
State of the Sector Survey

A Rocket Science report for Bexley
Voluntary Service Council

July 2026

Prepared for

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1. Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the 2025 State of the Sector Survey conducted by Bexley Voluntary Service Council (BVSC). The survey was open November–December 2025. It collected evidence about the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Bexley, and is the first survey BVSC took since 2019. The key findings and recommendations in this executive summary are elaborated on in the report.

Key findings:

Organisational profile: The sector is largely multi-issue and multi-community; most organisations work across 2 to 4 thematic focus areas and serve multiple communities.

Governance: Trustee recruitment is a significant challenge, with around a third of organisations reporting vacancies that are affecting organisational performance.

Staff and volunteers: A quarter of organisations report staff vacancies, with challenges most evident in specialist roles such as advocacy, social care and equalities.

Financial sustainability: Confidence in financial sustainability is uneven, with smaller and mid-sized organisations showing greater uncertainty in their financial future.

Change in demand for services: Demand has increased across all areas, particularly in financial advice, equalities, employment and disability services.

Future service demand: Demand is expected to continue rising, especially in financial hardship, housing, equalities and social care, reflecting sustained and emerging need.

Partnerships: Respondents want BVSC to provide more opportunities to facilitate collaboration with both the local authority and other VCSE organisations.

Organisational and support needs: Funding is the primary concern, alongside needs for support in partnerships, governance, volunteering and digital capacity.

BVSC offer and support: Organisations are generally very satisfied with the current support offer – however, more can be done to support the challenges the sector faces.

Recommendations:

Funding is the core challenge faced by the sector. Five recommendations for BVSC are suggested that address broader challenges and support attracting higher funding:

- ☐ Target support on skills gaps (funding and monitoring and evaluation)
- ☐ Facilitate better connections with local authority
- ☐ Expand collaboration between VCSE organisations
- ☐ Develop approach to support gaps in trustees
- ☐ Improve data collection in the state of the sector survey

2. Introduction

2.1 This report

Bexley Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) disseminated a sector-wide State of the Sector survey to its members in late 2025. After cleaning the data, 53 organisations provided responses to this survey.

BVSC commissioned Rocket Science to analyse the survey data, understand what it means for the local sector, and compare it with the national picture. Rocket Science then compiled this report. This report includes:

- Context to the wider policy landscape, considering risks and opportunities
- A deep dive analysis into 10 areas of interest that emerged from the survey
- Conclusions and recommendations to support the sector moving forward
- An Appendix that provides a graph and brief overview for each survey question

2.2 National policy context

2.2.1 The current landscape

The UK voluntary sector faces a period of sustained challenge characterised by economic uncertainty, difficult funding landscapes, and evolving political priorities.

According to [NCVO's 2025 'The Road Ahead'](#) assessment, across the UK, many VCSE organisations are facing the 'perfect storm' created by falling funding, increasing costs and rising demand. This is reshaping the operating environment for many charities.

Policy changes, particularly devolution and regional strategies, are also reshaping how the sector operates. For example, the NHS 10 Year Plan and abolition of NHS England have implications for VCSE organisations involved in health and social care delivery. For example, the move 'from hospital to community' aims to integrate services with the local VCSE and deliver more care locally and in homes.

2.2.2 Key risks and vulnerabilities

Funding pressures: Public donations are reducing, whilst grant-making has become increasingly competitive. The funder landscape is also shifting, with some funders winding down activities, closing applications, or changing strategic priorities.

In 2025, [Charity Commission](#) reported that 22.5% of charities are dipping into reserves to plug the gap, a temporary measure that reduces long term financial resilience. Indeed, many organisations have already cut back as far as is operationally feasible. Further reductions risk compromising investment in training, development and staff

wellbeing programmes. This forced corner-cutting may ultimately prove more costly, undermining the sector's ability to recruit and retain talented staff.

Increases to employer National Insurance Contributions and living wage increases are additional financial strains on the sector, particularly for organisations reliant on paid frontline staff. For many charities, this has already reduced financial headroom and increased dependence on short term funding or reserves.

Workforce recruitment and governance challenges also affect organisations.

- **Volunteer recruitment:** [The Community Life Survey](#) showed that formal volunteering in England fell from 27% (2013/14) to 16% (2023/24), as people face competing pressures from paid work, study and caring commitments
- **Trustee recruitment deficit:** [NCVO's trustee recruitment and retention report](#) revealed that 79% of charities find it difficult to fill board vacancies - this forms a critical governance challenge affecting organisational effectiveness
- **Leader wellbeing:** [Fair Collective](#) reported that 85% of small charity leaders report that their role has negatively impacted their mental health, reflecting the cumulative strain of working in the voluntary sector

2.2.3 Opportunities and response

Despite sustained pressure, there is evidence of adaptation and resilience among charities of different sizes and missions. There is no perfect solution but effective response depends on informed decision-making around operational models.

Funding: Charities, especially smaller organisations, are increasingly recognising the importance of combining multiple income sources, prioritising unrestricted funding and making deliberate decisions about which activities and contracts are financially viable can build greater resilience. [Cahoot's 2026 State of the Sector report](#) shows organisations are exploring a wider range of funding mechanisms including social investment, community-based investment such as bonds or shares, or place-based funding linked to wider regeneration or community wealth initiatives.

Existing assets: Organisations are taking a strategic look at assets and resources they or other charities already hold. Physical assets such as buildings or equipment have potential for generating income or reducing costs through collaborative use.

Collaboration: Rather than competing for limited funding or contracts, some organisations are forming bidding consortiums. This spreads risk, reduces duplication and improves access to funding for smaller organisations.

Data and digital capability: Recent findings suggest that only around 11% of charities are using predictive analytics to understand patterns of donor retention and income risk. Investment into analytics capability could unlock considerable insights into an organisation's financial vulnerability and income.

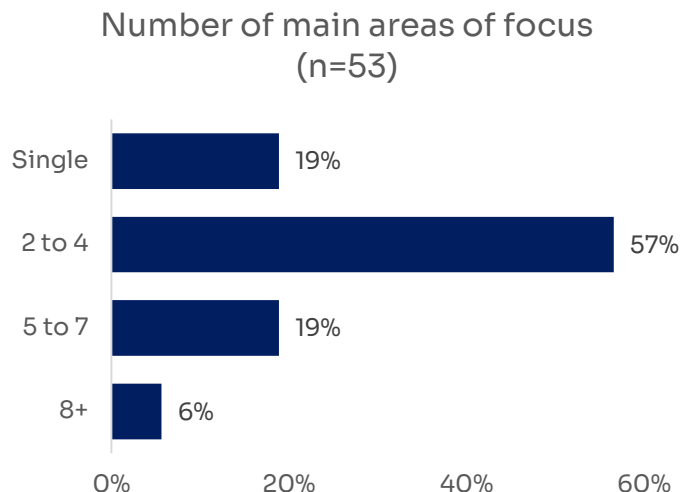
3. Deep dive analysis of key themes in the state of the sector survey

3.1 Respondents by number of main areas of focus

Just under 1 in 5 organisations specialise in a single area of focus, with the majority of organisations in Bexley being multi-issue.

Most organisations concentrate on 2 – 4 areas of focus, suggesting that Bexley’s VCSE sector tend to focus on a few key areas, which are often interconnected. Much fewer organisations work across eight or more areas.

Health and wellbeing, disability, education and training and community and development are the core focus areas, reflecting UK-wide trends.

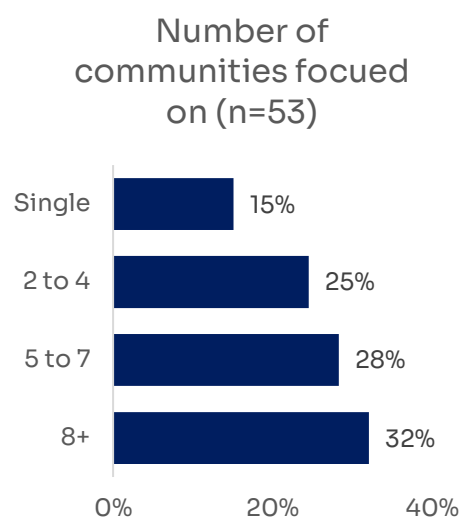


3.2 Number of communities focused on

Most organisations in Bexley serve multiple communities, with only 15% of respondents focused on a single community. ‘Community’ is defined as a group of people connected by a shared identity or geographic location.

On one hand, this could indicate a large distribution of services across Bexley’s communities, having a broad impact. However, it could also suggest that there are many communities in Bexley in need of support, forcing organisation to spread their services thinly across communities.

Furthermore, almost 70% of organisations anticipate that service demand will increase slightly or significantly over the next 12 months. Given that many organisations are already supporting multiple communities, together, these figures suggest that demand for services in Bexley is high and across multiple communities.



3.3 Insight into Trustee vacancies

Around a third (32%) of respondents reported having a Trustee vacancy. 70% of respondents reported experiencing some level of impact on organisational running due to delays in recruiting trustees.

Of the organisations with a Trustee vacancy, almost 66% had 2 to 3 vacancies.

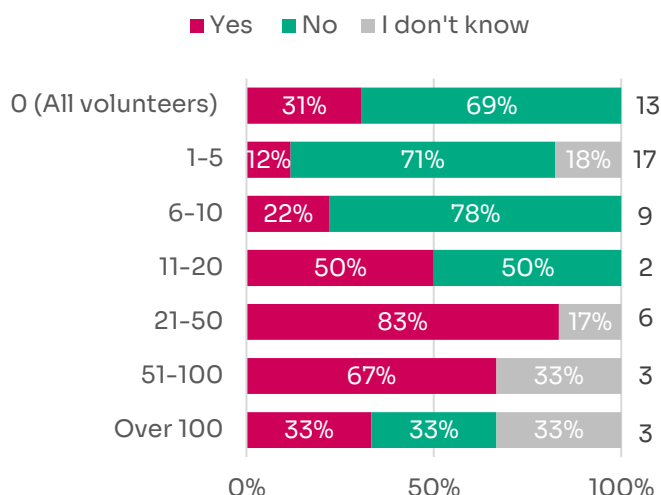
29.4% of organisations had a vacancy for over 6 months, with an extra 23.5% having a vacancy for 3 – 6 months. Only just above 10% had a vacancy for less than 2 weeks (see Q13).

Organisations with between 11 and 100 paid employees are particularly likely to have Trustee vacancies.

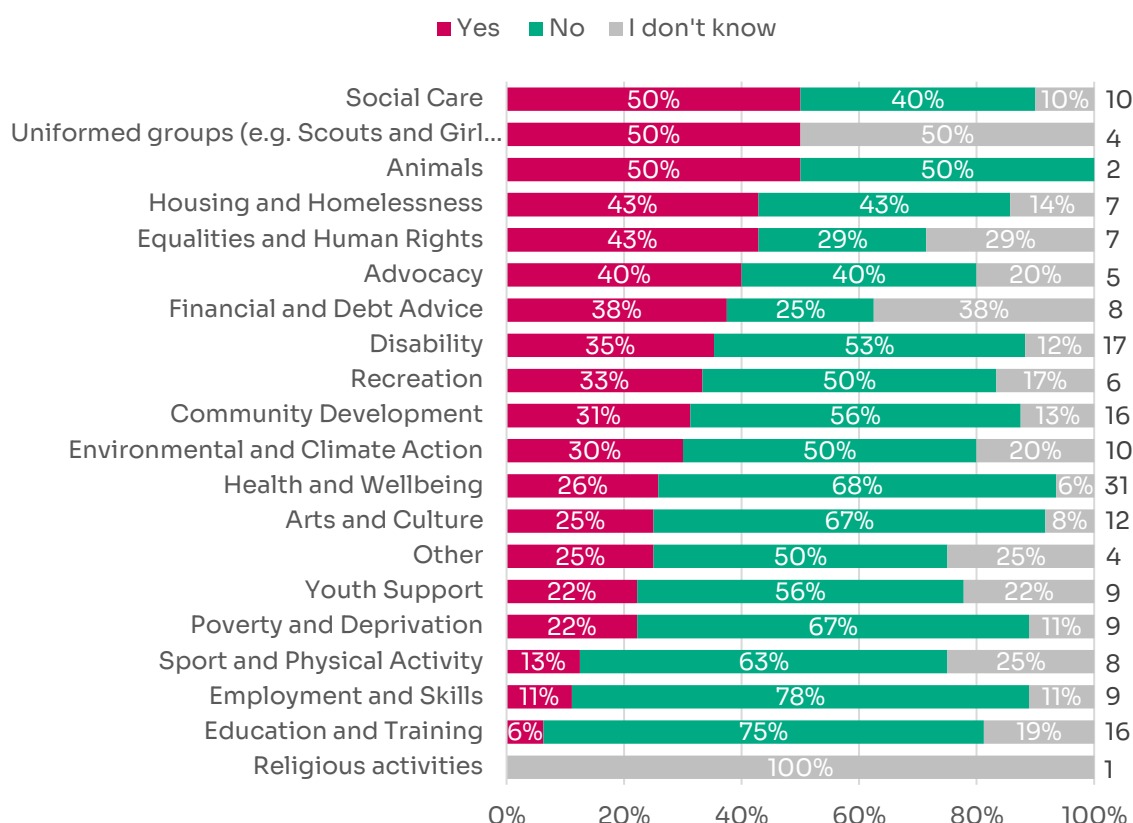
Not-for-profit organisations face the most acute Trustee recruitment pressure, followed by charitable trusts and unregistered community organisations. Conversely, CICs and CIOs report significantly lower Trustee vacancy rates.

The graph below highlights the number of vacancies by area of focus. It shows that social care (including health and wellbeing and disability), housing and homelessness and equalities and human rights are sectors which face the most Trustee Vacancies. This could be due to a need for specialist skills, experience, or expertise. Notwithstanding, Trustee Vacancies are a challenge in virtually every area of focus with only one exception: religious activities.

Existence of Trustee vacancies by organisation size by number of employees

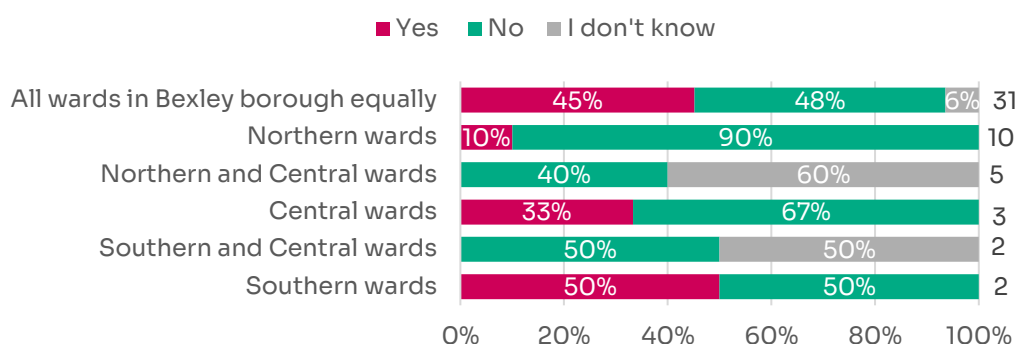


Trustee vacancies by area of focus



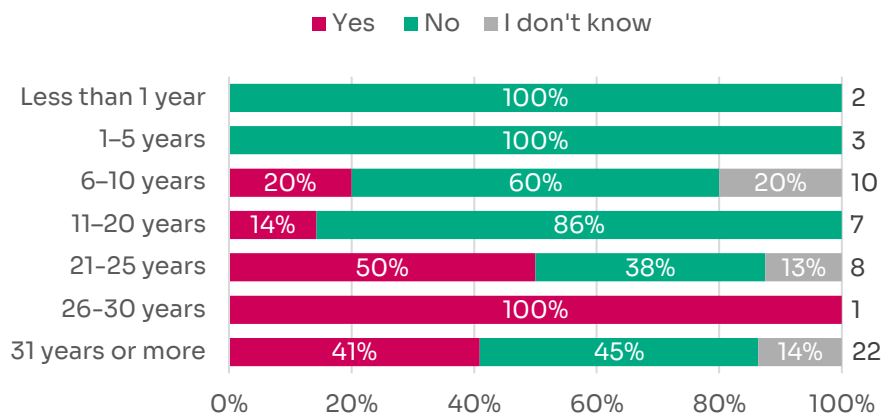
Trustee vacancies are generally a challenge for Bexley-wide services.

Existence of Trustee vacancy by geographical area served



In terms of organisational tenure, only respondent organisations over 6 years of age had trustee vacancies with 1 in 2 respondent organisations over 20 years of age reporting a vacancy. This suggests that older organisations struggle more with trustee recruitment. It is possible that younger organisations have not yet turned toward trustees and may face issues as they move to this approach.

Existence of Trustee vacancy by tenure of organisation

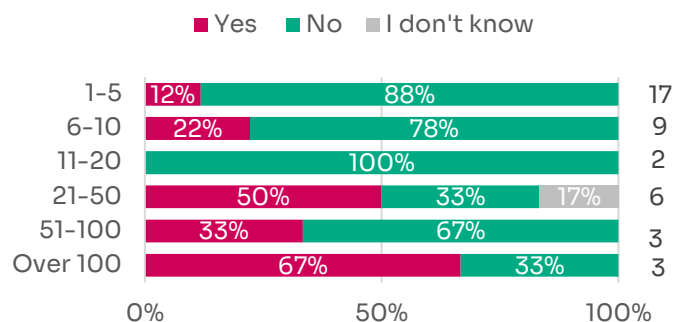


3.4 Insight into staff and volunteer vacancies

A quarter of organisations (see Q21 in Appendix) report staff vacancies. Of these 10 organisations, three have had vacancies open for over three months.

Organisations with 21 or more employees demonstrate higher vacancy rates than smaller organisations with 1 – 20 employees.

Vacancies for paid staff by number of paid employees

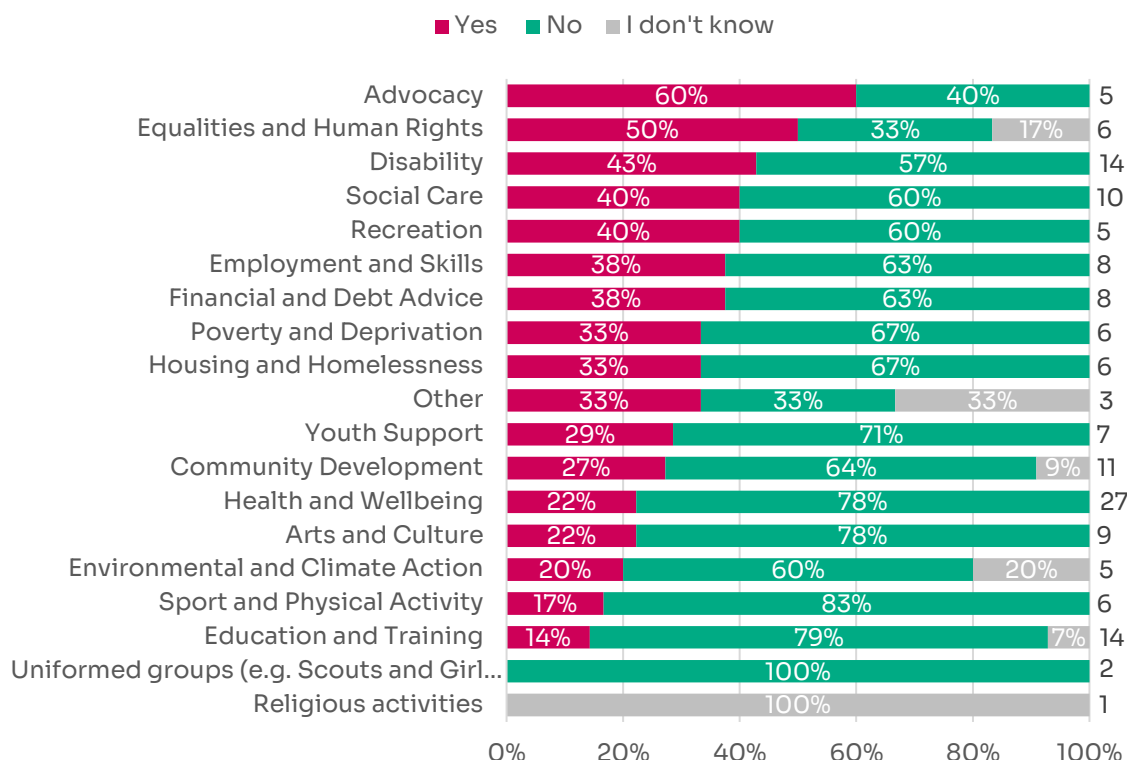


Virtually all focus areas reported at least one paid staff vacancy, with only two exceptions: uniformed groups and a religious organisation. This widespread distribution indicates that paid staff recruitment is a challenge across Bexley, albeit with varying intensity.

Advocacy, equality and human rights organisations reported the highest concentration of paid staff vacancies, which could reflect the complexity of expertise needed for this work.

High vacancy rates also appeared in social care and disability organisations and those focused on poverty and financial inclusion. This could suggest higher staff demands, specialisation requirements, or potential challenges in attracting and retaining staff.

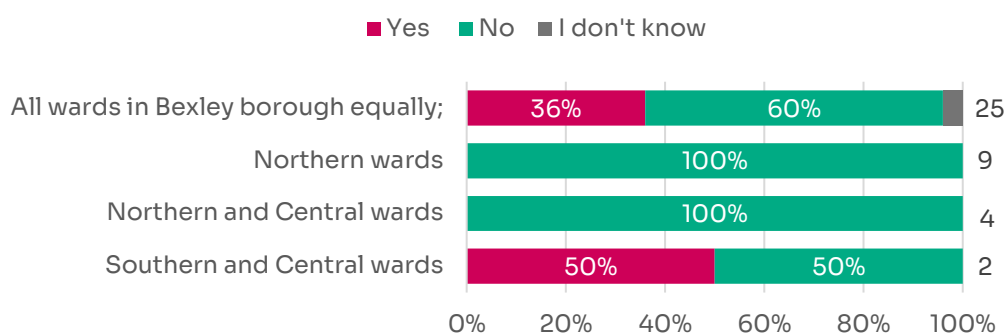
Vacancies for paid staff by area of focus



Regarding volunteers, 57% of organisations reported having a vacancy. Over 1 in 3 organisations had a volunteer vacancy for over 6 months. However, the majority of organisations had no net gain or loss in volunteers over the last 2 years, with an even number of organisations also having net gain or net loss of volunteers. This suggests that volunteer numbers have remained steady over the last 2 years.

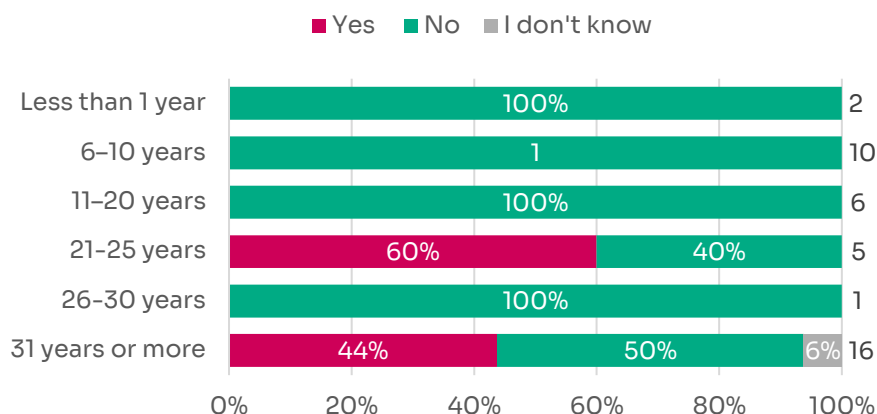
Again vacancies are a bigger challenge for organisations working across the borough, with just 1 organisation focused on several wards reporting a vacancy.

Vacancies for paid staff by geographical scope



Similar to trustee vacancies, longer-established organisations reported more paid staff vacancies than younger ones.

Vacancies for paid staff by organisation tenure



For organisations who have experienced a net loss in volunteers, this was driven by shifting personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities, changes in capacity, or a preference for paid roles. Mental health challenges and an aging volunteer demographic further compound difficulties in retaining volunteers.

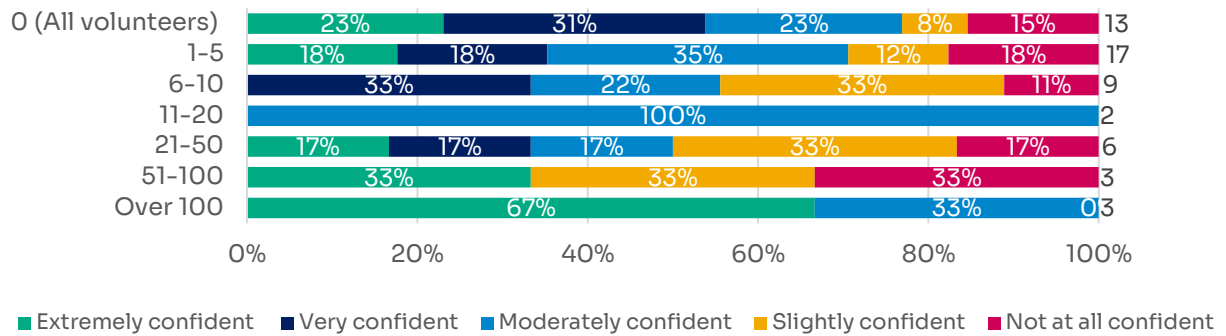
For organisations who had successfully recruited volunteers, due to increased pressure on capacity or expanding their numbers of projects, they used targeted strategies including enhanced publicity, advertising, and attendance at recruitment events. They also ensured that their volunteer offer was strong, identified where they really need volunteers, and shared the value of volunteering.

3.5 Confidence about future financial sustainability

Financial sustainability confidence is unevenly distributed. Larger organisations seem to be more resilient than smaller ones, while certain focus areas face more pressure.

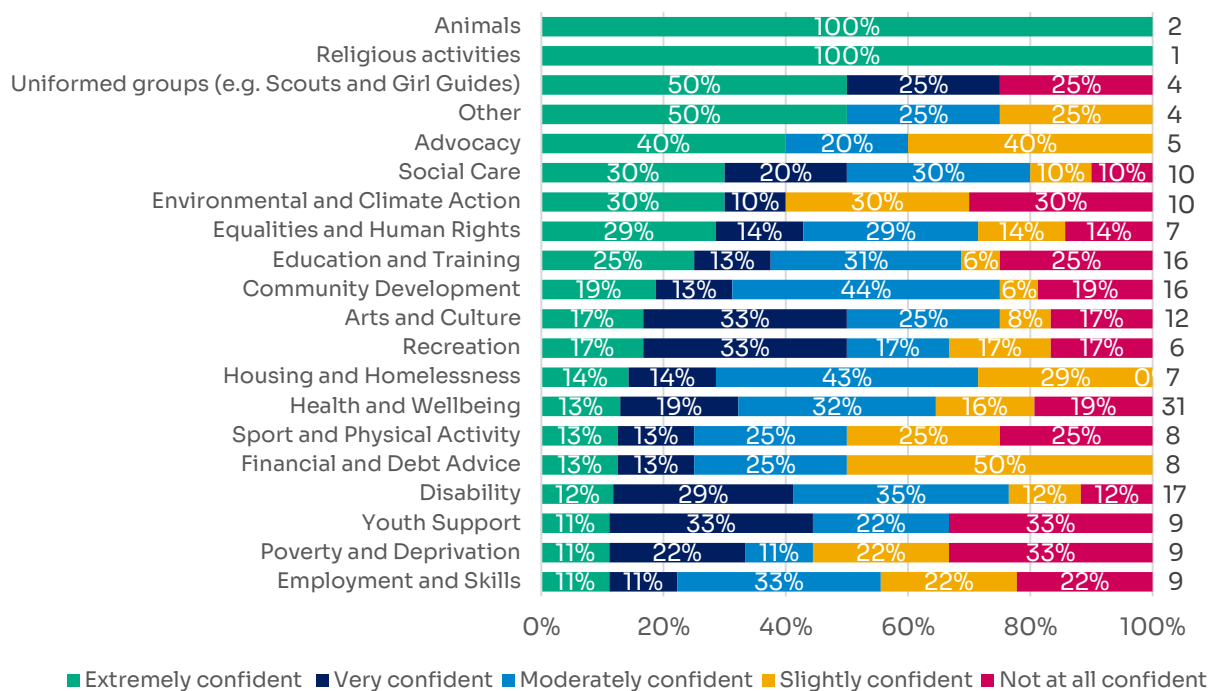
As the graph below shows, there is no clear trend in terms of organisation size in terms of which feel the most or least financially stable. While organisations with over 100 employees have the highest levels of confidence with all responses showing they are either extremely or moderately confident, there are just three respondents from this organisation size in total.

Confidence about organisation's financial sustainability for the next 12 months by organisation size



Considering financial sustainability by area of focus, organisations working in employment and skills, youth support services, sport and physical activity, poverty and deprivation and financial and debt services report notably lower confidence in their financial sustainability for the next 12 months.

Confidence about organisation's financial sustainability for the next 12 months by focus area



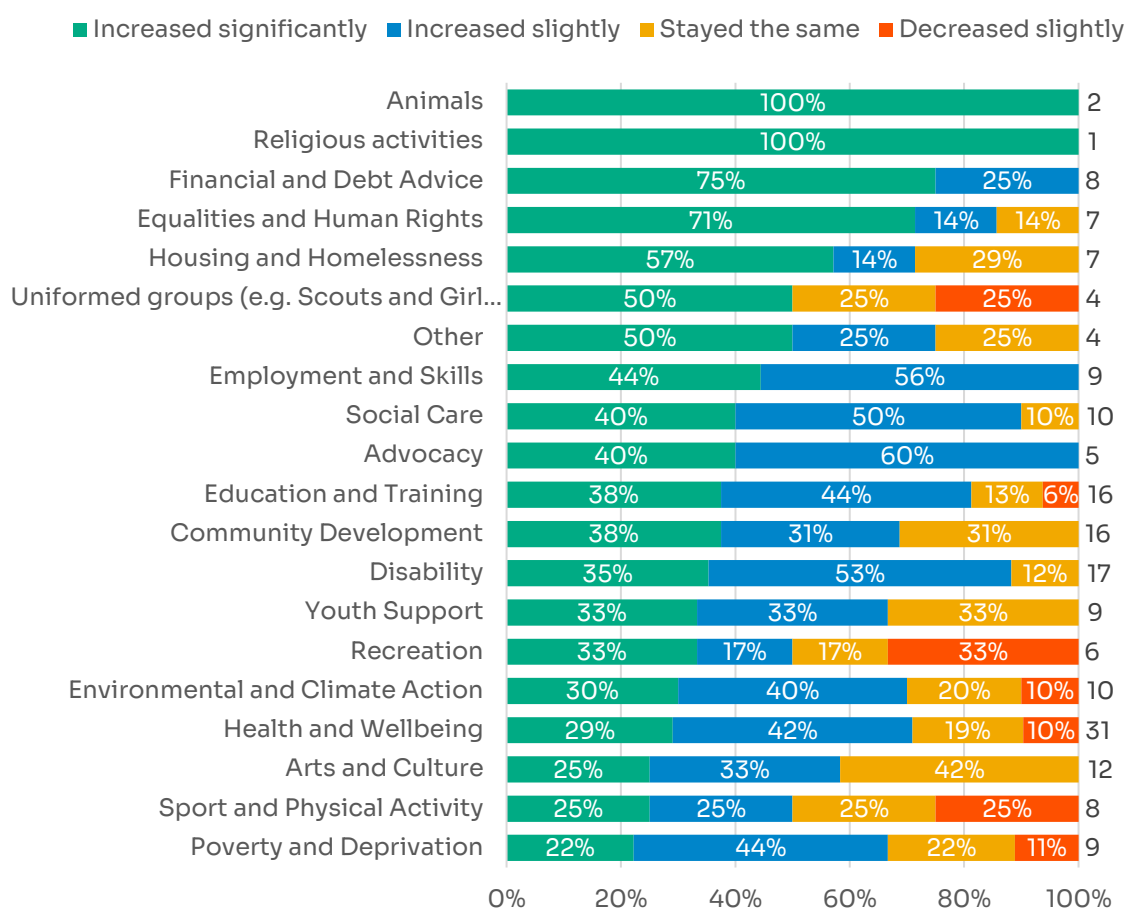
3.6 Change in demand for services

Across all sizes of organisations and areas of focus, organisations reported either a significant or slight increase in demand for services in the last 12 months.

Financial and debt advice has increased significantly, which could reflect the ongoing cost of living challenges faced across the UK. The demand for equalities and human rights support and advocacy has also had large increases, alongside employment and skills, education and training and disability support.

“It's always been there but a real increase in housing, debt and poverty related needs”

Change in demand for services in the past 12 months by area of focus



Note: the answers for this question ‘How has demand for your services changed in the past 12 months?’ did not include the option ‘Decreased Significantly’.

3.7 Expectation for service demand in next 12 months by organisational characteristics

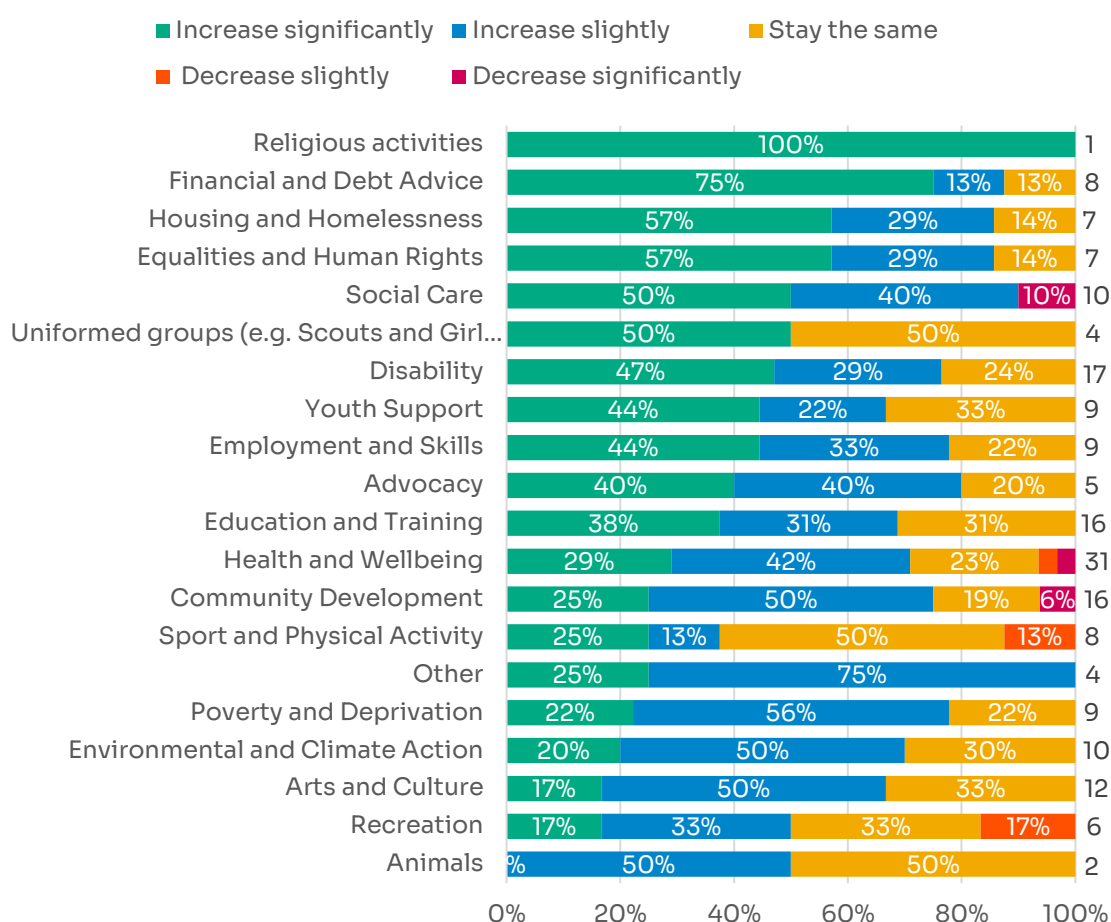
The overwhelming majority of respondents expect demand to increase, either slightly or significantly.

Reflecting changes across the last 12 months, respondents anticipate that the most significant increases in demand will be within financial and debt advice, housing and homelessness, equalities and human rights, and social care/disability. Respondents anticipate that demand for sports and physical activity will either stay the same or decrease slightly.

Specific emergent needs noted in open ended responses include:

- Youth mental health, particularly the rising access thresholds
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) support
- Cost of living assistance
- Housing and homelessness pressures
- Digital needs, especially for older people

Expectation of change in service demand in the next 12 months by focus area



3.8 Improving partnership work across Bexley

There was a strong desire for better recognition of the local provision already there and for more collaboration between organisations, particularly the local council.

Over 50% of organisations reported having a very strong or strong relationship with the London Borough of Bexley (Q 54). Nonetheless, organisations identified that the biggest way BVSC could improve its offer to the local voluntary sector is by **further enhancing the relationship with the council**, communicating the outcomes of discussions with the local authority and decision makers. This would improve the transparency between BVSC, the local authority, and the voluntary sector and ensure BVSC better supports its sector.

There are a few suggestions that the local authority could provide more support through funding. These suggestions included:

“If the local council could invest more in Bexley based organisations through providing funding or pro actively work with us to access external funding to bring into the borough”

(With regards to the local authority) “Recognising the work done in the Community by small and medium size organisations and ensuring funding reaching them and not the select few”

“All of our contracts are short term and this makes it difficult to plan. We do not have contracts with the local authority and it is a risk that our main funder is planning to put funding via the local authority in the future which could jeopardise our access to these funds”

Improving partnership with the local authority would also help organisations to better meet demand. Two suggestions included:

“Better signposting, support and understanding (from the LA and SEL ICB) of local organisations that already exist to support these people”

“There are so many groups in Bexley that want to help people but need support, if the council recognised the sector more, we could help them support the residents”

Building relationships and fostering greater transparency between organisations was also identified as important to strengthen trust and collaboration. This can enhance organisations’ ability to work effectively together and open up opportunities to secure joint funding. A suggestion to improve collaboration included:

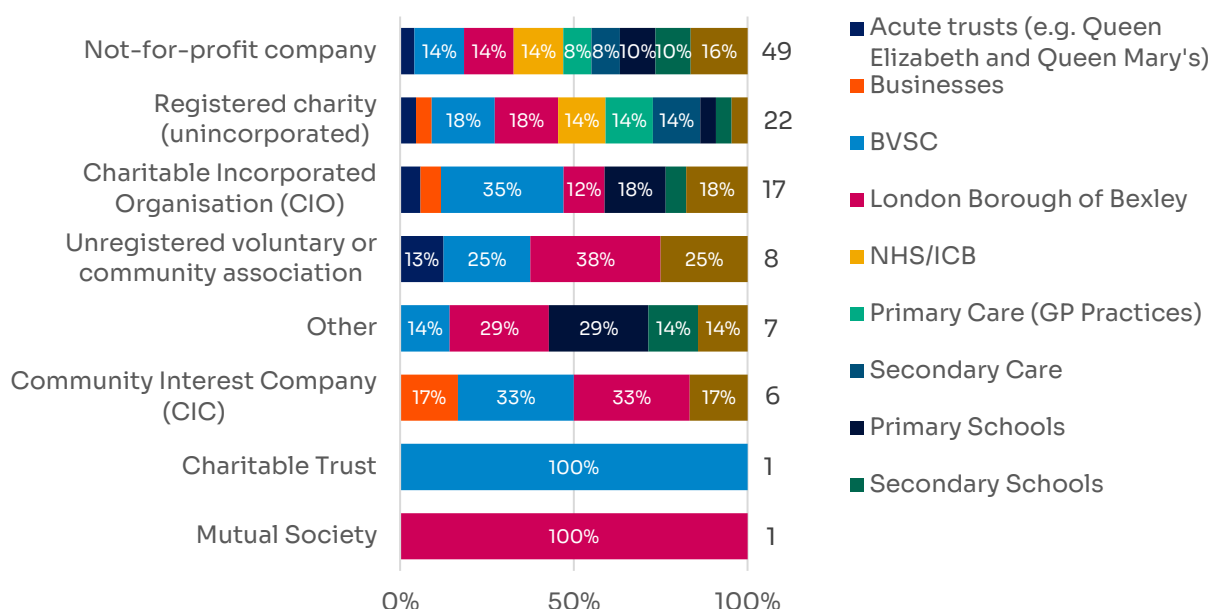
“Better transparency and trust between organisations. Bigger charities seem to be the 'go to' for funding opportunities for the local authority. Opportunities are rarely

shared with smaller organisations who feel that this sometimes causes division within the local voluntary sector”

There is a need for accessible networking opportunities between VCSE organisations, including online forums or WhatsApp groups for informal knowledge sharing and more strategic meetings held on a quarterly basis. The current voluntary sector forum is open to all and attended by local councillors, so this feedback suggests there is a communications issue. Responses stressed the importance of online options given capacity challenges.

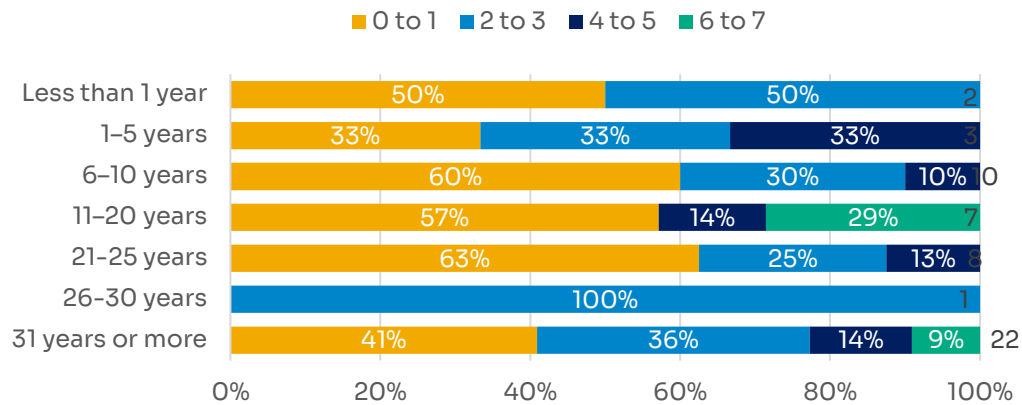
“Understanding the various organisations and what they do and then pull our strengths together to address the challenges we face”

Respondent organisations with Strong and Very Strong partnerships by organisation type

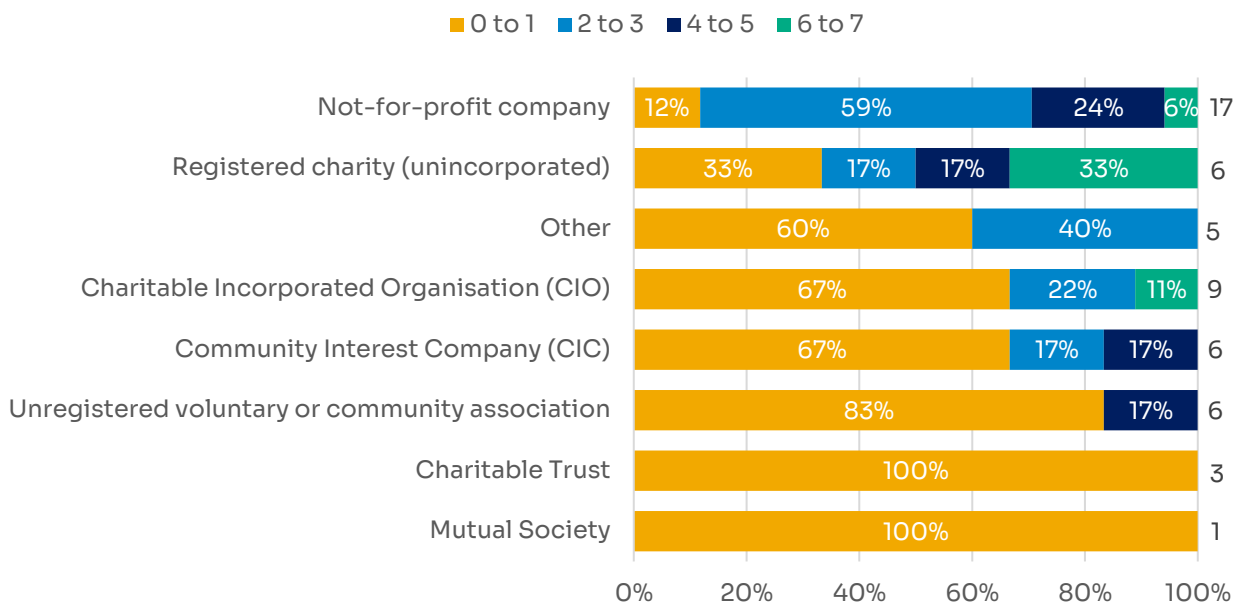


The number of organisations and organisation types with which respondents reported a strong partnership with were also analysed and broken down by respondent organisation type, tenure, and area of focus. As visible, over 2 in 3 registered charities and not for profit companies reported strong partnerships with more than one organisation in Bexley, with 1 in 3 charities reporting as high as 6 to 7 strong partnerships.

Number of organisation types with strong relationships by organisation tenure



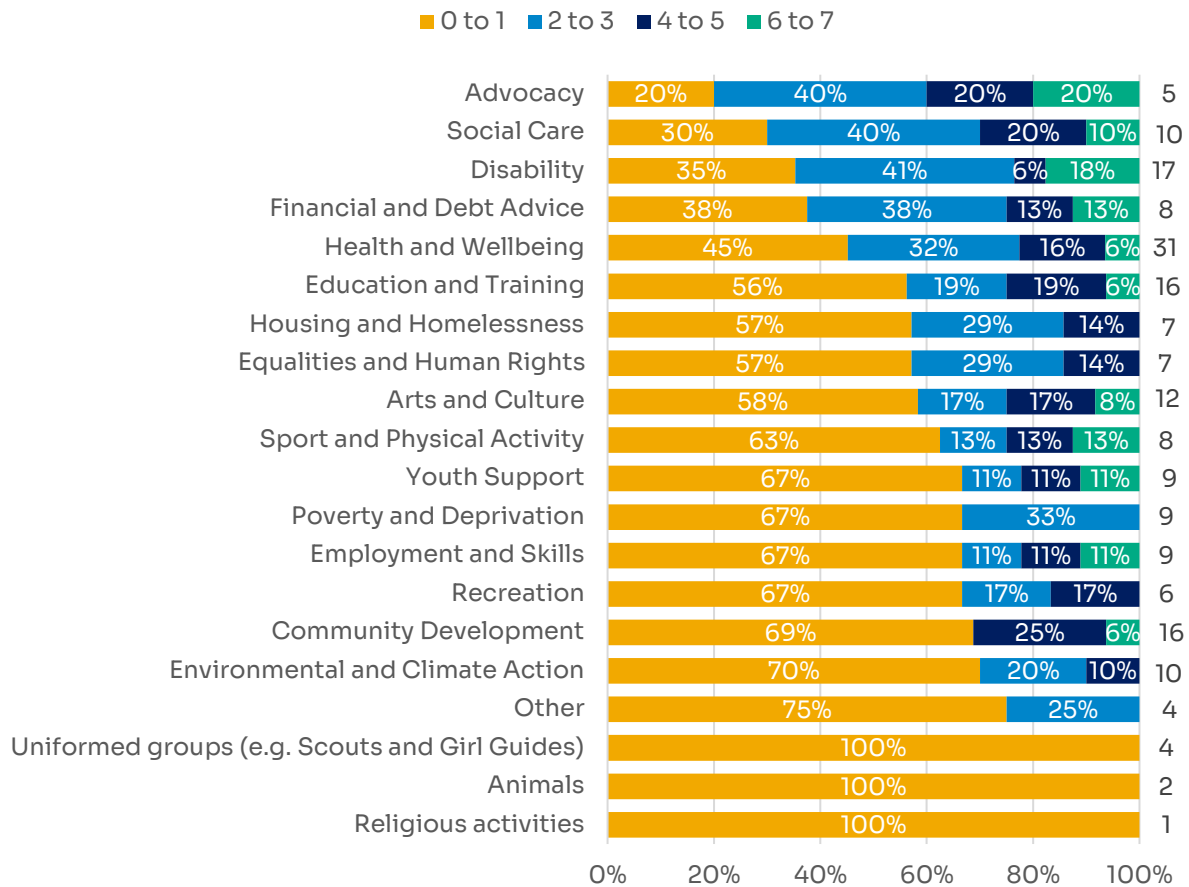
Number of organisations with strong relationships by respondent organisation type



Additionally, in terms of organisational tenure, over 1 in 2 respondent organisations under 5 years of age and over 31 years of age reported more than 1 strong partnership, suggesting that younger and older organisations are more likely to have stronger partnerships.

The organisations with a higher number of strong partnerships tended to be working across advocacy, social care, disability, financial and debt advice, and health and wellbeing.

Number of organisation types with strong relationships by area of focus



3.9 Future challenges and support needs

Funding emerged as the critical priority, with 60% of organisations identifying it as one of their top concerns.

The most significant funding challenge centred on the difficulty of securing long-term or multi-year funding, limiting organisational planning and stability. Organisations also highlighted that there are fewer grants available for smaller organisations given increasingly restrictive criteria and more competition. Some organisations had limited capacity or confidence to apply for grants, often impacting smaller charities with overstretched volunteers.

This challenge is reflected in NCVO's The Road Ahead Report (2025), where they describe the unpredictable and challenging times created by decreased funding and increased costs. Whilst shifting to diverse funding sources is important for the voluntary sector, finding them can be difficult. The report highlights that there is a lack of awareness (and some practical barriers to access) among small charities around other funding opportunities. This includes social investment which enables them to take out loans or sell shares to raise funds. The NCVO has developed some practical guidance that can support the charity sector [here](#).

The second top support need was around partnership development. As described in deep dive area 3.8, this could include both other VCSE organisations and the local authority.

Whilst financial support is the primary concern, organisations also require operational support to function effectively. These included venue access, communications, volunteer and Trustee recruitment, digital or IT support.

A challenge identified by a youth organisation was the disparity between Bexley's actual deprivation levels and external funders' perception of the borough, resulting in reduced access to funding opportunities and limiting the sector's ability to address community need.

“A lot of funders do not recognise Bexley's deprivation and we miss out a lot of funding opportunities because we are perceived as not urgently needing support”

Organisations' top three support needs



3.10 How BVSC can improve its offer to the local voluntary sector

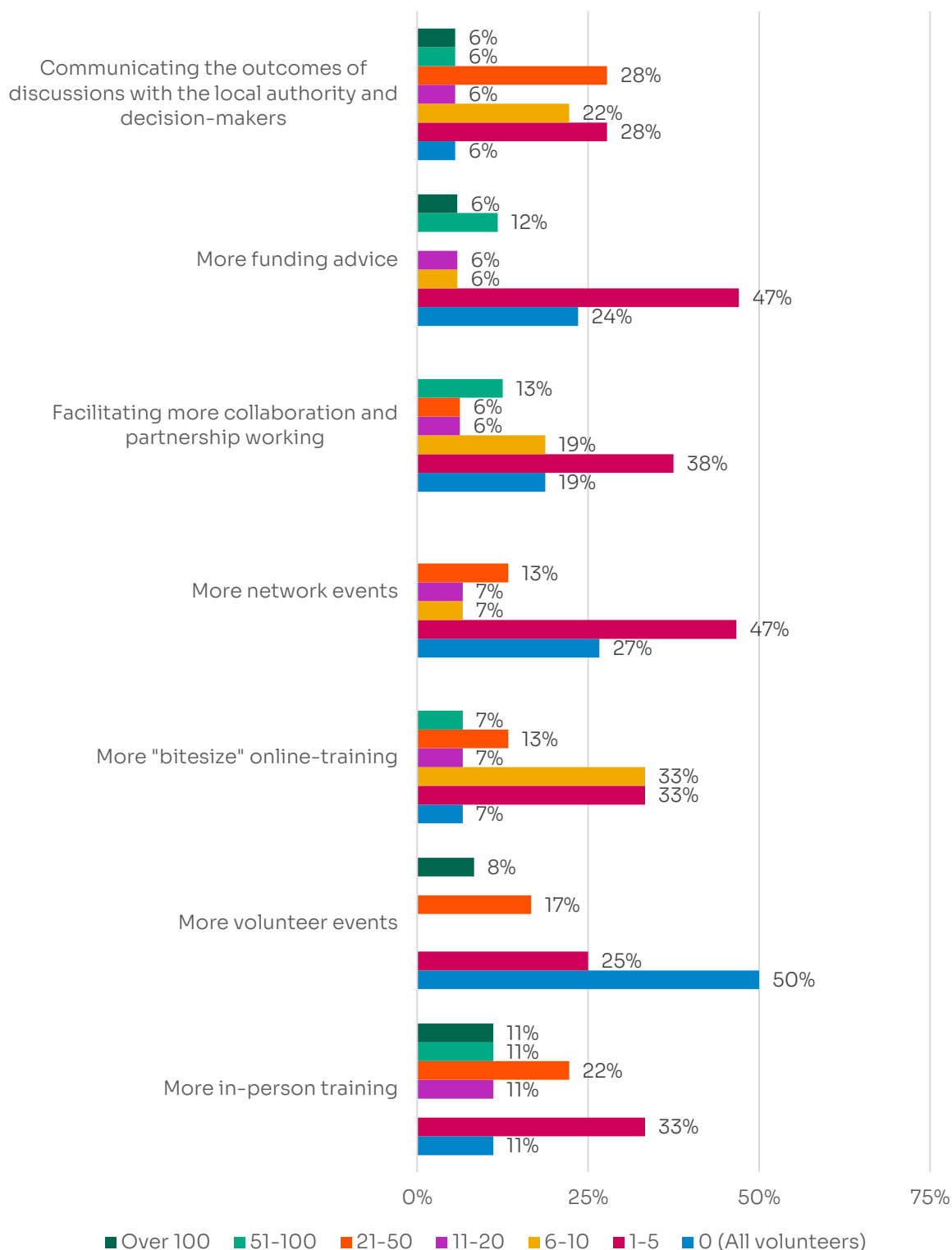
BVSC supports the sector well. However, respondents also highlighted several areas where BVSC can improve its offer, the most significant being around funding advice, networking events and improving communication between the VCSE and the local council. The smallest organisations, those run entirely by volunteers and those with 1 to 5 employees, show the strongest demand for an improved offer from BVSC.

The highest priority support areas identified by smaller organisations were receiving more funding advice, having more volunteer events and networking events. 47% of organisations with 1 – 5 employees wanted more funding advice and networking events, highlighting that smaller organisations are struggling with the funding process, especially around receiving feedback from the bids they submit. Across all organisation sizes, there was a steady demand for more in-person training and more 'bitesize' online training, showing appetite for accessible learning.

The emphasis on the importance of networking events suggests a desire to better understand similar services. Organisations also want clearer communication about the outcomes of discussions between local authorities, decision-makers and the voluntary

sector. This aligns with other responses throughout the survey, with many wanting BVSC to consult with the VCSE prior to statutory meetings and to ensure organisations are kept informed about important developments, such as changes linked to ICBs.

Ways that BVSC can improve its offer to the local voluntary sector by organisation size



4. Conclusions and recommendations

The VCSE sector in Bexley is vibrant and active across various intersecting areas, providing support for the diversity of people within Bexley. The sector appreciates the support delivered by BVSC. However, core challenges are being faced, many of which reflect the national challenges faced by the VCSE sector.

A key area of concern for organisations is around funding and long-term sustainability. This is a tricky challenge to address and needs co-ordinated action not just from BVSC, but central and local government, organisations such as the NHS and VCSE organisations themselves, to increase capability in applying for funding and to increase the likelihood of success.

BVSC can support these efforts. Five recommendations for BVSC have been developed.

Recommendation	Description	Priority
Target support on core skills gaps	Funding and monitoring and evaluation are core gaps. Better ability to evidence impact will further support the sector to attract funding. As noted, few organisations nationally are using digital innovation techniques such as predictive analytics despite their potential to identify patterns of donor retention and income risks. BVSC could support the local sector to upskill in areas of digital innovation (even if they do not identify as a need) given the potential to support funding sourcing.	High
Facilitate better connections with local authority	The sector is keen to have better engagement with the council. Given the council is a key local funder, supporting a better relationship is important. BVSC hold Voluntary Sector Forums 3-4 times per year that offer a dedicated space to enable the VCSE to shape local priorities, strengthen the collective VCSE voice, and drive collaboration with the local authority. However, awareness of this forum is low. This suggests the need to better communicate what BVSC already has in place. BVSC could facilitate a networking event aimed to break down barriers. Brent Council recently held a series of in-person externally facilitated workshops to better work with the VCSE sector. Attended by	High

Recommendation	Description	Priority
	over 100 public (councillors and council staff) and VCSE representatives, the sessions provided space to create shared understanding of issues and for the public representatives to hear from and connect with their local VCSE organisations. This could be a good model to adopt, leaning on the council to facilitate.	
Expand collaboration between VCSE organisations	Many organisations have a desire for more opportunities to meet, connect and learn about each other's organisations - particularly online. This is especially important for challenges for which there is incomplete understanding and/or a lack of skills and expertise which collaboration could address. This can also support the funding challenges, in that organisations can collaborate in applying for funding and/or pool funding. Additionally, reducing duplication of services can support the sector to do more with less (although the priority should be attracting more funding).	High
Develop approach to support gaps in trustees	Lack of board support is a challenge across different organisation types and sizes. Increasing senior level (i.e., executive leaders and trustees) strategic and practical skills in the sector is likely to further support development and success in funding. There are various ways this could be addressed and additional engagement with the sector will be important to identify appropriate ways forward. Potential ways include □ BVSC supports in advertising roles □ BVSC provides dedicated Trustee training □ BVSC provides training on key skills gaps as a result of the lack of Trustees	Medium
Improve data collection	The state of the sector survey provides important insight into the Bexley VCSE sector. However, some of the survey questions are leading, and there is	Low

Recommendation	Description	Priority
	more scope to include more questions to better learn about the sector challenges. Improving the state of the sector survey will further allow BVSC to target support. It will also allow BVSC to better highlight funding gaps to external funders such as the council.	

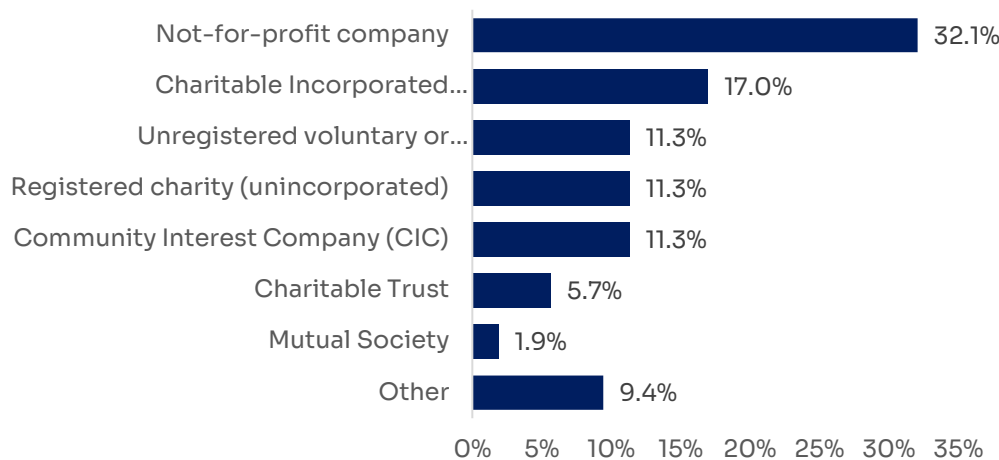


5. Appendix: Detailed survey findings

5.1 Organisational Profile

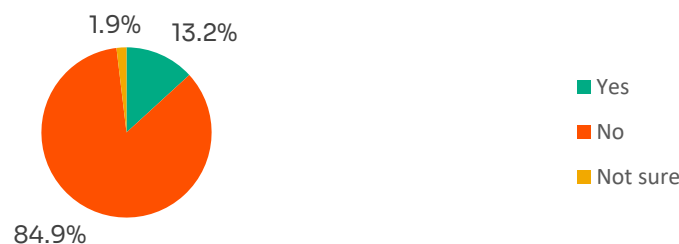
The survey was able to gather insights from a wide range of organisations with around one-third (32%) of the respondents from not-for-profit companies, followed by 17% from charitable incorporated organisations.

Q1. What is your organisation's legal structure? (If you're both a charity and a company please select 'Not-for-profit company' below) (n=53)



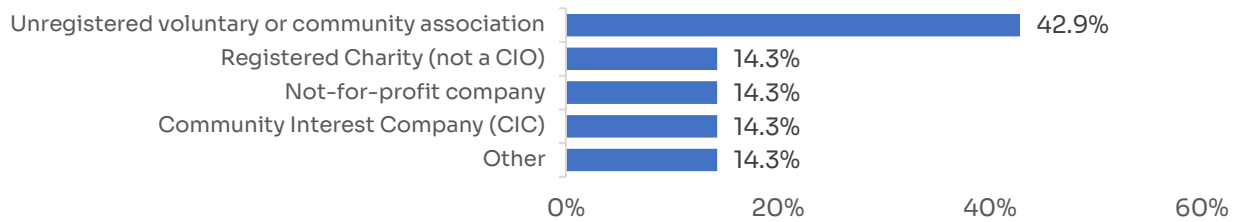
In terms of structure, 4 in 5 respondents reported that their organisation structure has never changed with 13% reporting the contrary.

Q2. Has the structure of your organisation ever changed? (n=53)



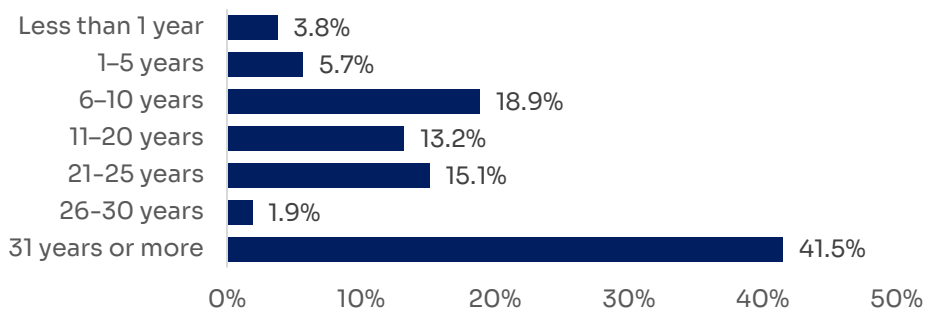
Of the 7 who reported that their organisation structure has changed previously, 43% reported that their organisation was an unregistered voluntary or community association, while the remaining 57% responded that their organisation was registered charity, not-for-profit, CIC or other each.

Q3. If yes, what was your organisation's legal structure previously? (n=7)



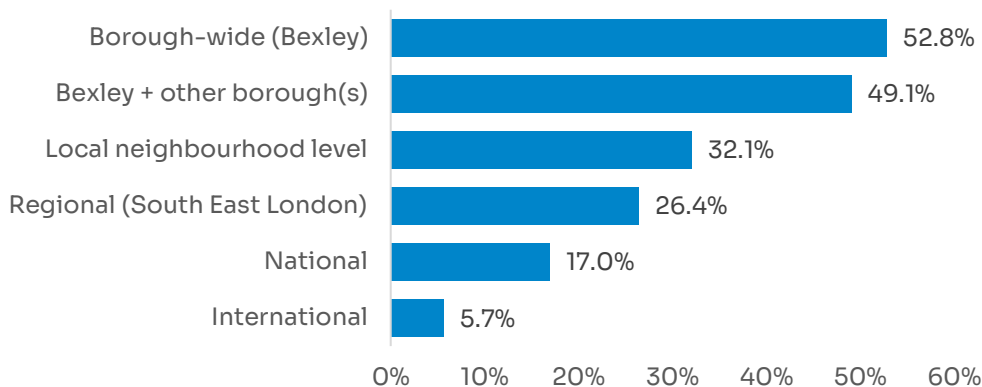
Over half of respondents (58%) came from organisations that have been operating for more than 20 years. This shows the sector is mainly composed of older organisations with experience supporting variety of communities over a long period, suggesting a relatively stable sector. However, it could also suggest that newer organisations are less aware of BVSC and are underrepresented in the survey.

Q4. How long has your organisation been operating? (n=53)



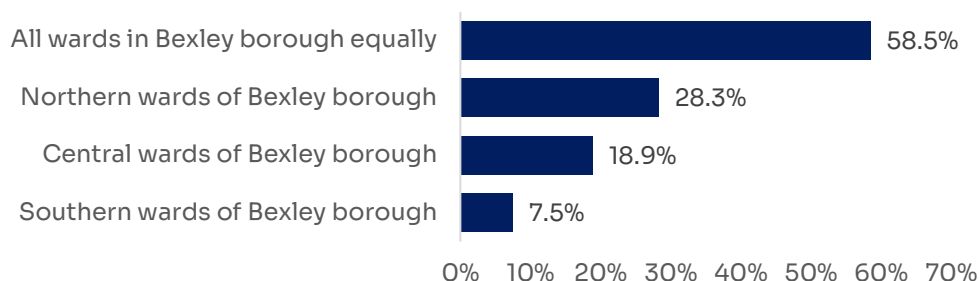
In terms of scale, the survey reached respondents from all types of organisations. As to be expected, most respondents were from organisations operating at local levels with 53% working across Bexley, and 32% working at local neighbourhood level.

Q5. At what scale does your organisation operate (please tick all that apply)? (n=53)



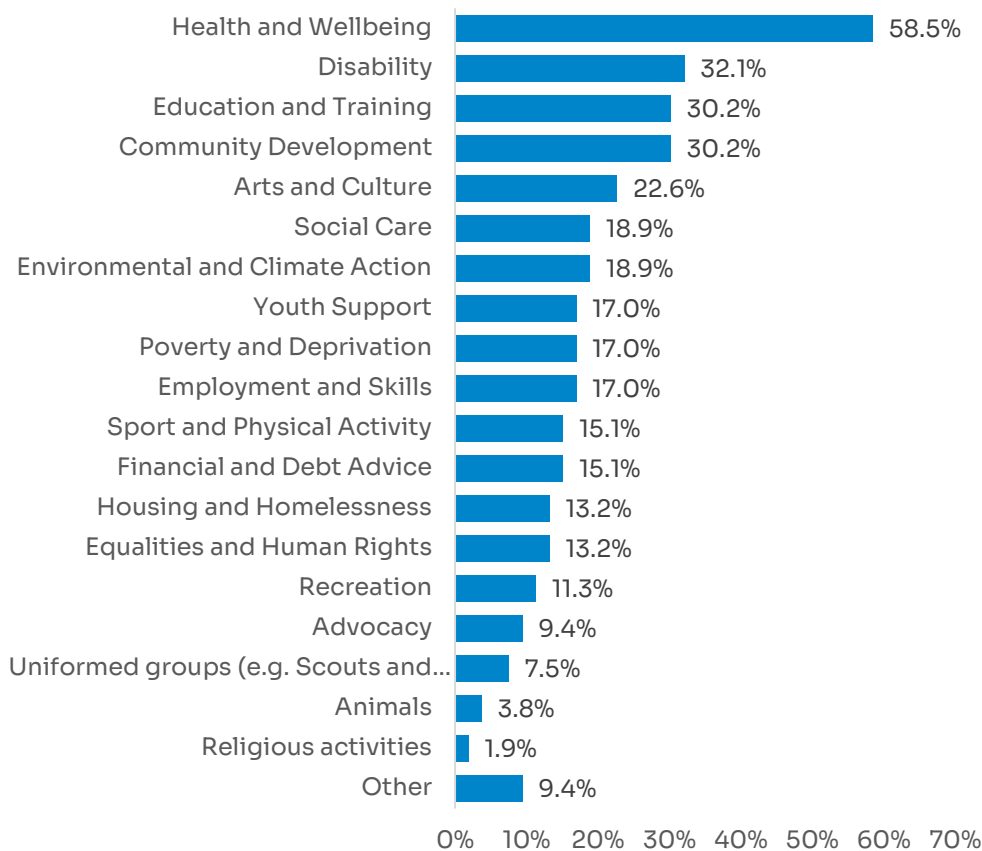
In terms of spatial focus, over half of the respondent organisations serve all wards across Bexley equally, while the remaining focus on northern, central, and southern wards in decreasing order of prevalence.

Q6. Which area(s) of Bexley borough does your organisation mainly serve? (n=53)



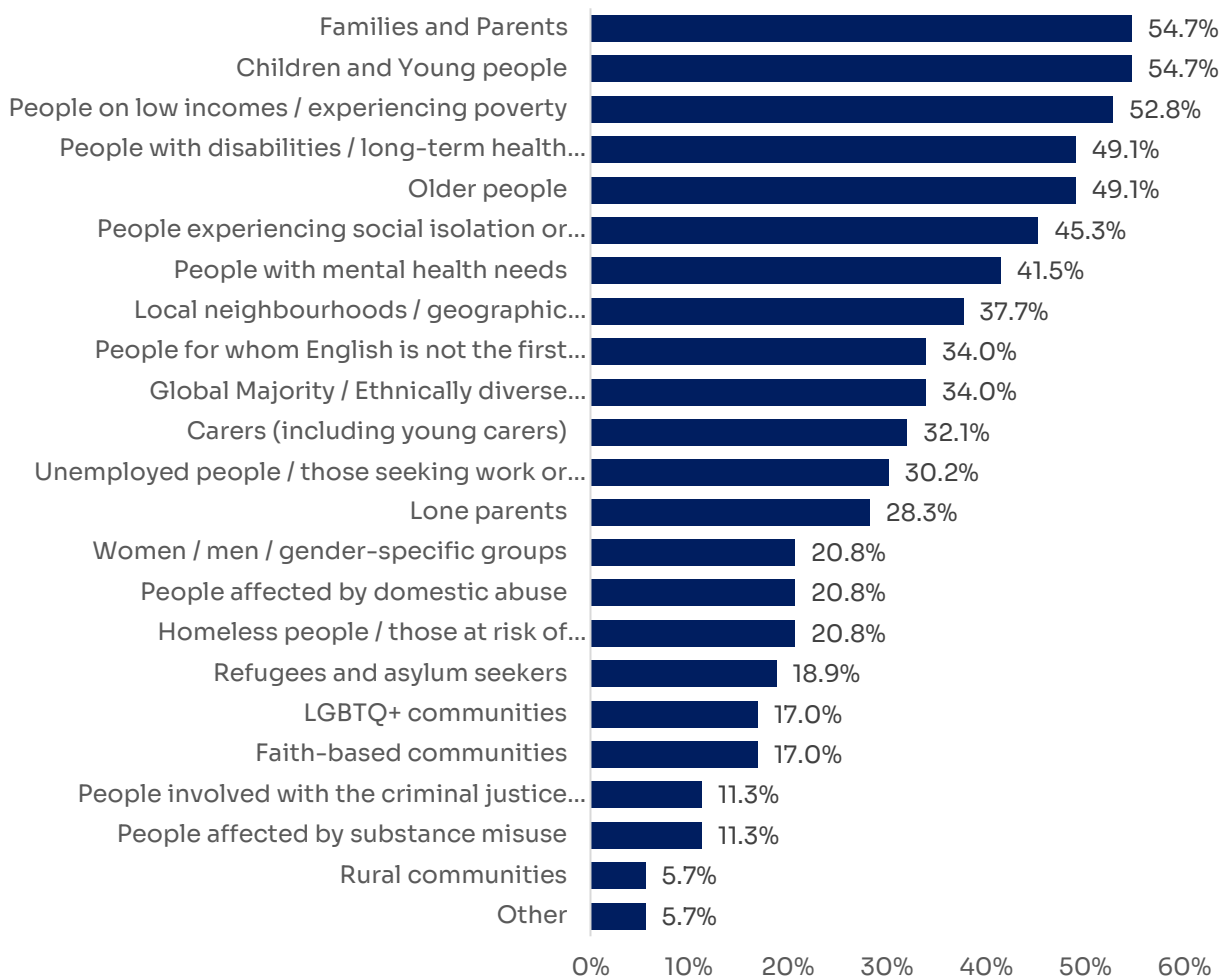
Organisations work across diverse areas with representation across all areas focus listed in the survey. Over half (58%) have Health and Wellbeing as one of their main areas of focus in line with other third sector surveys including the CLD Workforce Survey 2026 and the FreshSight's Young Talent Pipeline Survey 2026 conducted by Rocket Science. Additionally, around a third (32%) of respondent organisations had disability as a main area of focus.

Q7. What are your main areas of focus? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



In terms of target groups, respondent organisations work with many communities at once, with over half of the respondent organisations working with families and parents, children and young people, people on low incomes, and around a half of organisations working with people with disabilities and older people. This suggests that the sector has a diverse reach across communities.

Q8. Which communities do you work with? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)

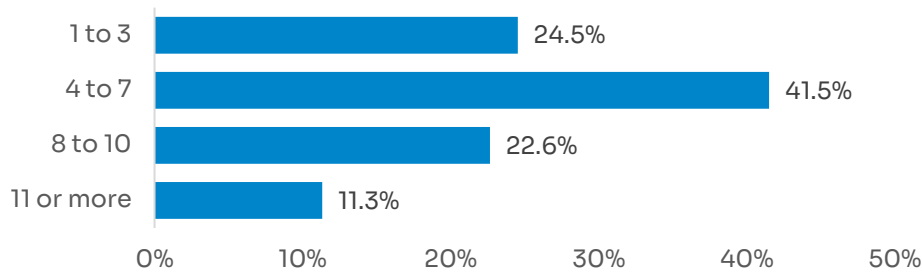


5.2 Governance

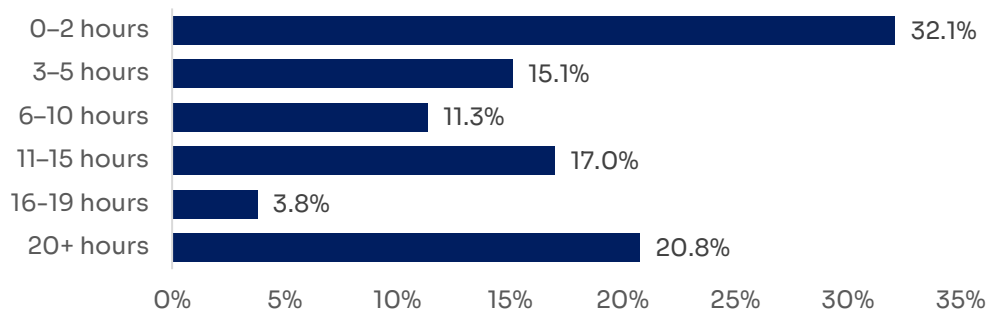
The respondents were also asked about the governance structure of their organisations.

Around three quarters of respondent organisations had more than 4 directors, trustees and management committee members suggesting strong governance structures across the sector. In an average month, across the majority of respondent organisations (58.5%) a director, trustee and management committee member worked less than 11 hours each month, suggesting a smaller workload at the higher level.

Q9. How many Directors, Trustees or Management Committee members does your organisation have? (n=53)

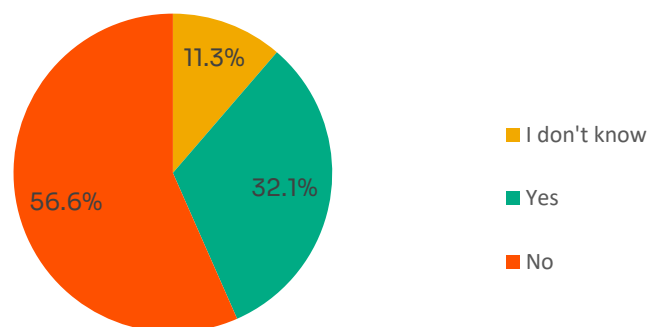


Q10. Approximately how many hours per month does a typical director, trustee or management committee member contribute to your organisation? (n=53)

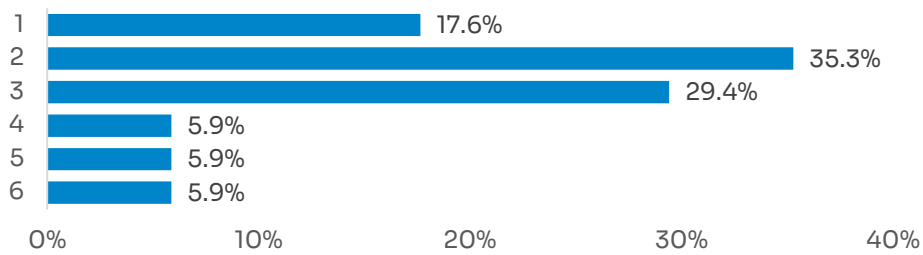


However, around a third (32%) of respondents reported having a trustee vacancy. Two-thirds with vacancies had 2 to 3, and the majority of openings were open for more than 3 months. 70% of respondents reported experiencing some level of impact on organisational running due to delays in recruitment. This suggests significant issues around recruitment of trustees in the sector. This has broader implications for organisations to be able to be strategic and bring in senior-level support.

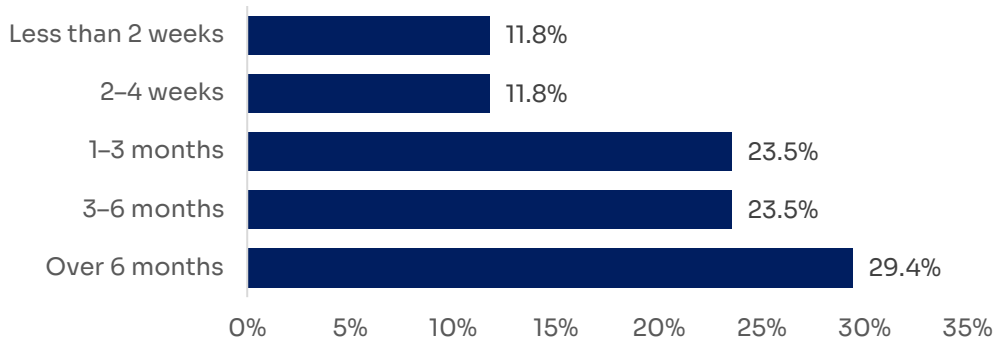
Q11. Do you currently have any Trustee vacancies? (n=53)



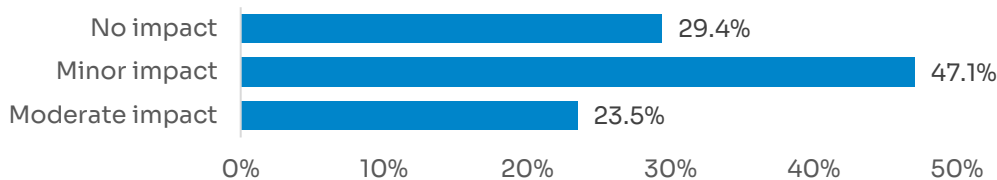
Q12. If yes, how many vacancies do you have?
(n=17)



Q13. How long have you had these trustee vacancies for? (please tick all that apply) (n=17)



Q14. To what extent do delays in recruiting trustees affect the running of your organisation?
(n=17)



In terms of skills gap at the board-level, respondents noted a wide range of skills gap observed at board levels with 41% highlighting fundraising and 30% highlighting legal expertise as a skills gap, while around a quarter also highlighted charity law, and property management.

Q15. What are the skill gaps in your board/management committee? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



In terms of skills available at the board-level, majority of respondents key leadership level skills and experience including experience of working in committees, workplace principles, leadership, financial and administration skills. This suggests a strong skilled leadership in the sector.

Q16. What are the key skills that your trustees/management committee members bring to your organisation? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Additionally, more than three-fourths of respondent organisations had community-representative leadership.

Q17. Are the communities that your organisation serves represented on your trustee board? (n=53)

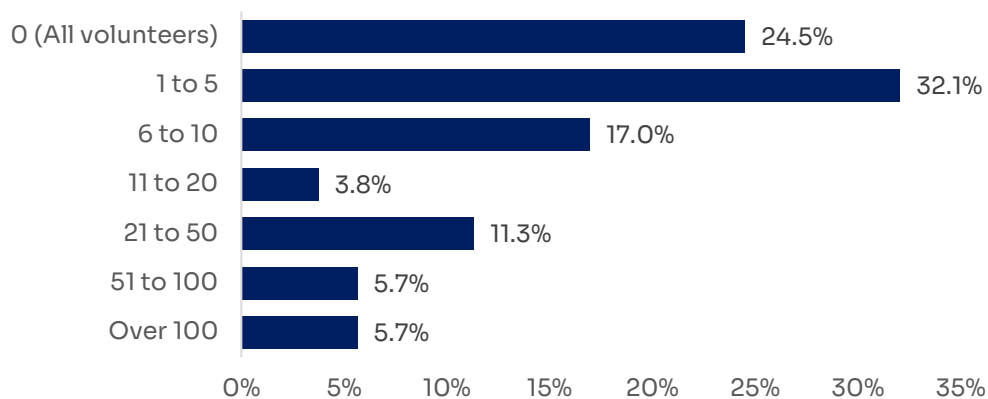


5.3 Staff and volunteers

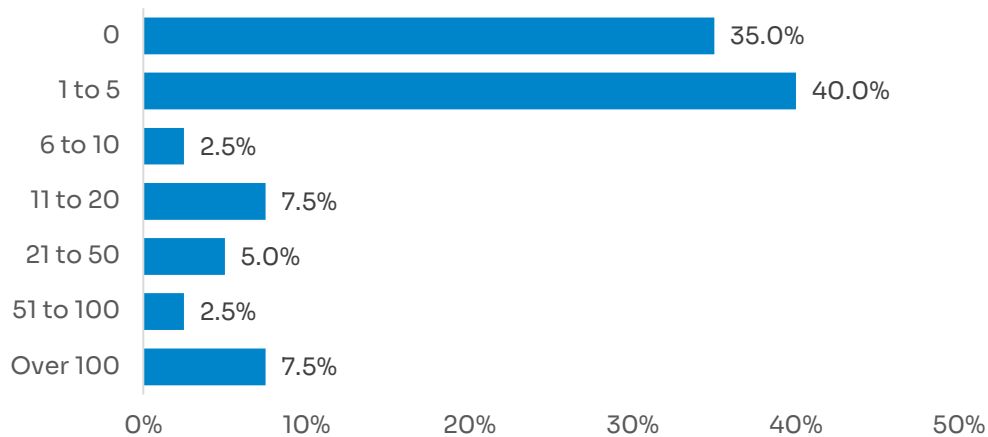
In terms of organisation size, most respondent organisations were small in size, with around one-thirds of the respondent organisations having between 1 to 5 paid employees and around a quarter of respondent organisations as volunteer-based.

Of the 40 respondent organisations that have paid employees, 40% had 1 to 5 employees on full-time role, with more than 1 in 3 not having any paid full-time employees. Similarly, over half of the respondent organisations (55%) had 1 to 5 employees on part-time role. This signals the prevalence of small organisations across the sector and an over-reliance on volunteers.

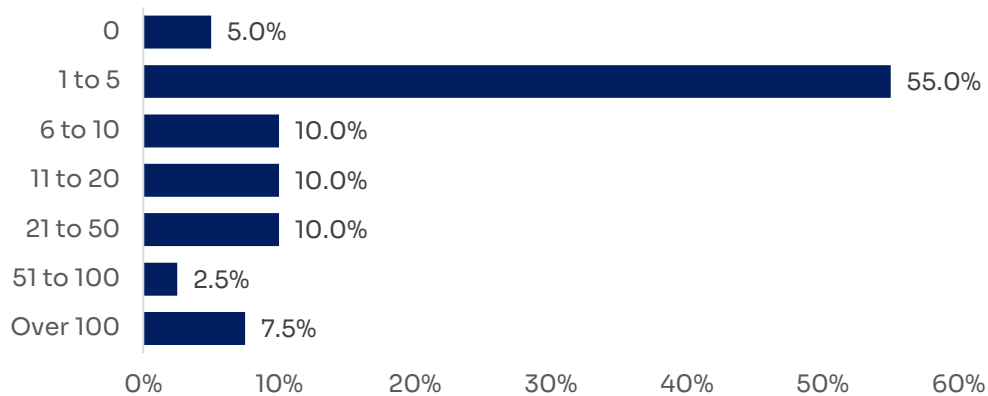
Q18. How many paid employees does your organisation have? (this is a simple headcount rather than a calculation of FTE) (n=53)



Q19. How many of your paid employees are full-time? (e.g. 35hrs per week or more) (n=40)



Q20. How many of your paid employees are part-time? (this is a total headcount rather than a calculation of FTE) (n=40)



Around one quarter of respondents reported a vacancy for paid staff. Of these 10 organisations,

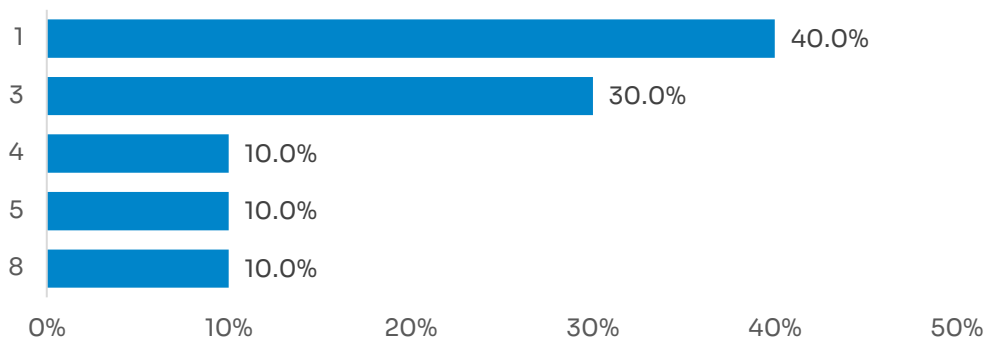
- 70% had 1 to 3 vacancies
- 70% of the vacancies had been open for less than 4 weeks
- 80% reported that they experienced some level of impact on their organisation function due to delays in recruitment.

This suggests that compared to trustee roles, the paid staff roles are relatively quicker to fill but further reiterates the negative impact of vacancies.

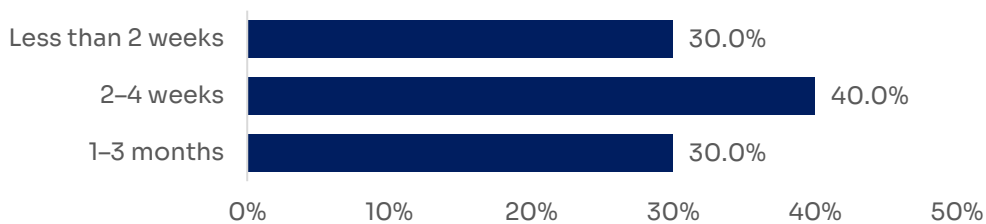
Q21. Do you currently have vacancies for paid staff? (n=40)



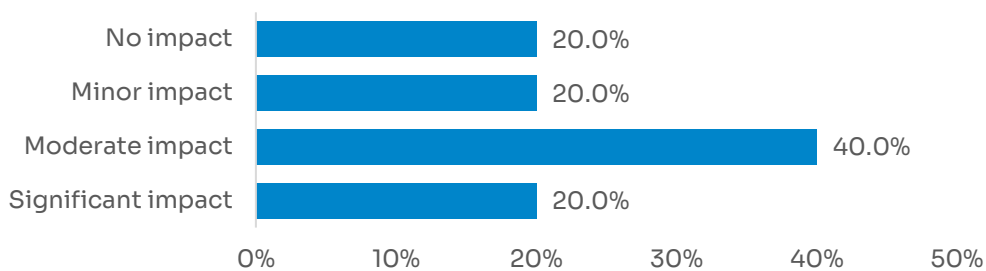
Q22. If yes, how many staff vacancies do you have? (n=10)



Q23. How long have you had these staff vacancies for? (please tick all that apply) (n=10)



Q24. To what extent do delays in recruiting staff affect the running of your organisation? (n=10)



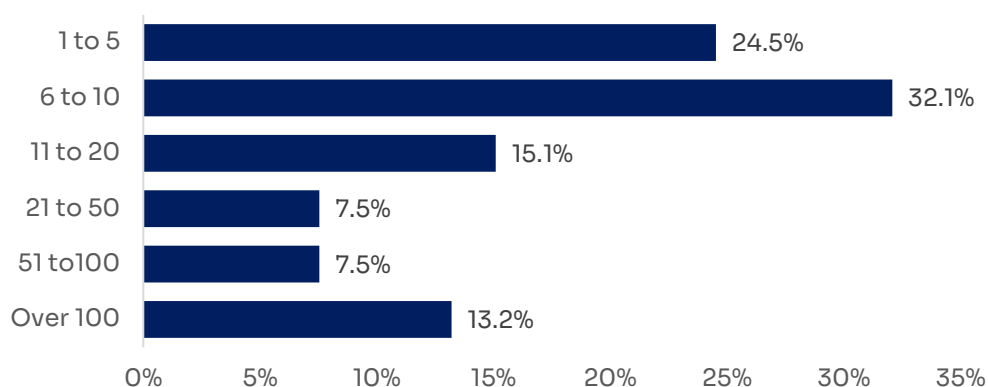
In terms of community-representation, 98% of respondent organisations agreed that the communities that they serve are represented by their staff team.

Q25. Are the communities that your organisation serves represented on your staff team? (n=40)

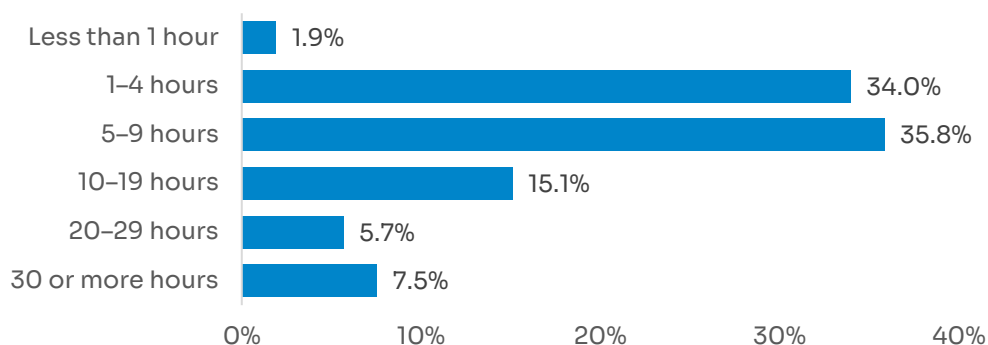


In terms of volunteers, all respondent organisations employed volunteers. Most (57%) have between 1 and 10 volunteers. Volunteers generally contribute between 1 to 9 hours as seen across 70% of organisations.

Q26. How many volunteers does your organisation have? (n=53)



Q27. Approximately how many hours per month does a typical volunteer contribute to your organisation? (n=53)



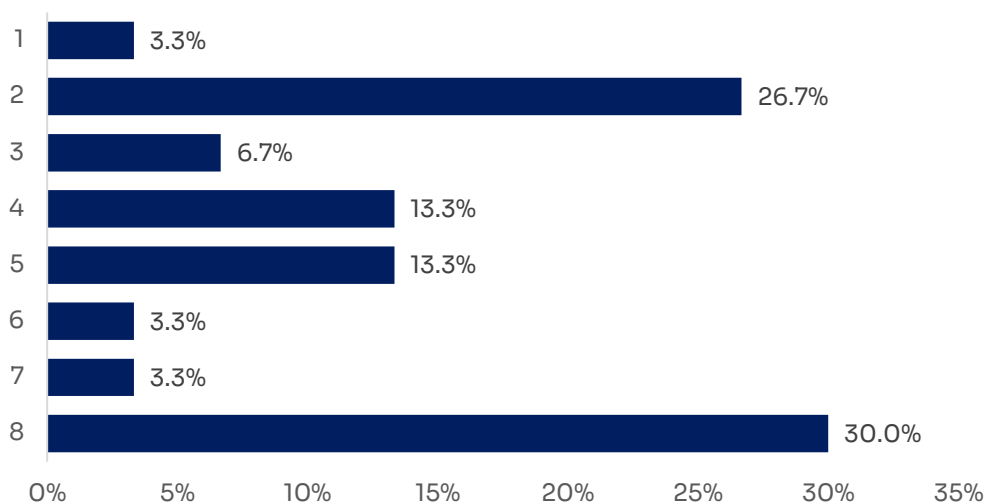
In terms of volunteer vacancies, 57% of respondent organisations reported having vacancies for volunteers with 30% of these organisations having 8 volunteer vacancies.

Over 1 in 3 organisations had a volunteer vacancy for over 6 months. Again, this suggests a significant gap in resourcing across the sector.

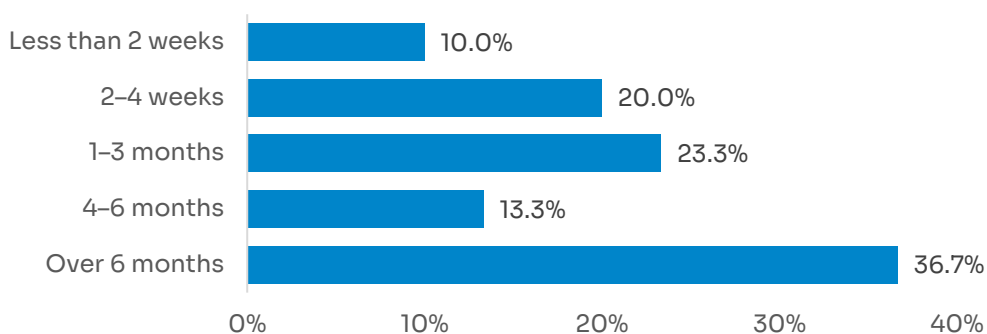
Q28. Do you currently have vacancies for volunteers?



Q29. If yes, how many volunteer vacancies do you have? (n=30)

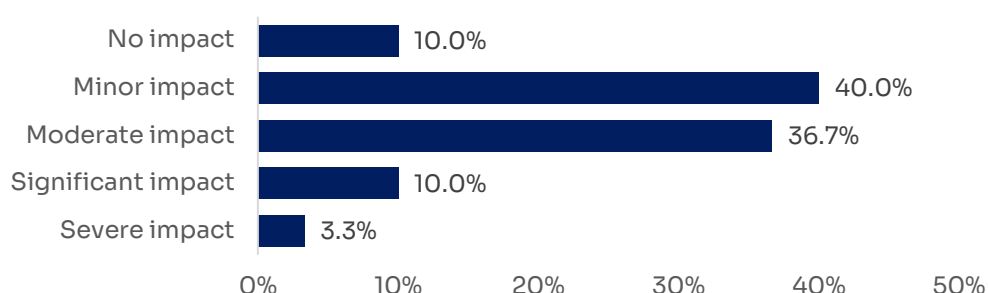


Q30. How long have you had these volunteer vacancies for? (please tick all that apply) (n=30)



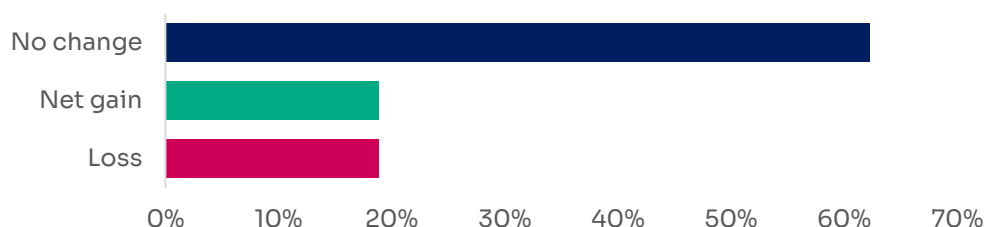
Despite delays in recruiting volunteers, the majority of responses highlighted that it only had a minor to moderate impact on the running of their organisation. Just over 1 in 5 suggested that it had a significant to severe impact on delivery, suggesting that delays in volunteer recruitment are not a priority area.

Q31. To what extent do delays in recruiting volunteers affect the running of your organisation? (n=30)



The majority of organisations had no net gain or loss in volunteers of the last 2 years, with an even number of organisations also having net gain or net loss of volunteers. This suggests that volunteer numbers have remained steady over the last 2 years.

Q32. Have you experienced net gain or loss in volunteers in the last 2 years? (n=53)



The majority of organisations have volunteers representative of the communities they serve, suggesting that recruiting a more diverse range of volunteers is not a priority.

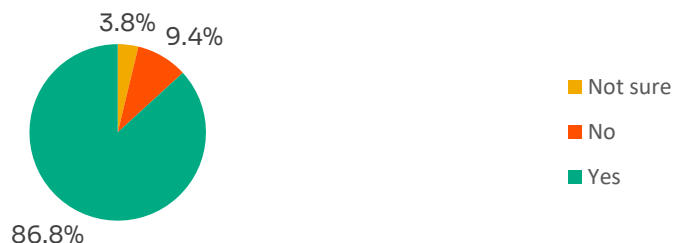
Q33: Please indicate in your own words what factors you believe have driven the changes in your volunteer numbers?

For organisations who have experienced a net loss in volunteers, this was driven by shifting personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities, changes in capacity, or a preference for paid roles. Mental health challenges and an aging volunteer demographic further compound difficulties in retaining volunteers.

For organisations who had successfully recruited volunteers, due to increased pressure on capacity or an expanding number of projects, they used targeted strategies including enhanced publicity, advertising, and attendance at recruitment events. They

also ensured that their volunteer offer was strong, identified where they really need volunteers, and shared the value of volunteering.

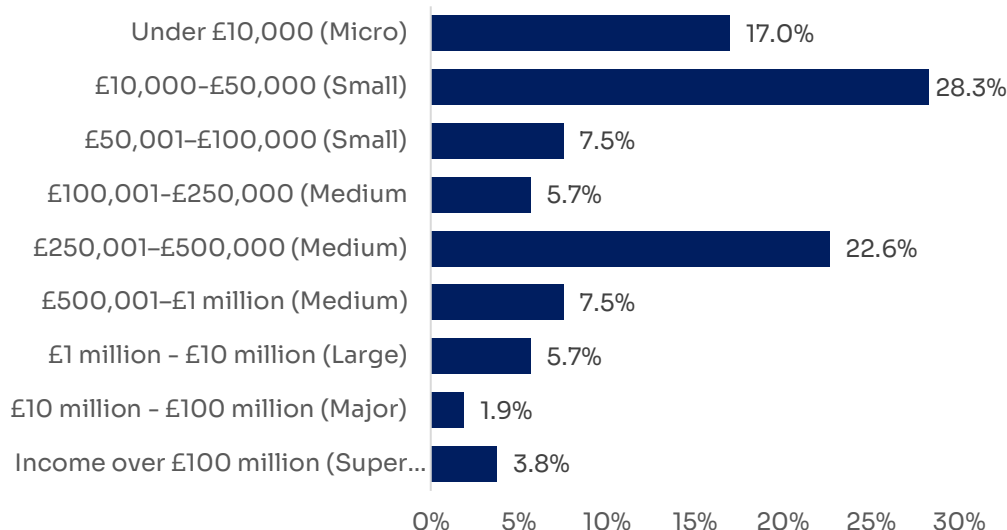
Q34. Are your volunteers representative of the communities you serve? (n=53)



5.4 Funding and income

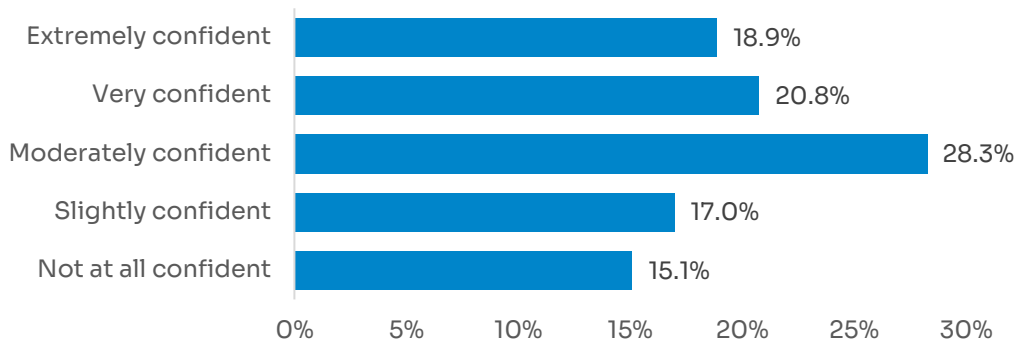
Just over half of the organisations have a micro to small annual income ranging from under £10,000 to £100,000 per year. 35.8% of organisations had an annual income was medium sized, suggesting that support should be tailored towards smaller or medium sized organisations.

Q35. What is your organisation's approximate annual income? (n=53)



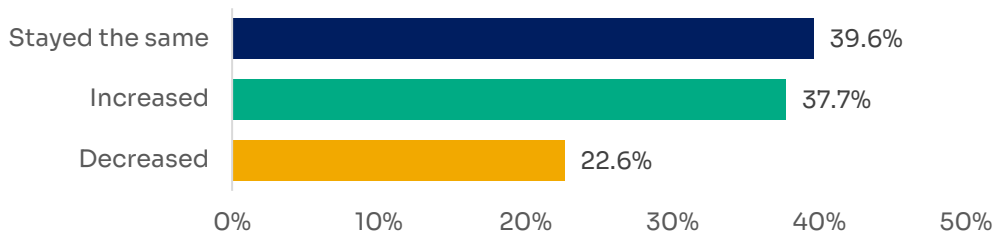
Organisation's confidence levels in financial sustainability over the next 12 months varies widely, ranging from extremely confident to not at all confident. The most common answer was moderately confident, suggesting that many organisations feel wary of their financial position.

Q36. How confident are you about your financial sustainability for the next 12 months? (n=53)

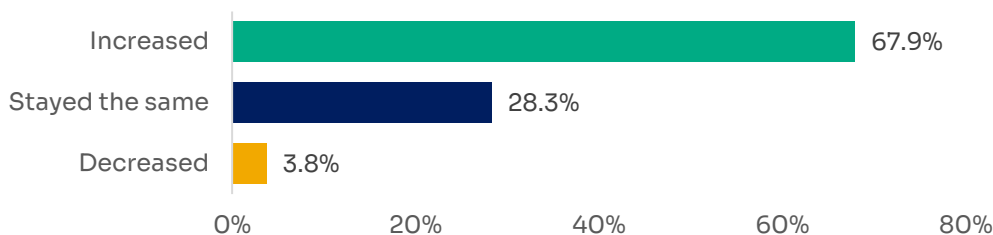


Despite 67% of organisations reporting an increased annual expenditure, only 37.7% of organisations' annual income had increased, with 22.6% of organisations reporting a decrease in annual income. This suggests that there has been a rise in operating costs, alongside a lack of increased funding to support this.

Q37. Over the last two years, how has your annual income changed? (n=53)

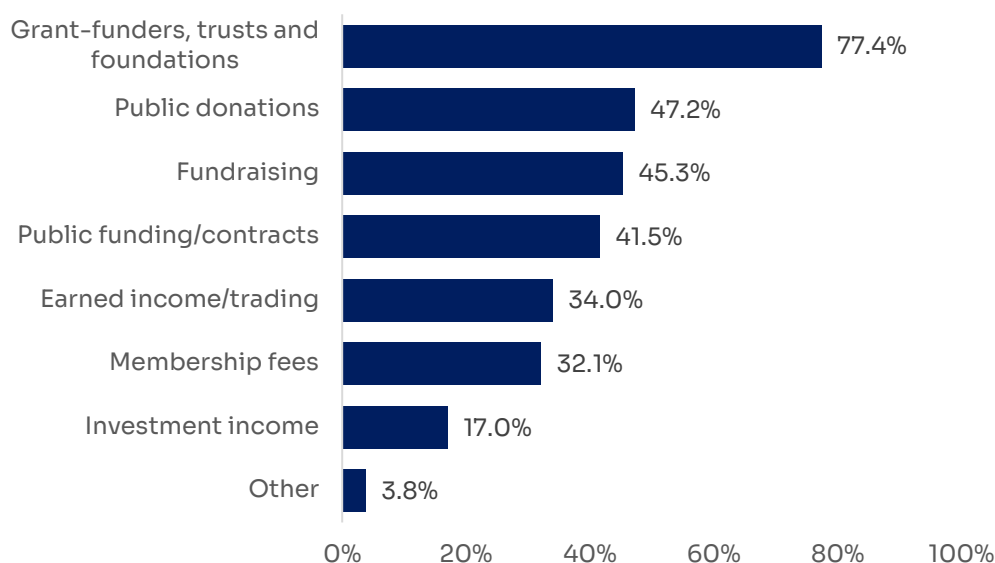


Q38. Over the last two years, how has your annual expenditure changed?(n=53)



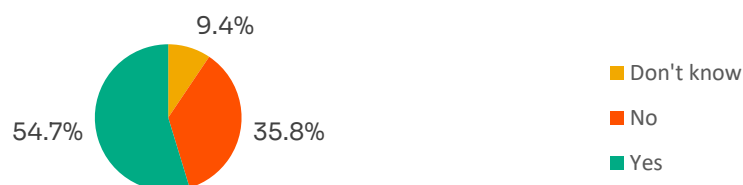
The most common source of income for organisations is from grant-funders, trusts, and foundations with three quarters of respondents receiving such funding. The majority of other income sources come from public donations, fundraising, public funding or contracts, earned income, or membership fees.

Q39. What are your sources of income? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Just over 1 in 3 reported that the funding they have received over the last 12 months has not covered the cost of running their organisation, with a further 9% reporting that they don't know. This suggests that many organisations are not adequately funded to sustain their operations or operating at a financial deficit.

Q40. Has funding over the last 12 months covered the total cost of running of your organisation for this period? (n=53)



Of the organisations who have current contracts, just over half had been uplifted in line with inflation. Furthermore, of those with current grants, only 1 in 3 had been uplifted with inflation. This demonstrates that many organisations are falling behind inflation.

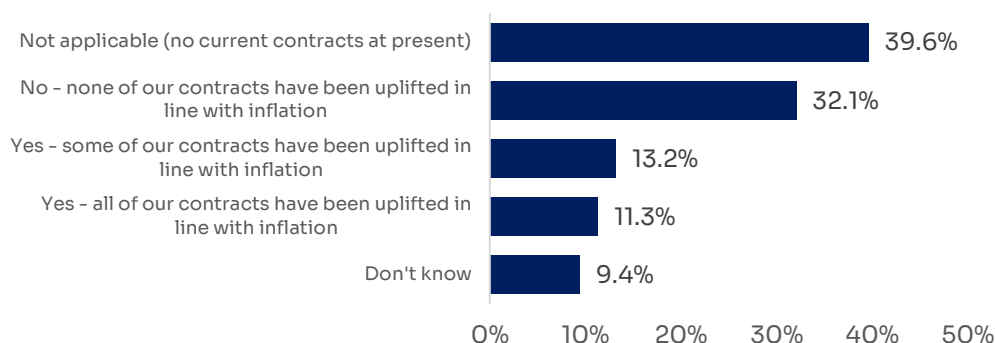
Q41. If not how have you managed the shortfall? (n = 19)

The most common strategy for managing the shortfall was the use of financial reserves, however it was clear that this is an unsustainable approach over time. One response highlighted that

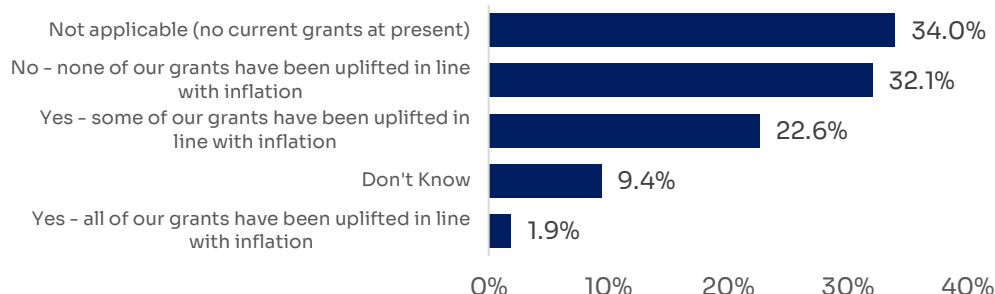
“We had reserves, however it is getting more challenging maintaining them”.

Organisations also used supplementary income sources such as donations and fundraising, alongside cost-cutting techniques including reduced paid staff hours and only using volunteers. In the most acute case, one individual personally financed the organisation, highlighting the severity of funding restraints.

Q42. Have your contracts been uplifted in line with inflation? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Q43. Have your current grants been uplifted in line with inflation? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Q44: What are your biggest funding challenges at the moment? (n = 53)

The most significant funding challenge centred on the difficulty of securing long-term or multi-year funding, limiting organisational planning and stability. Organisations also highlighted that there are fewer grants available for smaller organisations given increasingly restrictive criteria and more competition. Some organisations had limited capacity or confidence to apply for grants, often impacting smaller charities with overstretched volunteers.

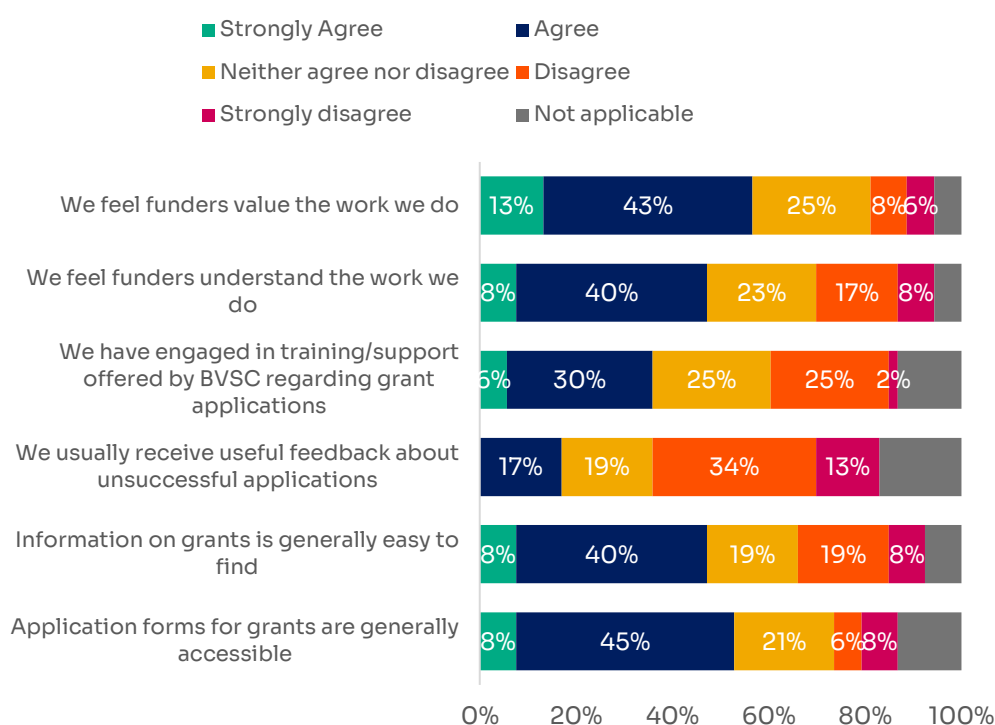
“There are few grants that cover our needs, as well our volunteers are stretched and do not have capacity to apply for grants”.

Other funding challenges included rising day-to-day operational costs, increases in living wage and national insurance alongside the growing difficulties of securing public or self-generated income.

Organisations report mixed views on their relationships with funding organisations. While funders are generally seen as appreciative and understanding of their work, and offer clear application processes, many organisations struggle to get meaningful feedback on unsuccessful applications.

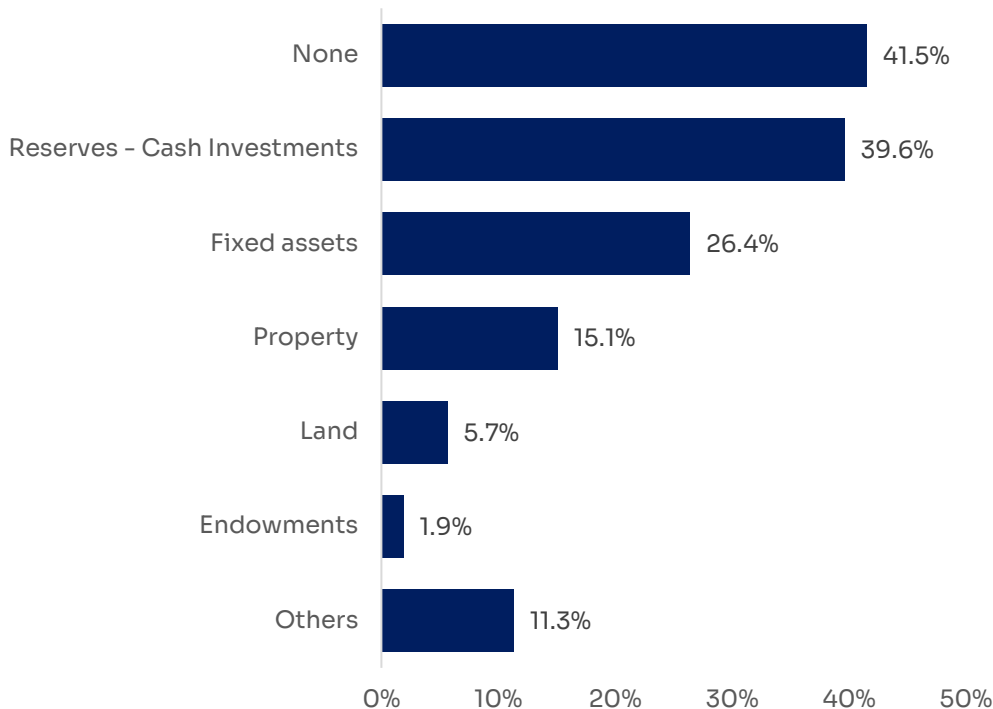
Only 36% of organisations have engaged in training or support offered by BVSC regarding grant applications, indicating an opportunity to develop their funding support offer further.

**Q45. Please select the most appropriate response to the following statements.
(n=53)**



Whilst most organisations own or hold no assets, the most common assets to own or hold is in cash investments, fixed assets, property or land. This highlights the diversity of asset holdings across the sector.

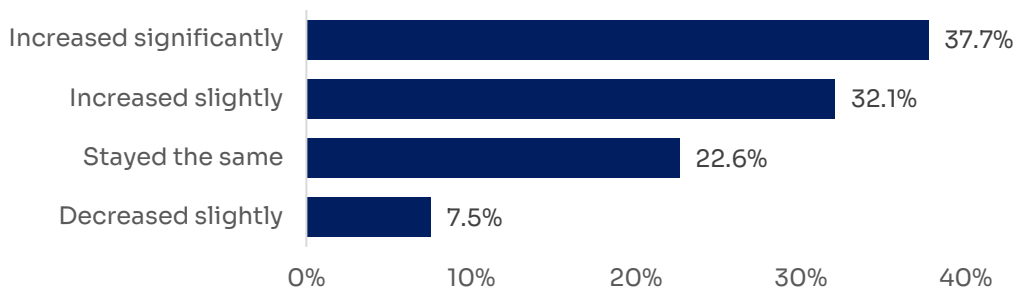
Q46. What type of assets does your organisation own/hold? (n=53)



5.5 Current status and demand

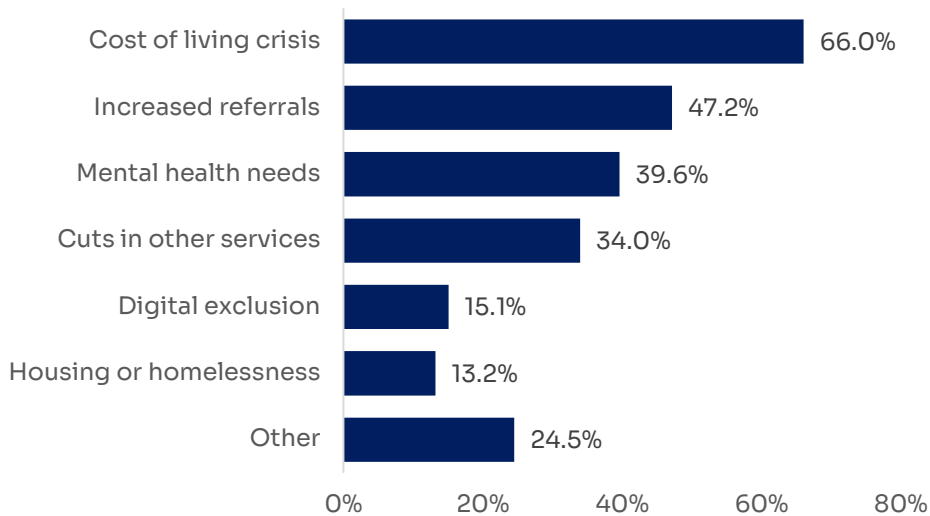
Almost 70% of organisations reported demand for services increasing slightly or significantly over the past 12 months. This shows that demand for community services is increasing.

Q47. How has demand for your services changed in the past 12 months? (n=53)



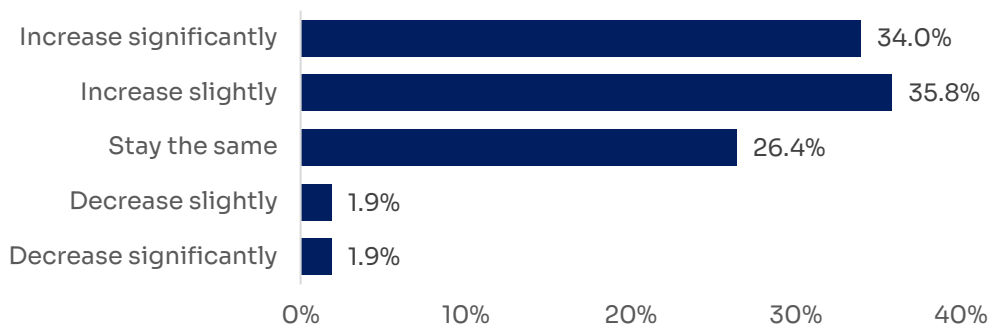
Organisations attribute rising demand primarily to the cost-of-living crisis and service cuts, alongside increased referrals, cuts in other services, and emerging needs in mental health, digital exclusion, and homelessness. This suggests that demand is being driven by multiple interconnected factors reflecting broader societal challenges.

Q48. What are the main drivers of this change?
(please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Almost 70% of organisations anticipate that service demand will increase slightly or significantly over the next 12 months. However, just under half felt confident that they would be able to meet the anticipated demand, suggesting that many organisations face a significant gap between expected demand and their capacity to respond.

Q49. What do you expect service demand will look like over the next 12 months? (n=53)



Q50. Do you expect your organisation to be able to meet the anticipated demand? (n=53)



5.6 Unmet needs and community gaps

Q51: Based on your understanding of Bexley, what groups or communities are currently underserved in Bexley?

Respondents identified a broad range of underserved groups in Bexley, including young people, those with mental health needs, unpaid carers, older and disabled people, BAME communities, individuals facing employment, and those with a low-income. One respondent highlighted that while Bexley is strong in delivering social care, gaps emerge in more specialised and preventative support services.

A lack of support for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers also emerged, with one respondent noting that:

“We've seen increased levels of migration which has been changing our demographic significantly but the services that exist in the borough have not adapted to this change”.

This highlights a gap in support offered around immigration or legal advice, of on housing support or debt for asylum seekers and refugees.

Q52: Are there any new or emerging needs you've observed?

Respondents pointed that there are many people facing increasing uncertainty and precarity, with one noting:

“It's always been there but a real increase in housing, debt and poverty related needs”.

Specific emergent needs included:

- Youth mental health, particularly the rising access thresholds
- SEND support
- Cost of living assistance
- Housing and homelessness pressures
- Digital needs, especially for older people.

Q53: What services or resources are most urgently needed to meet demand?

Whilst responses emphasised the need for increased funding, especially for more specialised services, there was strong desire for better recognition of the local provision already there and collaboration with between organisations too. One respondent noted that they want:

“Better signposting, support and understanding (from the LA and SEL ICB) of local organisations that already exist to support these people”

This also extended to the visibility of services in communities, with organisations expressing the desire to reach new audiences who are most in need of services.

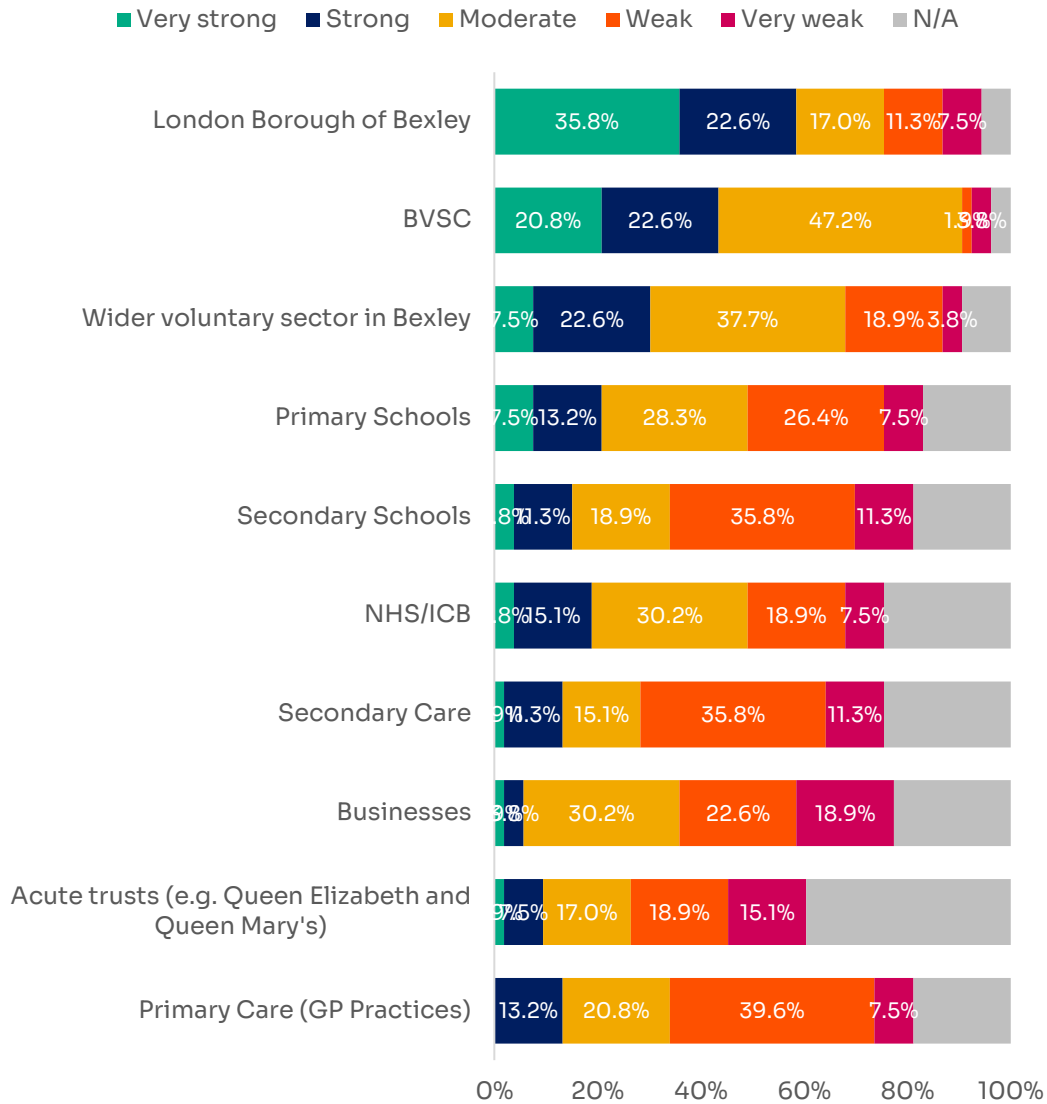
There is also a clear demand for more targeted and people-centred support for broader mental health services, SEND provision, activities for young people outside of school, financial guidance and cost-of-living assistance (including food banks).

5.7 Partnerships and Collaboration

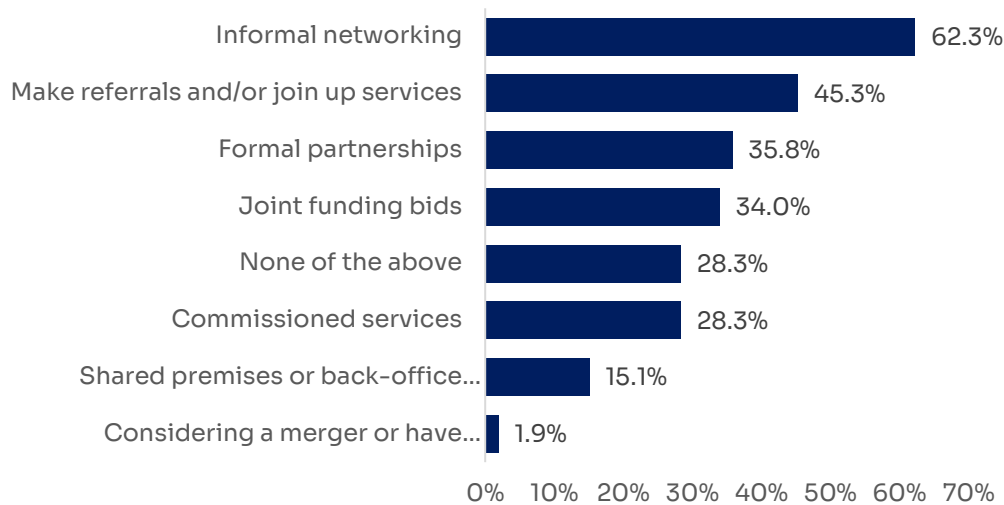
The strength of partnerships and collaboration with other organisations varies significantly. Collaboration and partnerships with the London Borough of Bexley and BVSC is positive, however collaboration with the wider voluntary service appears weaker, particularly within the healthcare sector and schools. This suggests that there are opportunities for deeper cross-sector working that could strengthen service delivery and reduce fragmentation.

This suggests that there are opportunities to develop better connections between organisations in Bexley, with under half making referrals or joining up services, having formal partnerships, or applying for joint funding bids. This indicates significant potential for increased collaboration that could strengthen service integration, reduce duplication, and enhance resilience and impact.

Q54. How would you describe your partnerships and collaboration with: (n=53)



Q55. Do you take part in any of the following
(please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Q56: What would help improve collaboration across sectors in Bexley?

Cross sector collaboration in Bexley requires better networking structures and improved transparency, both between VCSE organisations and local services including the NHS and Bexley Council.

The main suggestion included creating accessible opportunities for networking, including online forums or WhatsApp groups for informal knowledge sharing, or hosting quarterly strategic meeting. Some responses highlighted the importance of having an online option to participate, having previously missed out on in person networking opportunities due to lack of capacity.

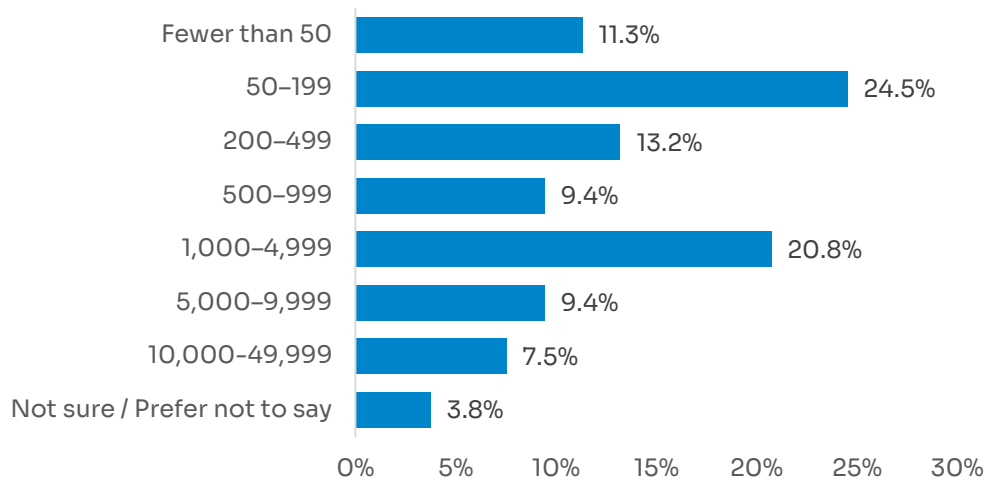
Getting to know one another, increasing transparency and trust between organisations, getting to know one another, can allow them to work together better. One response noted the importance of

“Understanding the various organisations and what they do and then pull our strengths together to address the challenges we face”.

5.8 Impact and Value

The number of individuals directly supported by organisations varies significantly in Bexley, with the most common answers being 50 – 199, and 1,000 – 4,999. This reflects a diverse sector comprising both smaller or localised organisations and larger services with substantial reach.

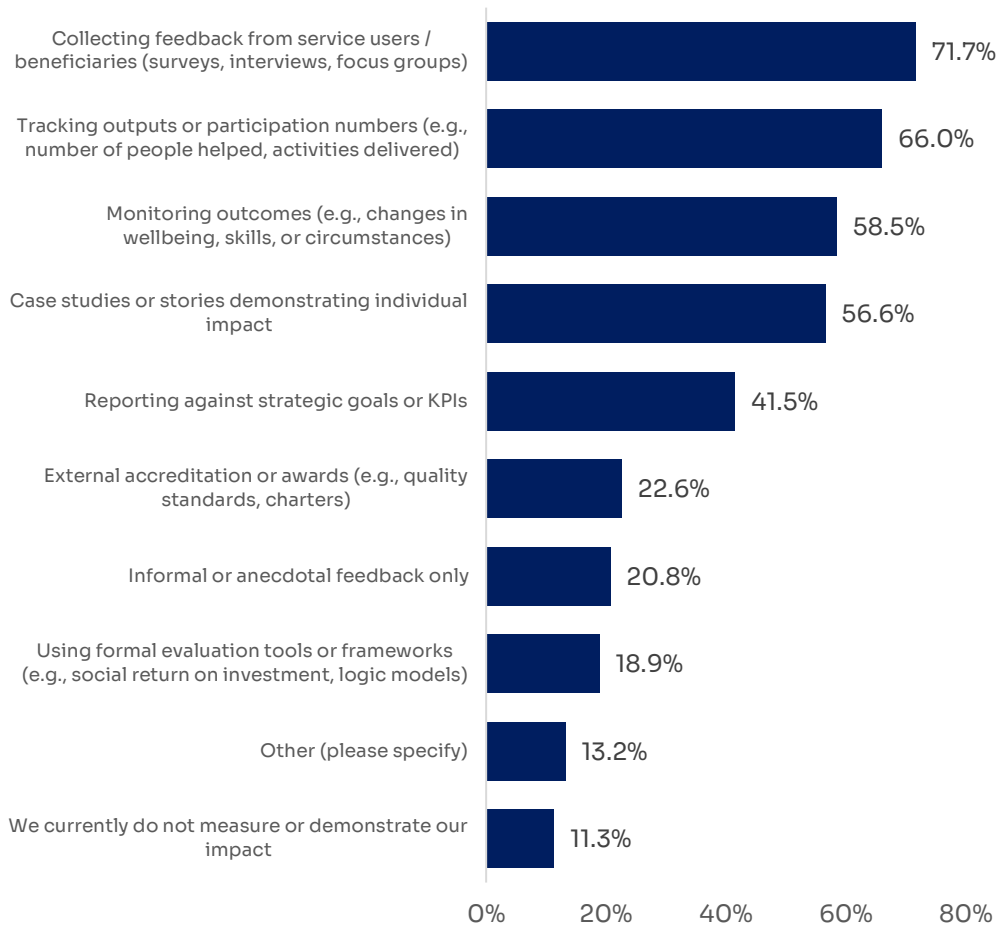
Q57. Approximately how many individuals did you directly support in the last 12 months? (n=53)



Nearly 9 in 10 organisations in Bexley employ some form of impact measurement, demonstrating a strong sector-wide understanding of the importance of monitoring and evaluation. The most common approaches include collecting feedback from service users, tracking and monitoring outcomes against strategic goals, and using case studies or stories.

Six organisations reported that they don't measure impact. Of these, the majority are volunteer led. This suggests that those who are volunteer led are less likely to measure impact, suggesting that this is because they have less capacity. This also suggests a particular support need for BVSC to address.

Q58. How do you currently measure or demonstrate your impact? (Please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Q59: What support would help improve your data collection, evaluation, or storytelling?

Whilst some organisations demonstrated that capacity and funding was key to improving data collection, many responses highlighted a range of different support options that BVSC could offer.

Targeted training needs included SROI analysis, storytelling or creating case studies, using social media, communication strategies, and digital such as CRM systems.

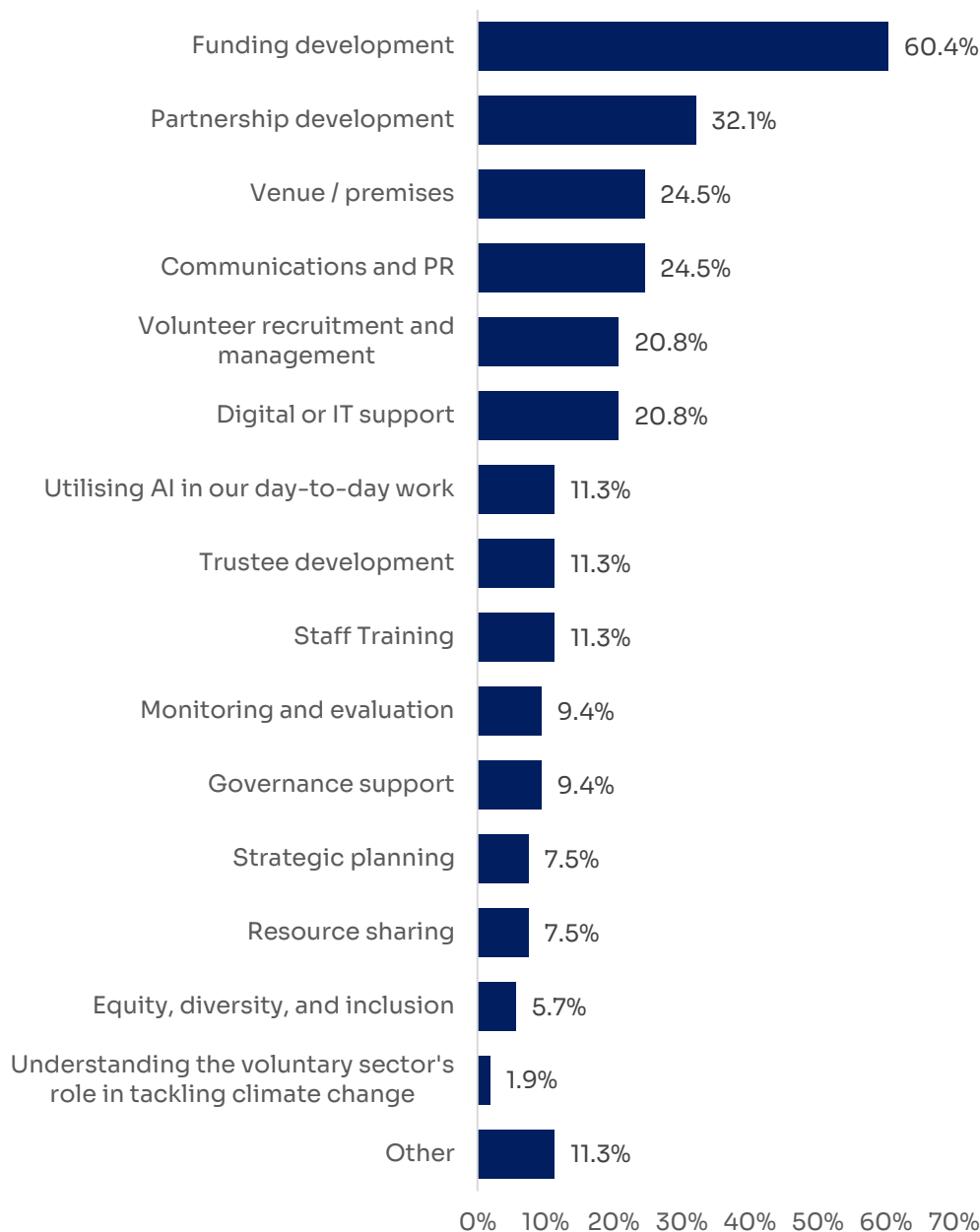
Additionally, some noted having that having opportunities to collaborate with other organisations to learn about how they collect evaluating data would be beneficial, perhaps through peer networking. There was also a desire to learn more about different ways of collecting feedback beyond evaluation forms, with one response noting

“Evaluation forms do not achieve a high return, yet verbal conversations show that they greatly value our services”.

5.9 Organisational and Support Needs

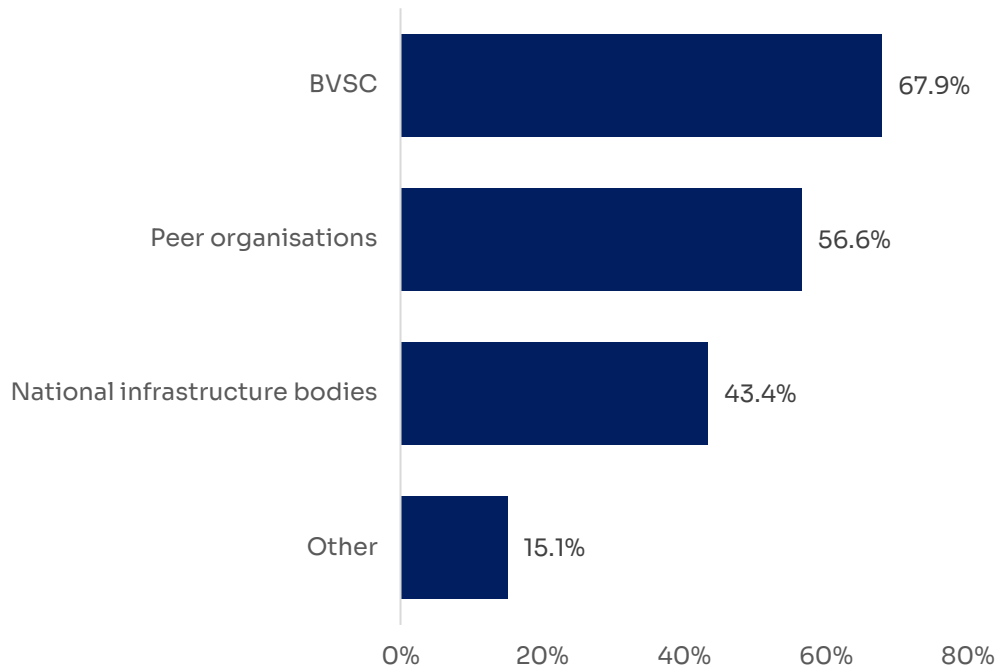
Funding emerges as the critical priority, with 60% of organisations identifying it as one of their top concerns. The remaining needs identified were around partnership development, venue access, communications, volunteer recruitment, and digital or IT support. Whilst financial support is the primary concern, organisations also require operational and infrastructural support to function effectively.

Q60. What are your top three support needs?



BVSC dominates local support provision, with 68% of Bexley organisations currently utilising support. However, it also indicates a gap, with nearly a third of organisations not using BVSC support, presenting an opportunity for BVSC to expand thier reach. Just over half also find support with peer organisations or national infrastructure bodies.

Q61. Where do you currently go for support?
(please tick all that apply) (n=53)



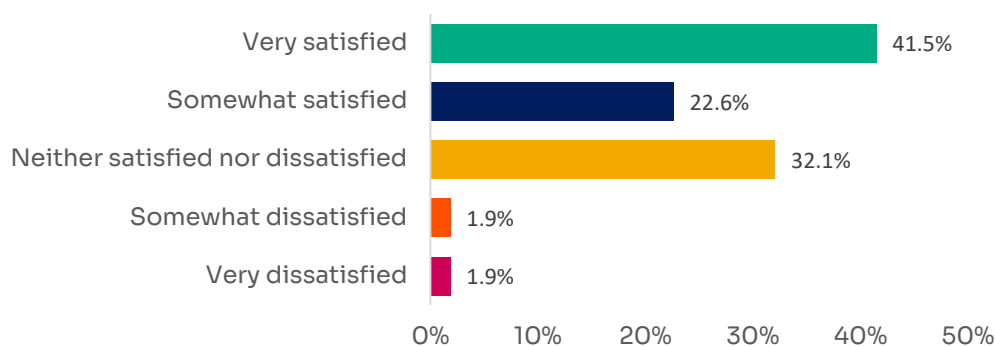
Whilst nearly half of organisations view BVSC’s current offer favourably, demand for further support exists across four key areas: communicating better with the local authority, providing funding guidance, facilitating collaboration and networking between organisations, and training. This indicates that BVSC could diversify and expand support rather than deepen existing provision.

Just over 3 in 5 organisations are either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the support that BVSC offers to the sector. Less than 4% are dissatisfied with the support, suggesting BVSC already does well to support the sector.

Q62. Are there ways that BVSC can improve it's offer to the local voluntary sector? (please tick all that apply) (n=53)



Q63. How satisfied are you with BVSCs support offer to the sector?



Q64: What other services would you like BVSC to provide?

While respondents were broadly positive about the services BVSC currently delivers, they also identified several areas where additional support could be beneficial.

A key theme was the need for stronger engagement with the VCSE and more effective representation of its views. Respondents highlighted the importance of BVSC advocating for the sector in statutory meetings with the local authority, ensuring that VCSE perspectives are clearly communicated. This also included keeping organisations informed about significant developments, such as the introduction of new Integrated Care Boards (ICBs).

Alongside this, respondents expressed interest in more practical, hands-on support. This included requests for tailored 1:1 advice on areas such as data collection, bid writing and review, and safeguarding.

Finally, many organisations emphasised the value of increased opportunities to connect with peers. There was a strong appetite for forums, particularly online or at accessible times, where organisations could share their work, exchange learning, and discuss successes and challenges.

Q65: Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experience, challenges, or needs as a Bexley-based organisation?

Many respondents expressed strong appreciation for BVSC's work and the support it currently provides, alongside a clear passion for their own work within Bexley. However, this was coupled with growing concern about the ongoing challenges facing the borough. Respondents highlighted a desire for a more comprehensive local needs analysis, as well as improved access to information to help residents find and receive support.

A commonly raised challenge was the perceived disconnect between the local authority and the voluntary and community sector (VCSE). Many organisations expressed a strong desire for closer collaboration, including better connections with the council and increased direct funding for Bexley-based organisations, or more coordinated support at a borough level. As one respondent noted:

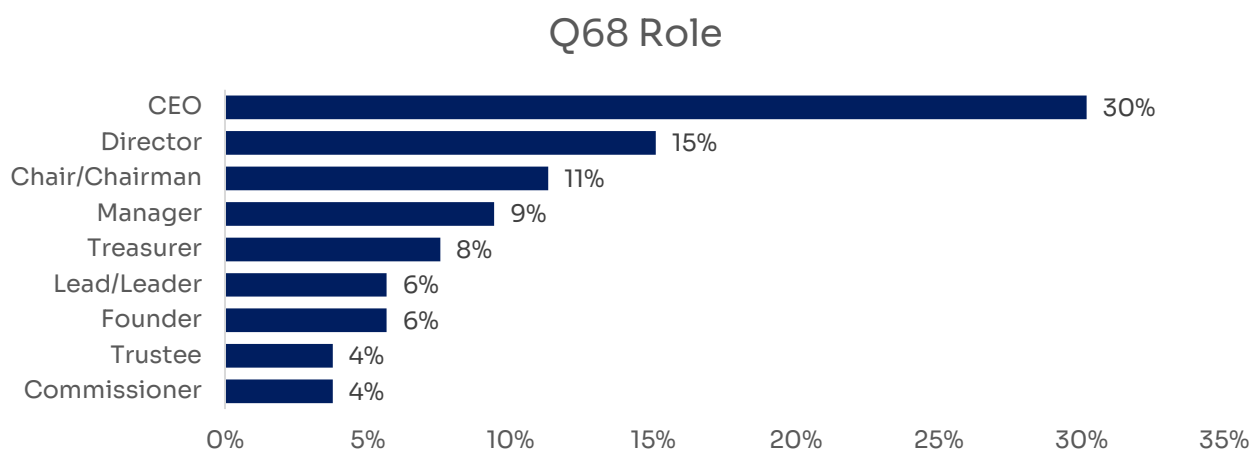
“There are so many groups in Bexley that want to help people but need support, if the council recognised the sector more, we could help them support the residents”.

Finally, respondents identified a significant barrier relating to funding. There is a perceived mismatch between Bexley's actual levels of deprivation and how the borough is viewed by external funders. This can limit access to funding opportunities and constrain the sector's ability to effectively respond to local needs.

Q68 Role

The open-text responses were collated and analysed to understand respondent profile.

As visible in the chart, over half of the respondents were at leadership level roles in respective organisations.



About Rocket Science

Rocket Science is a social purpose business, working towards a future where everyone can live healthy, happy, and fulfilling lives.

Our objectives are to help our clients reimagine systems, maximise investment to have the greatest impact and transform lifetime outcomes using a whole-person and prevention lens. We do this through research, mapping and analysis, evaluation and impact measurement, strategy and service design, participatory and peer research, learning, collaboration, and end to end fund management.

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