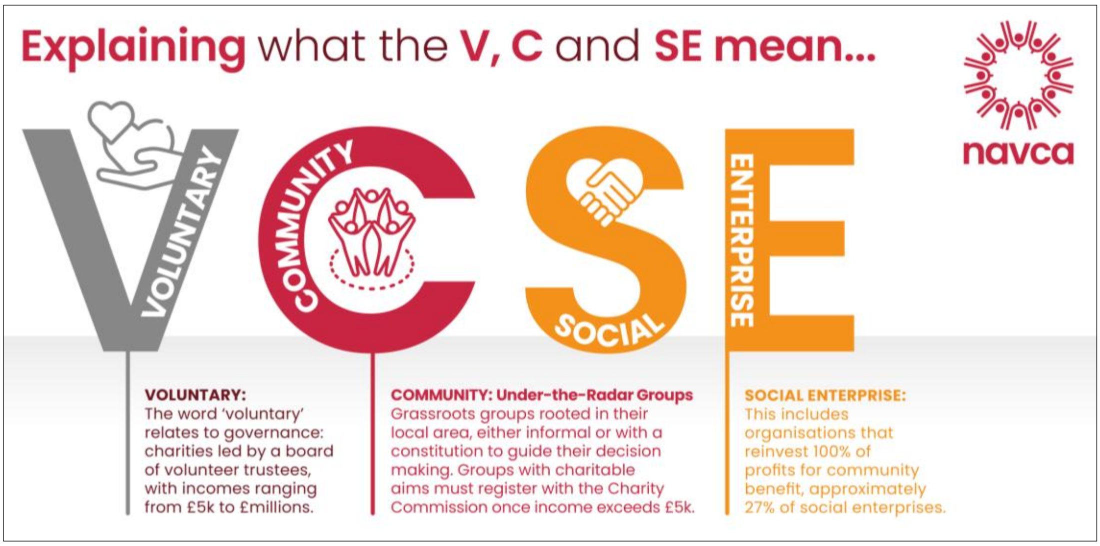
ABOUT US

Warwickshire and Solihull Community and Voluntary Action (CAVA) is the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector 'local infrastructure organisation' (LIO) for Warwickshire and Solihull, providing vital support to the volunteers, groups, organisations, enterprises and charities who are working to strengthen all our communities.

CAVA's national body, NAVCA explains the Sector in the following way:

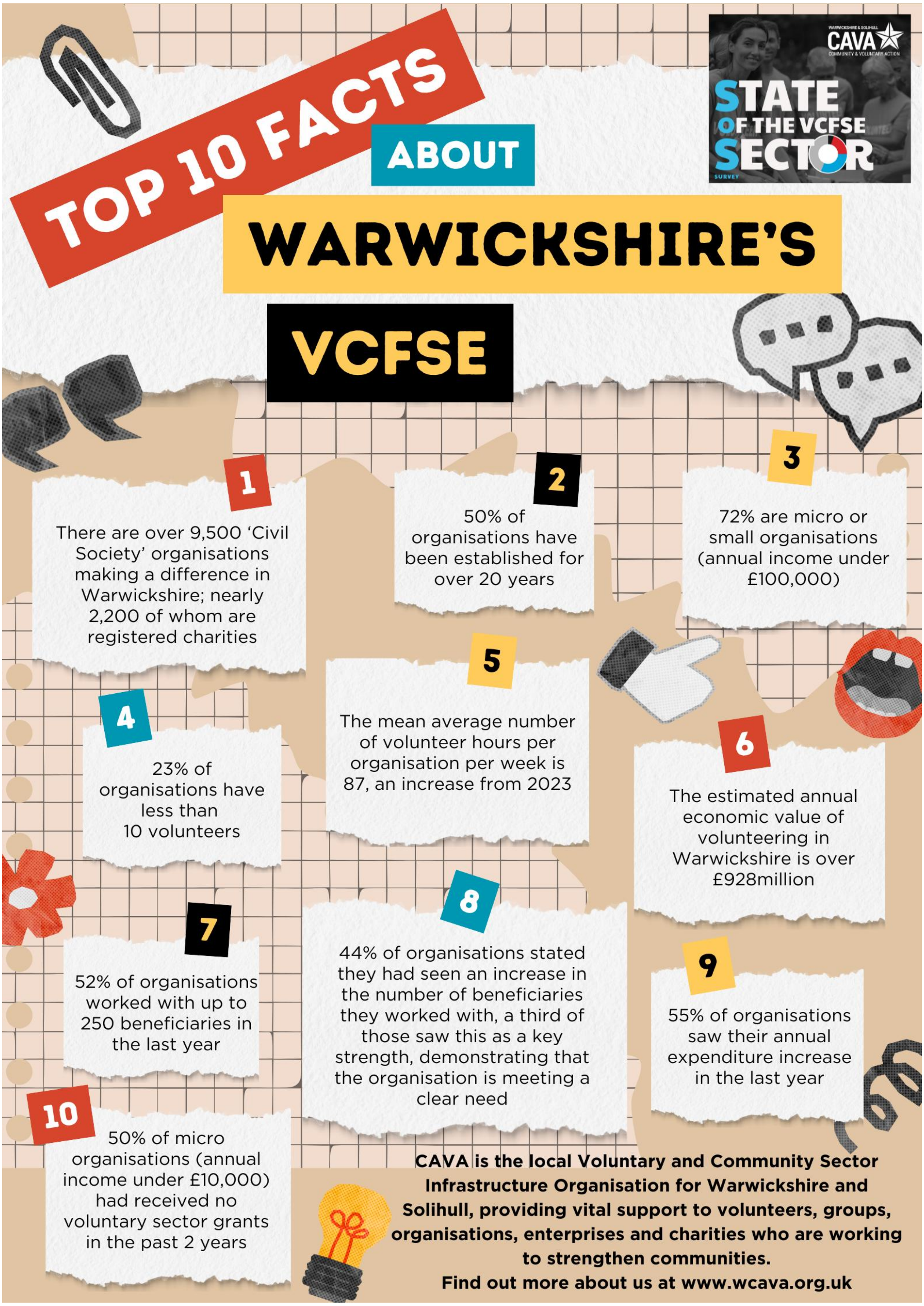


In NAVCA's 2025 report [Connecting communities, enabling common ground: the role of local infrastructure](), they confirm that nationally, many communities are feeling the effects of disconnection and isolation. LIOs are seeing first hand "economic insecurity, the loss of shared spaces, polarisation online, and ongoing inequalities which leaves communities struggling to feel safe and connected…LIOs bring connection, stability and leadership to their local VCSE sectors. They convene, coordinate and support. They help organisations grow, build governance, navigate change and respond to emerging threats". This, alongside central Government's drive to build community power and resilience through regeneration and local democracy within neighbourhoods, reiterates the central role of LIOs like CAVA play.

CAVA are committed to providing all our services locally and accessibly, whether that is support accessing volunteering opportunities, starting a community group, accessing funding or strengthening governance. Every year our dedicated teams help lever significant investment into the area. Our 2024-25 Annual Report showed that the collective value of funding secured, and volunteering opportunities developed was worth around £10.9 million to the local economy. It also revealed that we worked with over 1,200 organisations, held 281 events and nearly 1,500 volunteers were placed.

As the main point of contact between the VCFSE Sector and other strategic partners, such as local authorities and funders, we are committed to building better relationships and mutual understanding between and across all sectors. One of the ways we do this is by undertaking a bi-annual 'State of the Sector' survey which enables Voluntary and Community Organisations (VCOs) to raise their voice and highlight their successes and challenges, which in turn enables policy and decision makers to prioritise their work in and for communities.

We are pleased to present the findings of our survey for Warwickshire undertaken in 2025, produced in partnership with Tiller Research Ltd.


TOP 10 FACTS
ABOUT
WARWICKSHIRE'S
VCFSE
WARWICKSHIRE & SOLIHULL CAVA COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY ACTION
STATE OF THE VCFSE SECTOR SURVEY
1
There are over 9,500 'Civil Society' organisations making a difference in Warwickshire; nearly 2,200 of whom are registered charities
2
50% of organisations have been established for over 20 years
3
72% are micro or small organisations (annual income under £100,000)
4
23% of organisations have less than 10 volunteers
5
The mean average number of volunteer hours per organisation per week is 87, an increase from 2023
6
The estimated annual economic value of volunteering in Warwickshire is over £928million
7
52% of organisations worked with up to 250 beneficiaries in the last year
8
44% of organisations stated they had seen an increase in the number of beneficiaries they worked with, a third of those saw this as a key strength, demonstrating that the organisation is meeting a clear need
9
55% of organisations saw their annual expenditure increase in the last year
10
50% of micro organisations (annual income under £10,000) had received no voluntary sector grants in the past 2 years
CAVA is the local Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure Organisation for Warwickshire and Solihull, providing vital support to volunteers, groups, organisations, enterprises and charities who are working to strengthen communities.
Find out more about us at www.wcava.org.uk

METHODOLOGY

This is our sixth survey and was designed to be consistent with previous surveys, although the detailed data presented at this stage, covers the Warwickshire scope of CAVA's reach. Our research partner Tiller Research opened the survey online in June 2025; access to the form was promoted through our E-Grapevine newsletters, links on our website, through social media and promoted directly by CAVA's frontline officers. We also completed short surveys at a number of in-person events during the consultation period.

The online survey received 108 responses with usable data from representatives of VCFSE organisations across Warwickshire. Of these, 78 completed the full questionnaire. Completion was reduced in comparison to previous years and is a common picture across many research studies. Therefore, this year we also introduced a paper based ‘mini-survey’ to add supplementary feedback at events; an additional 67 responses were received through this mechanism. This approach demonstrates the need to offer flexibility to maximise feedback whilst valuing respondents desire to participate within challenging time constraints. For the quantitative analysis, reported percentages are based on the number of responses received for each question.

In addition, 16 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a sample of survey respondents to explore their responses in more depth. Interviewees were invited from organisations based in different parts of Warwickshire. They represented a mix of micro, small, medium and large organisations working across a range of areas including mental and physical health, community and family support, disability support, heritage, faith, and environment.

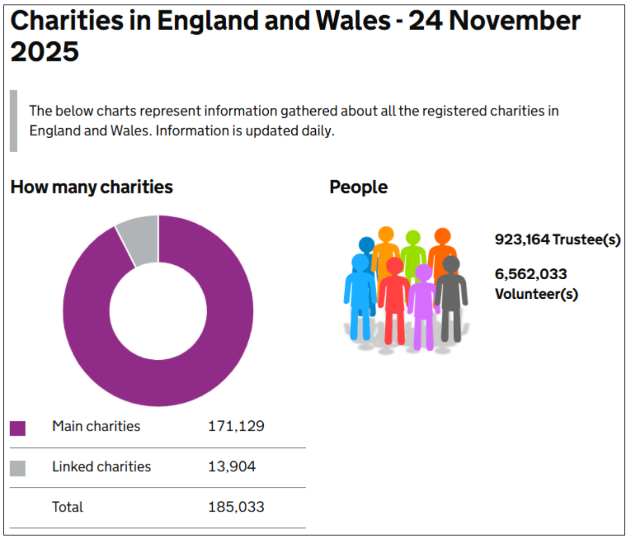
Our experience and local knowledge show us that the scope of respondents to the survey is very typical of the organisations that CAVA regularly works with, and we feel this is a reliable and representative sample to report against. This is also in line with other statistical methodologies and survey response rates.

We accessed supplementary data from the Charity Commission for England and Wales, and for national comparison we have also quoted the NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac 2024 (‘the Almanac’) as the most comprehensive picture and analysis of the Sector.

A number of questions were analysed to identify key themes. Responses from smaller and larger organisations were analysed separately to see if the size of organisation affected a respondent’s experiences or views.

How big is the 'sector'?

The Charity Commission lists 2,782 registered charities operating specifically in Solihull and Warwickshire*, and across England and Wales there are over 185,000 (an increase from 2023). The Almanac states there were approximately 166,000 organisations across the UK in 2021/22; this is based on Charity Commission data, and the application of their 'general charities' definition. We know however that the VCFSE Sector is a lot broader than that as there is no single administrative database for all voluntary organisations. More information on this can be found here.



Source *figures correct at 24/11/25

Compared to CAVA's last State of the Sector report in 2023, this indicates that the Charity numbers are shrinking slightly, with 0.7% fewer charities in Warwickshire; for comparison over CAVA's wider operating area, there were 1.3% fewer in Solihull. This could mean that some have adopted different operating structures but may still be accounted for under the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and following cost of living crisis. As this is the only evidenced data, we apply this reduction to our overall organisation number estimates.

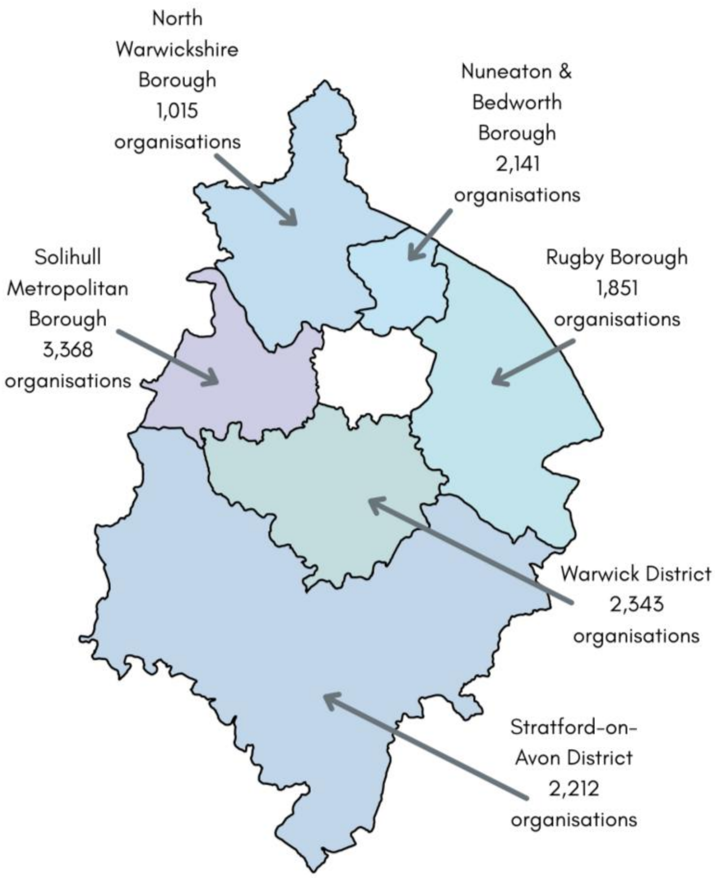
Based on Almanac data, Charity Commission figures and estimates of the wider 'civil society' (which includes sports clubs, unincorporated community associations, companies limited by guarantee etc.), **we estimate that there are around 9,600 VCFSE organisations currently operating in Warwickshire**; this is a broadly similar number to our 2023 report but less than 2021.

CAVA actively provides support to and has a membership open to organisations from across the civil society. It is those organisations who have completed the State of the Sector survey and whose responses we refer to as 'the Sector'.

Where are all these organisations?

We often get asked about the size and shape of the VCSFE Sector. There is no single, up to date administrative database that lists every community group, sports club, faith organisation, charity or social enterprise, so we can only provide estimates. The Sector flexes and shapes to meet community need, and organisations grow, shrink, establish and close regularly, for numerous reasons, as can be seen from the short-term initiatives which developed at pace and ended during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on Almanac and Charity Commission data about average VCFSE organisations per head of population, we have estimated that the 12,930 VCOs across CAVAs wider operating area of Solihull and Warwickshire are located as follows:



There is no hard data to back up this; organisations have a range of different operating structures, activities, services and areas of benefit. There are many that operate in small localities or neighbourhoods, or they could operate borough/district-wide, county-wide, across the sub-region or nationally.

Approximate percentage change by locality between 2021 and 2025:

Locality	% Change +/-
North Warwickshire Borough	-7.7%
Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough	-2.7%
Rugby Borough	+2.8%
Stratford On Avon District	+0.5%
Warwick District	-2.4%

For comparison over CAVA's wider operating area:

Solihull Metropolitan Borough	-6.4%

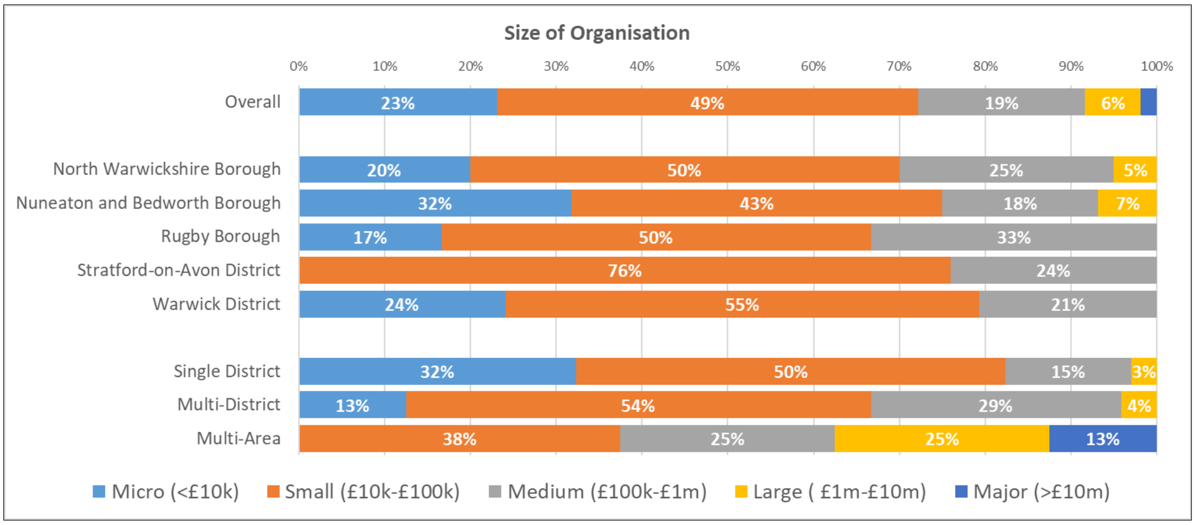
Based on 108 responses, survey respondents' main geographies for delivery were:

Where is the MAIN area of delivery for your organisation?	Count	Percentage
Single Warwickshire District	68	63%
Multi-District (within Warwickshire)	24	22%
Multi-Area (Warwickshire and other areas)	16	15%

Survey Respondents Organisation Size

NCVO's UK Civil Society Almanac categorises organisations by their size in relation to their income. Using their definitions, we found out that local data is largely comparable to the national picture, although clearly fewer smaller organisations participated in our main survey:

What size of organisation do you consider yourself?	Overall	UK data, NCVO Almanac
Major (annual income over £10million)	2%	0.5%
Large (annual income between £1million and £10million)	6%	4%
Medium (annual income between £100,000 and £1million)	19%	15.5%
Small (annual income between £10,000 and £100,000)	49%	31%
Micro (annual income up to £10,000)	23%	49%



Based on respondents to the survey, Nuneaton and Bedworth have the largest number of micro-organisations at 32% and no responses were received from micro-organisations in Stratford District, but we know many exist, so generally we feel that their experiences are not adequately reflected in our survey. Based on the nature of these very small groups, capacity to participate in the survey process presents challenges.

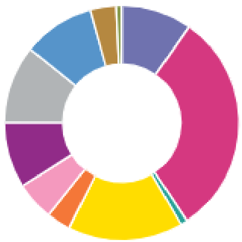
In a national context, the Charity Commission shows that micro charities made up 45% of the total number of registered charities in England and Wales and accounted for only 0.18% of the total gross annual income of charities. Below shows this stark disconnect of organisation size and Sector income:

Charities by income band - 24 November 2025

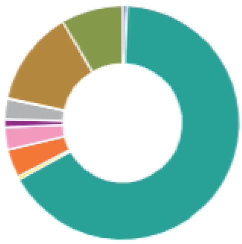
This page groups charities by their size, using income bands. By grouping charities in this way we can get an overview of how resources are distributed within the sector and achieve better comparisons.

Tell us what you think about this service.

Charities



Gross income



Income Band	Charities	Total gross income	Total expenditure
£0 to £5k	52,880	£59,720,499	£165,882,663
£5k to £10k	16,863	£124,452,556	£153,213,829
£10k to £25k	27,077	£449,245,414	£532,741,414
£25k to £50k	16,653	£599,531,310	£648,300,440
£50k to £100k	15,469	£1,112,070,791	£1,176,285,876
£100k to £250k	18,379	£2,945,387,058	£2,968,094,177
£250k to £500k	9,013	£3,172,287,503	£3,224,298,615
£500k to £1m	5,717	£4,064,133,447	£3,984,659,900
£1m to £5m	6,211	£13,619,599,821	£13,453,760,457
£5m to £10m	1,230	£8,747,585,737	£8,524,846,204
Over £10m	1,637	£68,787,106,772	£68,222,446,719
Total	171,129	£103,681,120,908	£103,054,530,294

Source *figures correct at 24/11/25

Survey Respondents' Organisation History

To better understand the history and foundations of the Sector, we asked when the organisations responding had been founded, and compared this to responses from our 2021 report. We found a reduction in newer organisations, and a significant increase in responses from those organisations established 20 years or more

When was your organisation formed?	Overall 2025	Overall 2021
Over 20 years ago	50%	33%
Within the last 10-20 years	22%	16%
Within the last 5-10 years	10%	19%
Within the last 2-5 years	11%	23.5%
Within the last year	6%	9%

Survey Respondents' Organisation Structure

To better understand the make-up of the Sector, we asked what respondents' legal organisational structure was and compared this to responses from our 2021 report. This shows that there has been no significant change in governance structures within the Sector, with charities being the main structure type:

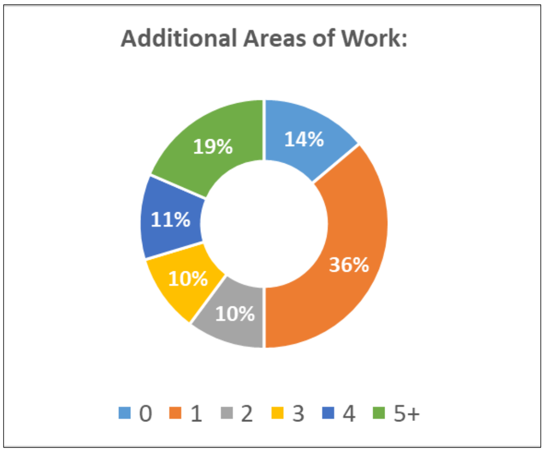
What is the legal status of your organisation?	Overall 2025	Overall 2021
Various Forms of Charity	67%	62.5%
Community Interest Company (CIC)	14%	18.5%
Unincorporated Association	12%	15%
Other	7%	4%

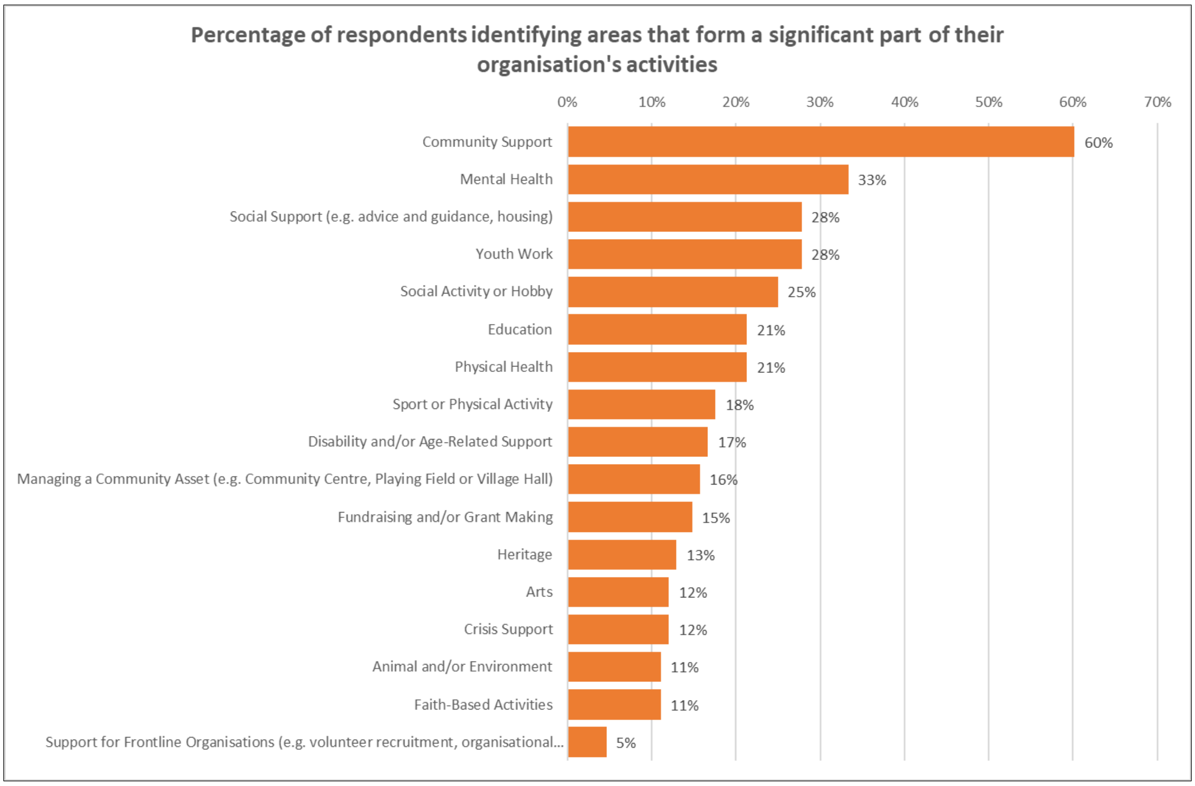
Survey Respondents' Areas of Work

The range of activities and services delivered across the VCSFE is broad. The main areas of work ranked by the highest number of responses were:

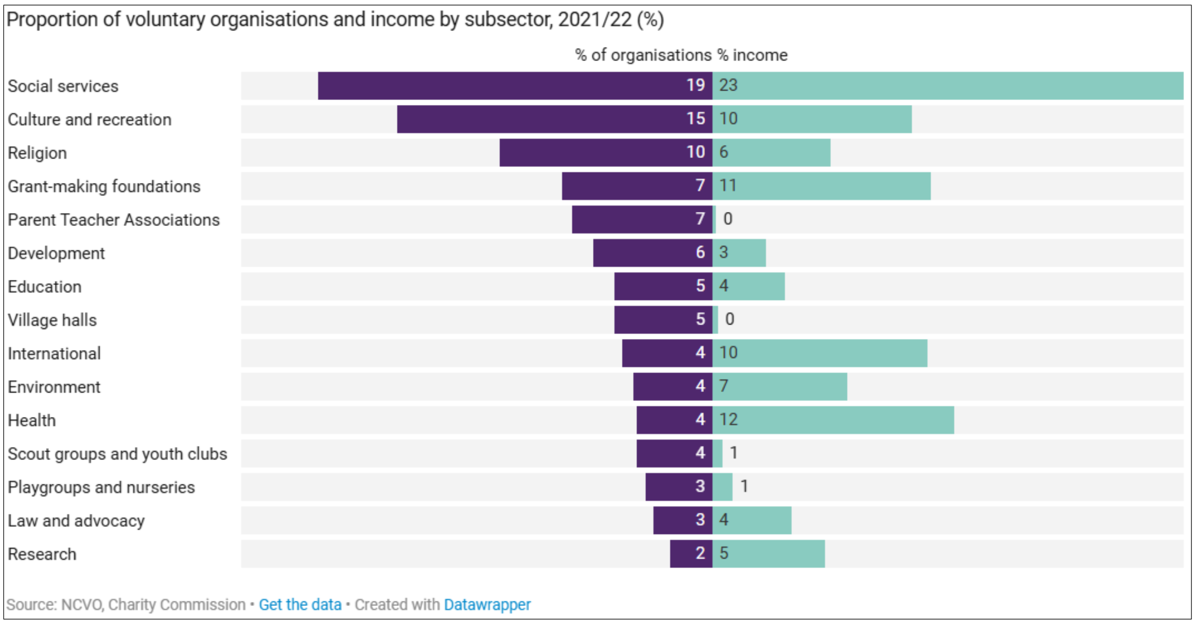
Community Support	21%
Youth Work	7%
Faith-Based Activities	7%
Physical Health	7%
Managing a Community Asset (e.g. Community Centre, Playing Field or Village Hall)	6%
Social Support (e.g. advice and guidance, housing)	6%
Disability and/or Age-Related Support	6%
Mental Health	6%
Sport or Physical Activity	6%
Education	6%
Other	6%
Arts	5%
Crisis Support	3%
Heritage	3%
Animal and/or Environment	2%
Fundraising and/or Grant Making	2%

86% of respondents said that their organisation had at least one area of work in addition to their main area of work. 40% of respondents said that their organisation had four or more areas of work. This indicates that the VCFSE Sector in Warwickshire delivers activities with a broad range of benefits for local people and communities. For example, 33% of respondents identify that their organisation delivers work to support mental health, though only 6% identify mental health as their main area of work. This indicates a contrast with public sector services, which are typically organised and delivered according to the provider's specialism.





Slightly different to our classifications, the Almanac uses the International Classification of Non-profit Organisations (ICNPO) to describe the activities of voluntary organisations. Some of these categories are very broad, e.g. social services include youth services, family services including domestic violence shelters, services for disabled and elderly people and support groups. Below you can see the number of general charities by subsector and income.



Source

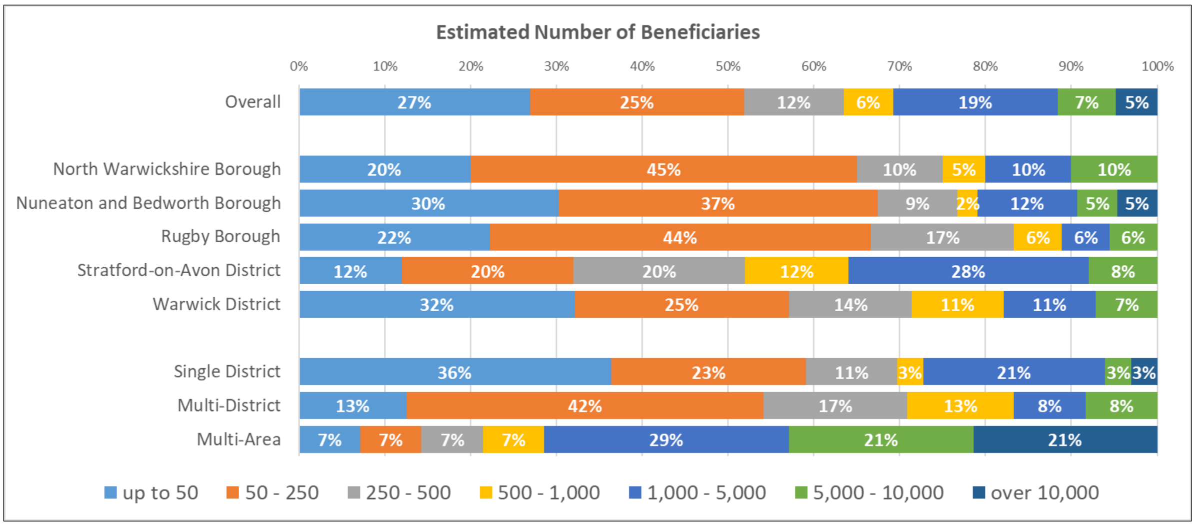
Survey Respondents Beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of work ranked by the highest number of responses were:

All Beneficiaries (no specific beneficiary group)	58%
Children and Young People	23%
Families/ Parents	11%
Carers	8%
People with Learning Disabilities	8%
People with Physical Disabilities	7%
Low Income Households	6%
People with Mental Health Problems	6%
Unemployed People	6%
People with Long-term/ Chronic Illness	5%
Older People	5%
People with Sensory Impairments	5%
Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups	4%
Offenders/ ex-Offenders	4%
Refugees/ Asylum Seekers	4%
Women	4%
Homeless People	3%
Survivors of Abuse/ Victims of Crime	3%
Substance Misusers	3%
Our organisation does not work with a beneficiary group (e.g. it is a membership organisation, or benefits animals/the environment)	8%

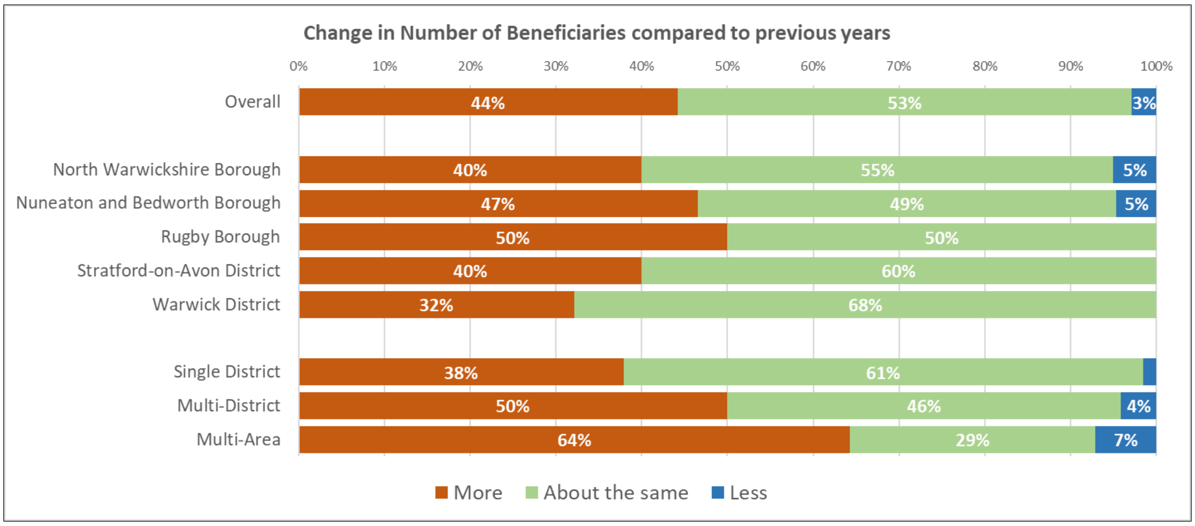
Other beneficiaries mentioned included: Men, LGBTQ+, Faith groups, serving or Ex-Services, and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

We asked if organisations could provide an estimate of the number of beneficiaries they had worked with in the past year. 52% recorded this as up to 250 different clients:



We further asked how this has changed compared to previous years:

- 44% have more beneficiaries
- 3% have fewer beneficiaries
- 53% have about the same number of beneficiaries



Our next question asked for more detail about the trends or changes in the requests, interests or needs of beneficiaries organisations had identified in the last year:

- 31% of survey respondents noted an increase in demand for their services over the last year, with organisations providing mental health or crisis support most likely to note a significant increase. As well as increased volume, increasing complexity of need was identified, with mental health and neurodivergence most mentioned. Some respondents linked the increased complexity of the needs they were experiencing with a lack of appropriate capacity in the public sector.
- 19% noted an increase in participation in community and/or physical activities, with increased demand for activities for younger people in particular.
- 8% noted an increase in financial pressures for beneficiaries, with an increased demand for free activities.
- 3% noted an increase in requests for help for older people, in particular increases in specific support requests for accessing online services.

Overall demand for and engagement with VCFSE services is a mixed picture, with demand itself remaining static, but complexity of demand and organisational response increasing consistently. This has different implications across the sector: organisations providing support services are typically seeing increased volume and complexity of need, which is stretching services. In contrast, organisations providing paid-for social and physical activities are typically seeing increasing participation, though they remain mindful of increased price sensitivity.

When we asked whether the focus of your organisation changed in the last two years, e.g. you're working with different clients, or you've changed your legal structure, 16% responded yes, 84% responded no. Of those organisations that have changed their focus in the last two years:

- 69% have extended the range of services they provide and/or specific beneficiary groups they work with. These changes were in response to needs identified within their communities and/or their existing beneficiary groups;
- 25% have changed their legal status, typically as a way of increasing access to funding opportunities or to provide liability protection for trustees;

- 4% have altered their objectives or processes in order to address specific challenges that had been experienced.

When looking at national data from the Charity Commission's annual survey of public attitudes to charities in England and Wales, it reveals that in the last year 9% of people received food, medical or financial support from charitable organisations, compared to just 3% five years ago.

Over the same five-year period, the proportion of people who said they'd donated to, or raised funds for charity in the past year, fell from 62% to 48%. Their analysis of charities' annual returns for 2023 shows the sector is not just delivering life-changing impact across communities but that it is an economic powerhouse for the economy, spending almost £96 billion a year on delivering charitable purposes.

Paid Staff

If organisations had paid employees, we asked how many they had:

Paid Staff Av.	Overall	North Warks Borough	Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough	Rugby Borough	Stratford-on-Avon District	Warwick District	Single District	Multi-District	Multi-Area
FTE	3.3	5.1	2.6	2.4	2.8	2.8	1.2	6.0	7.5
Full-Time	1.5	2.5	1.2	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.4	2.9	3.8
Part-Time	3.7	5.7	3.1	3.1	3.8	4.5	1.5	7.3	7.4

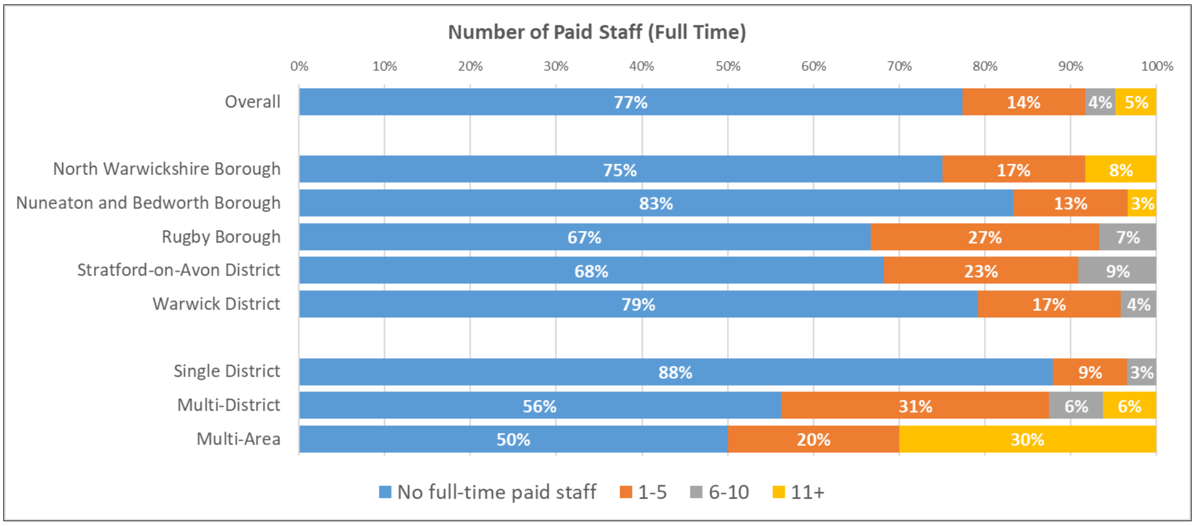
The Almanac states that 53% of voluntary sector employees worked for smaller organisations with fewer than 50 employees. In 2024, the voluntary sector employed about 978,000 people nationally, which remains around 3% of the total UK workforce. In the West Midlands those working in the voluntary sector made up 9% of the total workforce; this compares to 17% in the South East and 3% in the North East. Since 2011 the voluntary sector workforce increased by 30%.

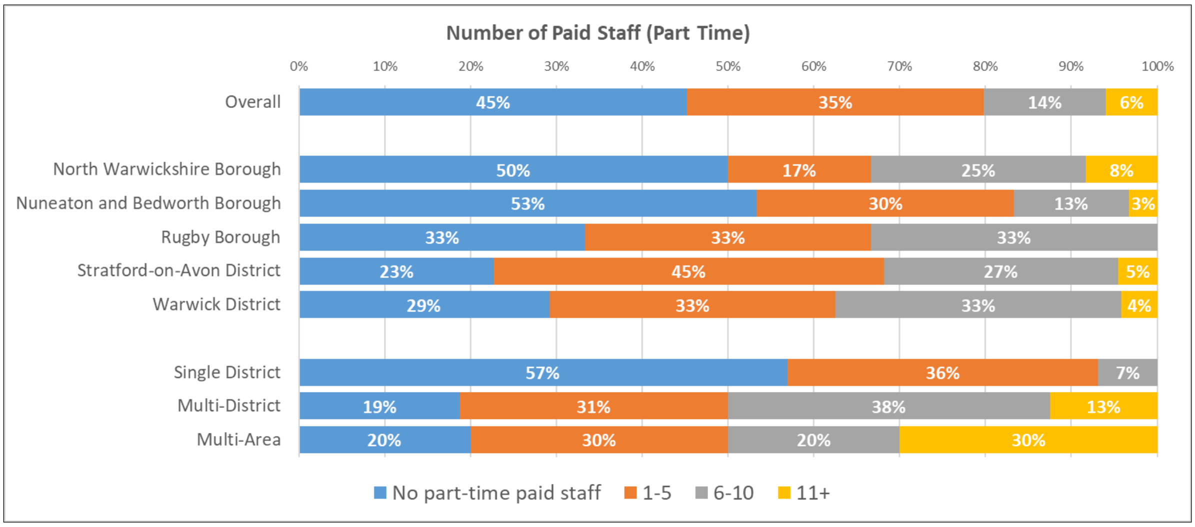
Anecdotally we had heard that many organisations were not aware of any relief they could claim against staff. So, we specifically asked whether they claim Employment Allowance to reduce their National Insurance costs:

- Yes 23%
- No – we are not eligible 32%
- No – we were not aware this exists 18%
- Don't know 28%

There may be a benefit in raising awareness of Employment Allowance, which can reduce overall payroll costs for eligible organisations.

In more detail, we asked how many paid staff organisations employed:





If they had paid staff, we asked what the changes, opportunities and challenges over the last two years in relation to the paid staff team had been. This might include recruitment and retention, changes in working patterns, impact of hybrid working, etc. General responses were:

- 48% of survey respondents either had no paid staff or reported no changes to their staff team;
- 12% noted recent changes to working patterns. This was typically either a shift to hybrid working, or the introduction of flexible working often characterised by a greater proportion of part-time roles;
- 4% reported an increase in staff capacity, typically as a result of securing additional funding to expand services.

In relation to challenges:

- 24% of survey respondents reported challenges related to funding. This included ongoing pressures to secure funding to retain current staff, and insufficient staff capacity due to funding constraints, which led to current staff being over-stretched. Rising costs, in particular increasing payroll costs, were identified as a risk to retaining staff even where funding was stable. The constant need to devote time and resources to funding issues and prioritising urgent tasks in over-stretched teams was identified as a distraction from the core role of those affected;
- 11% identified recruitment and/or retention of staff as a key challenge. A lack of funds to offer competitive salaries or provide pay rises to match inflation was the most common barrier identified, with workload pressures also highlighted. These challenges were most commonly noted by organisations that provide support services, in particular where staff require specific qualifications or experience;
- Other challenges included covering sickness absence, identifying appropriate and affordable training, and finding suitable accommodation for staff teams.

People are by far the greatest asset within the VCFSE, so we were interested in understanding more about the mental health and wellbeing of teams. We asked if there was anything organisations wanted to say about the unique challenges faced by paid staff in the VCFSE:

- 18% of survey respondents noted a potential wellbeing impact of limited resources. 11% noted the impact that funding uncertainty and/or low pay had on the wellbeing of their staff, with 7% indicating that staff work more than their paid hours or had limited breaks, which presented a risk of burnout;

- 11% noted role-related challenges, in particular staff in counselling, advice or support roles that may be dealing with difficult or distressing situations. Some noted that VCFSE organisations often attract staff with lived experience, which can be a strength in shaping service delivery but can also present additional support challenges, including an increased likelihood that staff may be balancing their work role alongside external life pressures;
- Although not explicitly asked about their response to challenges faced by staff, 7% of respondents noted the support they have in place for staff, including practices to encourage and enable self-care as a matter of course.

Volunteers

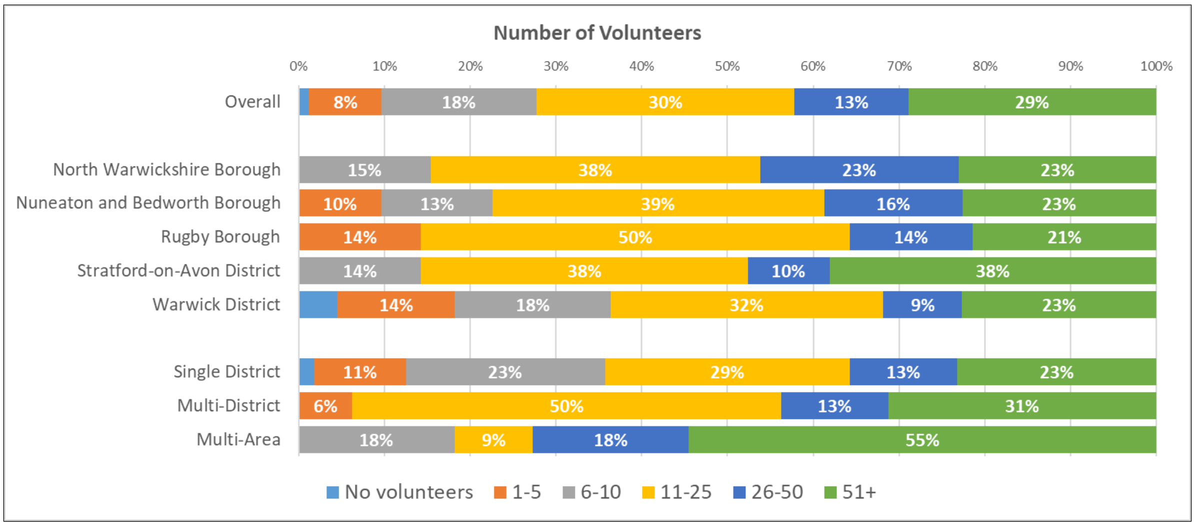
We recognise and know the value of volunteering within the Sector. The Almanac states that an estimated 14.2m people in the UK have volunteered through a group, club or organisation at least once in 2021/22; levels of formal volunteering have declined since and remain well below pre-pandemic levels. It refers to the [Community Life Survey](), where:

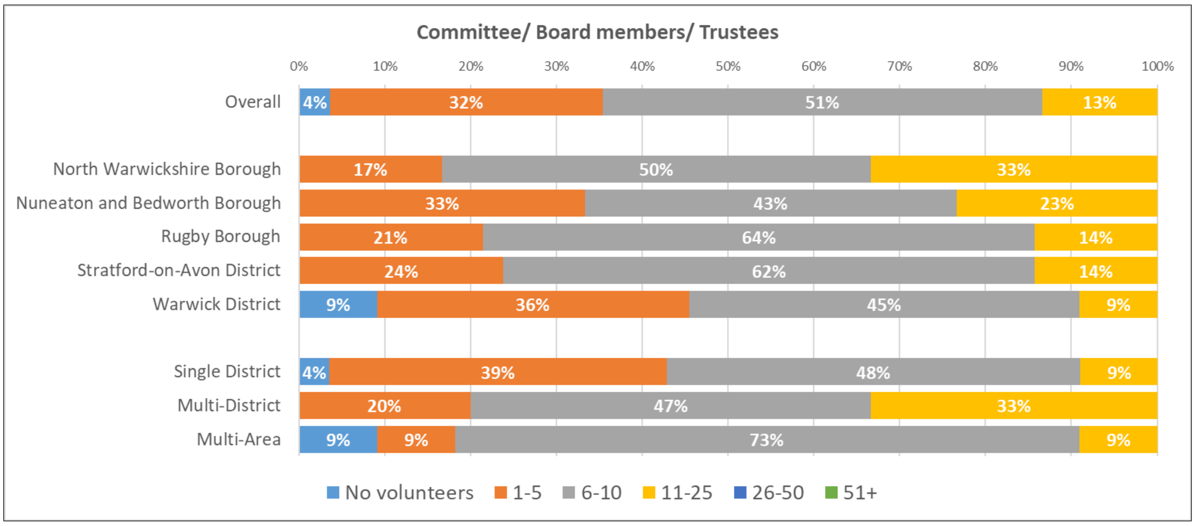
- 46% of people (around 21m in England, 25m in the UK) volunteered informally at least once a year; and
- 26% of people (12m in England, 14.2m in the UK) did so at least once a month.

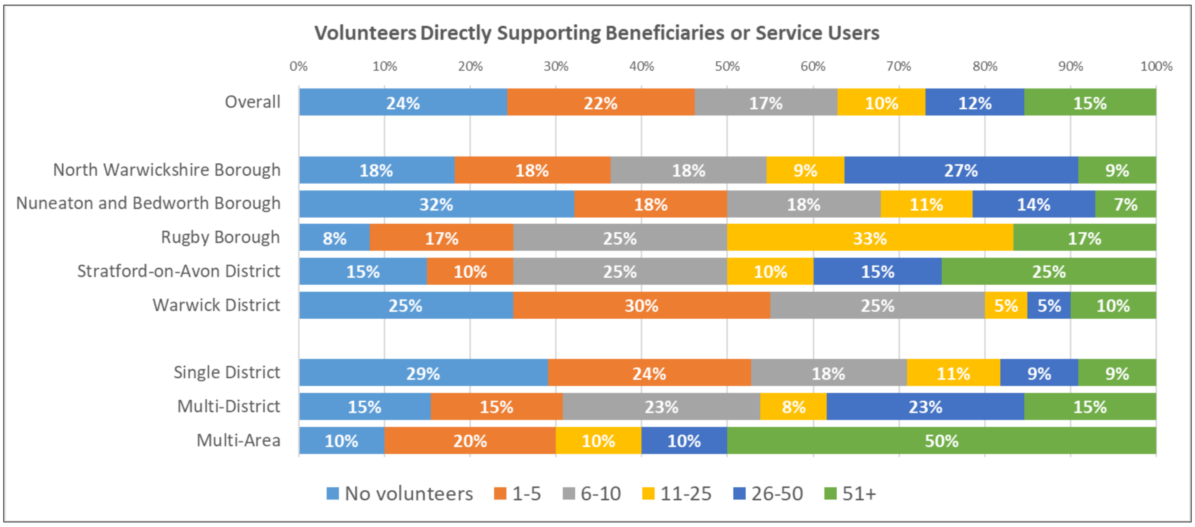
From our findings, compared to 2023, the overall number of volunteers per organisation has increased, but the average number of hours per volunteer per week has decreased. We estimate that the average Annual Economic Value* of Volunteering in Solihull and Warwickshire** is £1.25bn

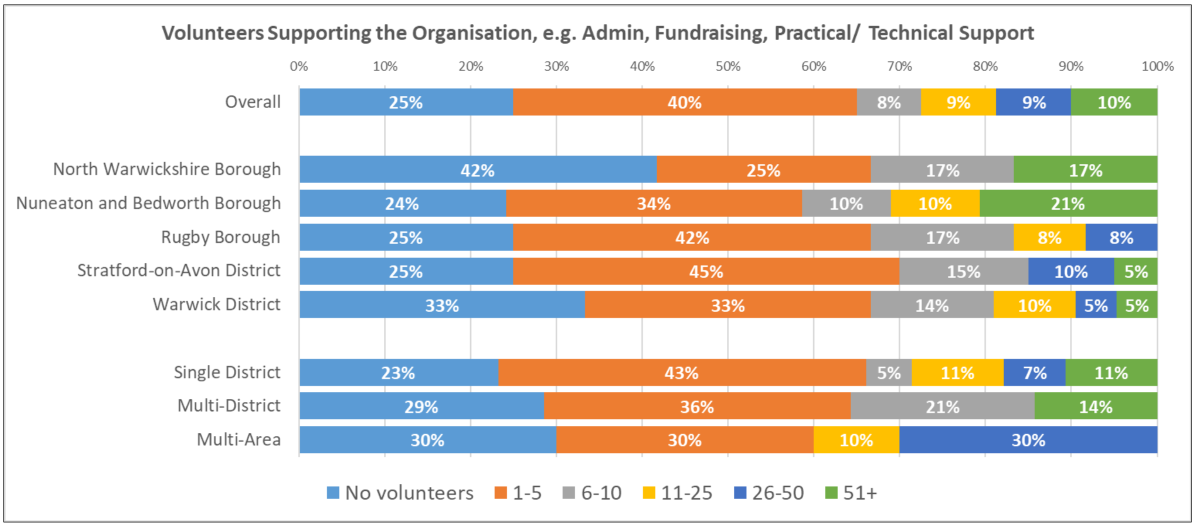
*Data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.
**Based on an estimated 3,368 organisations in Solihull the economic value is £327million; based on an estimated 9,562 organisations in Warwickshire the economic value is £928million.

We wanted far more detail about how organisations structured their volunteering, so asked how many volunteers their organisation currently has and the roles they undertake. Overall, average number of volunteers is 21 (median), 45 (mean).

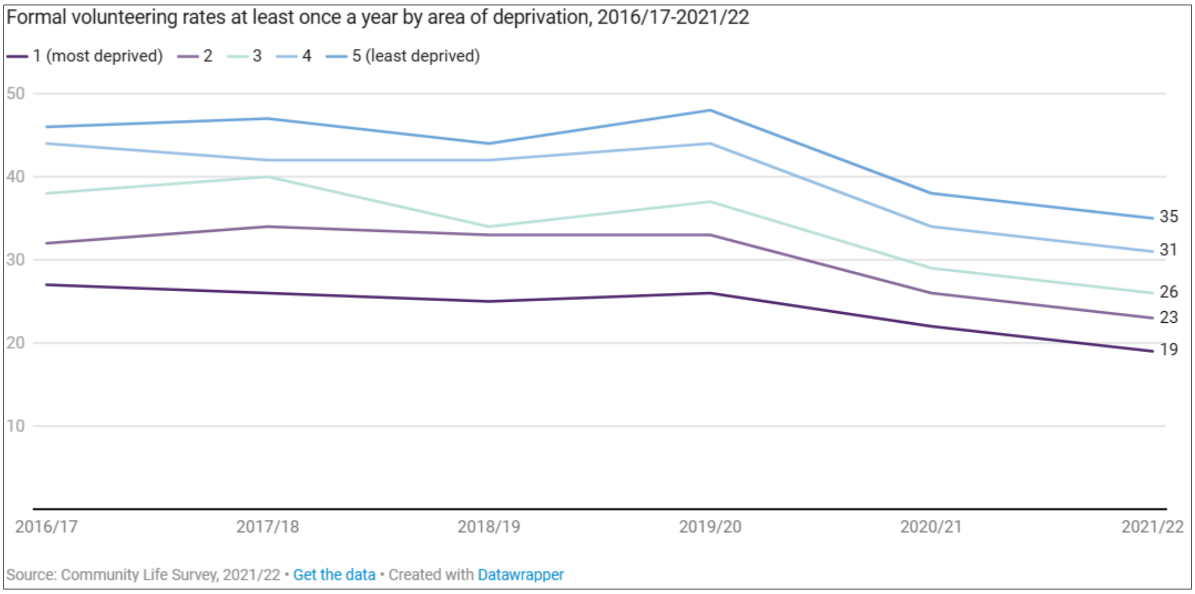






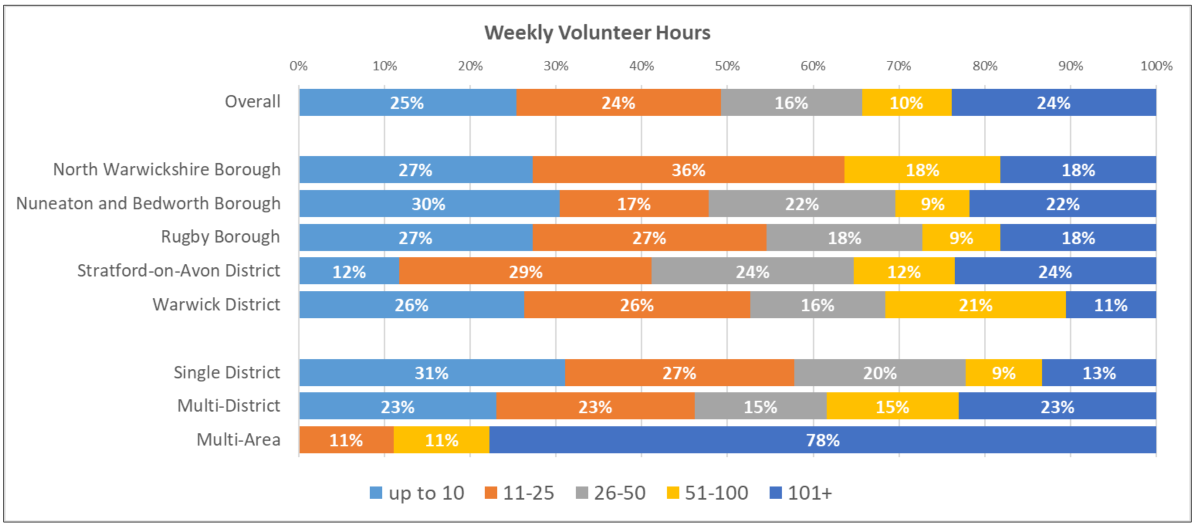


The Almanac refers to the Community Life Survey, where data shows that people living in the most deprived areas are less likely to volunteer formally than those in less deprived areas, and this is decreasing over time. Our data does not bear this out, but based on CAVA's volunteering support infrastructure offer we understand that recruiting to skilled volunteering opportunities in areas of higher deprivation is a greater challenge.



[Source]

We sought more detail about the way people volunteer, so asked approximately what the total overall number of hours is contributed by volunteers to organisations each week. This helps us to calculate the average economic value of volunteering. Overall, average volunteer hours per organisation per week were 29 (median), 87 (mean), with the average number of hours per volunteer per week as 2. Compared to 2023, the overall number of volunteers has increased, but the average number of hours per volunteer per week has decreased.



Much like paid staff, we asked what the changes, opportunities and challenges over the last two years in relation to volunteers have been. We gave examples like volunteer retention, recruitment, training, support, flexible volunteering, inclusive volunteering, etc. Generally, people said:

- 10% of survey respondents reported an increase in the number of people interested in volunteering;
- 7% noted an increase of individual support needs, which required appropriate attention to be given to the design of volunteer roles and volunteer support. This meant that an increasing proportion of staff time was required for volunteer support and management.

In relation to challenges:

- 56% of survey respondents noted significant challenges with recruitment and/or retention of volunteers. Particular challenges were noted with recruitment of trustees and back-office support roles;
- 15% reported increased challenges with sourcing timely and affordable training. With the higher turnover of volunteers experienced by many respondents, this increased the amount of training required. Organisations with roles that require a significant amount of training were most likely to report challenges resourcing training arising from a higher turnover of volunteers;
- 8% noted challenges balancing volunteer support with delivery of the organisation's core purpose. Some noted that their average age of volunteers was increasing, which had impacts on the design of suitable roles. This sometimes created a tension with funded delivery priorities;
- 5% identified challenges related to the administration of volunteer management.

People are by far the greatest asset within the VCFSE, so we were interested in understanding a bit more about the mental health and wellbeing of teams. We asked if there was anything organisations would like to say about the unique challenges faced by volunteers in the VCFSE.

- 18% of survey respondents were keen to highlight the positive benefits of volunteering, including an increase in life satisfaction, increased social connection, and reduced levels of depression and anxiety. Several respondents noted the support they had in place for volunteers, including formal and informal feedback mechanisms that enabled them to be confident about the positive impact of volunteering on mental health;
- 15% noted potential challenges related to a volunteer's role. This was a particular concern for volunteers in crisis support roles, though was noted primarily as a risk that organisations managed rather than a negative impact on the wellbeing of their volunteers. Training and support were identified as key mitigations of this risk;
- 10% discussed the range of personal pressures that volunteers faced, with several respondents noting the importance of flexibility and support to enable volunteers to balance their contribution with their other commitments;
- 7% suggested that volunteers in general are under-appreciated, with some noting that it is difficult to secure funding for providing volunteer support, which they found to be frustrating. Volunteer awards were seen to be good for highlighting the overall contribution of volunteers to the community, although there were differences of opinion about the most effective structure for these, some preferring general celebrations of all volunteer contributions with others favouring competitive awards promoting excellence.

IMPACT

Respondents were asked to describe the impact or difference their organisation is making:

Community Connections	47%
Reduced Isolation	43%
Improved Wellbeing	43%
Friendship	40%
Improved Mental Health	39%
Increased Confidence	30%
Improved Physical Health	25%
Safe and Supported Individuals	24%
Debt Relief/ Reduced Poverty	5%

It was important to us to think about the work of our Sector positively, and the assets and attributes, so we asked what success looks like for their organisation:

- 81% of survey respondents indicated that success for their organisation is indicated by successful delivery of their mission. For organisations providing support functions, success is typically viewed as having sufficient capacity to meet beneficiary needs in a timely fashion. For community activity providers, success is typically viewed as high levels of participation in or engagement with their core activities;
- 20% identified the sustainability of their organisation as a marker of success. This typically included secure long-term funding, along with having sufficient numbers of volunteers, high level of staff and volunteer welfare, and being well-managed. A further 6% viewed success as being able to grow and respond to needs within the community;
- 11% viewed success as creating the conditions for positive secondary outcomes, most often general wellbeing and community cohesion. Some respondents from organisations providing support viewed success as beneficiaries not returning in future as they are no longer in need of support;
- 10% viewed success as receiving positive feedback about their work and building a positive reputation in their community.

In the context of the wider communities organisations serve, we asked them to consider what success looks like for communities. This is also at the heart of the current drive around neighbourhood-based working at all levels of Government, and as referenced in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill. Responses indicated a range of interpretations about what is meant by ‘community’. Some respondents answered in terms of a community of interest, with others focussing on a geographical community. Some focussed specifically on those connected with their own organisation as their community. This indicates that there may be some value in further exploring what people think of as ‘community’ in order to strengthen and build a shared understanding around policies and initiatives designed to benefit communities; this is very apparent for example in the current development around integrated neighbourhood working via Integrated Care Boards (ICBs).

- 78% of survey respondents characterised success for their community as the delivery of positive outcomes. Most mentioned was strong community connections (29%) characterised by mutual support, friendly environments, and people feeling settled and able to find support when needed. High levels of wellbeing (7%) and confidence (5%) were also mentioned;
- 20% suggested that success for their community involves high levels of engagement with positive activities and services, with sufficient provision of activities and services to match local interest and meet community needs;

- 13% focussed on environmental factors as an indicator of success. High quality physical environments that felt safe and included access to nature and thriving local facilities were described;
- 3% of respondents suggested success for their community would see a reduced need for support. Some support organisations suggested that success would be there no longer being a need for their organisation.

When looking at national data from the Charity Commission's annual survey of public attitudes to charities in England and Wales, it reveals that in the last year 9% of people received food, medical or financial support from charitable organisations, compared to just 3% five years ago. Their analysis of charities' annual returns for 2023 shows the sector is not just delivering life-changing impact across communities but that it is an economic powerhouse for the economy, spending almost £96 billion a year on delivering charitable purposes.

The structured interviews we conducted gave a deeper understanding of impact. Interviewees highlighted how VCFSE organisations often have a strong connection with local communities. They can typically be responsive to needs as they are able to be flexible and will often be trusted more than public sector service providers, enabling more effective engagement that provides holistic support. Several interviewees highlighted the secondary benefits created by VCFSE organisations, including benefits of volunteering, stronger communities, and enabling both volunteers and beneficiaries to build social connections, often leading to improved wellbeing:

"The main thing they say is, 'I can't believe you're doing this for me'… That's the most common feedback we get."

"[I]t's all about the community. The community really own the place because they're the ones who shape what [happens]."

"So I just think for the participants, they come to a place which doesn't seem to have any business agenda. It must feel to them that we're just nice people that do nice things with them."

"What a lot of our [beneficiaries] will tell us is that because we're not this kind of conveyor belt service that they feel seen and cared for and then will find it easier to open up and tell us what's going on."

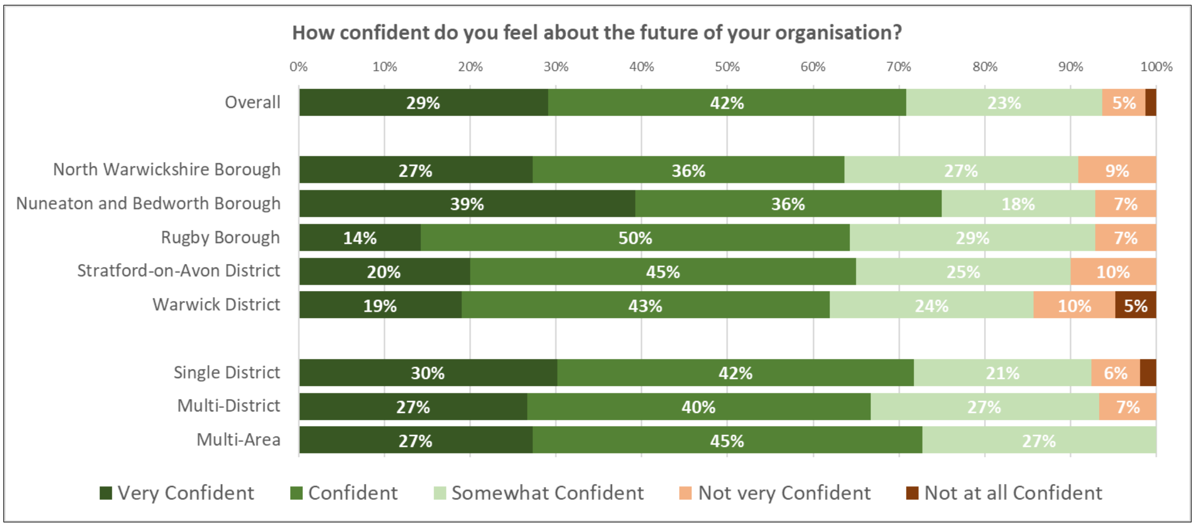
"We don't do a fixed session thank you very much, good luck, hope your life works out, kind of approach. What we do is far more client-led, they call the shots in terms of what the sessions look like and how long they last, whether they're just a few minutes, half an hour, an hour…"

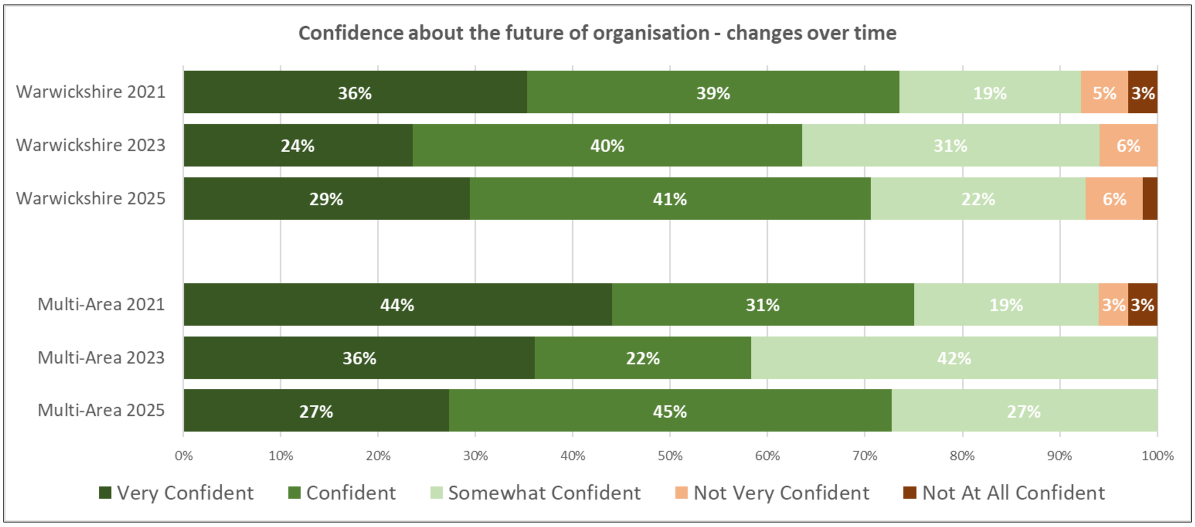
"I know that sometimes people who access a statutory service might be afraid to say things or do things because they're afraid that something else will get taken away as a result of it whereas we're not in that business at all. We're just happy to give. If we can help people sort out problems with statutory then we are here as a helping hand."

We asked about the current challenges and support needs experienced by organisations.

Confidence

Overall, 71% of respondents are 'confident' or 'very confident' about the future of their organisation. This compares to 63% in 2023, and 77% who selected 4 or 5 out of 5 in 2021.





Strengths and Opportunities

We asked what the most significant strengths and opportunities for organisations over the next two years are:

- 34% of survey respondents highlighted their workforce - both volunteers and paid staff - as a significant strength. Dedication, hard work and commitment of those involved with running VCFSE organisations and services is a key strength of the Sector;
- 31% highlighted the demand for their services as a key strength, demonstrating that the organisation is meeting a clear need;
- 27% identified their organisation's connection with the local community as a key strength. This had a range of benefits, including trust and engagement from community members, and support from

local businesses and agencies. In addition, several organisations noted their long history, and how this had established a trusted relationship and strong reputation with communities and stakeholders alike;

- 14% noted strong finances as a significant strength. For some, recently secured medium-term funding gave confidence for the next few years. Others noted successfully ongoing fundraising efforts and other income streams that gave an element of financial certainty;
- 14% highlighted strong governance and/or strategic vision, that gave their organisation a clear purpose and confidence to deliver. In some cases, this was aligned to current priorities of local or national government, which was viewed as offering opportunities for ongoing growth.

Interviewees gave many examples of the strengths of their organisations, citing local connections, community trust, the contributions of volunteers, and flexibility to deliver tailored services that meet individual needs:

"We are a very small local charity, but we are a local charity so we know the local community… and that helps build networks in the community… so you could go to one group and you could talk about what you do and then they pass it on to somebody else, but it's about building up that network. Because we are longstanding, the organisation has been in the town over 25 years so it's got a good reputation and a good name and a long history."

"I would say 99% of the time we can help in some way, even if that's just providing a cuppa and somebody to offload to and next steps and making onward referrals. So… I would hope that people feel that because of our nature and because we are that voluntary sector organisation that they can come here and they can trust us to act in their best interests, whatever that might be."

"[Our] consistent volunteers, those who come and stay with us for a long time, they're almost like the sort of army that we then call on… They are the people that then come in and do the really hands-on things that we couldn't necessarily do with a tiny team."

"So we get quite a lot of feedback and the feedback is positive and it shows how their lives have improved and the knock-on effect for those around them as a result of that."

Challenges

Thinking about challenges, we asked what organisations anticipated will be the biggest they may face over the next two years:

- 60% of survey respondents identified funding as their biggest anticipated challenge. This included concerns about accessing sufficient grant funding or developing sustainable funding streams that would be sufficient for covering ongoing and rising costs;
- 23% of respondents highlighted challenges related to volunteer recruitment and retention, with 4% focussing specifically on trustee recruitment;
- 12% noted challenges related to increasing beneficiary need. Organisations providing mental health and/or personal support often noted increasing complexity as well as volume of need;
- 11% identified challenges related to the impact of government policy, including specific concerns about the local government reorganisation and how this may disrupt positive working relationships and funding arrangements;

- 9% mentioned challenges with finding appropriate space in which to deliver their activities. Often this was linked to organisations out-growing their current venue, or was a result of the deteriorating condition of older buildings and/or difficult relationships with landlords.

Examples of these challenges were given by interviewees:

"I think all charities struggle with operational costs, fundraising and overheads and I think to try and get funders to appreciate that you can't invent a new project all the time and that sometimes what's been done is really worthwhile and gives great benefit but, you know, organisations do have to pay for their insurance, their audit, their staff costs, their pension costs, you know there are overheads, the telephone etc. you do have to pay those. I think it's getting funders to be more commercially aware that you can't just fund the direct cost… there is a lot of work goes on behind it from a safeguarding, from a training perspective, from a recruitment that if you didn't do those things properly then you would fail in carrying out your purpose as a charity."

"Obviously when you look at financial sustainability it's the confidence in sustaining the level of income that we need to… maintain the level of service we're currently offering but obviously we'd like to do more and our aim is to grow in a sustainable and controlled fashion."

"[W]e have had a couple of knockbacks in terms of funding over the summer that I wasn't expecting and that's thrown me a little bit. Not that it worries me particularly but it's "just that we need that and I've got to go and find it from somewhere else."

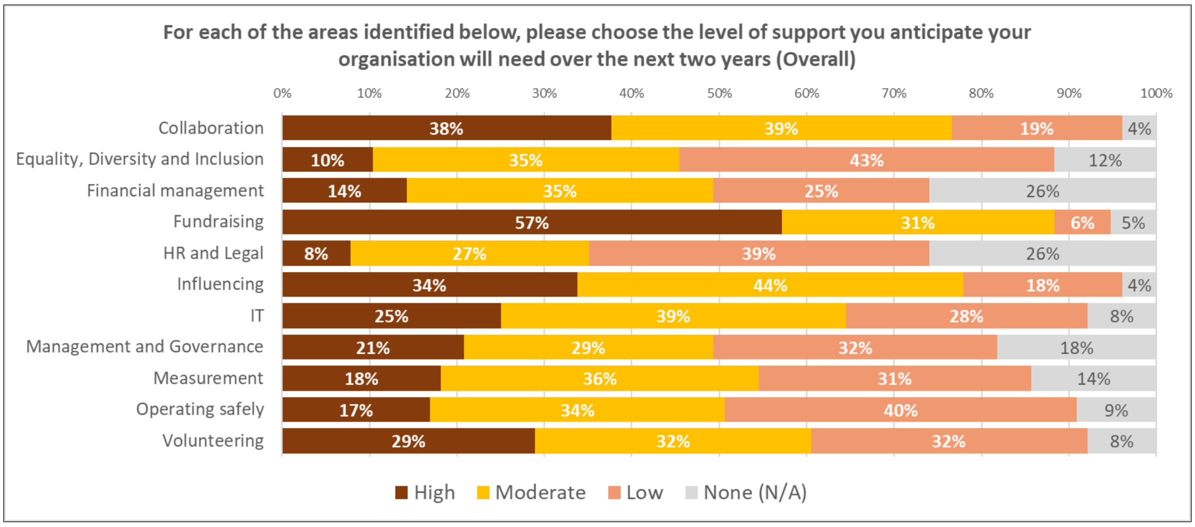
"Essentially if the money is not there to run all these support services then then it's not there and it's a shame because we're here we, want to do it and everything else but we can cut our cloth and we're very good at doing so."

"I suppose it's also having the number of volunteers, you know, quite a lot of my volunteers or most of my volunteers, because it's a daytime, they're all retired… So it's whether you can secure a similar level of volunteers going forward and I think volunteers are harder to come by. I don't know whether they are being required in their families to do more, childcare and stuff, which means that they might be less available or keen to volunteer on their days off… that's always the fear, that you won't have the volunteer base going forward."

"Of late, I think that respect hasn't diminished when people are reminded of it, but like so many things, there's an expectation now that organisations like ourselves and other voluntary sector organisations just exist, and they exist for the good of the public. So, the voluntary sector profile has diminished slightly"

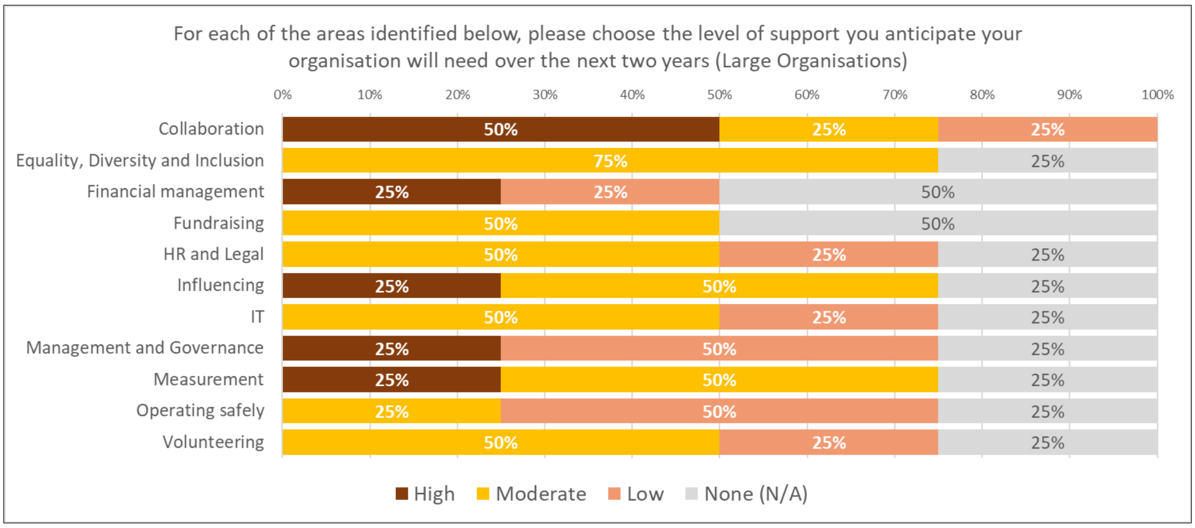
Support Needs

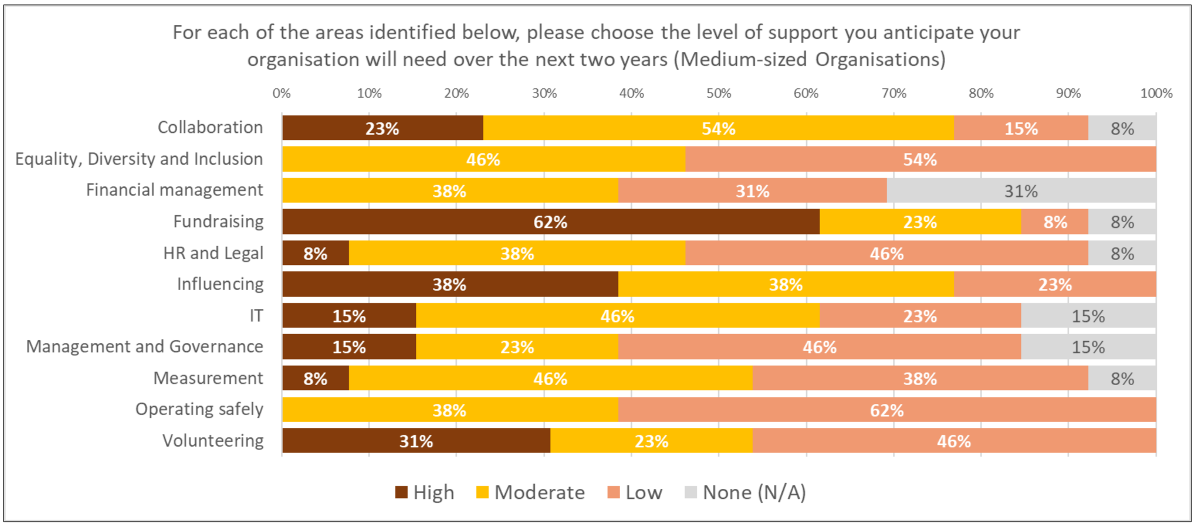
We gave a range of support areas that organisations might need; we asked respondents to choose the level of support they anticipated they may need over the next two years:

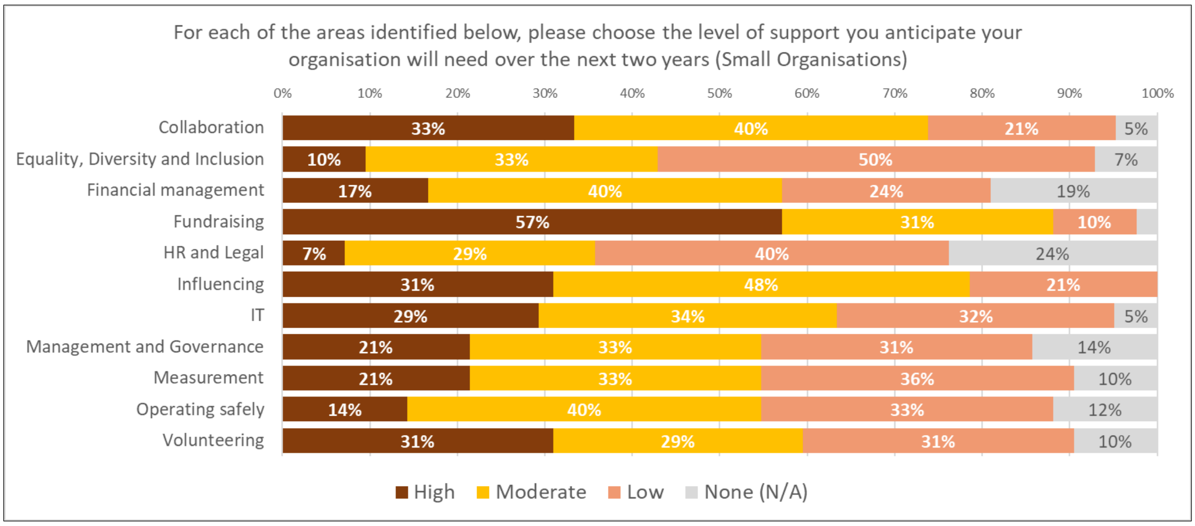


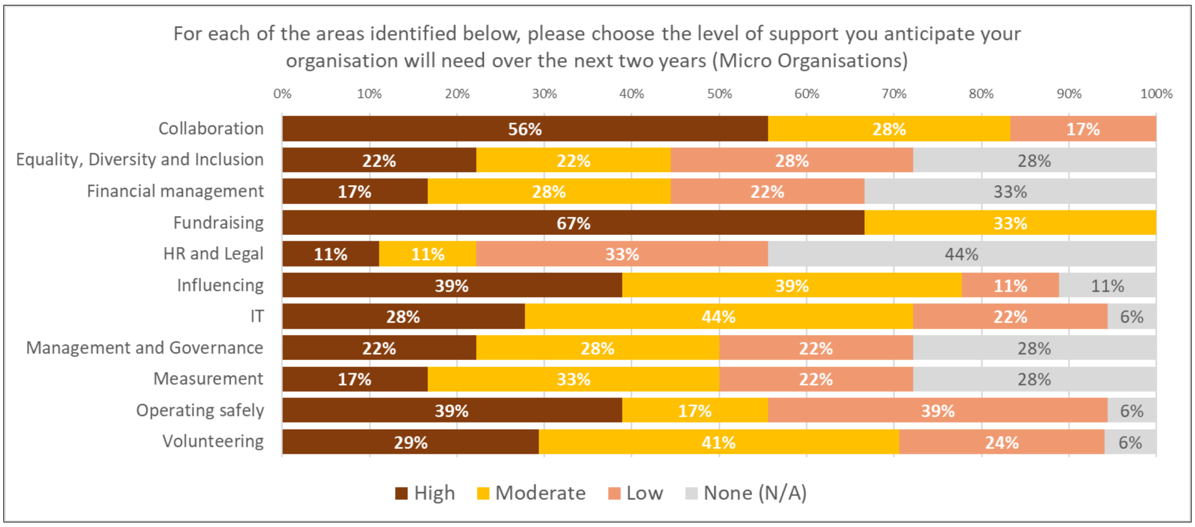
We broke down the responses by size of organisation as priorities can often vary in this context:

- Large organisations typically anticipate lower overall support needs.
- For other organisations, Fundraising is the area with highest anticipated support needs, followed by Influencing.
- Small and micro-organisations typically anticipate the highest support needs around Management and Governance, Measurement, and Operating Safely, possibly because the smallest organisations are least likely to have in-house expertise in these areas.




For each of the areas identified below, please choose the level of support you anticipate your organisation will need over the next two years (Medium-sized Organisations)
Collaboration 23% 54% 15% 8%
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 46% 54%
Financial management 38% 31% 31%
Fundraising 62% 23% 8% 8%
HR and Legal 8% 38% 46% 8%
Influencing 38% 38% 23%
IT 15% 46% 23% 15%
Management and Governance 15% 23% 46% 15%
Measurement 8% 46% 38% 8%
Operating safely 38% 62%
Volunteering 31% 23% 46%
High Moderate Low None (N/A)


For each of the areas identified below, please choose the level of support you anticipate your organisation will need over the next two years (Small Organisations)
Collaboration 33% 40% 21% 5%
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 10% 33% 50% 7%
Financial management 17% 40% 24% 19%
Fundraising 57% 31% 10%
HR and Legal 7% 29% 40% 24%
Influencing 31% 48% 21%
IT 29% 34% 32% 5%
Management and Governance 21% 33% 31% 14%
Measurement 21% 33% 36% 10%
Operating safely 14% 40% 33% 12%
Volunteering 31% 29% 31% 10%
High Moderate Low None (N/A)


For each of the areas identified below, please choose the level of support you anticipate your organisation will need over the next two years (Micro Organisations)
Collaboration 56% 28% 17%
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion 22% 22% 28% 28%
Financial management 17% 28% 22% 33%
Fundraising 67% 33%
HR and Legal 11% 11% 33% 44%
Influencing 39% 39% 11% 11%
IT 28% 44% 22% 6%
Management and Governance 22% 28% 22% 28%
Measurement 17% 33% 22% 28%
Operating safely 39% 17% 39% 6%
Volunteering 29% 41% 24% 6%
High Moderate Low None (N/A)

FINANCES

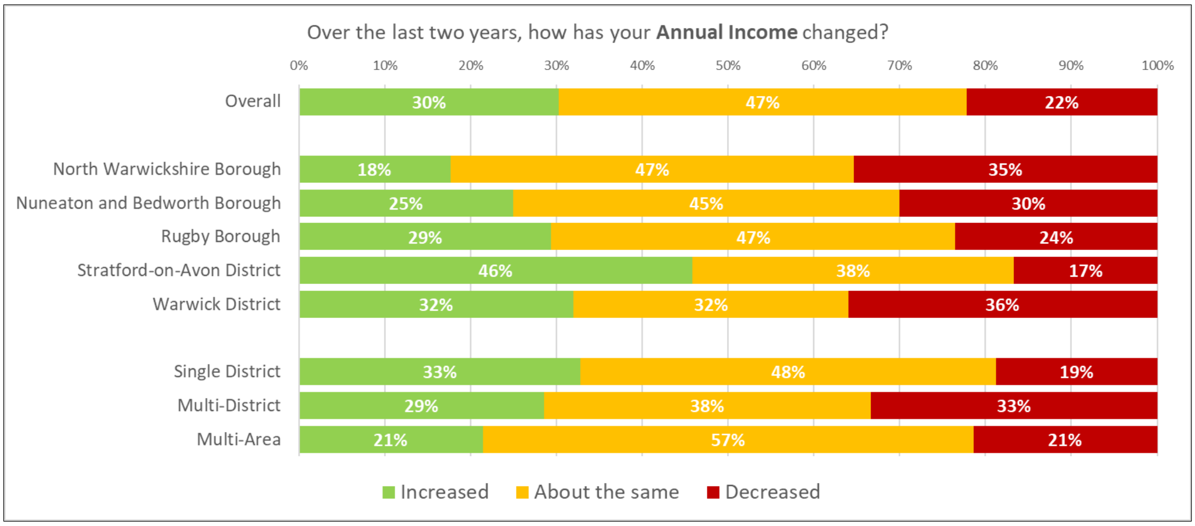
We wanted to understand the current financial position of organisations. We asked what their current **biggest financial pressures** were:

1st: Reduced grant income
2nd: Increased demand for services
3rd: Increased utility costs & Reduced income from donations

Finance changes

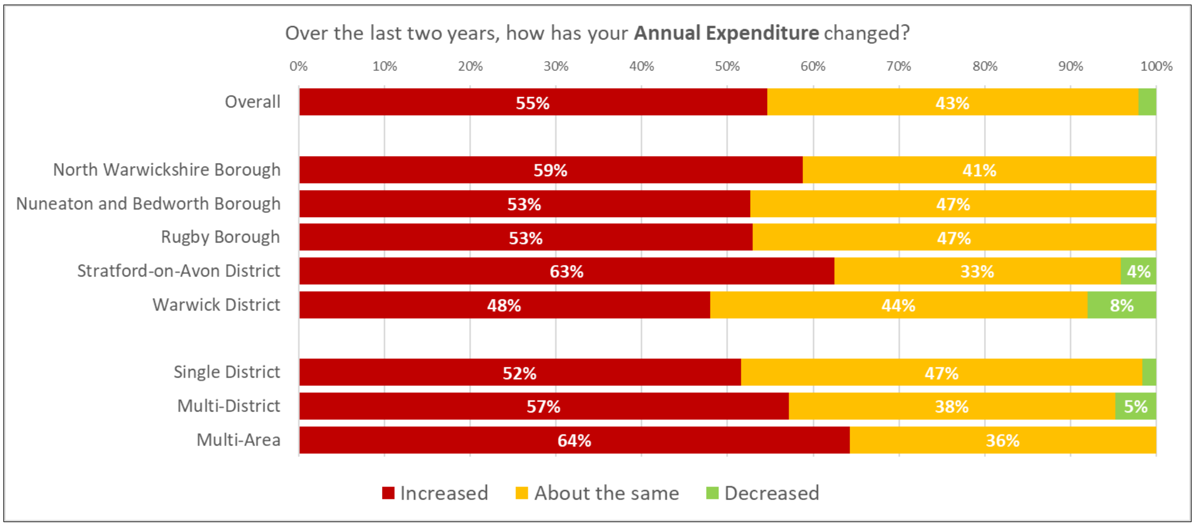
Income:

- 30% - Increased
- 47% - About the Same
- 22% - Decreased



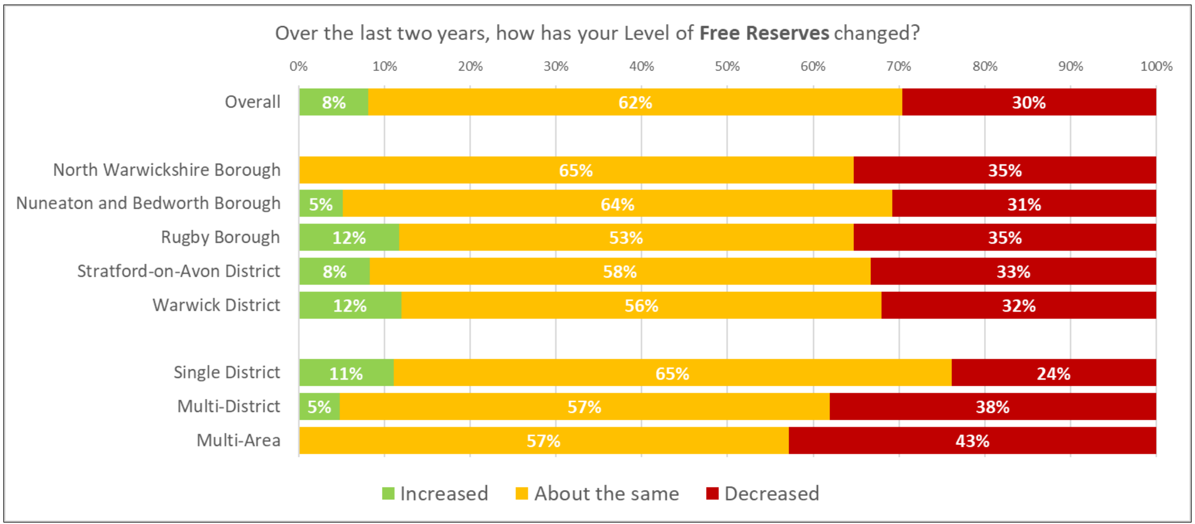
Expenditure:

- 55% - Increased
- 43% - About the same
- 2% - Decreased



Level of Free Reserves:

- 8% - Increased
- 62% - About the same
- 30% - Decreased

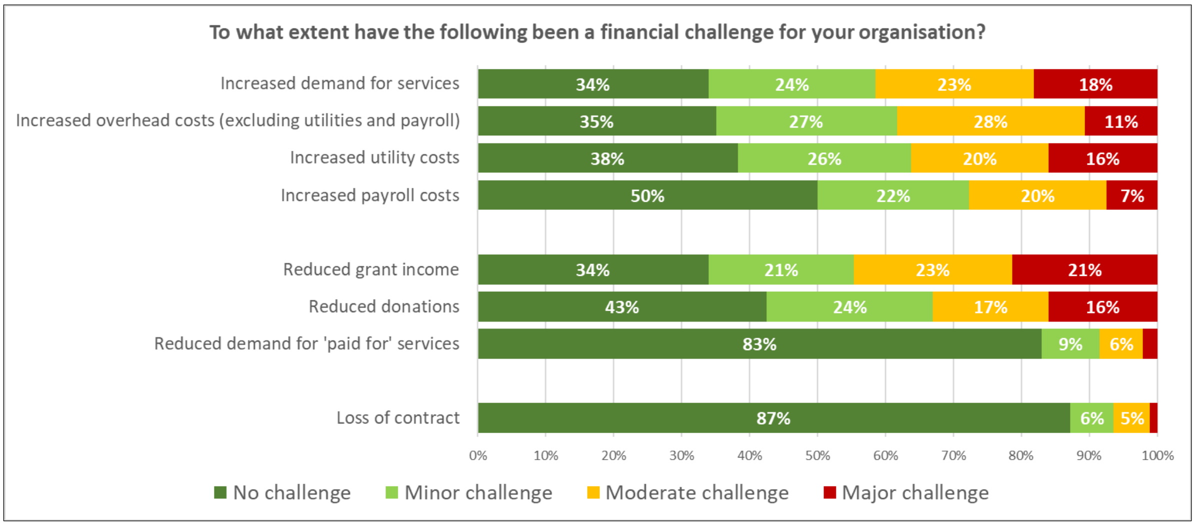


Although the majority of organisations have maintained or increased levels of free reserves, just under a third (30%) have seen free reserves decrease over the last two years. This indicates that Expenditure has increased at a faster rate than Income.

Larger multi-district and multi-area organisations are more likely to have seen a reduction in their free reserves than smaller local organisations, reflecting the pattern of income changes. This is the opposite situation to 2023, where larger organisations were more likely to have seen an increase in income and free reserves.

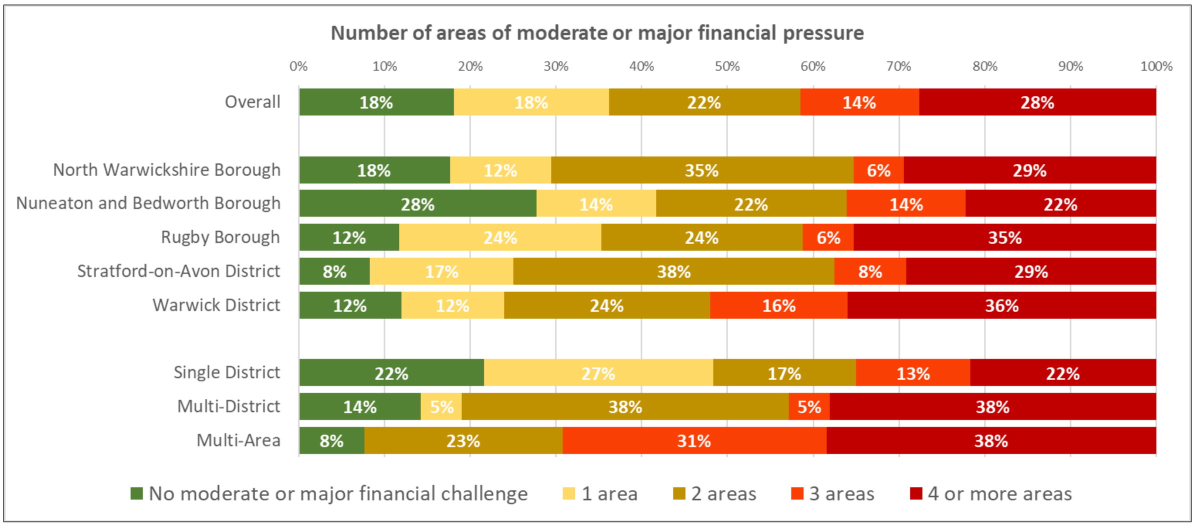
Overall financial challenges

We asked respondents to give us a more in-depth view of the extent of financial challenges for their organisation. There is an overall pattern of increased demand for services and increased overhead costs. Just over a third of organisations identified a ‘moderate’ or ‘major’ pressure from increased utility costs (36%), with just over a quarter identifying increased payroll costs as a ‘moderate’ or ‘major’ challenge (27%).



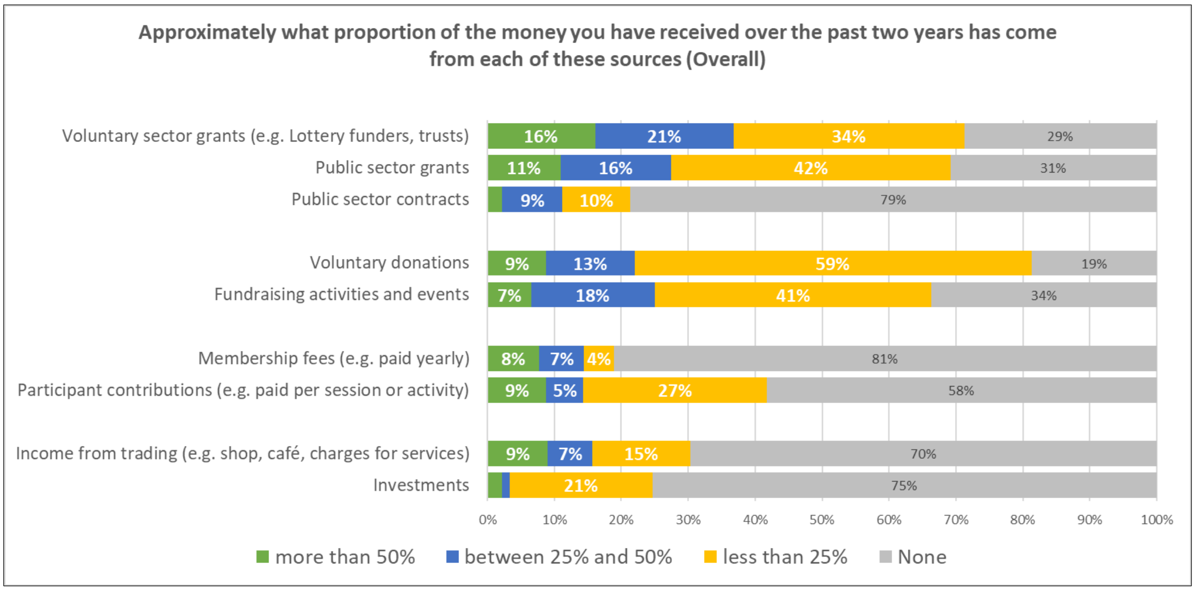
There is an increase in the proportion of organisations reporting a 'moderate' or major' challenge from reduced income. In 2023, 34% of respondents identified challenges from reduced grant income; this has risen to 44%. Similarly, moderate or major challenges from reduce donations has risen from 26% in 2023 to 33%.

Overall, 82% of organisations have experienced at least one area of moderate or major financial pressure, with 42% experiencing moderate or major pressure in three or more of the areas asked about. A third of respondents reported a positive change to finances over the past two years (33%), typically linked to securing a substantial grant or increased donations. This is a similar trend to the national picture; when looking at national data from the Charity Commission's annual survey of public attitudes to charities in England and Wales, over a five year period, it reveals that the proportion of people who said they'd donated to, or raised funds for charity in the past year, fell from 62% to 48%.

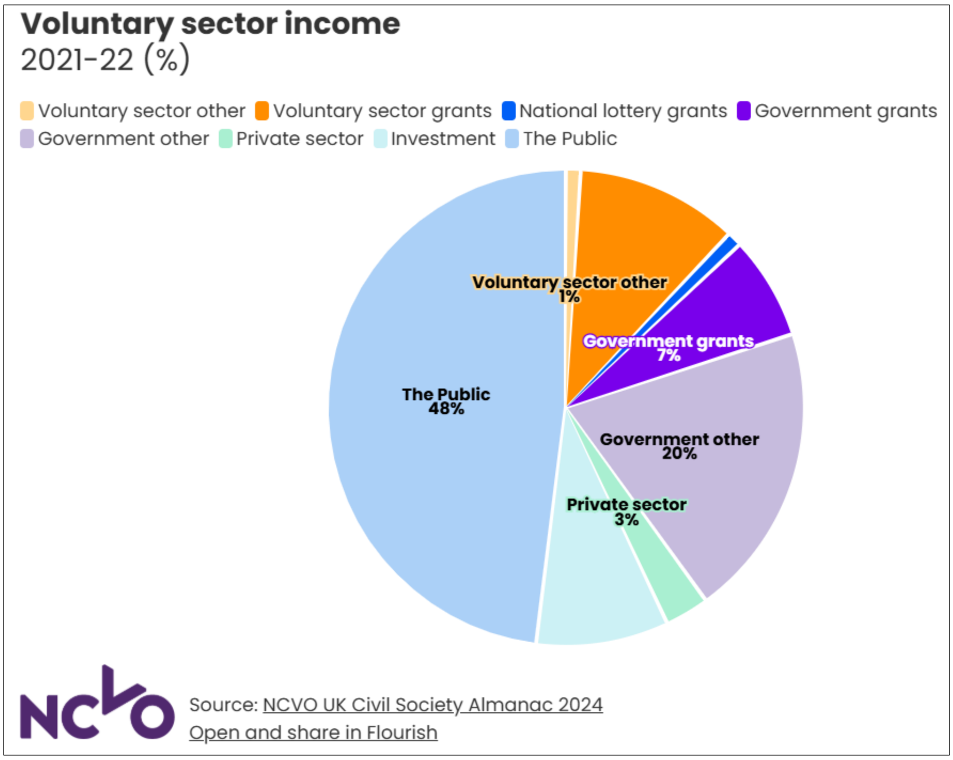


Income

We wanted to know a little bit more about the sources of income of organisations, so asked over the past two years approximately what were their sources of funding:

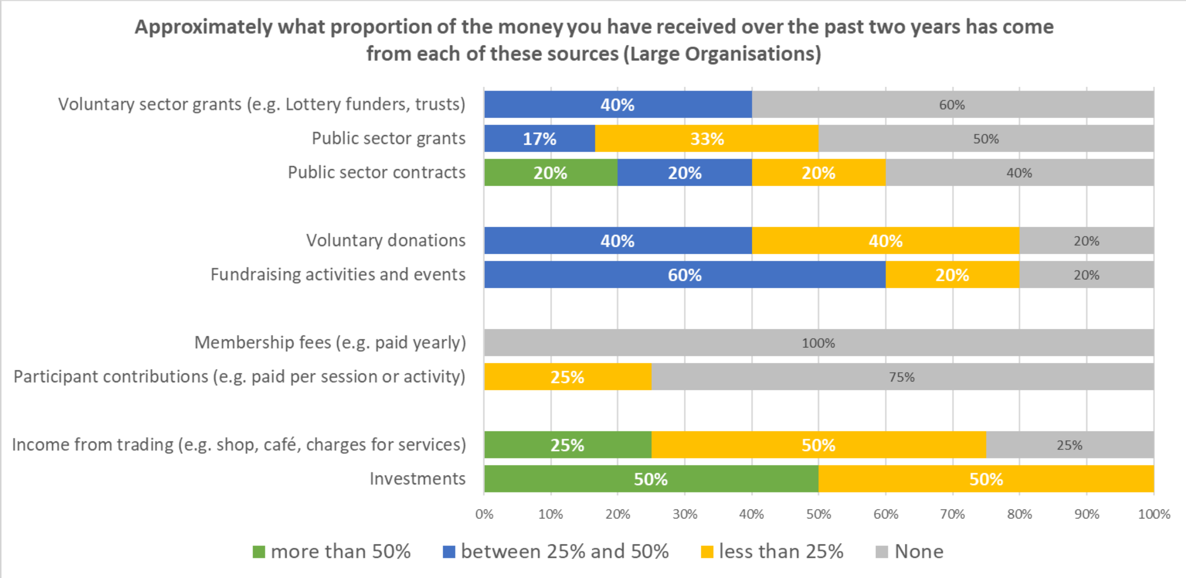


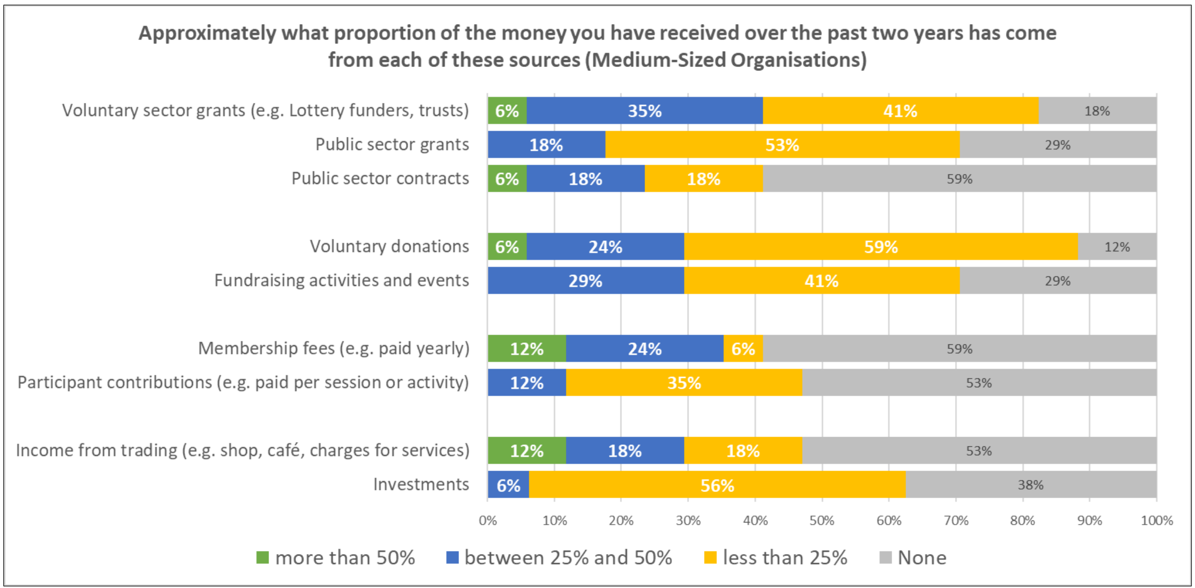
The charity 360Giving collects and publishes data to positively inform grant making. Their UK Grantmaking 2025 report refers to The Almanac's picture of voluntary sector income from 2021-22, and it seems that Warwickshire's sector income is a lot more dependent on grants and funding from other bodies than the national picture which is more the public (largely donations and legacies).

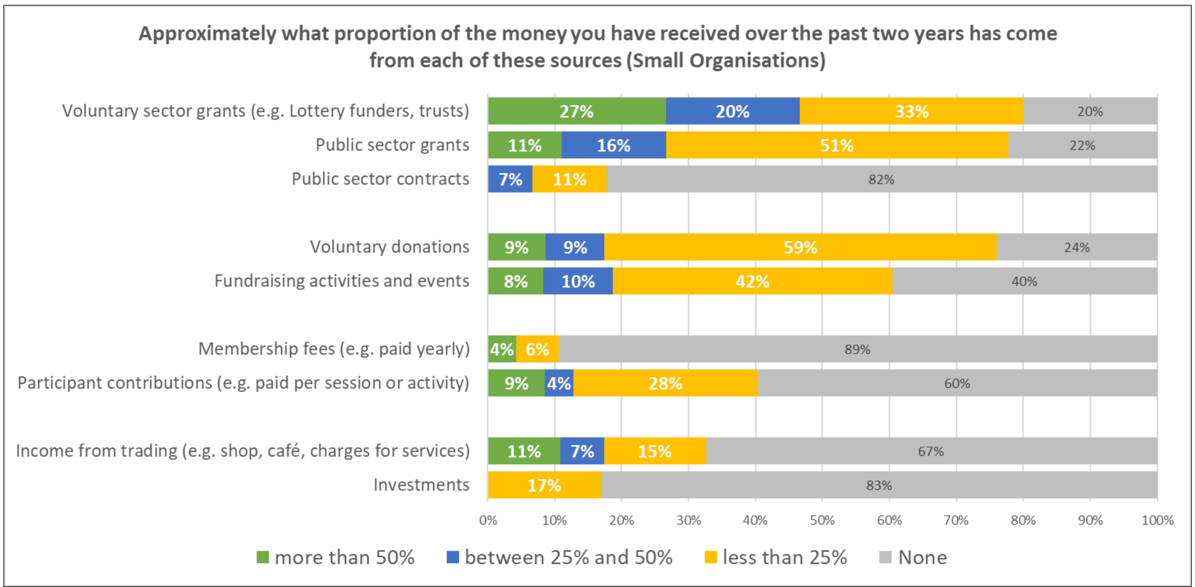


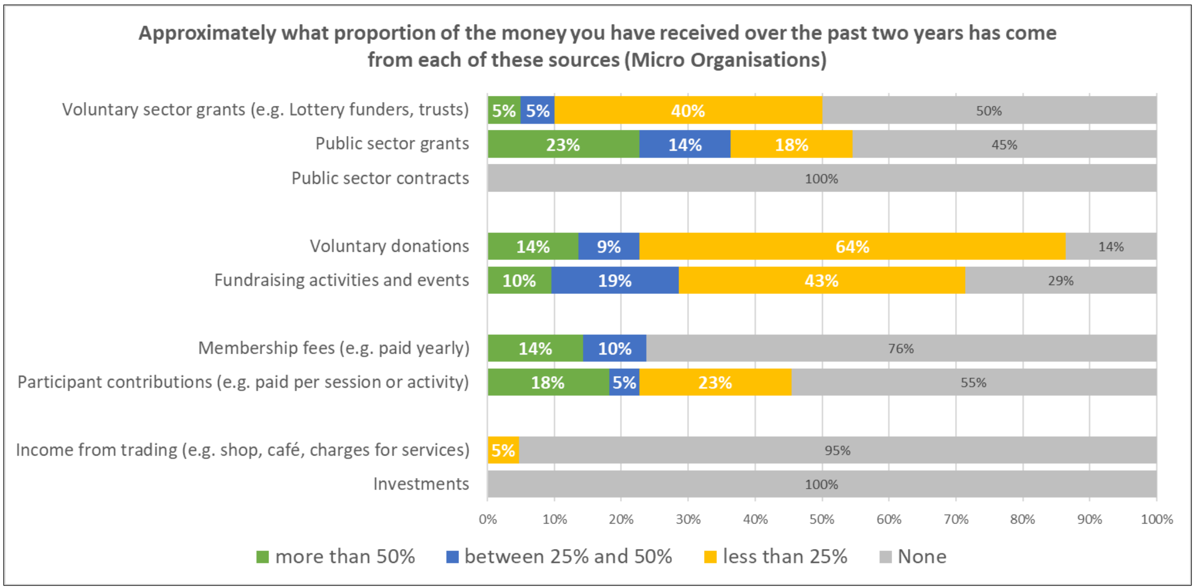
Source

Sources of funding is however significant in the context of the size of organisation:

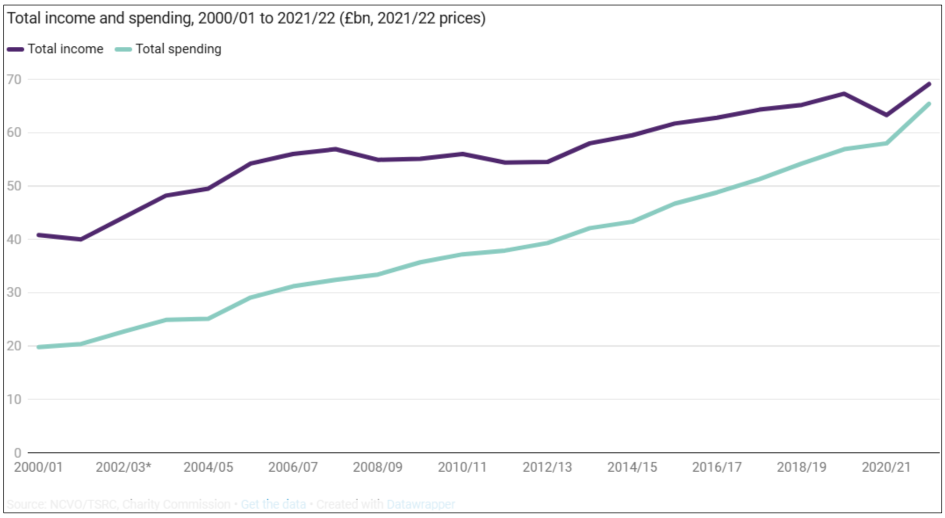

Approximately what proportion of the money you have received over the past two years has come from each of these sources (Large Organisations)
Voluntary sector grants (e.g. Lottery funders, trusts)
Public sector grants
Public sector contracts
Voluntary donations
Fundraising activities and events
Membership fees (e.g. paid yearly)
Participant contributions (e.g. paid per session or activity)
Income from trading (e.g. shop, café, charges for services)
Investments
more than 50%
between 25% and 50%
less than 25%
None


Approximately what proportion of the money you have received over the past two years has come from each of these sources (Medium-Sized Organisations)
Voluntary sector grants (e.g. Lottery funders, trusts)
Public sector grants
Public sector contracts
Voluntary donations
Fundraising activities and events
Membership fees (e.g. paid yearly)
Participant contributions (e.g. paid per session or activity)
Income from trading (e.g. shop, café, charges for services)
Investments
more than 50%
between 25% and 50%
less than 25%
None


Approximately what proportion of the money you have received over the past two years has come from each of these sources (Small Organisations)
Voluntary sector grants (e.g. Lottery funders, trusts)
Public sector grants
Public sector contracts
Voluntary donations
Fundraising activities and events
Membership fees (e.g. paid yearly)
Participant contributions (e.g. paid per session or activity)
Income from trading (e.g. shop, café, charges for services)
Investments
more than 50%
between 25% and 50%
less than 25%
None

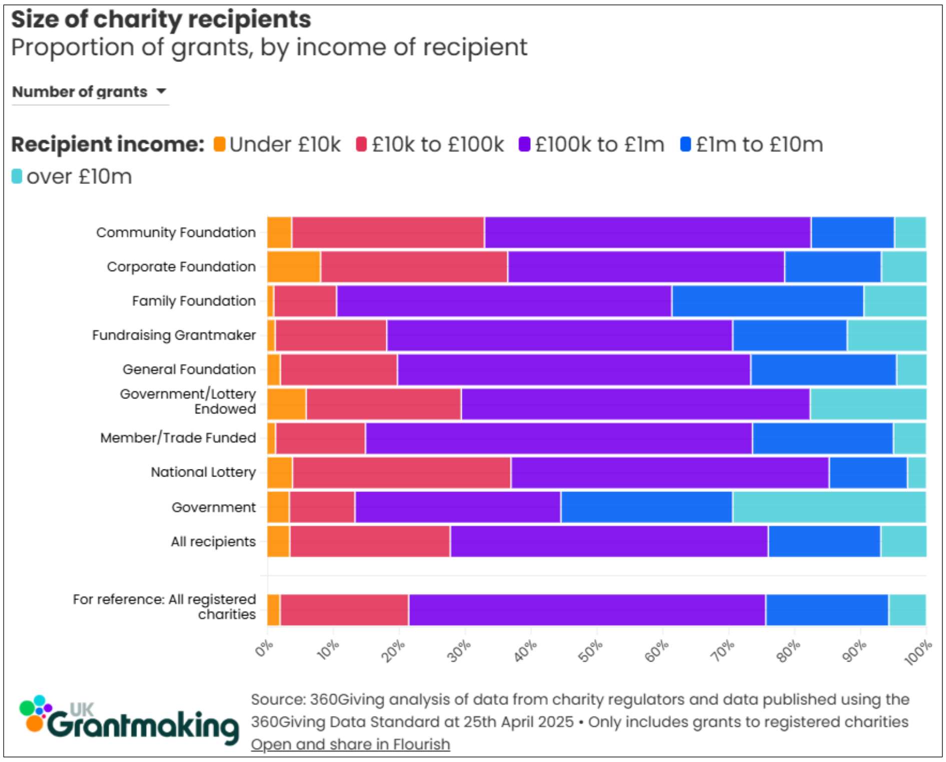


As a point of interest, the Almanac states* that nationally, in 2021/22, the voluntary sector's total income was £69.1bn, a 9% increase from the previous year's £63.5bn (after adjusting for inflation). However, the rise in the sector's total expenditure was smaller, increasing to £65.8bn, up just 2% from the previous year's £64.5bn. Also, it is also worth remembering that analysis showed that micro charities (those who have an annual income of under £5k) made up 45% of the total number of registered charities in England and Wales, and accounted for only 0.18% of the total annual income of charities.



Source

The UK Grantmaking 2025 report shows that total grantmaking to voluntary sector organisations from UK-based institutions is estimated at over £23bn in 2023-24, although not all of that will have been spent in the UK. The report also showed that the majority of charity recipients (75.6%) have a turnover of under £1million, and are more likely to be working with specific communities of interest or geography than general charities. The duration of grants was usually 3 years or less; only 3.6% of known grants made were for over 3 years. Using this data about the communities served, the Government provides more grants to recipients serving the general public, and Trusts and Foundations provide more grants to recipients serving specific communities, in particular, “children and young people”, and “people with disabilities”. The data below is largely reflective of our own data.

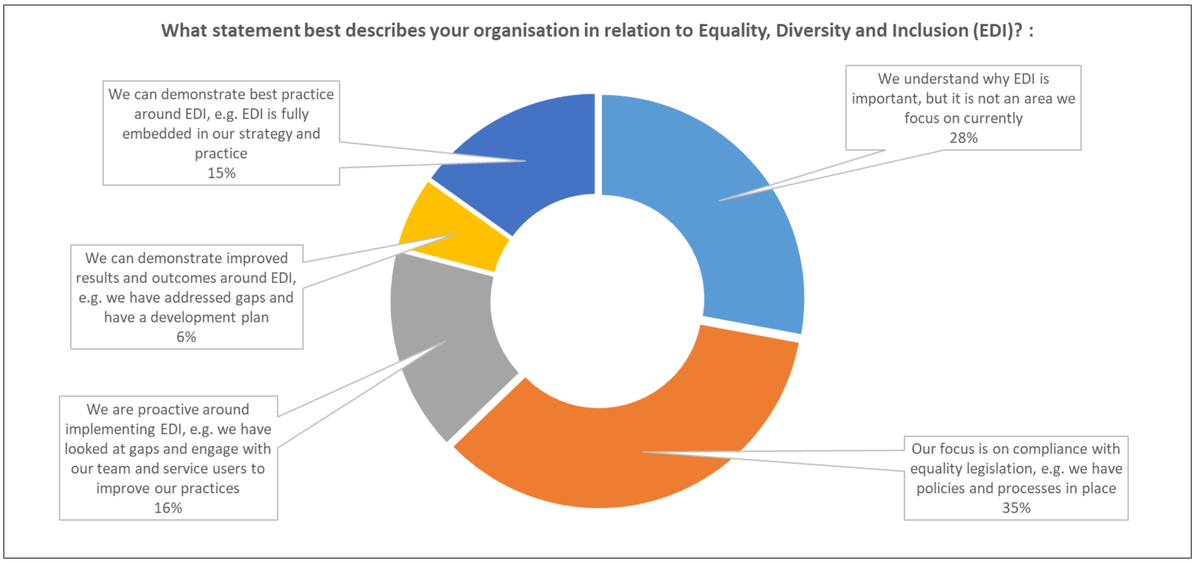


Size of charity recipients
Proportion of grants, by income of recipient
Number of grants
Recipient income: Under £10k £10k to £100k £100k to £1m £1m to £10m over £10m
Community Foundation
Corporate Foundation
Family Foundation
Fundraising Grantmaker
General Foundation
Government/Lottery Endowed
Member/Trade Funded
National Lottery
Government
All recipients
For reference: All registered charities
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
UK Grantmaking
Source: 360Giving analysis of data from charity regulators and data published using the 360Giving Data Standard at 25th April 2025 • Only includes grants to registered charities
Open and share in Flourish

Source

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (EDI)

As in the 2023 report, we wanted to understand more about the organisations' approaches to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) as we feel this has been under-reported in the past. We asked respondents what statement best describes their organisation in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):

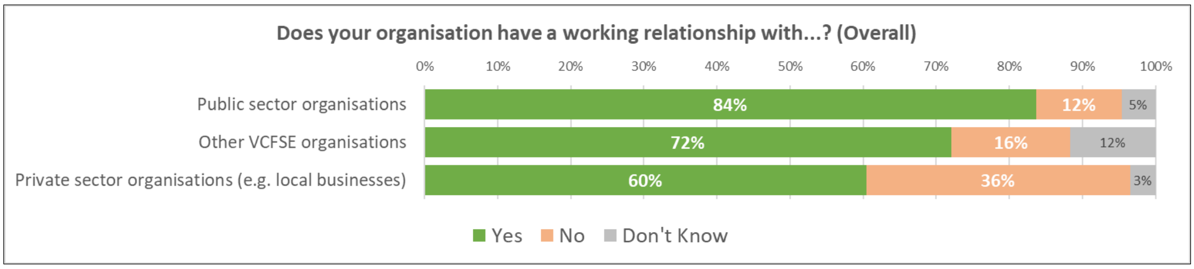


To better understand support needs, we asked what support would enable them to make further progress in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

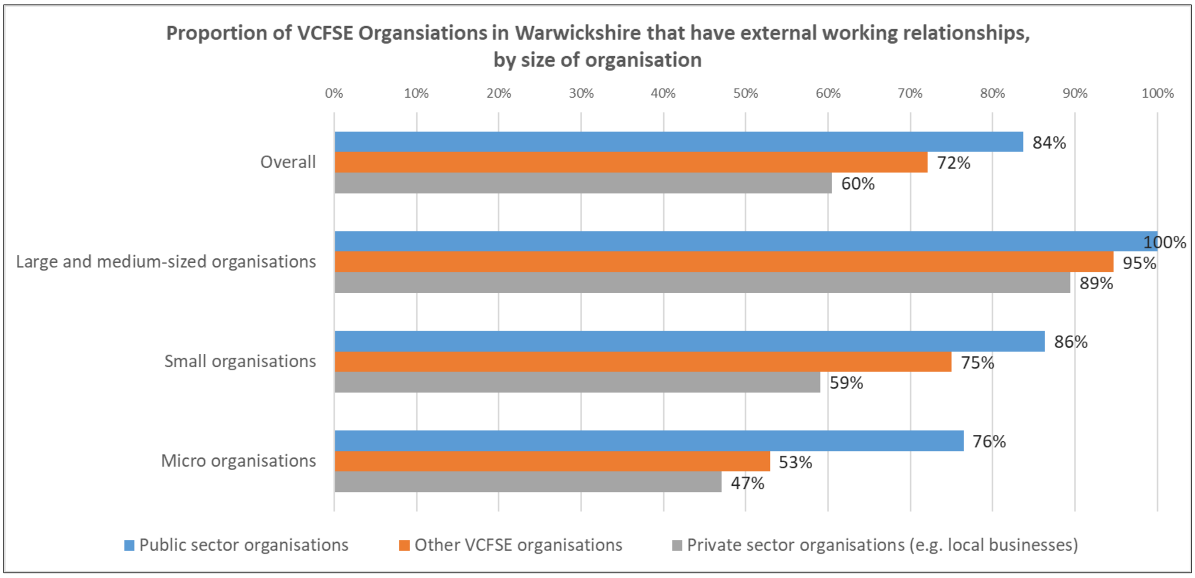
	Overall	Large and medium-sized organisations	Small Organisations	Micro Organisations
No support needed	55%	60%	49%	58%
Training for our team	19%	10%	24%	16%
Assessment of EDI strengths and areas for development	18%	30%	13%	16%
Developing an inclusive culture, e.g. awareness around language and communications	14%	20%	11%	16%
Policy development support	14%	15%	16%	11%
Reviewing staff and volunteer recruitment practices	11%	5%	18%	0%
Training for volunteers	0%	0%	0%	0%

WORKING TOGETHER

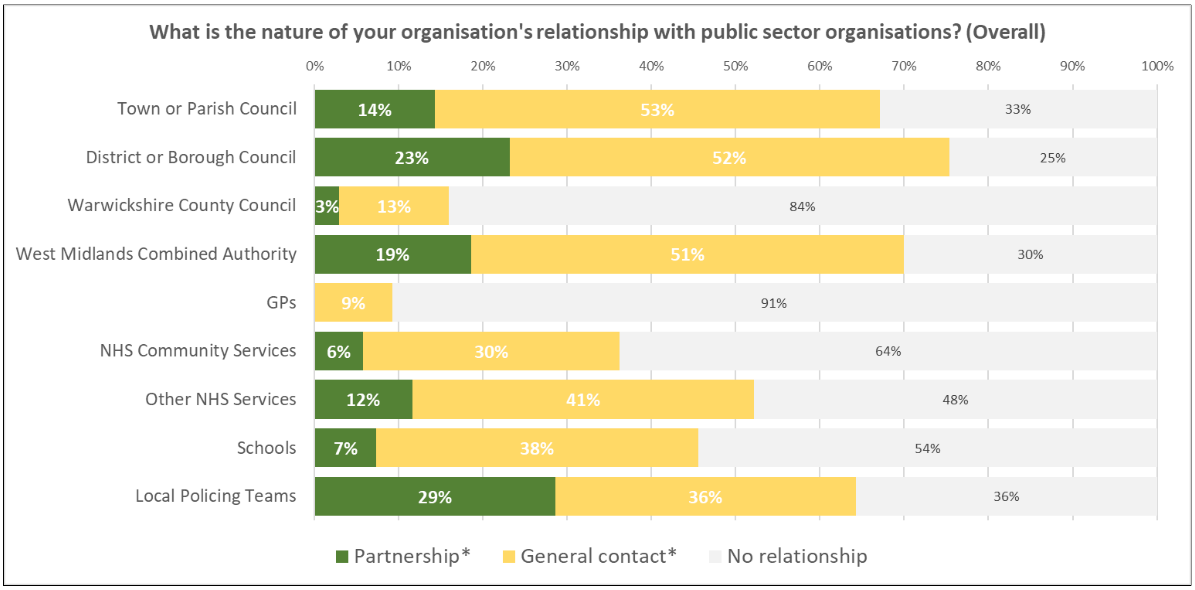
To help us to better understand cross-sector relationships, we asked a number of questions about how organisations work with others, from across the voluntary, public and private sector.

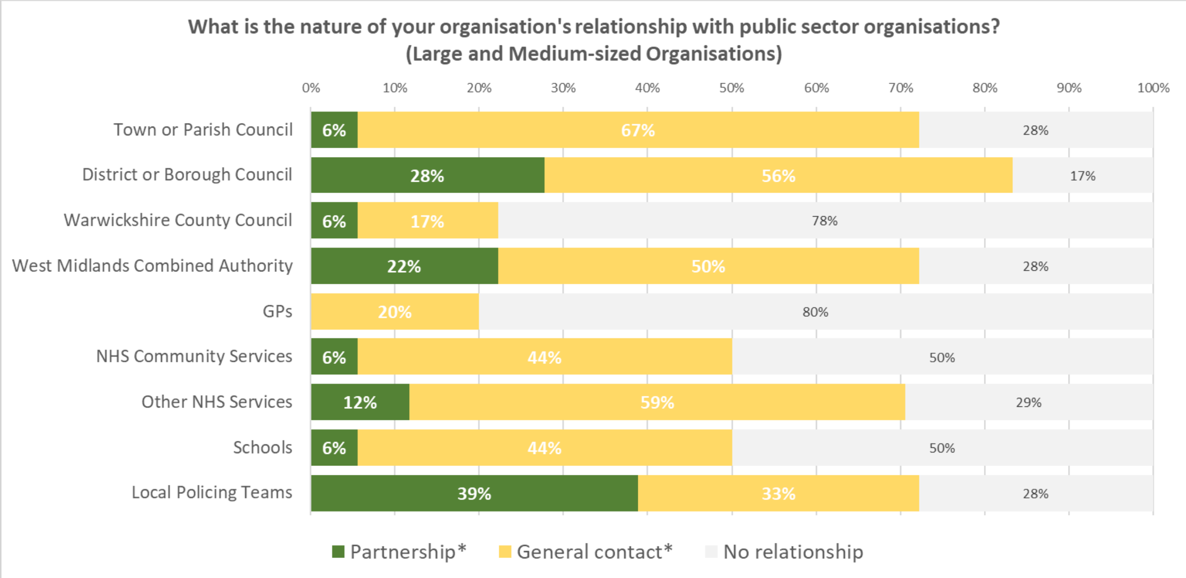


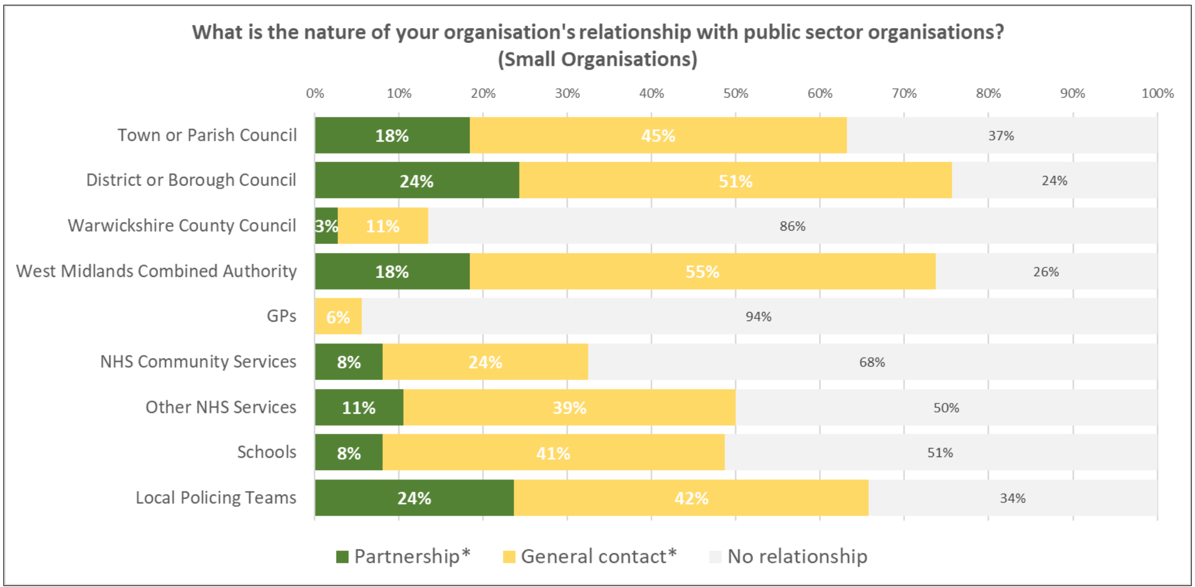
Networking and partnerships are central to the VCFSE sector. The majority of respondents reported working relationships with other organisations across the VCFSE, public and private sectors. The nature of these relationships did vary by size of organisation:

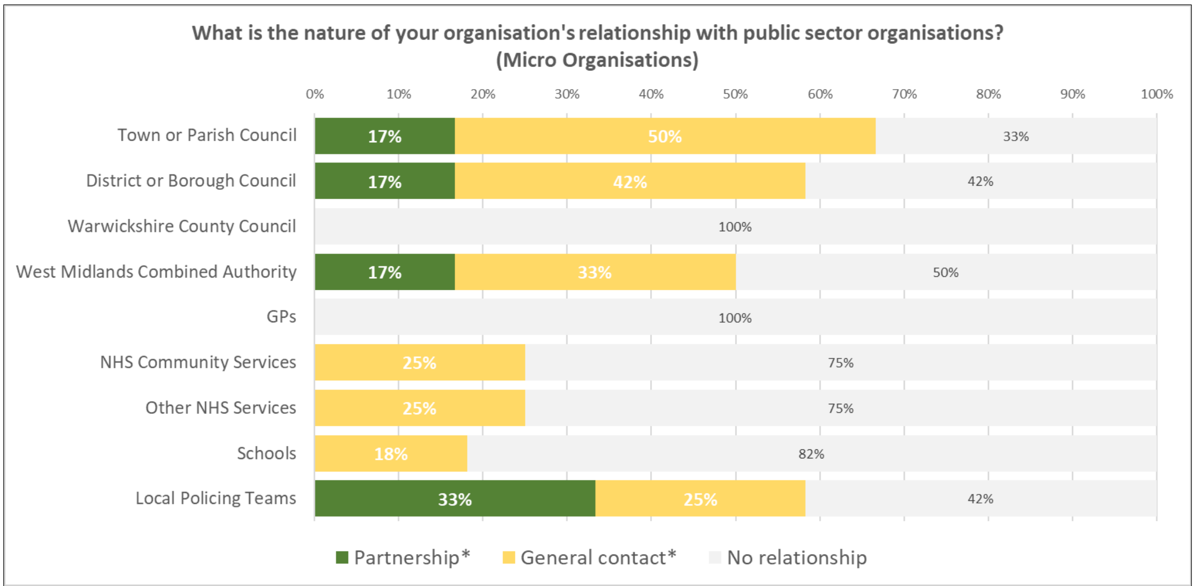


Relationship with public sector organisations




What is the nature of your organisation's relationship with public sector organisations?
(Large and Medium-sized Organisations)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Town or Parish Council 6% 67% 28%
District or Borough Council 28% 56% 17%
Warwickshire County Council 6% 17% 78%
West Midlands Combined Authority 22% 50% 28%
GPs 20% 80%
NHS Community Services 6% 44% 50%
Other NHS Services 12% 59% 29%
Schools 6% 44% 50%
Local Policing Teams 39% 33% 28%
Partnership*
General contact*
No relationship


What is the nature of your organisation's relationship with public sector organisations?
(Small Organisations)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Town or Parish Council 18% 45% 37%
District or Borough Council 24% 51% 24%
Warwickshire County Council 3% 11% 86%
West Midlands Combined Authority 18% 55% 26%
GPs 6% 94%
NHS Community Services 8% 24% 68%
Other NHS Services 11% 39% 50%
Schools 8% 41% 51%
Local Policing Teams 24% 42% 34%
Partnership*
General contact*
No relationship


What is the nature of your organisation's relationship with public sector organisations?
(Micro Organisations)
0%
10%
20%
30%
40%
50%
60%
70%
80%
90%
100%
Town or Parish Council 17% 50% 33%
District or Borough Council 17% 42% 42%
Warwickshire County Council 100%
West Midlands Combined Authority 17% 33% 50%
GPs 100%
NHS Community Services 25% 75%
Other NHS Services 25% 75%
Schools 18% 82%
Local Policing Teams 33% 25% 42%
Partnership*
General contact*
No relationship

In a bit more depth, we asked what works well with existing relationships with public sector organisations:

- 31% of survey respondents reported positive relationships with public sector organisations;
- 11% highlighted close collaboration or partnership in service delivery, or the planning of future developments. This included sharing of knowledge and resources, learning from each other, and openness and shared understanding of challenges on both sides;
- 10% mentioned support received from public sector organisations. This included funding, advice, and access to specialist services;
- 8% praised the quality of communication with specific contacts in public sector organisations;
- 5% noted the mutual benefits of VCFSE and public sector organisations working together. Different approaches, strengths and resources for achieving shared outcomes was highlighted.

We asked what, if anything, could improve these relationships in future:

- 14% of respondents suggested that there were no specific areas to improve their relationships with public sector organisations, choosing to focus instead on maintaining and sustaining current positive contact. Limited time and high staff turnover were identified as risks, and so focussing on mitigating these risks was identified as a priority. Some 4% expressed concern about the potential impact of forthcoming planned reorganisation of local government, and the risk this posed to sustaining positive links;
- 10% suggested that greater understanding across the public sector of the opportunities, strengths and challenges across the VCFSE sector would help support mutually beneficial relationships. Some felt that public sector organisations did not recognise the value of the connection that many VCFSE organisations have with local communities, and how these could be utilised through partnership working. Some felt that public sector approaches did not always respect the skills and experience within the sector, with suggestions made that VCFSE organisations should be included in planning and strategy development; some examples were given of public sector organisations engaging 'too late' with the VCFSE organisations to enable optimal results, with others given of assumptions being made about VCFSE contributions of capacity without consultation. Mutual respect and equal partnerships were viewed as a productive way forward;
- 9% of respondents expressed a desire for more funding and/or access to advice from public sector organisations. In some cases, it was reported that public sector organisations would make referrals, but there was no funding available to provide the anticipated support;
- 7% suggested a need to improve contact with public sector organisations. This included having a clear named contact. Several respondents noted that they had good contact with a specific individual, but when that person moved roles it was often a struggle to develop a new contact. This meant that contact between organisations was overly reliant on personal relationships, which was not considered to be a desirable situation.

Relationship with other VCFSE organisations

We asked in what ways they have practical working relationship(s) with other VCFSE organisations:

- 72% of survey respondents reported having a working relationship with other VCFSE organisations. For 37% of respondents, this was limited to networking and information sharing as part of general forums;
- 29% reported having one or more shared projects or joint delivery of activities with another VCFSE organisation. Examples included working in collaboration with organisations with a similar focus, and examples where organisations worked together to match beneficiaries with a more diverse range of opportunities or services, such as advice organisations teaming up with community venues;

* 24% gave examples of sharing resources or utilising the services of other VCFSE organisations. This included making or receiving referrals to connect individuals with appropriate services, hiring space or resources to deliver activities, and volunteer recruitment;
* 10% provided examples of mutual support to raise donations. This included supporting campaigns of other VCFSE organisations to generate donations of goods and resources, as well as raising funds.

We asked what, if anything, could improve these relationships in future:

* 24% of survey respondents said that they did not believe there was a need for improvement in relationships with other VCFSE organisations, expressing content with the current opportunities for networking and partnerships;
* 27% suggested a need for more networking opportunities, and events where connections could be made with like-minded organisations. Often this was linked to identifying a barrier to connecting with existing opportunities, in particular for volunteer-led organisations for whom daytime mid-week events are difficult to access;
* 17% noted that greater flexibility with funding would enable increased collaboration with other VCFSE organisations. It was suggested that working together has considerable benefits but is typically an un-funded element of an organisation's activities. Greater recognition from funders to allow grants to be used for activities that enhance capacity and capability to deliver projects - rather than funding being explicitly tied to direct project delivery costs - was identified as a desired development that would enhance outcomes;
* 14% suggested that more effort should be made to engineer partnership working opportunities. This included the creation of funding sources that favour collaboration over competition between VCFSE organisations. Support to identify complementary services and activities, and then to build a working partnership between organisations that utilises mutually beneficial skills and resources, was suggested by some as a way to strengthen the sector as a whole and enhance positive impact for communities.

Relationship with private sector organisations

We asked whether organisations have practical working relationship(s) with private sector organisations:

* 36% of survey respondents reported little or no relationships with private sector organisations;
* 17% said they received fundraising support from private sector organisations. Often this was linked to being nominated as a 'charity of the year' or receiving other grants, sponsorship or donations. A small number of respondents gave examples of ongoing support from private sector organisations to undertake fundraising activities, typically small businesses located close to the VCFSE organisation;
* 14% outlined practical support, most commonly volunteer contributions as part of a company's CSR programme. This seemed to work best for time-limited group projects. Some respondents noted that they received support from businesses in the form of discounted or pro-bono services;
* 13% described general positive ongoing contact or networking involving private sector organisations. This sometimes involved an ongoing working relationship, for example where the VCFSE organisation provides services relevant to customers of the private sector organisation, there may be support with promotion;
* 3% of survey respondents reported providing paid for services to private sector organisations, for example delivery of training.

We asked what, if anything, could improve these relationships in the future:

- 11% of survey respondents suggested they would benefit from support to engage with the private sector, for example through networking opportunities or facilitated forums to connect businesses with local VCFSE organisations
- 10% suggested there was scope for increasing awareness and understanding of the VCFSE sector among the private sector, and in some cases it was suggested that there is scope within the VCFSE sector to better understand what private sector organisations are looking for in partnerships. Identifying and emphasising mutual benefits of working together was suggested as a way of building successful long-term partnerships. Although there is scope for this to be done by individual organisations, some felt that collaborative efforts would be worthwhile;
- 5% expressed a desire for more support from the private sector, typically funding support or representation on the boards of VCFSE organisations.

General insights on working together

Interviewees discussed successful partnership working, with most focussing primarily on relationships with public sector organisations. There were many examples shared of positive relationships with local councils and the NHS, but a common theme that these were only at an operational or transactional level. Several interviewees expressed a desire for greater recognition from senior decision makers within the public sector of the value that VCFSE organisations can bring, and greater involvement at a strategic or planning level:

“We do work very closely with the district council, and it does give us an opportunity to raise funds that wouldn’t be available to the district council.”

“I'm not sure if I went to somebody high up in the NHS locally they would know who we were. But certainly more local like social prescribers or local GP’s or certainly the local hospitals would know who we were but I don't know that the policymakers at the top would.”

“I think sometimes there is talk about involving the sector and we’re invited to a meeting and then they can be aspirations and promises of all of these great things to come but actually they don’t and then six months, twelve months down the line you see a role advertised with the local authority or the NHS that could easily have gone out to partnerships.”

“My view is that actually what the sector can offer is often better and better value. So better value financially but better value in terms of impact because they've already got "the relationships with all of the other organisations to start to build that.”

“I just wonder whether there is any opportunity to either influence council and policy makers more or help strengthen some of those communications… where you can see you are directly supporting some of the things which they have identified as priorities… at least appreciating that we are directly positively impacting that because I think that’s what I feel, that they don’t necessarily know who is out there, what they’re doing and how they can make the most impact from that.”

Interviewees identified a range of enablers for successful partnerships. Central to this was cultivating positive personal relationships, identifying mutual benefits, and being respectful of the limitations of individual partners:

"It is a partnership because we're all bringing different skills, excellent skills to the best of the community rather than it being isolated… and that works because it shows the best where we all give our best, wanting the best and we all come at it from different angles without the egos being in the centre, which sounds wonderful. You can tell when it works and when it doesn't work!"

"I think a lot of people fall down because they generate a link and then they ignore the link. You've got to be on the case all the time… and certainly, public sector partners you've got to be reminding them all the time that you're there, that you're willing to help, that you are helping and… we're providing them as much of a service as they are to us."

"I also find that cake helps a lot. Face to face meetings where at all possible, so that they can understand that we are positive about this, we are going to do what we say we're going to do and that we're wanting to build that relationship."

"We try and involve other voluntary organisations who are fairly close to us that have partnerships locally and then try and bring together them with some of our partners, so we become more of a web rather than a big circle with us standing in the middle of it."

"I'm saying, you know what we're knackered and yeah, you're asking for something but actually at the moment we can't do it and I think that's important, being honest of not now but we will relook at it maybe in three or six months' time when it may work."

"As an example, we work with a local nursery and they've supplied all our plants... They provided them at a very good price because we are a charity, we then discovered that they are actually a not-for-profit organisation as well. So, we've been working with them quite closely… and we're now on the verge of doing joint volunteer days where we get our volunteers together in the same place."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) Sector continues to make a significant contribution to community wellbeing, social cohesion, and the delivery of essential services. However, the Sector is facing increasing pressures, including rising demand, constrained financial resources, workforce challenges, and uneven access to infrastructure. To ensure the Sector remains resilient, sustainable, and capable of meeting future needs, it is recommended that:

Strengthen collaborative opportunities
Partners from across the area adopt a coordinated, long-term approach to investment and partnership that strengthens the capacity, stability, and strategic influence of the VCFSE Sector.

Improve funding stability and diversification
Promote multi-year funding arrangements, support organisations to develop mixed-income models, and enhance access to small-scale grants for grassroots and emerging groups.

Strengthen cross-sector collaboration
Continue to build on or establish structured partnership mechanisms between the VCFSE, local authorities, health partners, and wider community networks to ensure meaningful involvement in planning, commissioning, and strategic decision-making.

Invest in workforce and volunteer development
Provide targeted support for training, leadership development, volunteer recruitment, and wellbeing initiatives to address capacity constraints and improve retention across the Sector.

Increase recognition and visibility of the Sector's impact
Further strengthen communication efforts, promote shared impact reporting, and raise public and stakeholder awareness of the VCSFE Sector's contribution to communities.

CAVA SUPPORT

Overwhelmingly respondents expressed their appreciation for the support CAVA already provides, and members were keen to see this continue. No one person or organisation is responsible for the success of the VCFSE sector - it's a collective effort - but as a learning organisation we took the opportunity to ask some more detailed questions about the services CAVA provides:

Positives

We asked what organisations think CAVA does well:

- 74% of survey respondents identified advice, information and/or support from CAVA as a helpful and valuable contribution to their own work. Tailored advice and support, in particular with funding and policy development, was highlighted as a particular strength, as was the quality and conciseness of information in the fortnightly newsletter;
- 31% identified networking as a particular strength of CAVAs. This includes providing opportunities for VCFSE organisations to connect with each other. Also mentioned was CAVA's "vast network" of high-quality contacts, which several respondents identified as an effective way of finding appropriate support or connections even in areas where CAVA themselves do not have specific expertise;
- 11% highlighted CAVA's role as an advocate for the VCFSE sector. Raising the profile of the sector in local communities was identified as an important function CAVA performs, with appreciation shown for general promotion of volunteering and the annual volunteer celebrations. Also mentioned was CAVA's role in building connections and understanding between the VCFSE sector and public sector organisations;
- 18% of survey respondents made specific reference to their experience of seeking support from CAVA. Praise was given for quick responses and friendly approach, in addition to the tailored, helpful responses received.

Interviewees praised CAVA's information, advice and networking support, in particular support for small organisations. It was noted that CAVA provides bespoke support that is tailored to organisations, which was much appreciated:

"We're so lucky to have CAVA. They're an excellent organisation and they are providing so much support. We've found them nothing but positive really, even though we're a very small organisation, they're very supportive and can do about what you would like to achieve and thinking about possible solutions for things."

"When I took over the admin… the policies were in disarray, so [CAVA] helped me with that."

"We value our interactions with them because on an individual basis most of our community partners are just focused on their particular volunteering activity and actually being able to interact with CAVA which has got a remit for covering Warwickshire… means we have useful conversations about the direction of volunteering… and see what their takes are on that."

"I know that when I need to be doing something, that they have some of the answers for us."

"CAVA's wide-ranging reach helps us. I go to networking meetings they organise, I go to training sessions they organise. Partly because they've good training sessions, quality training sessions where I can learn but also because I can use their network to promote our organisation."

"Really practical support in terms of helping identify potential grants and sources of funding that we can go after. So they understand who we are and what we're trying to achieve and I think the advice that they've given us has been outstanding… that's where I talk about meaningful and bespoke, it's clearly not the same advice they're giving to everybody, they've actually gone through the list of people that they know and they've gone, here try these, try these and again, understanding the challenges around the three year funding streams being difficult, but helping and advising us on good places to go and potentially how to position the need for support. That's been outstanding, really helpful."

"Charities like CAVA don't always get the gushing praise. They aren't the puppies and the poorly children and everything else, so a message back to say that they are appreciated and valued for being the glue that holds us together."

Voice

We asked "How do you think CAVA could be more effective at strengthening the voice of the VCFSE Sector in Warwickshire?":

- 24% of survey respondents either explicitly said that CAVA's priority should be to continue to deliver their current services, or provided no suggestions for how CAVA could be more effective at strengthening the voice of the VCFSE Sector in Warwickshire;
- 9% suggested focussing on raising their profile with the community as a whole, as a means to both promote the sector and engage with more VCFSE groups;
- 7% requested an increased volume of networking opportunities;
- 7% requested enhanced access to CAVA support. This included suggestions for opportunities outside of office hours to make them accessible for organisations run by volunteers with day jobs, clarifying initial points of contact, and increasing provision in Solihull;
- 5% of survey respondents suggested that CAVA needed to undertake an exercise in planning for the future. This included suggestions for CAVA to undertake an exercise in identifying and preparing for future challenges, and to support organisations within the sector to do the same.
- 4% suggested CAVA could collate and disseminate more sector intelligence, and could enhance communications about its development and delivery priorities along with progress towards these.

Interviewees were generally of the view that CAVA should focus on sustaining and evolving their current services. These perhaps could be extended to more proactive facilitation of sector partnerships. There was a general view that CAVA is most successful at supporting small organisations that are more likely to lack specific internal skills or knowledge on specific topics. Micro organisations also praised CAVA's support, but were more likely to note a barrier to accessing this, especially volunteer-led organisations where lead contacts have other commitments during traditional working hours. We note that often events are held during 'normal working hours', but one-to-one support can be made available outside of these times. Larger organisations typically have greater internal capacity and more specialised skills, so benefit less from CAVA's core advice and support services. These organisations identified most value in CAVA's information dissemination, training and networking services, and were more likely to express a desire for more strategic leadership and representation to facilitate relationships between the VCFSE sector and the public and private sector:

"They don't have an endless supply of money, they will be under budgets so again, we have to be careful that we don't exhaust an excellent organisation."

"Theoretically I think [trustee training] would be really useful. I'm not sure my trustees would access it though because it would depend on the time of day that they will work. I think sometimes as a sector we often deliver things that are Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 and probably Monday to Friday, 9 till 3 because that suits the majority of the sector and potentially the staff. I think recognising that, particularly for trustees, catching them in those twilight hours maybe online and other things like that would be an opportunity for them to engage in things otherwise you almost prevent them from participating because it's another responsibility within the day."

"I think [VCFSE organisations are] the answer to each other's problems. Imagine a charity that's struggling to keep a full time finance person and there's another charity that only needs someone one day a week and if there was a way of connecting those dots, I think that would be incredibly powerful because you'd have another organisation you could subcontract work from, whether it's on a long term basis or on a short term basis but could help both organisations to get out of a hole."

"I'm quite fortunate I've got a very good trustee board. But yeah, I think often… particularly small charities, we don't necessarily have a budget for full time HR and a full-time finance and everything else so everybody ends up doing a bit of everything or buying people in. I think the other area whereas a sector you're really valuable is if people have got skills and resources."

"Individually, the local people at CAVA are absolutely superb and great. I have heard of the impact they have had but never felt that they represent [our organisation] because… we're big in their eyes. We're not big in our eyes but if you're a little one-person charity [then] we're huge… So, personally although I can see that CAVA do a lot of really good work I don't feel that they represent my organisation."

We would like to say thank you to all organisations who took part in the research in 2025, from mini surveys at CAVA events, to full surveys and 1:1 interviews. Your contribution to our research is very much appreciated.

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