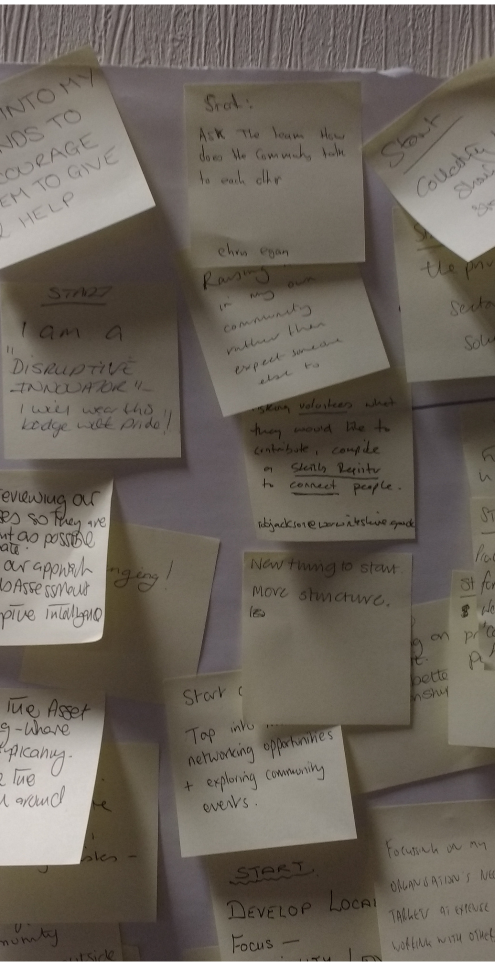
State of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector in Warwickshire and Solihull 2021/22

STATE OF THE VCSE SECTOR

Tiller research

CAVA
COMMUNITY & VOLUNTARY ACTION



ABOUT US

Warwickshire & Solihull Community & Voluntary Action (CAVA) are the local trusted Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) infrastructure organisation for Warwickshire and Solihull, providing vital support to the volunteers, groups, organisations, enterprises and charities who are working to strengthen all of our communities.

Every year our dedicated teams help lever significant investment into the area. Annually, the collective value of funding secured and volunteering opportunities developed is worth around £3million to the local economy.

We were formed in 2008 through the merger of separate 'Councils for Voluntary Service' and 'Volunteer Centres' to provide a single point of access for everyone who wants to engage in community and voluntary action. Therefore we have a collective history of over 200 years of supporting local communities to thrive.

We are committed to providing all of our services locally and accessibly. Whether that's support accessing volunteering opportunities, starting a community group, accessing funding or strengthening governance. Our 2020/21 Annual Report showed we worked with nearly 1,700 organisations, our events reached over 2,500 people and 2,020 volunteers accessed support.

As the main point of contact between the 'VCSE 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 VCSEs 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 the survey undertaken in 2021, produced in partnership with Tiller Research.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE DATA

Below are some of the keys facts from the research:

76%

ORGANISATION SIZE

considered themselves small or micro sized

47%

PAID STAFF

the majority of organisations operate with no paid staff

32%

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

operate their organisation with between 6-10 volunteers

50

COMMUNITY REACH

on average groups work with up to 50 beneficiaries per year

86%

IMPACT

feel they are effective in achieving the impact they want

13,300

SECTOR SIZE

estimated number of VCSE organisations in Warwickshire and Solihull

HOW BIG IS 'THE SECTOR'?

The Charity Commission lists 2,983 registered charities operating specifically in Warwickshire and Solihull*, however we know that the VCSE Sector is a lot broader than that.

The NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac 2021 states there are 163,000 VCOs (voluntary and community organisations); this number has fallen slightly since the last report. They further state that the annual 'value' of the Sector is £75billion.

Based on Almanac data and estimates of the wider ‘civil society’, which includes sports clubs, unincorporated community associations, companies limited by guarantee etc., we estimate there are around 13,300 VCSE organisations currently operating in Warwickshire and Solihull.

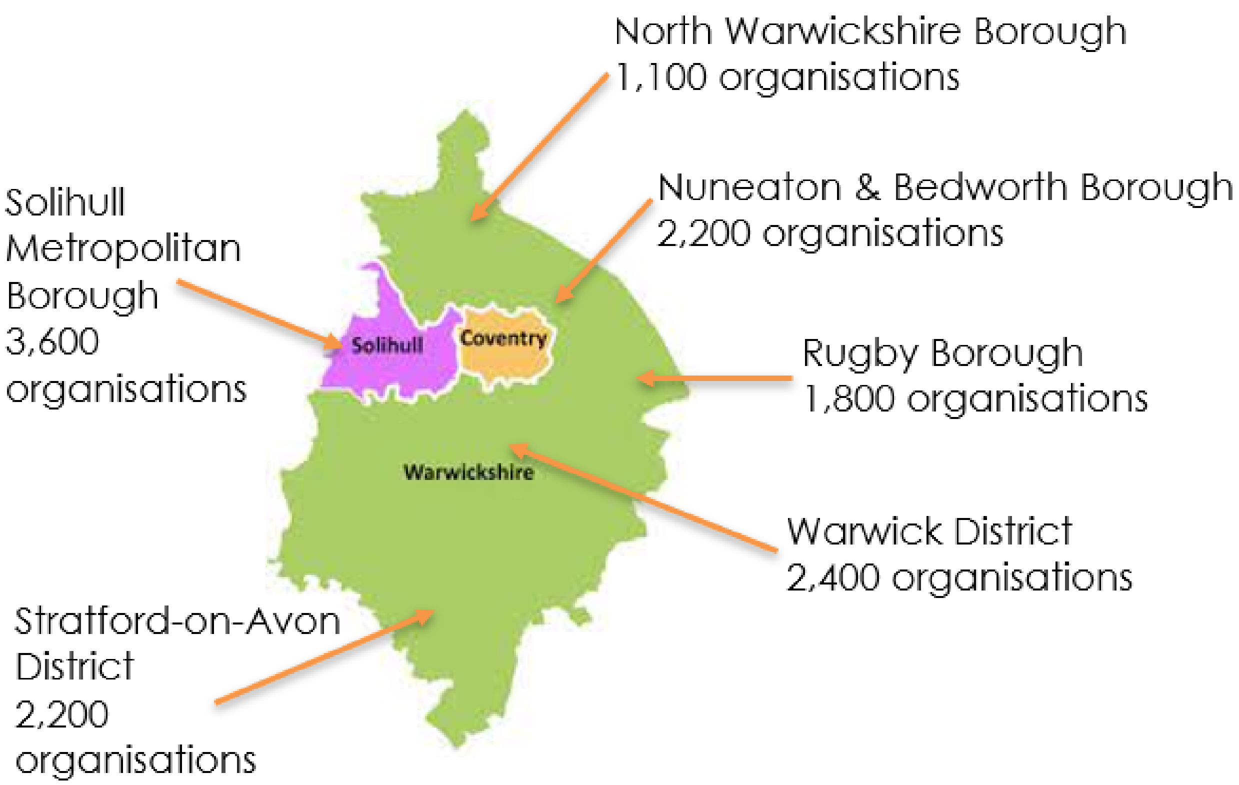
CAVA actively provides support to, and has membership open to organisations from across the 'civil society'. It is those organisations who have completed the State of the Sector survey and whose responses we refer to as 'the Sector'.

* Figures correct 01/04/2022.

WHERE ARE ALL THESE ORGANISATIONS?

We often get asked about the size and shape of the Sector. There is no single, up to date directory that lists *every* community group, sports club, faith organisation, charity or social enterprise, we can only ever use estimates. The Sector flexes and shapes to meet community need, organisations grow, shrink, establish and close regularly. Nationally, NCVO cites there was a 1.8% reduction in the number of charities (2018/19 data compared to 2017/18 data).

We have estimated that there are 0.017 VCSE organisations per head of population, therefore for Warwickshire and Solihull, we feel the numbers per locality look a little bit like this:



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

METHODOLOGY

This is our fourth survey, and was designed to be consistent with previous surveys. We opened the survey online in September 2021. Access to the form was promoted through our eGrapevine newsletters in Warwickshire and Solihull, links on our website, through social media and promoted directly by CAVA's frontline officers.

Our experience and local knowledge shows us that the scope of respondents to the survey is very typical of the organisations that we regularly work with. The sample size is based on 137 complete survey responses which we feel 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 2021 as the most comprehensive picture and analysis of the Voluntary and Community Sector.

A number of questions were analysed to identify key themes. Reponses from smaller and larger organisations were analysed separately to see if the size of organisation affected a respondent’s experiences or views, however, the same key themes were represented across organisations of different sizes in broadly similar proportions, and so these have been combined. Similarly, there was no notable difference in responses linked to geographical location; any significant areas of difference are shown in the tables and graphs.

RESPONDENTS DELIVERY

The sample size is based on 137 complete survey responses:

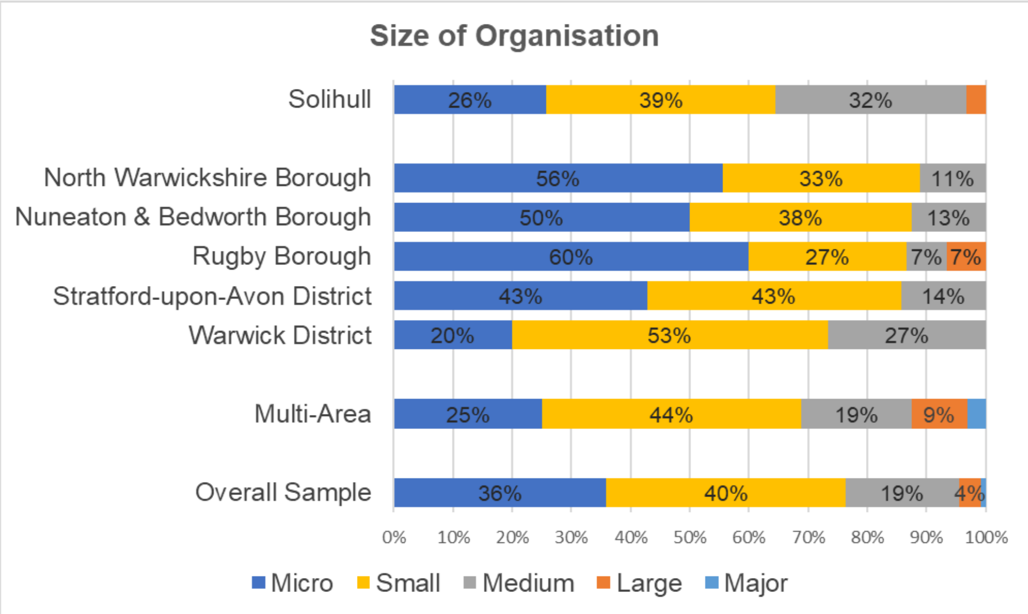
North Warwickshire Borough	9
Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough	16
Rugby Borough	15
Stratford-upon-Avon District	14
Warwick District	15
Northern Warwickshire	3
South Warwickshire	9
Warwickshire-wide	15
Solihull Borough-wide	21
North Solihull	9
East Solihull	1
National	3
International	2
Other*	5

*Organisations selecting ‘other’ typically deliver services in a specific geographic area that includes a part of Warwickshire and a neighbouring area outside the county. Throughout the analysis, ‘Multi-Area’ figures combine responses from ‘Northern Warwickshire’, ‘South Warwickshire’, ‘Warwickshire-wide’ and ‘Other’.

ORGANISATION SIZE

NCVO’s UK Civil Society Almanac categorises organisations by the size in relation to their income. Using their definitions, we found out that:

		Warwickshire and Solihull	UK data, NCVO Almanac
Major	Over £10 million	1%	0.5%
Large	£1million – 10 million	4%	3.5%
Medium	£100K - 1 million	19%	16%
Small	£10K - £100K	40%	35.6%
Micro	Up to £10K	36%	44.4%



ORGANISATION HISTORY

To better understand the history and foundations of the Sector, we asked when the organisations responding had been founded:

	Warwickshire	Solihull
Within the last year	8%	10%
Within the last 2-5 years	15%	32%
Within the last 5-10 years	19%	19%
Within the last 10-20 years	19%	13%
Within the last 20-50 years	19%	16%
Over 50 years ago	21%	10%

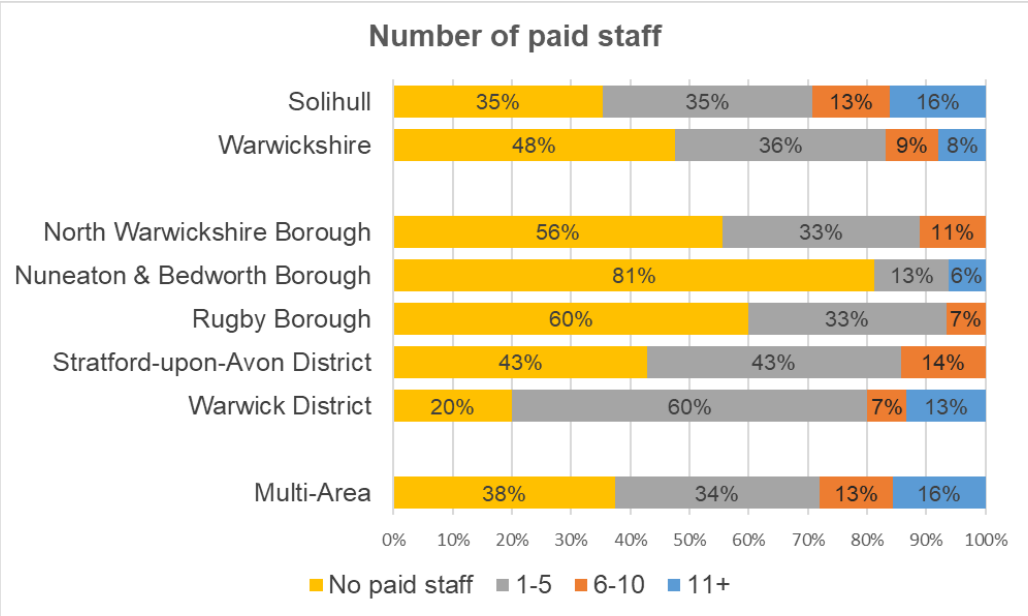
ORGANISATION STRUCTURE

To better understand the make-up of the Sector, we asked what respondents legal organisational structure was:

	Warwickshire	Solihull
Various forms of charity	67%	58%
CICs	8%	29%
Unincorporated Associations	20%	10%
Other	5%	3%

PAID STAFF

If organisations had paid employees, we asked how many they had; of the sample, on average there was 5 employees:



The NCVO Almanac states that nationally there has been an increase in the workforce of the Sector, an increase of 3% since the previous report, and 20% since 2010. Nationally the Sector has seen the biggest percentage increase in workforce compared to the public and private sectors.

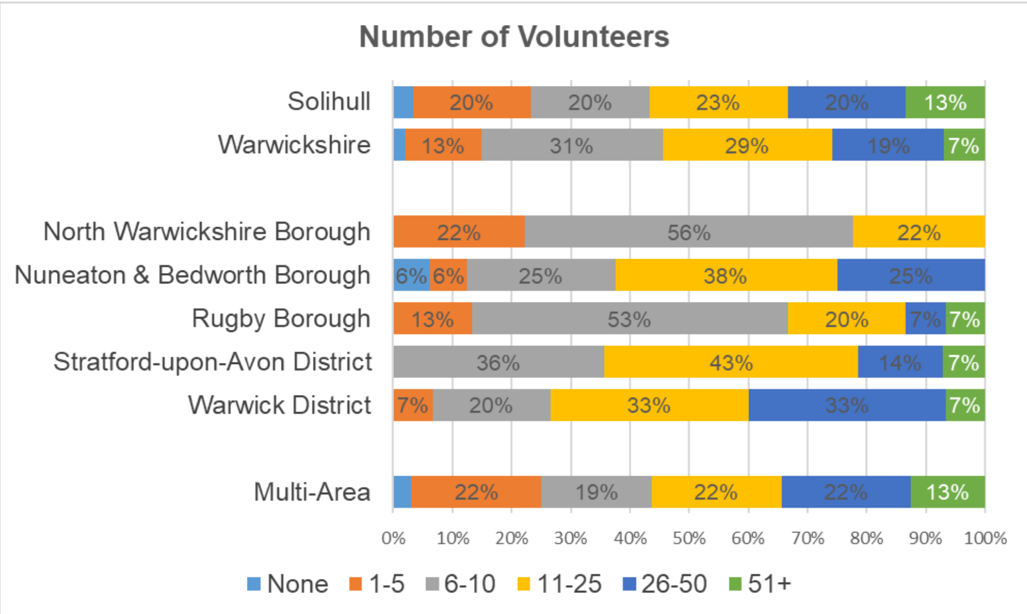
There had been an 8% increase in workers on short-term contracts, with part-time contracts more common than other sectors. The Sector is disproportionately staffed by women (67% of the workforce in 2020), and has an older age profile than the private sector.

We asked how the Covid-19 pandemic has changed staff teams:

- 43% of respondents provided no answer to this question, or said the question was not applicable;
- 23% reported no change to their staff team;
- 17% of organisations had introduced remote or hybrid working. Many were continuing to work in this way as they had experienced substantial benefits from doing so;
- 8% of respondents reported a reduction in their staff team, either through reduced hours or reduced numbers;
- 7% said that they had increased the number of team members and/or the hours staff worked;
- 3% of respondents said that their staff team had experienced considerable difficulties in adapting to the changes and demands created by the pandemic.

VOLUNTEERS

We recognise and know the value of volunteering within the Sector. Respondents were asked how many volunteers, including Committee/Board members/Trustees organisations they had; of the sample, on average this was 28:



AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS PER VOLUNTEER

14

AVERAGE ANNUAL VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING* PER ORGANISATION

£9,722

AVERAGE ANNUAL ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING IN WARWICKSHIRE & SOLIHULL**

£129.3M

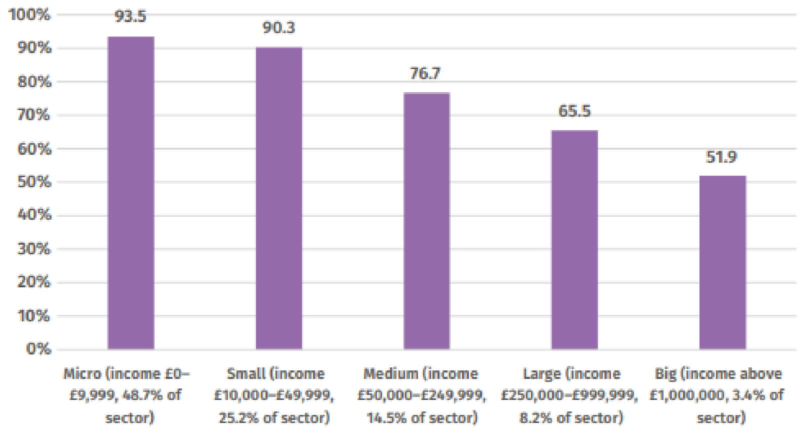
*Data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings produces an estimated equivalent hourly 'volunteering wage rate' of £13.68 in 2019.
**Based on an estimated 9,700 organisations in Warwickshire the economic value is £94.3million; based on an estimated 3,600 organisations in Solihull the economic value is £35million.

VOLUNTEERS

The largest proportion of organisations across Warwickshire and Solihull are micro and small sized, who we know have the lowest levels of income, fewer paid staff and who depend most on volunteers. The Almanac gave this example of levels of dependence on volunteers for the survival of by these smaller organsations:

FIGURE 3.2: MICRO AND SMALL TSOS ARE HUGELY RELIANT ON THE SUPPORT OF VOLUNTEERS FOR SURVIVAL

Percentage of TSOs in the North that could not survive without support from volunteers, 2019 (n=2,667)



Source: Third Sector Trends Survey 2019

According to the NCVO Almanac, 16.3million people volunteered through a group, club or organisation in 2020/21, with over half of the adult population of the UK volunteering their time informally to help others at least once during the pandemic, while formal volunteering rates fell from about 20million; this however could have been driven by the closure or temporary suspension of groups and activities. The Charity Commission also conducted a survey in 2021 around the impact of Covid-19 where a third of registered charities (32%) stated that access to volunteers had decreased.

We asked how the Covid-19 pandemic had changed who is volunteering; feedback reveals a mixed picture:

- 39% had not experienced a change in who is volunteering;
- 35% reported reduced numbers of volunteers. Often this was linked to a reduction or suspension of activities due to pandemic restrictions, with many volunteers not returning since activities have restarted;
- 27% had successfully engaged with new groups of volunteers, typically as a result of a change in personal circumstances and/or new opportunities created by different models of service delivery or new activities.

VOLUNTEERS

Some common themes:

- The number of older people volunteering, and/or those with complex health conditions, has reduced in several organisations. This is thought to be because of greater feelings of vulnerability and/or loss of confidence among this demographic. It is also linked to other potential barriers to volunteering, e.g. greater use of technology in service delivery is noted by some as a barrier that may disproportionately affect older volunteers;
- Organisations that continued operating during the pandemic, often with an adjusted delivery model, generally appear to have retained a higher proportion of volunteers than those who suspended their activities. These organisations are also far more likely to report increased volunteer numbers and a more diverse volunteer cohort than they had before the pandemic;
- Working-age adults make up the majority of new volunteers. Several organisations reported a short-term influx of volunteers who were on furlough leave, some of whom have now returned to work and are no longer volunteering. Retention of this volunteer demographic appears to be highest in those organisations offering online or other flexible opportunities.

Art work commissioned by CAVA to celebrate the
2021 Volunteer Awards in Warwickshire and Solihull

VOLUNTEERS

We further asked how the Covid-19 pandemic had changed the way organisations recruit and retain volunteers:

- 51% have not made significant changes to volunteer recruitment and support;
- 25% report a reduction in volunteer recruitment, generally because of barriers to undertaking recruitment activities or a reduction in volunteering opportunities;
- 18% of organisations have introduced an online element. This includes recruitment via social media, interviews and training using online platforms, and ongoing support using Zoom/ teams for meetings and/or private social platforms for informal and group support. An additional 3% of organisations report attempting to use digital tools for recruitment and retention of volunteers, but with little success;
- Other responses included: being more targeted in volunteer recruitment, especially when looking for volunteers with particular skills or experience; reviewing volunteer roles to introduce more flexibility; making changes to enable people to volunteer alongside other personal or work commitments.

Thinking about existing volunteers, we asked how the Covid-19 pandemic changed the way organisations managed and supported volunteers:

- 41% of organisations say they haven't made any changes to the way they manage and support volunteers;
- 32% introduced more remote support during the pandemic, including increased telephone and email contact, online meetings, use of private social media and WhatsApp groups, and online meetings. Many organisations have experienced benefits from this way of working, with most looking to continue these in some form either alongside or instead of face-to-face contact;
- 16% of respondents noted reduced contact with volunteers. In some cases this was related to lower volunteer numbers, but was more often mentioned in relation to volunteers being more isolated, and the challenges this creates;
- 7% of organisations mentioned enhanced hygiene practices to ensure volunteer safety, but also to give them confidence to continue in their role;
- Other responses included: relying more on volunteers due to reduced staff numbers; additional time and effort being put into planning support for volunteers; offering more training, meeting and social opportunities.

BENEFICIARIES

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

Community Services/ Facilities	27%
Community Development	12%
Mental Health	11%
Advice/Info Services	10%
Social Activities	10%
Youth Clubs/ Services	9%
Disabilities	8%
Environment/ Conservation	8%
Education/Training	7%
Befriending	6%
Sports & Leisure	6%
Voluntary & Community Sector Support	6%
Health – General	5%

It is worth noting that many organisations provide a range of services and activities across a range of themes.

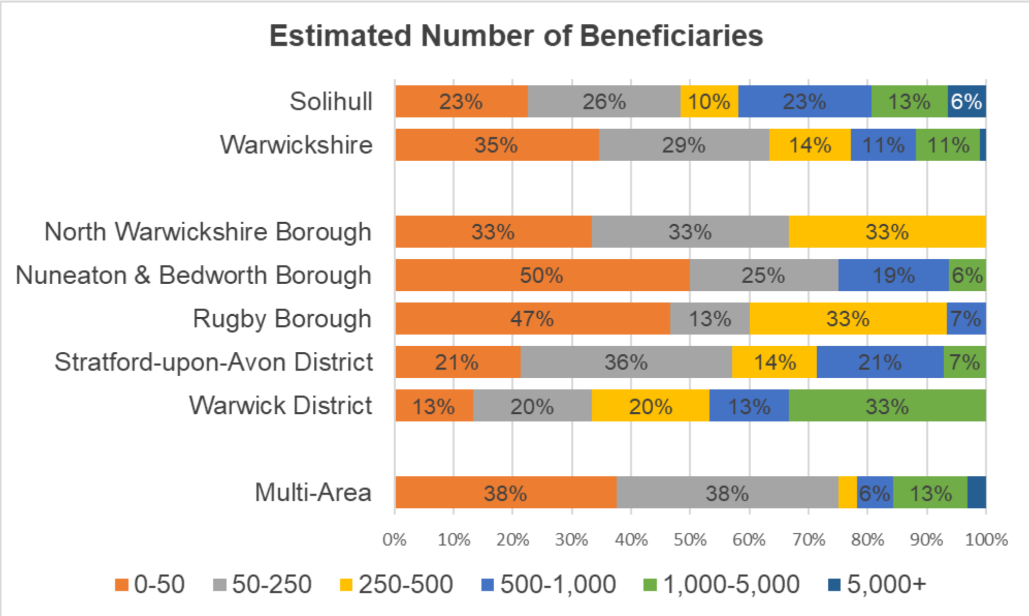
The main beneficiaries for this sample are:

All beneficiaries	43%
Children & Young People	30%
Families/ Parents	16%
Older People	13%
People with Mental Health Problems	9%
People with Learning Disabilities	5%
Women	4%
Carers	3%
Faith groups	3%
People who are unemployed	3%

Other beneficiaries mentioned: men; people with low income; people with long term/chronic illnesses, sensory impairments or physical disabilities; LBTQ+; Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic groups.

BENEFICIARIES

Respondents estimated the number of beneficiaries they had worked with in the last year:



We further asked how these numbers compared to previous years:

- Seeing more people 42%
- Seeing less people 32%
- Seeing about the same number 26%

Trends

The most mentioned themes were:

- An increase in mental health needs (20%)
- Increased social isolation (17%)
- More complex/greater intensity of need (9%)
- An increase in needs relating to finance, e.g. food poverty, fuel poverty (8%)
- Positive changes following the pandemic, e.g. greater interest in local participation (6%)

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES OF VCSE SERVICES IN WARWICKSHIRE & SOLIHULL*

665,000

The VCSE reach is 83% of the population of Warwickshire and Solihull.

*This is based on the average VCSE organisation reaching 50 beneficiaries with their services.

SERVICE DELIVERY

We asked respondents to share their biggest concerns or positive things about the area where they deliver most of their services.

Positives

- 17 organisations noted the positive outcomes that they had achieved, including addressing clear gaps in support within their communities;
- 3 organisations told us that the support they received from the community was very positive;
- 3 organisations felt positive about their success in re-engaging with the community following the pandemic, including with young people and through the use of online resources and technology Community building;
- Other positives identified by respondents included: the positive impact of partnership working; the resilience of the VCSE; and one organisation noting the strength of their leadership and governance.

Concerns

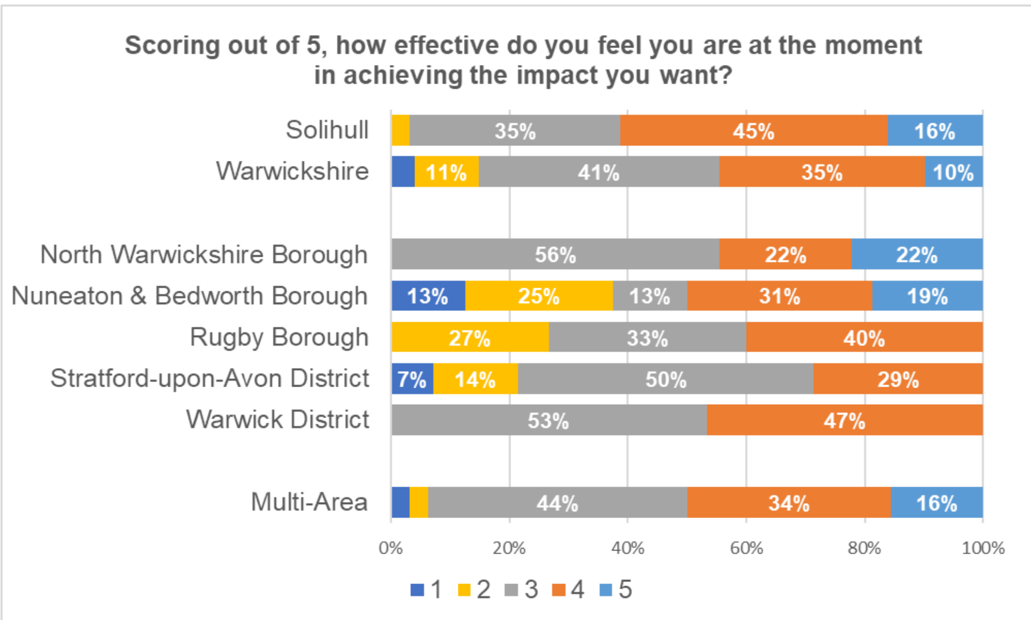
- 15 organisations felt that communities' need for support was high and many felt this had substantially increased with the pandemic (e.g. through issues such as social isolation and financial hardship). One organisation noted that safeguarding and early intervention was important;
- 12 organisations found engaging with users challenging. Issues mentioned included reluctance to ask for support, awareness of support, difficulty identifying those in need, advertising/ PR;
- 11 organisations felt that the need in communities was greater than the capacity their organisation had to respond. Issues reducing capacity included difficulty recruiting staff and/or volunteers, governance, financial concerns;
- 11 organisations found securing funding challenging;
- 10 organisations felt that volunteer recruitment was their biggest challenge;
- 6 organisations felt that increasing use of a community building, or having access to a suitable venue was their greatest challenge;
- 6 organisations were concerned about building and maintaining partnerships and/ or securing support from the local authority;
- Other concerns raised included: the impact of future/ ongoing pandemic restrictions; difficulties recruiting staff; the ability of organisations to turn the ideas into action; and reducing the carbon footprint of organisations.

IMPACT

Respondents were asked to describe the impact of their organisation in three words. The word cloud below shows the responses received.

The size of the word indicates relative frequency, with the largest words mentioned the most

Scoring out of 5, we asked how effective organisations felt they were in achieving the impact they wanted; we saw that on the whole organisations are feeling quite positive, although there are some notable differences in Nuneaton & Bedworth and Rugby boroughs:



CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT NEEDS

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

Challenges

FUNDING

45%

The most frequently mentioned challenge was securing sufficient income, including funding from grants, contract work or donations. Several organisations expressed frustration that grants were targeted at new short-term and pilot projects, rather than the continuation of existing models and core costs;

PREMISES

18%

Almost one in five organisations faced challenges related to buildings. These included needing to increase use or hire of a venue, and/ or funding and managing building maintenance or extension works. Two organisations were concerned about their lease and one needed to relocate to a larger venue;

VOLUNTEERS

17%

Recruitment and retention of volunteers was identified as a significant challenge by around one in six respondents. This split into three areas, each identified by a similar number of respondents: challenges recruiting volunteers to support service delivery; challenges recruiting volunteers to take on governance/ committee roles; difficulties retaining volunteers over time;

REACHING PEOPLE IN NEED

14%

Around one in seven organisations felt their greatest challenge was identifying and reaching people in need, and engaging them as clients/ users of their services. Several organisations stated that this challenge had increased with the pandemic, as they had lost contact with many clients when face-to-face contact ceased, and they had been less active / visible as an organisation within the local community;

GROWING DEMAND

12%

Around one in eight organisations found meeting increased need in communities their greatest challenge. Several respondents noted that there were plans to expand or increase the capacity of their organisation to meet this growing demand, which presented additional organisational challenges;

SERVICE DELIVERY

9%

Almost one in ten organisations identified challenges relating to service delivery, including issues related to ensuring ongoing quality, and managing complex cases. In many cases, this was linked to difficulties in staff recruitment, retention, and/ or training;

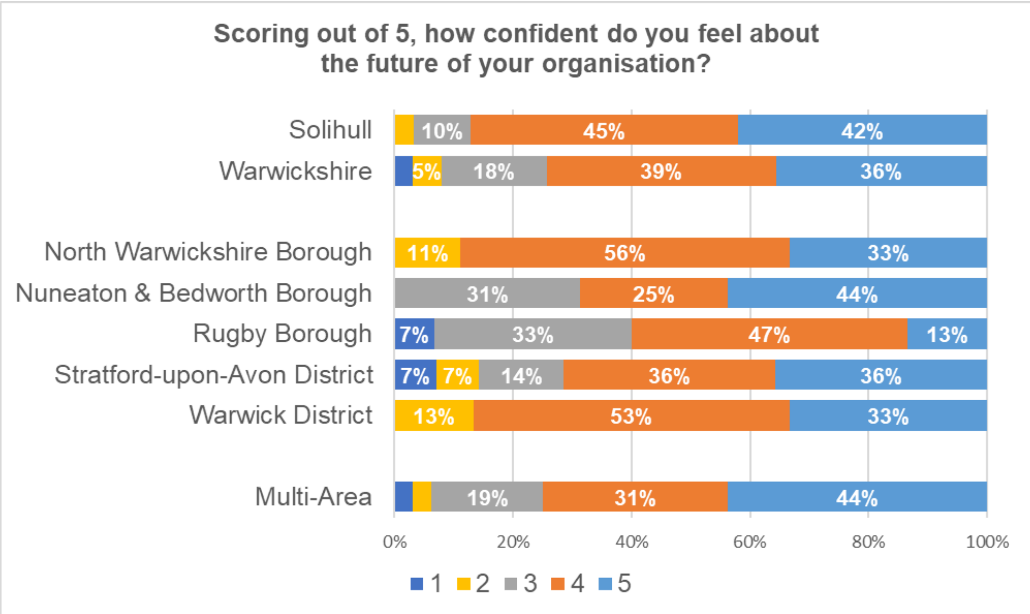
ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT

7%

Some responses noted challenges related to the running of their organisation, such as paperwork, a new business model, structural changes or evaluating and evidencing impact.

CHALLENGES AND SUPPORT NEEDS

Confidence



Support needs over the next year - Case Study

Stretton-Under-Fosse Village Hall is a community building in the rural north of Rugby. The Committee were interested in registering as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with the Charity Commission, and preparing their policies and procedures for this change. CAVA worked closely with them to develop their constitution and policies, providing templates and tailored advice.

The Committee have been proactive in engaging with CAVA training and events to best prepare themselves for the next steps in the hall's life, and to continue to deliver more and better for their community. This has included bid writing, networking, and income generation training through our Free VCSE Development Support package and numerous 'Meet the Funder workshops'. The hall benefited from several grants as part of the Support package to bring in fundraising support to assist them in applying for funding and to develop their own fundraising skills.

CAVA continues to support the committee as they pursue funding for the development of the hall, the organisation, and their own skills through provision of research and signposting to appropriate funds and development opportunities, advice on projects, and proof-reading grant applications.

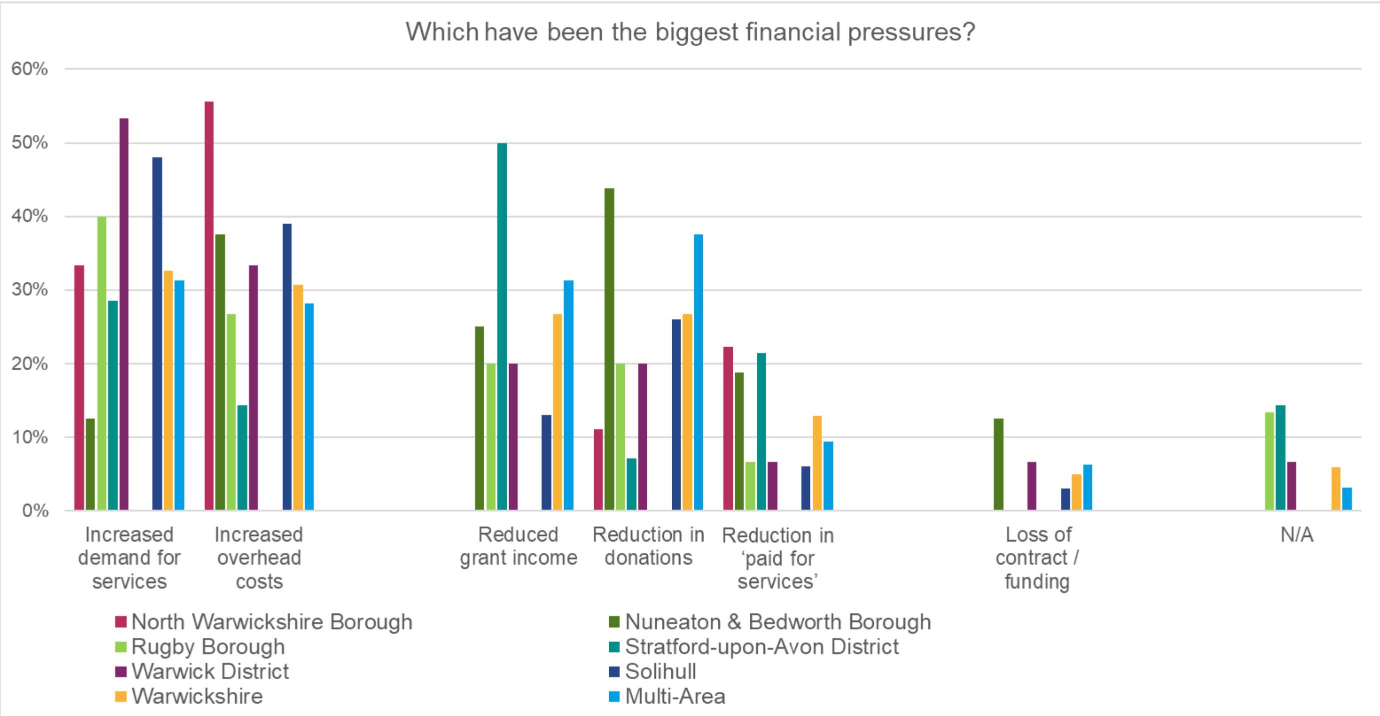
FINANCES

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

1ST INCREASED OVERHEAD COSTS

2ND INCREASED DEMAND FOR SERVICES

3RD REDUCED FUNDING



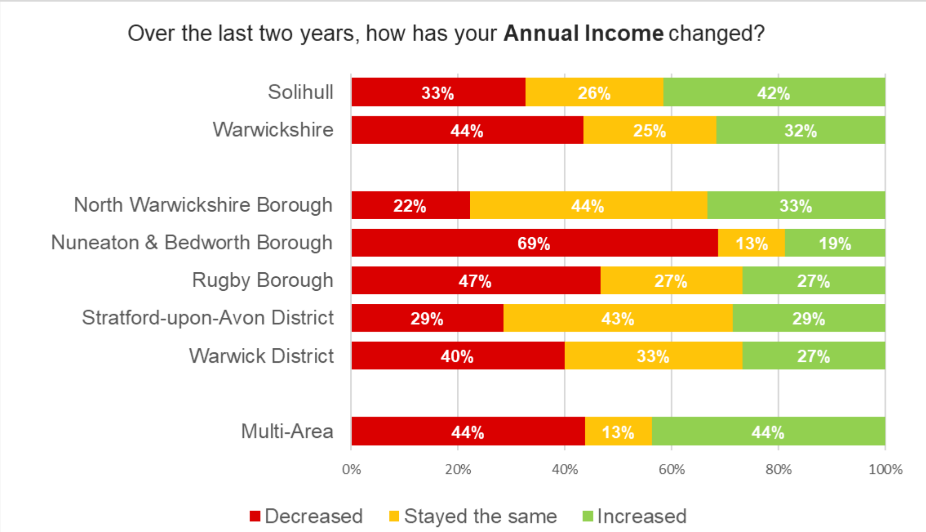
These pressures did not necessarily mean reduced overall income for an organisation. In some cases, reduced income in one area was replaced by increased income in another, e.g. trading income disrupted by the pandemic being replaced with Covid-related government grants.

NCVO's UK Civil Society Almanac 2021 stated that nationally income in the VCSE has continued to rise, and totals approximately £56billion per year, although this has slowed which is not unusual, when the national economy is sluggish this would have an understandable link to slower increases in VCSE income.

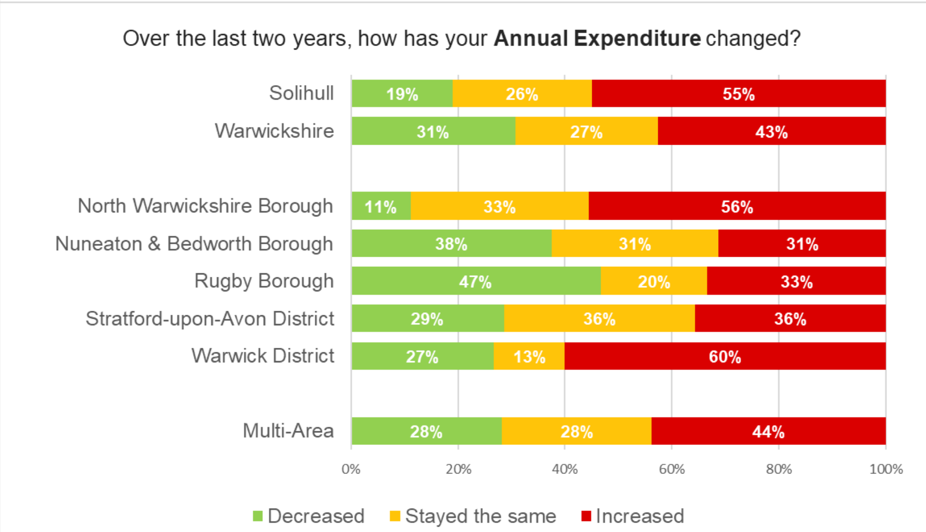
NCVO reported that larger voluntary and community organisations (3.5% of the Sector) account for 80% of the total Sector's income, spending and assets.

FINANCES

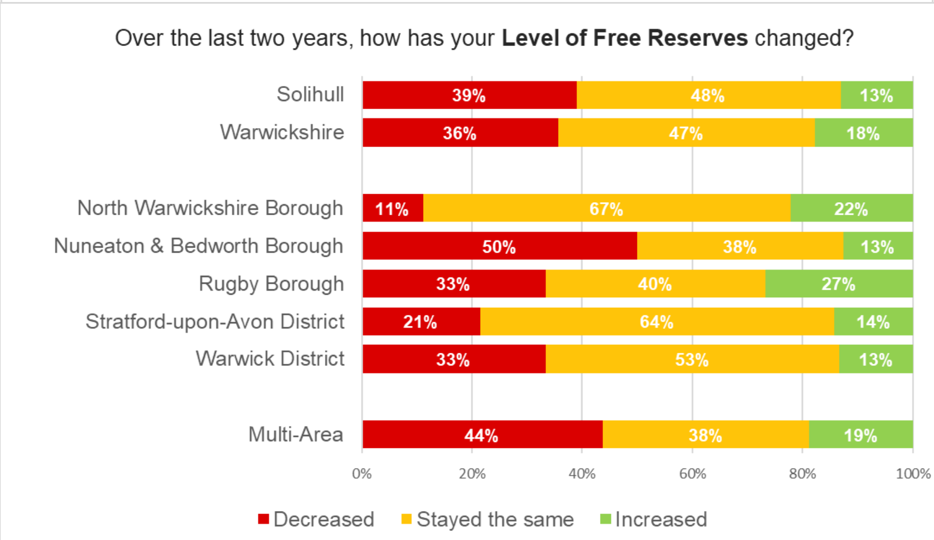
As part of understanding the current financial pressures, we asked how income, expenditure and reserves levels had changed over the past 2 years:



According to the sample, Warwickshire's VCSE annual income has decreased at a greater rate compared to Solihull; income in the VCSE in Nuneaton & Bedworth and Rugby however has dropped more significantly than the Warwickshire average.



The expenditure of Solihull's VCSE has increased more than Warwickshire's; however increases in North Warwickshire and Warwick District's expenditure is well over average.



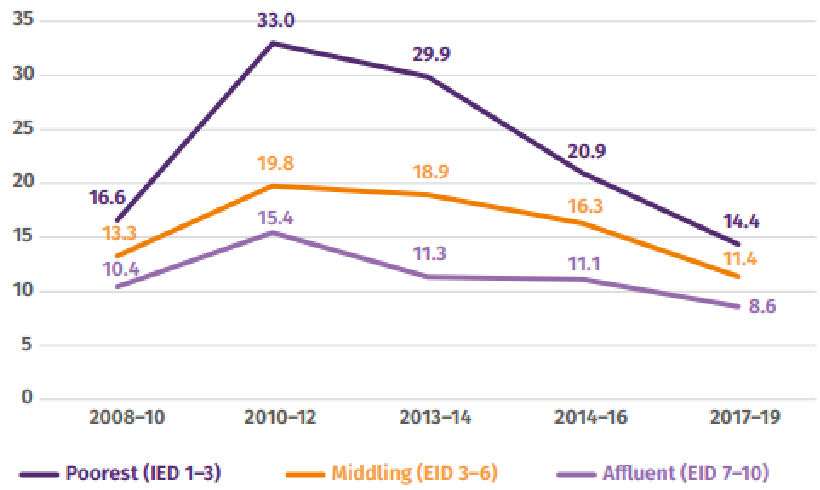
All areas have seen a decrease in the level of free reserves, with only minimal increases. The decrease seen by organisations in Nuneaton & Bedworth is a concern.

FINANCES

The NCVO Almanac pointed to the fact that VCOs in the most deprived areas of the UK have been hardest hit over the last decade. Areas in both Warwickshire and Solihull have some of the most deprived and also the most affluent areas in England.

FIGURE 6.3: TSOS IN THE POOREST AREAS HAVE BEEN HIT HARDEST DURING THE LAST DECADE

Percentage of TSOs experiencing significantly falling income based in areas of relative affluence or deprivation, North East and Cumbria, 2008–19 (English indices of deprivation)



Source: Third Sector Trends Survey 2019

The charity 360 Giving collects and publishes data to positively inform grant making. They undertook research into UK Covid relief and recovery grants; data released by 174 grant makers showed that 66,000 grants were made, worth almost £2.4billion, and that:

- The majority of grants were small; 67% of grants were for £10,000 or less with a further 29% for between £10,000 and £100,000.
- Most grants to registered charities went to those medium sized charities with an income between £100,000 and £1million.

Our research showed that the top 3 main sources of income over the last 2 years were:

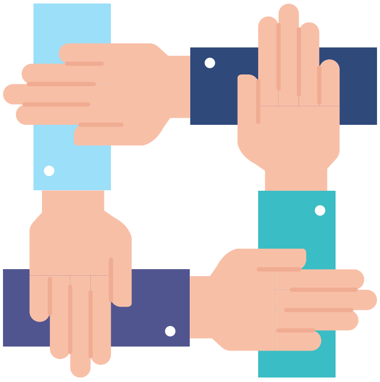
- Grant funding 55%
- Donations 35%
- Earned income/trading 29%

42% stated that this was more than previous years, 39% said it was about the same, and 19% said it was less.

PARTNERSHIPS

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

CAVA Support



Overwhelmingly respondents expressed their appreciation for the support CAVA already provide, and members were keen to see this continue.

Key points for development:

- 12 organisations mentioned that CAVA could support the sector by promoting the work of VCSEs to public and private sector organisations, the local press and public. Promoting good news and impact stories, as well as calls for support is important;
- 8 organisations felt that CAVA might usefully support VCSE organisations to network with each other. It was felt that this would provide a useful source of peer-to-peer support, learning and sharing of resources, encouraging collaboration and partnership working, and a way to prevent duplication of work. One organisation suggested CAVA might facilitate partnerships between VCSE's and public and private sector organisations;
- 8 organisations suggested there was need for more support and guidance on securing funding, including bid-writing;
- 7 organisations felt CAVA could usefully support them with volunteer recruitment;
- 7 organisations felt the need for increased promotion of CAVA's services, ensuring that organisations were aware of the services offered;
- 5 organisations mentioned CAVA undertaking advocacy and providing a voice for the VCSE, including raising issues with funders and public sector organisations;
- 3 organisations felt that the support offered by CAVA should be sector-led and informed by ongoing dialogue with and visits to see the work of members;
- 3 organisations felt training or support with organisational governance and management issues (e.g. HR, advertising roles) would be helpful.

PARTNERSHIPS

"Market yourselves more. I was unaware of the organisation until only luckily by chance someone mentioned you."

"Keep building the partnerships between service providers and public and private sector partners. Support efforts to secure income and promote volunteer recruitment."

"CAVA is a well-respected organisation and provides vital links with VCSE sector and has credibility. I think the key issue is enabling and facilitating local organisations to work effectively together."

"If at all possible, visit local charities and see first-hand what needs individual places have."

PARTNERSHIPS

Relationships with the Public Sector

Many comments were received about improved relationships, particularly during the pandemic when the VCSE has been more valued. The flexibility, agility, and local connections of many VCSE organisations were highlighted as offering particular value to partnerships with public sector organisations.

Also, a number of examples were offered of good relationships built on trust, though these are often based on relationships with specific contacts that are vulnerable to staff turnover or reorganisations in public sector organisations.

Key points for development:

- Several respondents expressed frustration that some public sector bodies talk positively about partnership working, meeting community needs, and the value of the VCSE, but don't undertake the actions required to enable effective work to be developed;
- Several organisations felt that they were ignored by public sector organisations, or faced unrealistic expectations that they can undertake work to meet needs beyond the capacity of public sector organisations, but without any resources to undertake this work;
- A few organisations mentioned that they were vulnerable to public sector organisations making decisions, often related to re-purposing of physical assets, that had a big impact on their operations. This was typically done with little to no engagement with the VCSE organisation, or any apparent appreciation of the negative impact this would have on the work undertaken.

Relationships with the Private Sector

There are many positive relationships reported, which include financial support, donations, and some practical support. A few organisations have private sector clients, with examples of facility hire and providing services to support staff.

Key points for development:

- Half of the survey sample have no relationship with the private sector;
- Around half those organisations with historical relationships with the private sector reported less contact since the start of the pandemic. Rebuilding these relationships is viewed as important.

PARTNERSHIPS

Relationships across the VCSE Sector

Networking with other organisations is seen as a key strength of the VCSE Sector. This takes many forms including local geographical collaboration, networking with organisations delivering similar services, and wider networks offering more general support. A few respondents said that the opportunities for networking had reduced during the pandemic, though others identified new opportunities that had emerged, and an increase in organisations wanting to work in partnership.

A number of respondents reported mutually beneficial relationships with other VCSE organisations. Sometimes these were formal partnerships, but often take the form of sharing resources and working together on projects where benefits and interests coincide. Other examples given involved VCSE organisations using the services of each other, such as room hire, which in some cases led to further joint-working arrangements.

Key points for development:

- A significant minority of respondents (around 20%) identified a need to work more closely with other VCSE organisations. In many cases, this resulted from a feeling that contacts had reduced during the pandemic, and there was a need to rebuild useful relationships.
- Some expressed the view that, with many meetings moving online, some of the valuable elements of informal networking had been lost and needed to be restored.

LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION

What has changed most in the last 2 years?

Responses to this question revealed a mixed picture. Some organisations feel they have successfully responded to challenging circumstances, with many expanding or diversifying in response to community needs. In contrast, others face reduced capacity, often in the face of increasing demand.

The overall picture is of a sector experiencing significant change, which is having a range of both positive and negative impacts. The experience, opportunity and challenge for individual organisations depends on a range of interconnected factors, often related to the field of work in addition to the skills, expertise, finances and physical resources available.

RESILIENCE & ADAPTATION

43%

Many organisations reported responding positively to the challenges of the last two years. Respondents noted being flexible and adaptive, both in response to operational challenges and in response to meeting changing needs with their communities or client groups. This included examples of building resilience, expanding organisations and diversifying service delivery.

"We have had to adapt to become resilient in the pandemic. We have had to create new projects to support communities that are asking for our help... We have had to find other ways of making money because the funding can be unreliable."

"Had to relocate to another site."

"We've had time to refocus and build our core stability and the time to source funding to allow this to happen."

REDUCED CAPACITY

30%

Almost one in three respondents reported reduced capacity in their organisation, mostly due to a combination of pandemic restrictions, lower volunteer numbers and a drop in financial and other resources.

"We have been unable to function in almost 18 months and we lost our site and building. We now have a new site and are rebuilding..."

"Reduced volunteers - and reduced opening hours."

"Demand for support increased and resources decreased!"

LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION

17%

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Around one in six respondents noted their success in building new relationships, whether with communities, individuals or other organisations with similar objectives. This proactive engagement with others was typically linked to undertaking organisational planning or strategy development, seeking to enhance the organisation's impact, sometimes with reduced resources.

"We have become more recognised and central to work in the community as we put on many more events including sports, festival, fun days and a community café."

"We have learnt how to survive, and how to support others doing similar things."

"We are more aware of social media and the role it plays in promoting our organisation."

10%

INCREASING NEED

One in ten organisations reported significant increases in the level of need among the people with whom they work.

"We've expanded considerably due to the overwhelming need of existing group members and new ones."

"It is harder to achieve results, harder to be recognised for the good work we do, and yet there are more and more people needing our services."

7%

A REDUCTION IN FACE-TO-FACE SERVICES AND EVENTS

Some respondents noted a shift to online or remote delivery of services. This offered new opportunities and successes for some, but was identified by others as having some negative consequences.

"We also held successful Webinars and plan to develop them in the future."

"Losing touch with colleagues who work in the same field as us…"

"Fewer opportunities to meet so a lot done online which brings its own challenges."

LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION

What lessons have you learned or changes will you keep?

37%

THE BENEFITS OF TECHNOLOGY AND REMOTE WORKING

Many organisations had learned to use technology more widely within their work, and had discovered a range of benefits and opportunities. This included remote working and/or service delivery, and more confident use of a range of technology. Examples include:

- Intention to keep some element of remote working. In particular, online meetings were found to be particularly beneficial due to being time-saving, inclusive, improving attendance and reducing car travel (16%);
- Improved IT skills and/ or infrastructure, with an intention to continue this having seen the benefits that technology can offer (11%);
- Learning the value of communication within teams, and new ways of doing this more effectively (6%);
- Realising the power and importance of a social media presence (4%).

26%

THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANISATIONAL PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

Several respondents noted that recent events had led to a review of governance and planning, and a greater recognition of the value this strategic work brings by enabling their organisation to be more resilient and more effective in achieving its aims. Examples include:

- Learning the importance of planning for the future, and building resilience to respond to unexpected events (10%);
- Learning the importance of strong governance, and of ensuring organisations were able to plan, adapt and change effectively (7%);
- Experiencing the benefits of collaborating with other organisations, building partnerships and proactively seeking advice (4%);
- Recognising the importance of maintaining accurate data, of monitoring costs, and of using evaluation to shape effective services (3%);
- Noting the importance of avoiding an overload of work (2%).

LEARNING AND TRANSFORMATION

12%

THE POWER OF LOCAL ORGANISATIONS CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES

Some organisations identified significant learning around the importance of local connections with communities:

- Re-connecting communities following the pandemic had led to new approaches (5%);
- The importance of inclusivity (4%);
- Grassroots organisations using local knowledge to deliver effective support (3%).

11%

THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEERS

Just over one in ten respondents noted how the pandemic had highlighted the value of volunteers, and the importance of having effective recruitment, support and recognition in place:

- Ongoing volunteer recruitment is important. Organisations had seen the importance of volunteers to ongoing delivery, and some had experienced reduced levels of volunteers during the pandemic, so needed to attract new supporters (9%);
- The importance of valuing the contribution made by volunteers (2%).

Social Enterprise

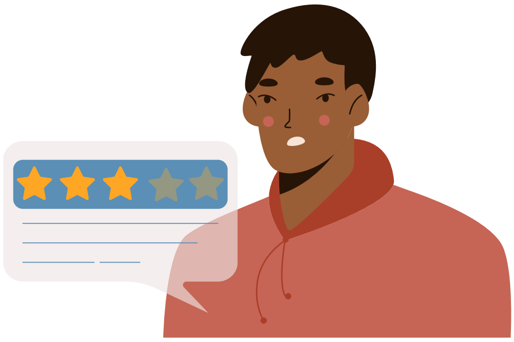
Social Enterprise UK undertook their own national research in 2021 to understand the state of the social enterprise sector; this showed that in spite of the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, social enterprises were continuing to be able to deliver economically, environmentally and socially. CAVA's own evidence showed a particular increase in new social enterprises establishing, especially in Solihull, so we wanted to better understand the demands, issues and impact felt by community businesses across Warwickshire and Solihull.

We asked if they had been running a different business model compared with pre-pandemic, and if so, what impact has this had? Of the 29 respondents who answered this question:

- 48% are not running a different business model;
- 22% have developed new or additional services;
- 19% are operating a reduced service;
- 11% are delivering a similar service in different ways, e.g. using online delivery or working with a different client cohort.

The main impact noted by those running a different model was on support and retraining needs for staff and volunteers.

OTHER FEEDBACK



Celebrating the sector

“Creating new connections between people in the community has been a real joy.”

“It's so important to hold onto all the good achievements across the board.”

“We have a wonderful team of volunteers and without their input we would find it hard to run our [service]."

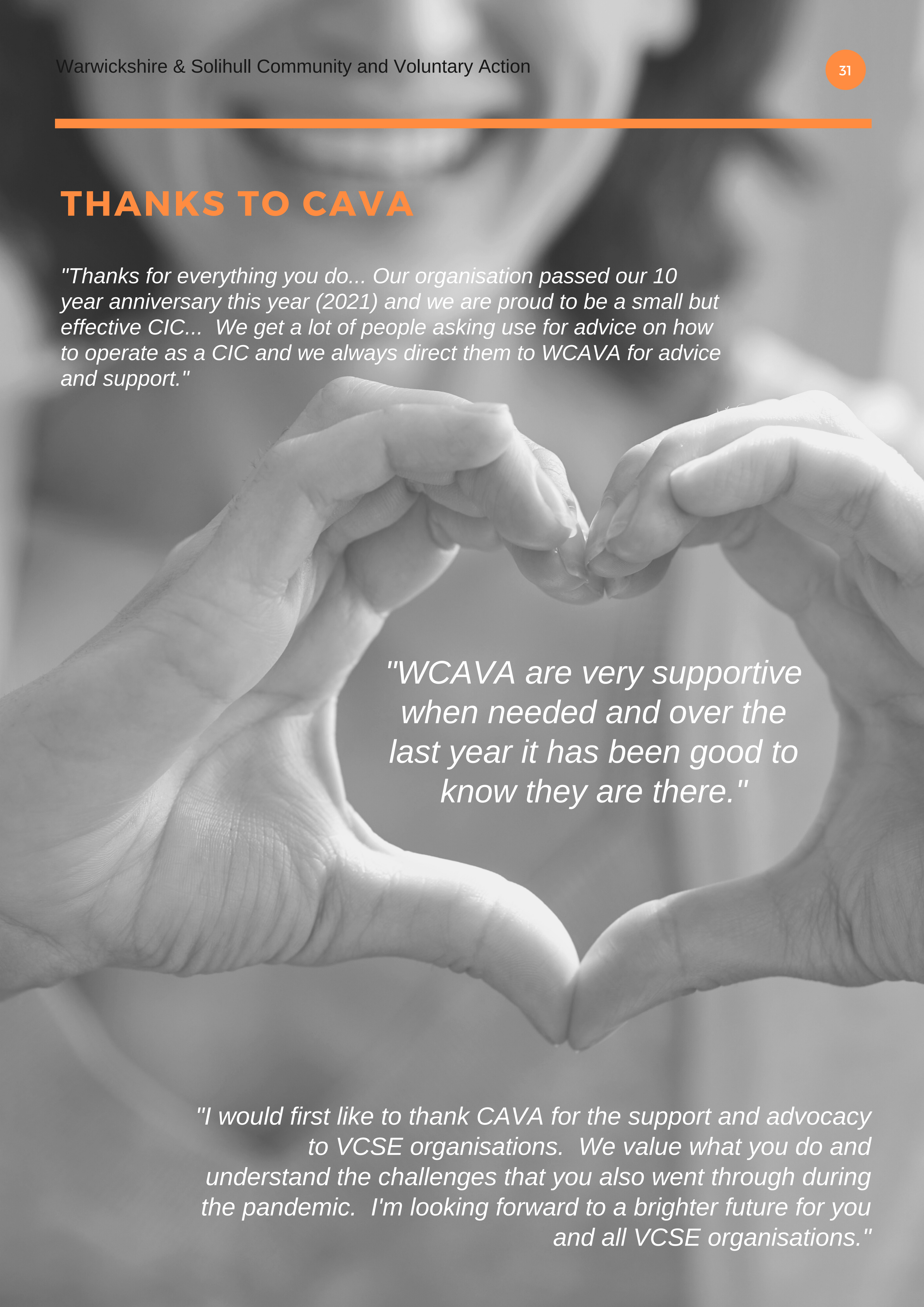
Resilience and opportunity

“We've done well to maintain a service since emerging from lockdown...”

“We are pleased that we did not go under during the pandemic, this was a real risk but we managed to survive albeit with reduced staff and opening days.”

“We are still standing! Quite an achievement after a horrible year or so.”

“It's been refreshing to see so many people who still have so much energy to support their community. There are some amazing organisations doing some amazing work, who have really pulled through for people during the pandemic and who will continue to do amazing work for the public if they have the means to.”



THANKS TO CAVA

"Thanks for everything you do... Our organisation passed our 10 year anniversary this year (2021) and we are proud to be a small but effective CIC... We get a lot of people asking use for advice on how to operate as a CIC and we always direct them to WCAVA for advice and support."

"WCAVA are very supportive when needed and over the last year it has been good to know they are there."

"I would first like to thank CAVA for the support and advocacy to VCSE organisations. We value what you do and understand the challenges that you also went through during the pandemic. I'm looking forward to a brighter future for you and all VCSE organisations."

STATE OF THE VCSE SECTOR IN WARWICKSHIRE AND SOLIHULL 2021/22

WCAVAORG

WCAVAORG

CAVAORG

For more information about CAVA visit: http://www.wcava.org.uk

For more information about NCVO's Civil Society Almanac, and the full 2021 report visit: http://beta.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-publications/uk-civil-society-almanac-2021