

## BVSC State of the Sector in Bexley Review 2019

Final Report

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# 1. Executive Summary

This State of the Sector review of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCFS) in Bexley coincides with transformational change across the VCFS organisational landscape in Bexley. This change is catalysed by shifts in the way that national, regional and local civil society needs to operate to build and sustain communities; a scaling up of the challenge to all sectors in Bexley to work collaboratively within a complex ecosystem where traditional sector boundaries are increasingly blurred; and physical, economic and demographic changes taking place within Bexley on an unprecedented scale and rate. All of this is accompanied by continuing austerity and the need for the sector to continue to do what it does best - support the health and wellbeing of Bexley residents.

There are more than 800 VCFS organisations, including 407 registered charities, and up to 1,200 if very small issue- or local neighbourhood-based organisations are included. The size and income range and scale reveals a combination of small organisations that have great local knowledge, connections and community trust, but are highly dependent upon volunteers and particularly vulnerable to income fluctuations, and large organisations with capacity to play a full and active role in service commissioning and contribute to big picture thinking on service transformations.

There are strong thematic focuses on physical and mental health and support for children, young people, families and older people. The largest organisations work within the health sector and care for older people, chiming with contemporary demographic challenges.

A significant uplift in recent demand for services is evident and some gaps in provision were identified. Perceived gaps in provision correspond, in the main, to the need to supplement services for young people, carers, people leaving care and people with mental health issues. There is also a close correlation between perceived gaps in provision and issues arising as a result of emerging national and local civil society policy frameworks and local development-related and demographic changes in Bexley. These include collaborative working, government policy knowledge and supporting new communities. Balancing the need to achieve sufficient coverage across disparate communities in the south of the borough and additional, new, communities in the north is challenging the sector and spurring discussions on rationalising structures and organisation bases and the need to focus more on driving up partnering and collaboration.

Most organisations had not undergone significant structural changes or changes to their status since their establishment. Where changes of this nature had taken place, or were being considered, these tended to be catalysed by the requirement for greater collaboration in response to population growth and change in the north of the borough and/or new rigours around partnering and collaboration that a greater level of commissioning will bring.

A great deal of value is placed upon the volunteers that support VCFS organisations, who undertake a variety of roles from one-to-one and group-based beneficiary-facing work to back office support,



marketing and promotion. The importance of the role of trustees was similarly valued in terms of providing challenge, guidance, maintaining quality, supporting senior staff and adding weight to organisations' capacity and expertise to negotiate and collaborate.

Recruitment of staff, volunteers and trustees was considered a challenge by most, with only 13% finding staff recruitment 'Easy' and even fewer in relation to the recruitment of volunteers and trustees. A variety of approaches were adopted to recruit volunteers and trustees, with few quoting strategic, cross-borough initiatives; relying rather on their own individual contacts and approaches.

Organisations quoted different experiences in relation to premises. Over two thirds of those surveyed felt that their premises was 'secure', but real concerns were expressed around the suitability of premises, key determinants of which were affordability, the flexibility and responsiveness of the landlord, general condition and suitability for those with access needs.

Organisations are dependent upon mixed models of grant funding; component parts being grants, contracts and asset based investments. The largest proportion of survey respondents quoted 'donations and individual giving' as elements of their income stream, followed by 'grants from national trust/foundations/other', reinforcing the need for skills and capacity to access philanthropic giving and highly competitive trust regimes. Three quarters of survey respondents said they were 'very' or 'fairly' concerned about the sustainability of their funding. Taking key sources and levels of external funding being awarded to Bexley in recent years by way of a barometer of relative success and a comparator of performance with statistical neighbours, it is evident that there is scope for Bexley to drive up performance in terms of the number and level of successful grant awards.

Informal connections with, and referrals between, either VCFS organisations and others outside the sector are significantly more prevalent than relationships that involve high levels of inter-agency collaborative working; the latter becoming increasingly important as the statutory sector devolves responsibility for delivery and even statutory responsibility to VCFS organisations.

Significant positive impacts attributed to the sector by VCFS and public stakeholders alike include plugging gaps and adding value to statutory services; achieving efficiencies and engaging with communities in ways that drive up service quality and savings to the public purse; making prevention a reality; connecting with the most isolated and vulnerable communities and enriching and saving lives; and providing powerful, accurate insights into local needs and expertise on how to address them. Weaknesses and struggles revolved around bringing collaboration rather than competitiveness to the fore in terms of sector operational traits; ensuring consistency of quality across the sector; articulating the profile of the sector, the variety of support it provides and the impact it delivers; and balancing day-to-day delivery with the need to step back, review, reflect and adjust.

Immediate sector support needs focus upon the generation of sustainable income, followed by support for effective governance and collaboration. The majority of survey respondents would look



first to BVSC for support, followed by peers and contacts; demonstrating reliance upon and trust in local VCFS relationships.

## Headline Statistics

- An 800 strong complement of VCFS organisations, rising to 1,200 with the inclusion of very small, issue- or local community-focused groups. 407 registered charities.
- 56% of registered charities generate an annual income of up to £25,000, a further 18% generate between £25,000 and £100,000 and 7% generate over £1million.
- 92% of organisations experienced an increase in demand for services in the last 3 years. 86% quoted a score of 80 or above where 100 equals extremely high level of uplift.
- Up to 25,000 people per year receive face-to-face support from individual VCFS organisations, rising to 85,000 indirect beneficiaries.
- An individual trustee can contribute up to 50 hours support per month for their organisation.
- One organisation alone quotes support from between 500 and 600 volunteers at any one time. Across the sector, an average of 10 hours per month contributed by each volunteer.
- 75% of organisations make referrals or join up their services with others. 80% network informally.

## Key Recommendations

The recommendations arising from the review focus around key themes. A suggested lead for each recommendation is assigned to either (or a combination of) Bexley VCFS organisations, BVSC and the London Borough of Bexley. A summary of the recommendations is set out below:

...for VCFS organisations, in order to respond, effectively, to new and different challenges and the need to continue to predict and respond to community health and wellbeing needs:

- drive up partnership working and collaboration; an openness and commitment to 'better together'.
- take practical action to reduce reliance upon statutory and grant funding and apply greater focus to diversifying sources of income and building capacity to compete successfully for funds. This includes taking full advantage of the income support training provided by BVSC.
- dedicate additional resource to the development of case study materials in order to demonstrate successes and impact.
- embrace the opportunities that greater use of digital technology and social media presents for operational efficiencies, reaching communities and profile raising.
- help BVSC to help the VCFS by consistently supplying to BVSC intelligence on local community needs; issues and challenges facing individual organisations or service sectors/sub-sectors; opportunities that will drive up the quality and breadth of service delivery; and case studies on successes and impacts that will help to raise the profile of the sector and pinpoint value that clearly demonstrates to statutory partners the benefits of engaging and partnering with the VCFS.



...for BVSC

- Scale up actions to raise the profile and awareness of the VCFS, showcasing successes and impact, and support greater use of digital technology and social media to enable this to happen.
- Extend and develop the existing framework to promote and deliver volunteering opportunities.
- Support the engagement of the VCFS in commissioning, inspiring statutory and VCFS organisations alike by providing practical examples of 'what works', particularly around social value-based commissioning.

...for London Borough of Bexley

- Drive up external VCFS grant income. Identify, lobby for and co-ordinate place-based funding coming into the borough.
- Develop a strategy to maximise use of community assets and hubs in support of community benefit and VCFS sustainability.
- Establish a framework to develop a full and effective role for the VCFS in commissioning, focusing particularly upon social value-based commissioning.
- Build and extend connections between the VCFS, businesses and housing associations in order to lever additional knowledge, skills, expertise and resource into the VCFS.

... in order to maximise the potential for BVSC and London Borough of Bexley to support the VCFS

- Define the respective roles of the London Borough of Bexley and BVSC in order to ensure that both play to their strengths in providing full and effective infrastructure support to the VCFS in Bexley.

## 2. Introduction

In October 2018, Bexley Voluntary Service Council (BVSC) appointed Rocket Science to undertake a review of the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) in Bexley. The purpose of the review was to identify:

- The profile of the sector in Bexley including the services it provides and who it supports;
- The financial health of the VCFS in terms of income sources and associated trends impacting upon organisational sustainability;
- Any issues around governance and recruitment;



- Challenges and opportunities facing VCFS organisations, contextualised by factors defining the contemporary operational environment as well as determinants of the direction of travel;
- Organisation support needs, the sources of support used and preferred learning methods;
- The nature and level of collaboration within the sector and with other, predominantly public, agencies; and
- Some key messages demonstrating the impact of the sector.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 A range of approaches

Rocket Science employed a range of complementary quantitative and qualitative research methods, designed to elicit a range of perspectives, building in both elements of co-design with Bexley VCFS as well as challenge by inviting participation by other local stakeholders. The approach consisted of the following elements:

#### ***Review inception meeting:***

Rocket Science met with BVSC and four other representatives of the Bexley VCFS in November 2018 order to agree the methodology and identify priorities for the lines of inquiry.

#### ***Desk research:***

In order to contextualise the research, we conducted a desk-based review of national, London-wide and Bexley-specific policies, strategies and data in order to determine the wider policy frameworks and local challenges, which collectively provide the Bexley VCFS operational platform, as well as identify the profile of the sector.

#### ***VCFS electronic survey:***

Drawing upon the context of the priorities identified in the inception meeting, the content and outcomes of the previous state of the sector survey conducted in 2014 and Rocket Science's experience – notably from conducting similar VCS reviews conducted in several other London boroughs – an online survey was designed and distributed to BVSC's VCFS database of 300 organisations.

The survey combined profiling questions, enabling the capture of structural characteristics specific to the organisation, and questions encouraging VCFS organisations to comment upon wider issues that would serve as indicators of the health of organisation and the sector as a whole including



challenges, factors impacting upon sustainability, relationships with others and support needs. The survey remained open for four weeks. In addition to the online survey, a paper survey was made available to organisations that preferred to complete it offline to maximise accessibility.

#### ***Stakeholder conversations:***

Focused by a discussion guide, the Rocket Science team and BVSC staff conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews with 17 stakeholders; a combination of Council staff and members, Clinical Commissioning Group representatives and VCFS organisations. VCFS stakeholders were selected on the basis that they would have sufficient scale to have an active involvement in public sector commissioning and, for some, an ability to contextualise their experience in Bexley with corresponding knowledge of operating in other boroughs or parts of the United Kingdom (UK). The list of stakeholders interviewed is set out in Appendix A.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and by telephone and were designed to elicit a range of perspectives on the sector and the challenges it faces predominantly, albeit not exclusively, from organisations external to the VCFS.

#### ***Workshop:***

Close to the completion of the research, Rocket Science facilitated a workshop at Bexley Central Library, Bexleyheath which was attended by 17 representatives of VCFS organisations. The purpose of the workshop was to share, test and add depth to initial key findings and to help to shape some practical recommendations and conclusions.

## **3.2 Note on the scale and representativeness of the VCFS contributions**

This report draws upon data garnered from all of the above approaches. 46 organisations responded to the online survey: just under 15% of those contacted. We believe that the response rate could have been affected by the fact that, at the time our survey was conducted, the Council was approaching completion of its own consultation on the Bexley Connected Communities Strategy 2019 – 23, which included a VCFS survey and meetings with groups and key interest organisations. That said, together, these two consultations provide a rich seam of insights into the health of the sector and its priorities at a key moment in time.

Although we have been careful to avoid over-reliance on the online survey data, the combination of research methods – use of open source data and insights from the VCFS who participated in the online survey, stakeholder interviews and workshops - collectively reflect a good cross-section of the VCFS in Bexley:

- Open source online data reflected all registered charities located within the Borough;





- The top beneficiary groups of organisations responding to the online survey reflected those of the registered charities in Bexley (young people, children and people with disabilities and mental health issues).
- With the exception of very small organisations, there was good income spread across respondents to the online survey; income being a key determinant of organisation size and trends. This included a good sample of those earning below £100,000.
- The attendees of the workshop represented predominantly very small and small organisations, mostly relying upon teams of less than five staff members and the goodwill of volunteers for their sustainability.

As the research progressed, it became evident that undertaking a fine-grained analysis of the precise number and focus of all of the VCSF organisations in the borough (which would require extrapolation and extensive use of assumptions) and quantifying and comparing and contrasting the sector now with its profile in 2014, would not be the most productive use of resource. Instead, most benefit would derive from garnering insights into qualitative feedback to reveal essential requirements for the health of organisations and the sector generally and practical actions that would support BVSC to provide quality support in what is, perhaps the most testing time for the sector in decades.



## 4. Key Drivers Behind the VCFS Operational Landscape in Bexley

The following summary describes two key component parts of the context for Bexley's VCFS's operations, which, together, paint a picture of:

- shifts in the way that national, regional and local civil society needs to operate in order to respond to need through the underpinning prisms of community and place;
- the way in which support and services need to connect with and respond to communities in support of cohesion and 'good growth'; and
- a significant scaling up of the challenge to all sectors in Bexley to work collaboratively within a complex civil society ecosystem where traditional sectoral boundaries are increasingly blurred.

### 4.1 The National and Regional context for the promotion of Civil Society

This research took place at a time of unprecedented societal, political and economic change. The combined effects of a decade of austerity and the deep divisions exposed by the process of Brexit suggest that a new form of lasting social settlement and community healing is required. A recent study by the New Local Government Network (NLGN) argues that following settlements based on universal welfare provision (1945-80) and the more recent market-driven approach to services, we are now entering a new phase in the relationship between the state and the independent voluntary/charitable sector. NLGN defines this as "the community paradigm" requiring radical rethinking of public service design and delivery.

Many local authorities in London and across the country – including Bexley - are already undergoing major transformation programmes, reviewing their strategic priorities and ways of working. At the same time, civil society organisations are under increasing scrutiny and, in the wake of some high-profile failings, experiencing declining levels of public trust. The Charity Commission's Statement of Strategic Intent, 2018-23 is clear on the need to hold charities more to account given the privileges associated with acquiring charitable status. The conclusion of an extensive 2-year Inquiry, Civil Society Futures, is that many civil society organisations need to change, but that "to change for the future, all of us within civil society and those who interact with it need to respond with care, courage and commitment." These are crucial contextual dynamics, which are redefining a more inclusive civil society for the mid c21st at the same time as changing the nature of relationships between its component parts, not least the state (in the form of local government) and the VCFS.

The world in which Councils and other statutory service providers coexist is undergoing irrevocable change. We are moving from a situation in which statutory organisations provide services, to one in



which (with reduced resources) they become co-producers of outcomes with other partners from across civil society and a supporter of social action and mutual aid. There are associated unprecedented expectations of the voluntary and community organisations to step up as an equal to the statutory sector, sitting at the same table as visionary; strategist; partner; contractor/deliverer; learner and communicator of what works; connector of, and to, services; mentor to peers; and, simultaneously, act as advocate for the VCFS and communities *and* partner to the state.

This state of flux brings particular challenges and demands for VCFS organisations and providers of infrastructure support.

The following are the key component elements of the national and regional policy context, and calls to action towards greater collaboration, that are most relevant to the Bexley VCFS review, conclusions and recommendations:

- [The Government's Civil Society Strategy 2018](#), which recognises five civil society drivers and places expectations and responsibilities upon the component parts of each: People (for a connected and resourceful society), Places (with a clear focus on opportunities for young people), the Social sector (promoting philanthropy and bringing different sources of funding and investment together for social impact), the Private sector (promoting responsible business practice and good growth) and the Public sector (advocating a revival of grant-making and associated flexibilities and collaborative commissioning, where caution is exercised over the placing of rigid best value measures that can act as barriers to smaller, diverse civil society initiatives in particular).
- [Julia Unwin's Civil Society Futures, 2018](#) with its underpinning PACT principles of Power (significantly shifting power, sharing more decision making and creating the conditions for all to play full role in things that matter to them); Accountability (putting people first and sharing responsibility for that), Connection (creating and deepening connections with people and communities and bridging economic and social divides) and Trust (staying true to our values, standing up for them and trusting others with vital decisions that affect them).
- [More, Better, Together – A Strategic Review of Giving in London, September 2018](#) considered five different forms of charitable giving in London. It concluded that whilst London is a national and global centre for philanthropy, Londoners' giving of time and money has dropped over the last five years (by 8%) and they are relatively less generous than the rest of the country; there is a disconnect between the wealthiest and their engagement in philanthropy; corporate community involvement and the giving of time and skills tends to focus on central and inner East London and outer London boroughs struggle to compete; and in response to public sector cuts there has been a rise in collaborative grant making and joint investment. Its recommendations include calls upon London funders to collaborate, engage in 'Funder Plus' activity where finance is accompanied by capacity building support; and seek/recognise individuals and organisations that give most and give best. A complementary review of Place-based Giving – Funding,



Engaging and Creating Stronger Communities by the Office of Civil Society, considered successful place-based giving schemes and advocated a scaling up of actions to create more.

- **National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) Commission – Change for Good, January 2015**, set out the need for infrastructure organisations to be flexible, adapt and look forward rather than default too much to a ‘business as usual’ agenda, partly because the sector “doesn’t know what it doesn’t know” and may not have been exposed to the potential of new forms of support and service delivery. The Way Ahead, co-ordinated by London Funders, explored the need to affect a ‘systems change’ to ensure the capital retains a vibrant civil society with the required access to business, technical and enterprise support, as well as a voice on the ongoing debate about London, its governance and the issues it faces. City Bridge Trust’s associated 2017 review of local infrastructure and civil society support in London informed programmes for future investment in pan-London infrastructure from April 2018, including the Cornerstone Fund, seeking inspiration for making best use of civil society assets and resources.

## 4.2 The local context for the Bexley VCFS operational landscape

In terms of the local policy context, key for the VCFS is the development of the Bexley Connected Communities Strategy, which seeks to build capacity and resilience across the VCFS in Bexley and corral the sector in supporting key civil society actions across four strategic pillars; in many ways a local reflection of the Civil Society Strategy 2019 – 23. At the time of this research, a consultation on the Strategy was adding depth to the detail on collective action to shape communities and solutions to local challenges.

The draft Connected Communities Strategy quotes a further 12 key borough strategies, excluding the recently published NHS Ten Year Plan, all of which have a bearing upon the local context for VCFS actions in Bexley; combining to create a complex set of policy and action trajectories within which the VCFS will need to adjust and play to its strengths in order to connect communities to associated opportunities.

The London Borough of Bexley is characterised by geographical and socio- economic contrasts. The English Indices of Deprivation 2015 portray, overall, a relatively affluent borough:

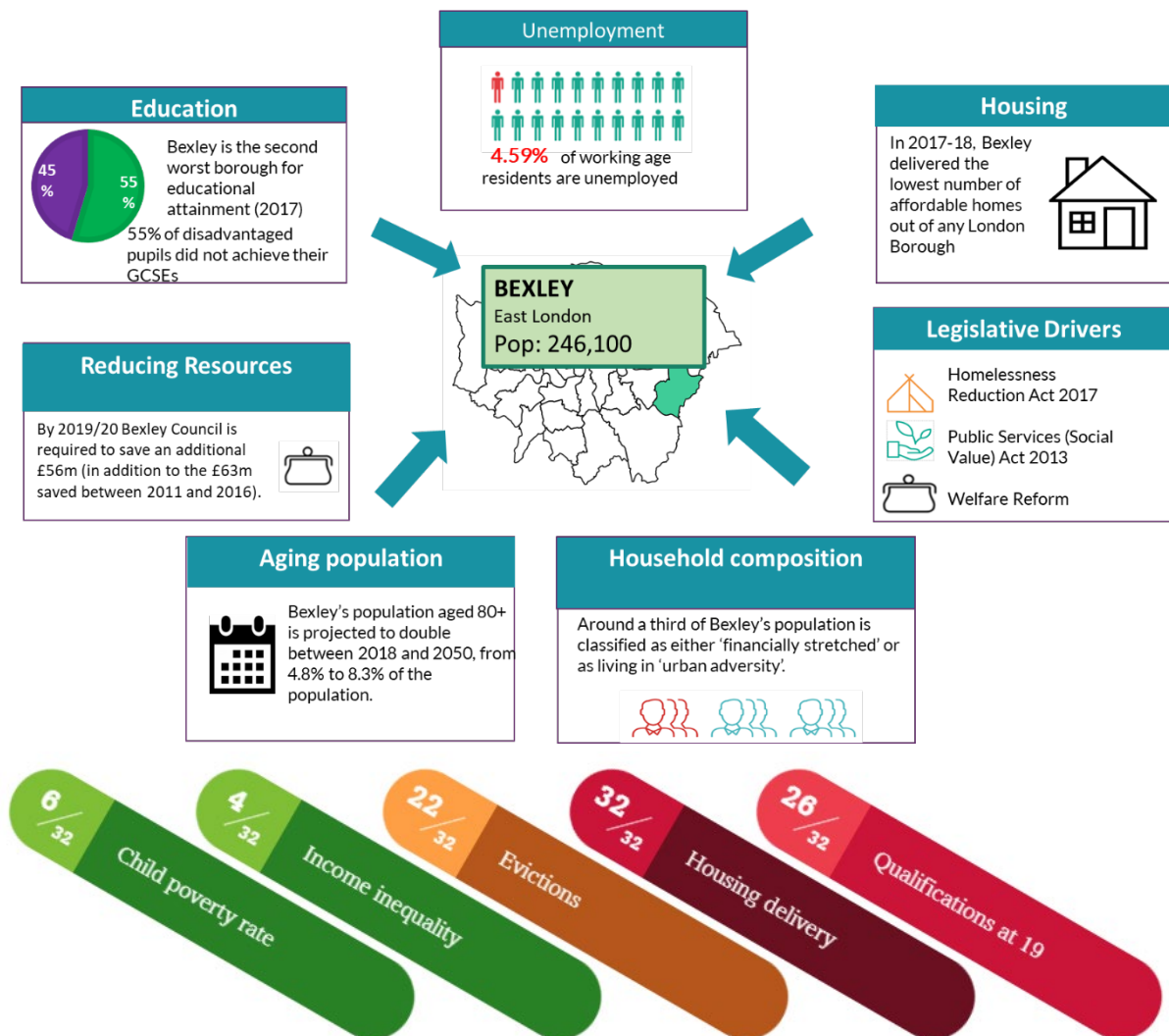
- It ranks 8<sup>th</sup> in London, where 1<sup>st</sup> is the least deprived borough and there are no neighbourhoods, or super-output areas, that are in the most deprived 10% in the country – a common measure of significant and serious comparative disadvantage. 14 of its neighbourhoods are in the top 10% that are least deprived.
- It has low income inequality.
- Although only 1% of housing completions in Bexley are currently affordable – private rents for low earners in Bexley is the second most affordable in London.



- Unemployment in Bexley is relatively low. Currently, at 4.9% unemployment has remained, consistently below the London rate and generally reflected the UK as a whole.

However, the following diagram provides a snapshot of key characteristics, which begin to demonstrate how this overarching affluence masks disadvantage and issues undermining a healthy society.

**Figure 1: Bexley – a summary of key characteristics**

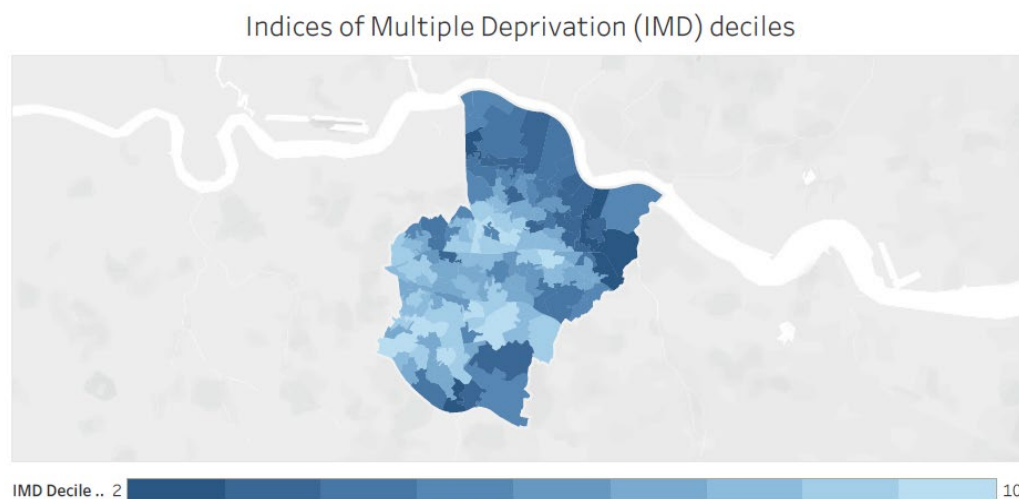


Source: London's Poverty Profile, Trust for London and New Policy Institute, March 2019

Disadvantage within Bexley is focused in neighbourhoods located in bands across the north and south of the borough; particularly within Thamesmead East, Belvedere, Erith and Cray Meadows wards. This is demonstrated on the heat map below, where the darker colouring denotes the highest levels of deprivation.



**Figure 2: Indices of multiple deprivation**



*Source: Indices of Multiple Deprivation (Deciles), 2015 (L.B. Bexley ward profiles)*

We asked the stakeholder interviewees and the VCFS what they felt to be the key local drivers that were influencing the needs and aspirations of the communities they support. Their responses are summarised below:

- **Unprecedented growth in the north:** The north of Bexley is experiencing growth on a par with a 'new town expansion', with an additional 30,000 homes – including unfamiliar, high-rise developments - being built in Erith, Thamesmead, Belvedere and yet more growth across the borough boundary around Ebbsfleet. This growth is bringing with it:
  - Physical and service infrastructure requirements (health, schools, housing, transport, leisure);
  - A shifting focus away from 'dormitory' to a stronger indigenous, self-sustaining economy and the need to engage communities with this change;
  - A growth in demographic diversity, with the introduction of a younger and more ethnically diverse community. This has spurred the need to reconsider what the new 'welcome' to Bexley should look like within the context of new and different needs and aspirations, including the requirement for a culturally competent VCFS workforce that resonates with new communities and the need for support and services to pivot more to the north; and
  - A great opportunity to 'shape the place', in the early growth stages, before the burgeoning of growth predicted to follow Crossrail.
- **An expanding north/south divide:** Already characterised by a sense that the north 'belongs' to London in terms of its geography and demographics whilst the south looks toward Kent, the



growth is reinforcing this. Some communities feel that this expansion is being accompanied by unaccustomed challenges, common to inner city areas rather than Bexley, including increasing incoming transient populations, incidences of homelessness and begging. There is a simultaneous juggling of priorities by cash strapped organisations and services, spurred by an associated need to re-think whether (and how) to focus support on dispersed communities and thinly spread services in the south, to pivot their focus northwards or look for ways to cover both.

- *A large and growing older population:* Bexley's older population is the third fastest growing in London, with attendant health and social issues (dementia, family fragmentation, isolation, end of life care, comorbidity) and associated service bias. Slade Green is currently a particular hot spot where support services for older people is in highest demand.
- *Perceived as prosperous, but there are pockets of deprivation:* Three schools in Bexley were included in the worst 11.6 percent of state-funded secondary schools in England in 2018<sup>1</sup>; less than 15% population is defined as 'healthy'<sup>2</sup>; two thirds over 45 are obese; and cardio-vascular disease is burgeoning. *'We are sitting on a time-bomb for health and social care'*. Vulnerable groups are suffering increasingly from alcohol and substance abuse and sexual health is poor.
- *Austerity - constricting of the public purse and 'red-lining' of discretionary funding:* *"The London Borough of Bexley is at the vanguard of implementing government cut imperatives, with another [£30m] to find..."* There is an increasing need to make less go further, with consequential challenges, particularly for small VCFS organisations dependent upon public funding for sustaining their services.
- *Large-scale policy and service provision change:* Four key challenges emerged:
  - The future will view people through the prisms of 'communities' and 'place', but matching words with deeds will require step changes in behaviours and practices.
  - The health sector is undergoing large-scale structural realignment in order to comply with the trajectory toward place-focused, person-centred provision and the devolution of service delivery to those closest to, and most able to support, communities.
  - The move away from a traditional commissioner/deliverer relationship to a partnership of equals and intelligence-led delivery will place high expectations of VCFS around collaboration, precision, performance and gathering and sharing learning.

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<sup>1</sup> Schools fall below the Government's performance threshold if students fail to make enough progress across eight subjects, with a particular focus on English and maths.

The three schools in Bexley falling short of the Government's floor standards are Bexleyheath Academy, Bexleyheath, Cleeve Park School, Sidcup and Welling School. Source [www.Gov.uk](http://www.Gov.uk) <https://www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk>

<sup>2</sup> The statistics relating to health in this paragraph were quoted during the course of the stakeholder interviews.





- There is a resultant catalysing of structural changes within VCFS organisations and across the sector. These include efficiency-focused changes - staff cuts, service realignment, more and better use of technology and structural refinements; exploring different legal entities and mergers and a realisation that partnership needs to become 'business as usual' rather than a 'nice to have'.
- *Government policy fallout:* The impact of Universal Credit is of particular concern as are increases in temporary housing with attendant risk of homelessness and trajectories towards poverty.

These issues point to a struggle to keep pace with fast-moving change, coupled with continuing austerity. These challenges are affecting not only the VCFS but the wider public sector, which is still defining its role within the context of the directions of travel.





## 5. Profile and Characteristics of the VCFS in the borough of Bexley

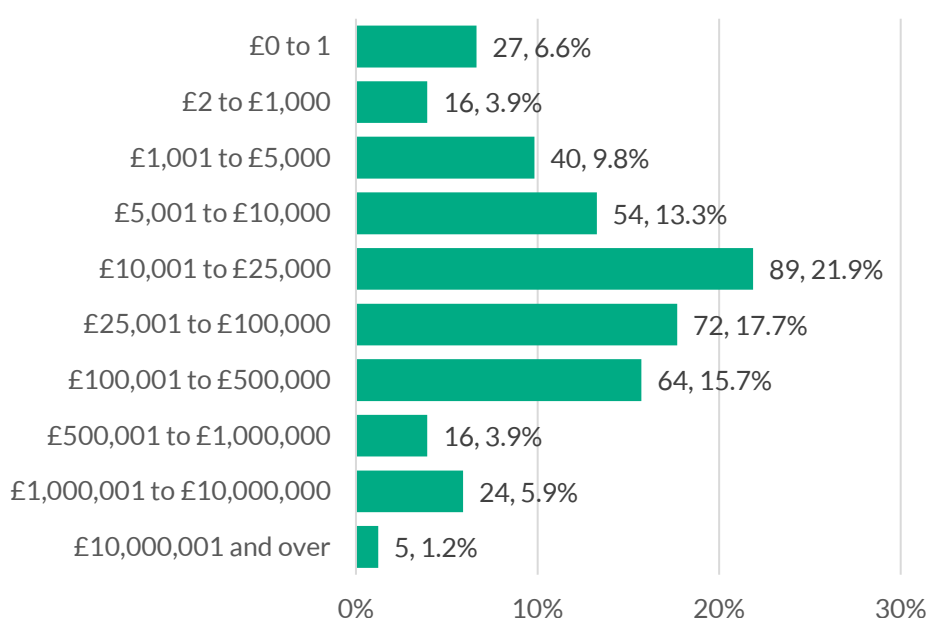
### 5.1 The profile of the sector

The profile of the sector should not be viewed - in isolation - as a determinant of the health of the VCFS in Bexley. However, it is an indicator of the level to which the scale of VCFS resource offers sufficient potential capacity to play a full and effective part in supporting and connecting with communities.

There are more than 800 VCFS organisations in Bexley, including 407 registered charities<sup>3</sup>. It has been estimated that there may be as many as 1,200 if very small, issue or very local community-focused groups are included. Figure 4 sets out the size of the registered charities by income, according to Charity Commission data 2019.

**Figure 3: Registered charities operating in Bexley by income**

*The figures to the right of each bar give the of charities in each category and, next, the percentage this category comprises of the entire population.*



*Source: Charity Commission March, 2019*

Around 56% of charities generate an income of up to £25,000, and a further 18%, generate between £25,000 and £100,000. The prevalence of small charities as a proportion of all VCFS organisations

<sup>3</sup> All Charity Commission data referenced in this report was sourced in March 2019

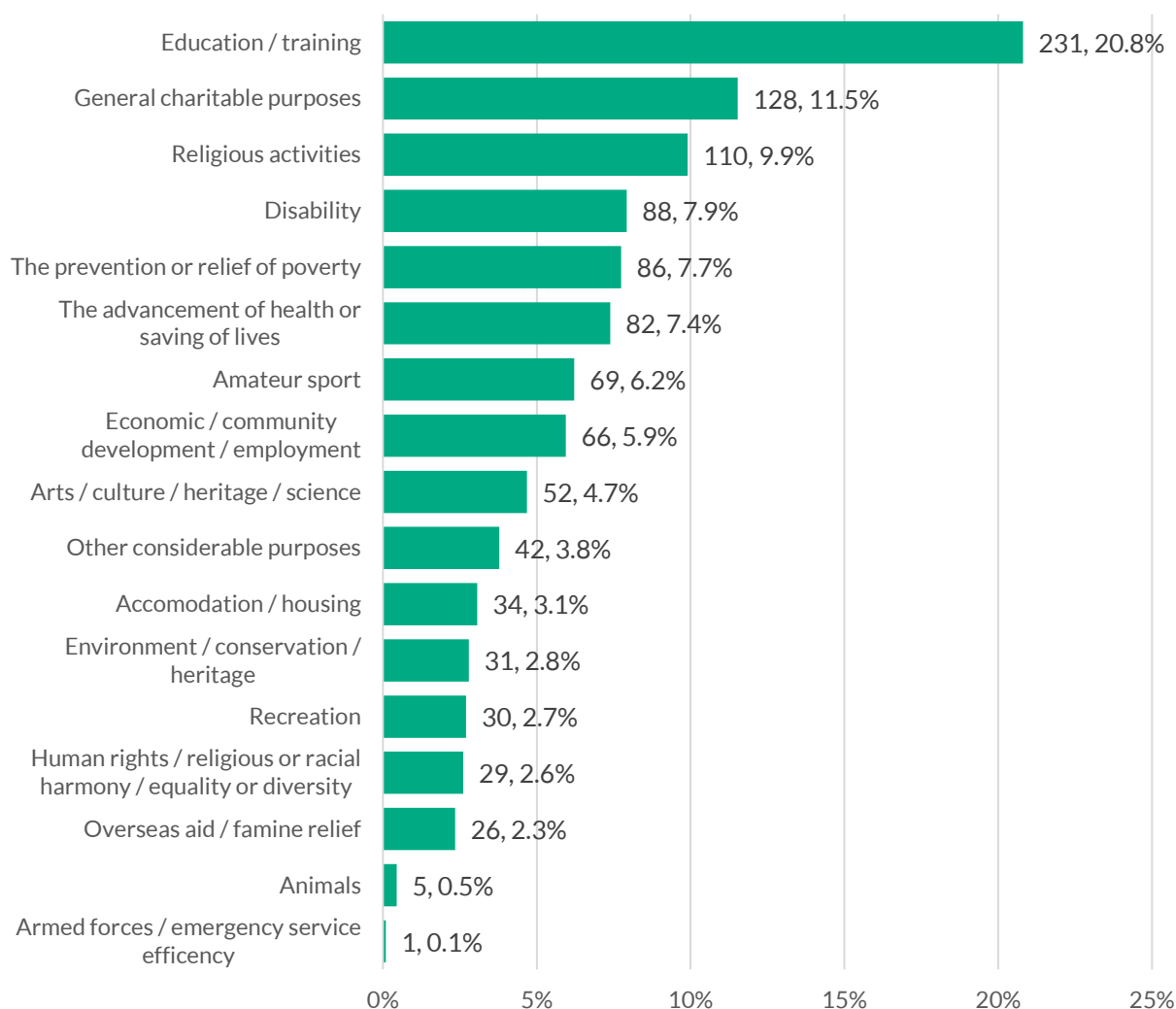


within Bexley, generally suggests a dependence upon volunteers and vulnerability to income fluctuations. At the other end of the scale, around 7% generate an income of over £1,000,000, indicating the presence of a good proportion of VCFS organisations with capacity to become involved in service commissioning; either in partnership or independently. The largest organisations work predominantly within the health sector (particularly mental health) and care for older people, which chimes with the demographic and health challenges set out in 3 above.

Figure 4 shows registered charities by their field of activity focus. N.B. individual charities may operate across more than one field.

#### Figure 4: Charities by field of focus

*The figures to the right of each bar give the of charities in each category and, next, the percentage this category comprises of the entire population*





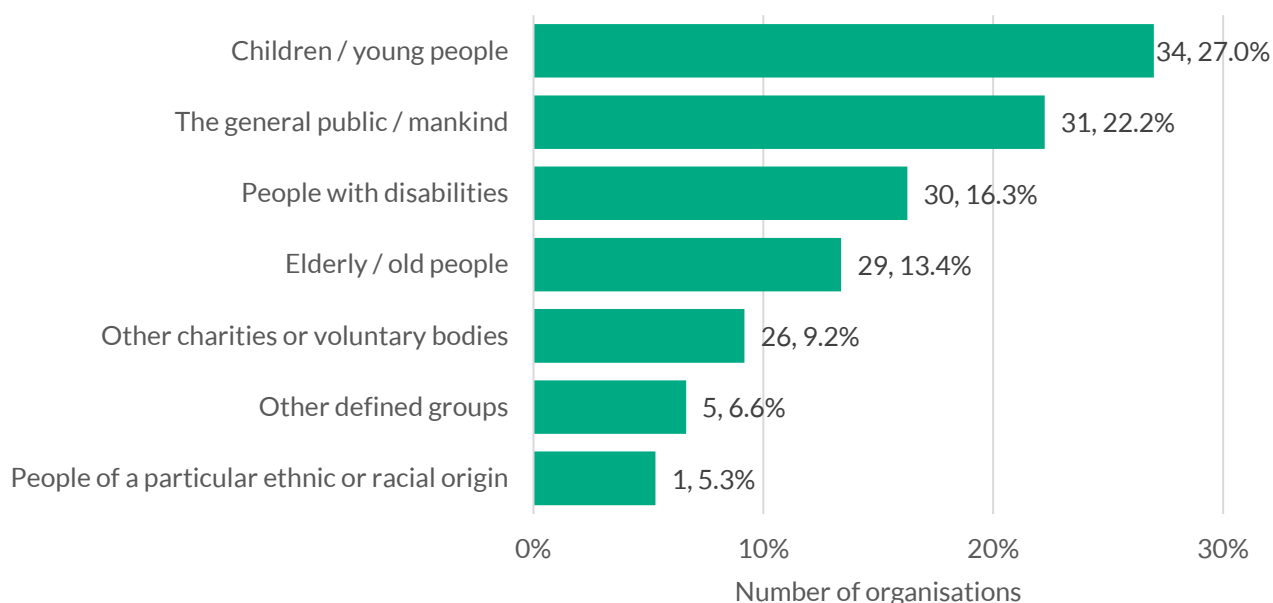
The greatest proportion of organisations in Bexley – just over one in five – focus on education and training activities. It is important to note that the Charity Commission’s definition of education and training activities is widely drawn. In addition to the more ‘traditional’ definition of education and training and employment-related upskilling, organisations defining their activities as involving education and training include those supporting youth development (including scouting and sports-related activities); the provision of support customised to the development of specific BAME, faith and local neighbourhood community groups; financial and personal wellbeing support (e.g. debt advice) and performance arts-related development activities.

It is important also to note that General Charitable Services, to which the second largest proportion of charities contribute, is, similarly, widely drawn. Prominent within this are charities that primarily support young and older people and BAME communities.

Figure 5 shows registered charities by whom they help. Again, individual charities may support multiple groups.

### Figure 5: Charities by beneficiary group

*The figures to the right of each bar give the of charities in each category and, next, the percentage this category comprises of the entire population.*



*Source: Charity Commission 2019*

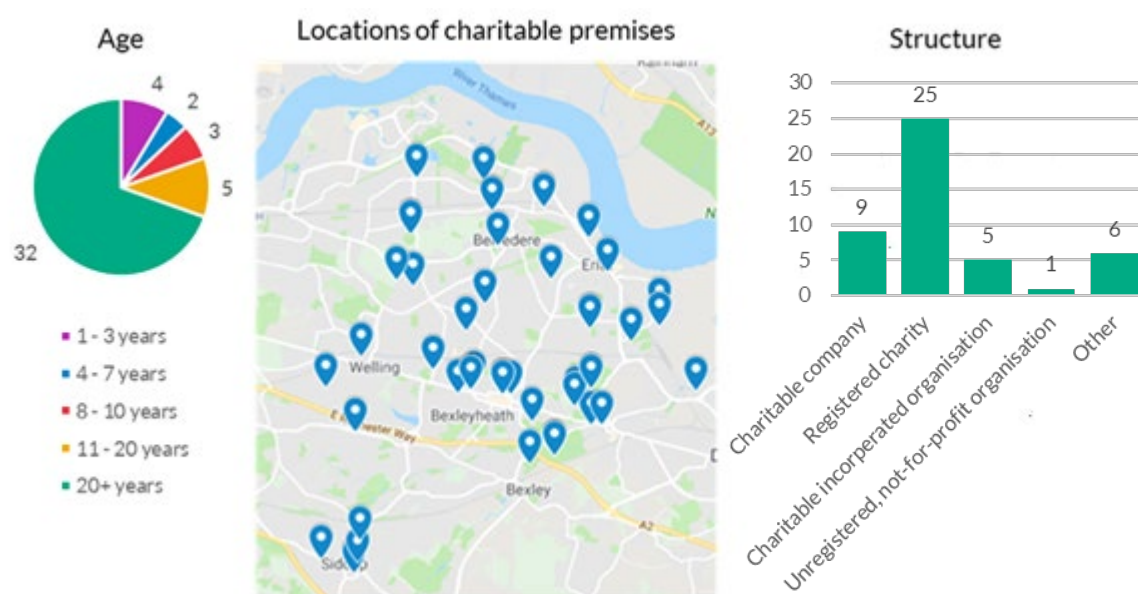
Support for children and young people is the beneficiary category supported by the greatest number of charities. The category, ‘General Public/Mankind’, is also broadly drawn but includes a range of interests with caring responsibilities, particularly focused upon older people.



'Other charities and voluntary bodies' includes a similarly broad church of organisations, but focusing, in the main, on very localised activities like neighbourhood watches and particular community groups.

## 5.2 Who responded to the VCFS Survey

Figure 6: Overview of the profile of respondents



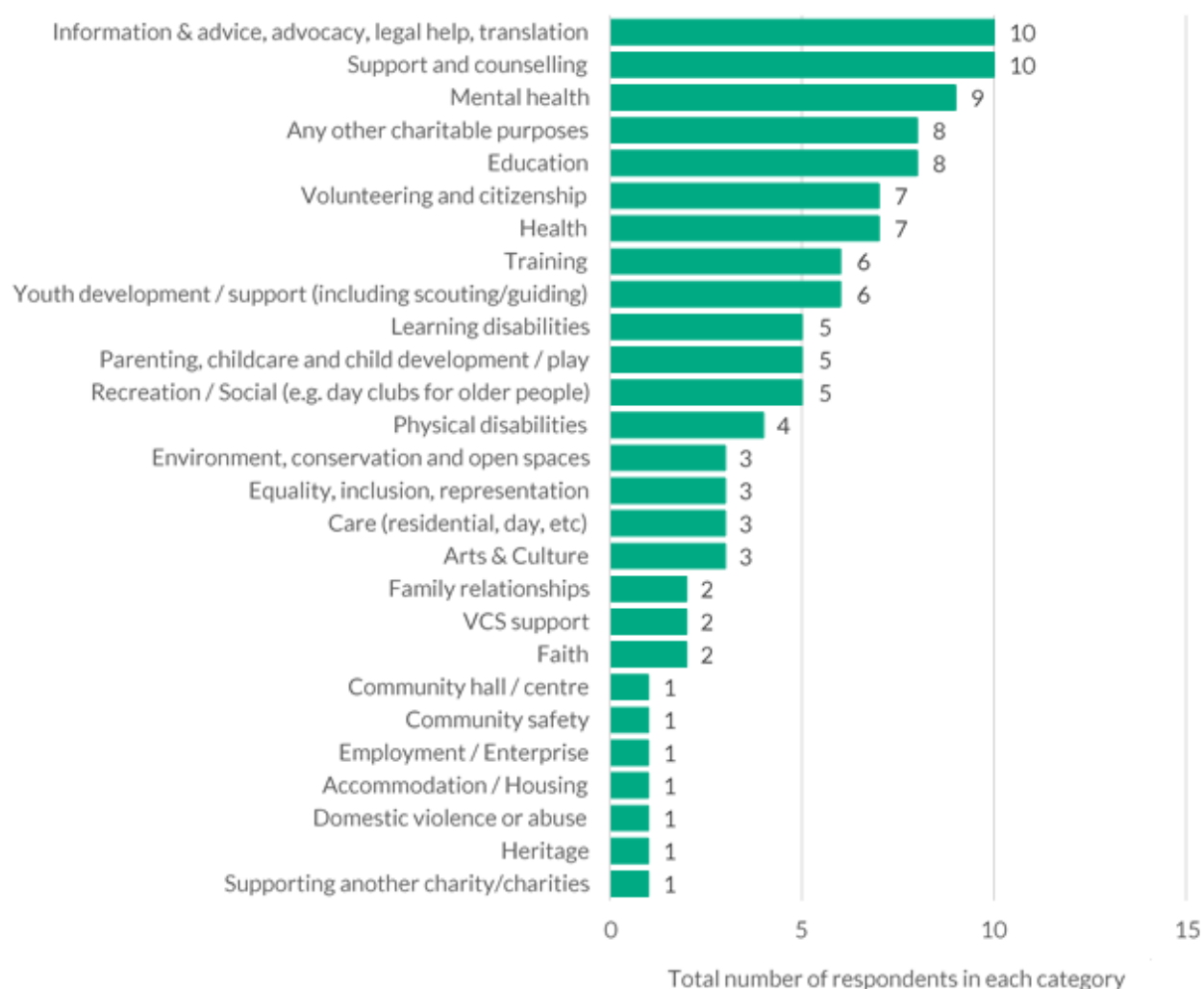
Respondents are spread relatively evenly across the borough. Most are well established, with more than two thirds having been in operation for over 20 years.

Over 50% of respondents are registered charities and a further 20% is designated as a charitable company. Very few organisations told us that they had made changes to their structural status since they were set up, although shifts are quoted. Our conversations with stakeholders revealed that structural change is higher on the agenda of larger organisations spurred, in the main, by imperatives connected to enhancing readiness for service commissioning and the need for expansion into communities in the north of the borough. Options being explored include mergers and broader collaborations with nominated lead organisations, the establishment of community interest companies and amalgamation of cross-borough outposts. This is explored further in the section on partnerships and commissioning below.

Over half of the organisations (31 organisations) that responded to the survey work across Bexley, while 13 organisations work locally within a particular part of Bexley. More than half work within a wider area (16 regionally, 7 nationally and 4 internationally), indicating ability to compare and contrast experiences in Bexley with those elsewhere.



Figure 7: Respondents by what they do



There is a strong focus on general support and counselling, information, advice and guidance, education and training with a strong thematic focus on health and mental health and support for children, young people, families and parents. This is reflective of the profile of Bexley's 407 registered charities.

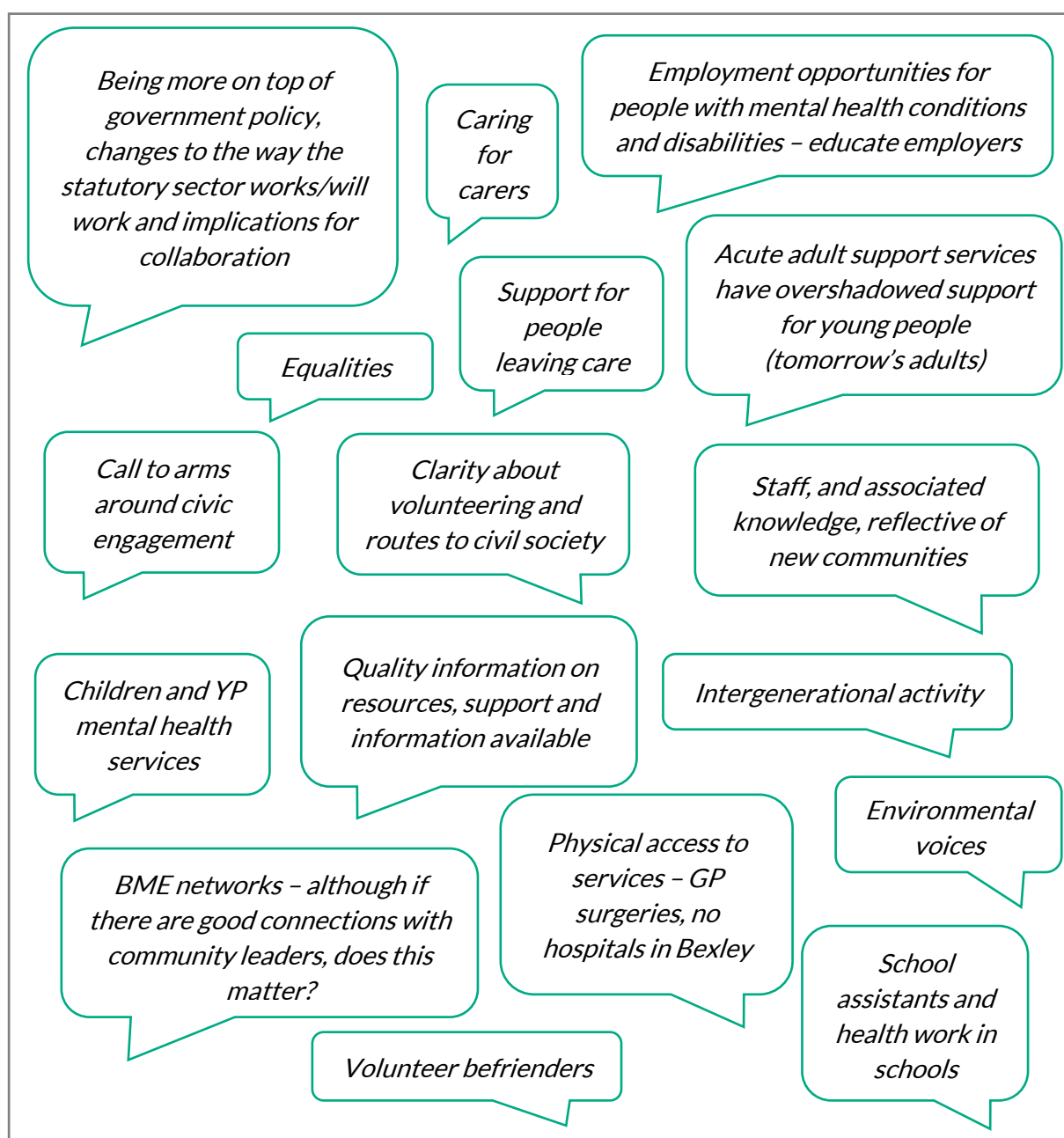




## 5.3 Gaps in provision

We asked all consultees we engaged with to tell us whether they felt there were beneficiary support gaps. The following were identified, which combine beneficiary focus, support method and means of accessing services:

Figure 9: Quotes from respondents on support gaps





## 5.4 Staff resources

The graph below shows numbers of staff employed by survey respondents. This demonstrates participation by a good cross section of organisations within Bexley in terms of size which, together with income, is a good determinant of challenges and trends.

**Figure 10: Number of employees**



We also asked organisations to tell us how many volunteers and trustees support their work and how much time they spend doing so per month. The responses are set out below.

**Figure 11: Number of volunteers**



**Figure 12: Number of trustees**







**Figure 13: Average hours provided by Volunteers and Board members**

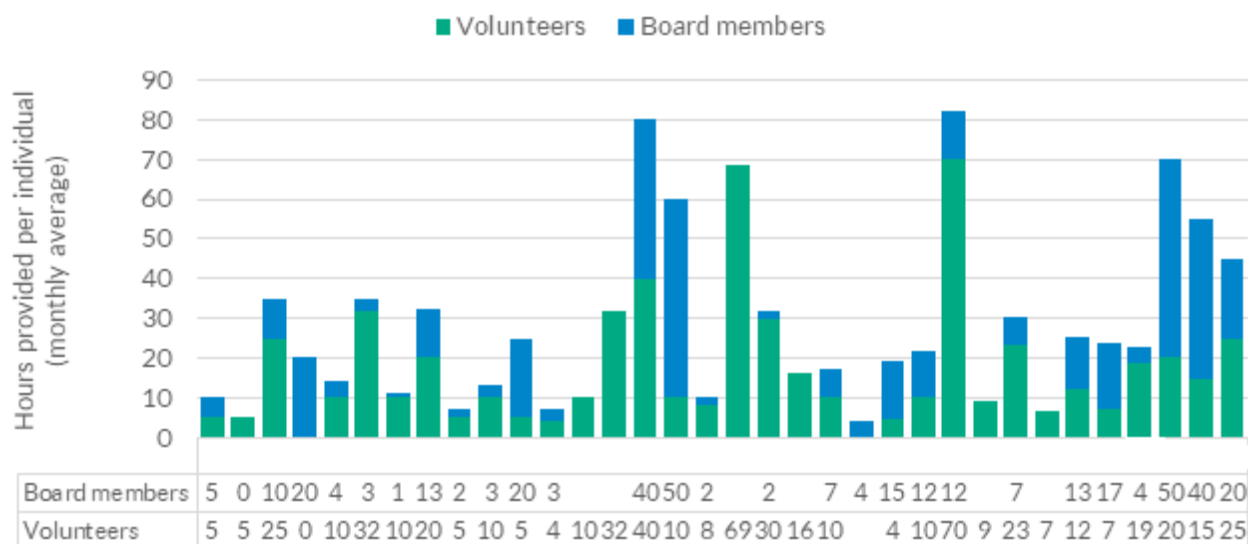


Figure 13 shows the average number of hours worked by a volunteer and board member from each of the 34 respondent organisations. Each bar represents one organisation.

Taking the first bar as an example, the average volunteer for this organisation provides 5 hours of their time per month and the average board member 5 hours per month.

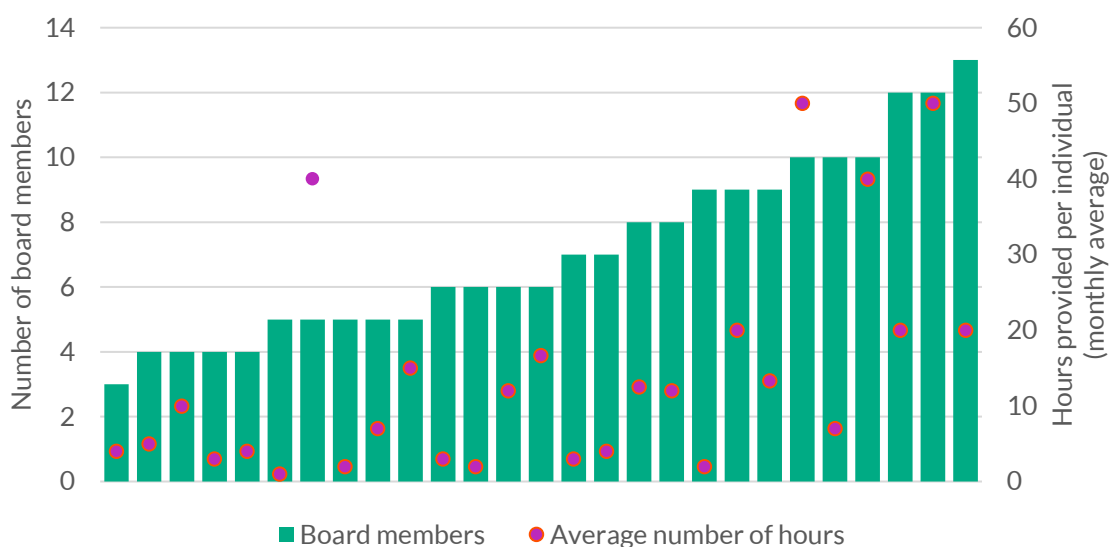
There is significant variation in the amount of time volunteers and board members contribute to organisations. Some are more reliant than others on the time of their volunteers. For example, one organisation, quoting one of the highest levels of volunteer resource, working alongside five full-time employees, reported that they have 30 volunteers contributing an average of 32 hours per month. However, most organisations reported volunteer time to be around 10 hours per month.

The responses around time contributed by board members tended to fall into two categories. The majority of respondents noted that their board members provide a few hours per month. However, a small number noted that their board members tend to provide a significant monthly input (in one instance, an average of 50 hours a month per board member).

There was no real evidence to suggest a connection between the average hours provided by a board member and the number of board members in total. This would seem to discount the possibility that board members with a significant monthly input are taking up workload which otherwise would be distributed to others if boards were bigger.



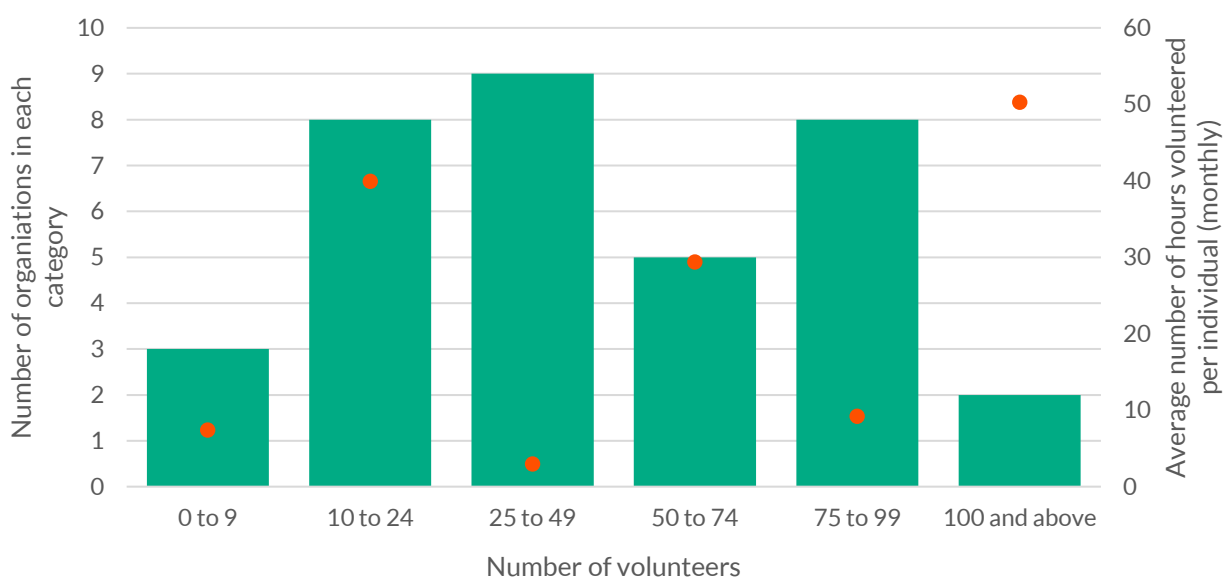
**Figure 14: Size of organisation boards and average hours provided per month**



*NB. There were a total of 27 responses contributing to the above graph.*

**Figure 15: Number of volunteers and average hours per month provided**

*The bar chart and y axis to the left give the number of organisations in each category and the average number of hours volunteered are plotted on the y axis to the right.*



*NB. There were a total of 35 respondents contributing to the above graph*



**Figure 16: Total amount of time (hours) provided by volunteers**

Number of volunteers	Average number of volunteers	Total time (hours) gained through volunteering per organisation
0 to 9	7	112
10 to 24	14	435
25 to 49	32	995
50 to 74	57	581
75 to 99	89	945
100 and above	100	1,400

Insufficient data is available to estimate, robustly, the financial contribution of volunteers to VCFS activities across the borough. However, on the basis of the data provided by the nineteen organisations that supplied information on volunteer numbers and the hours of time they contribute per month, it would cost, on average, each organisation £29,770 per annum to pay volunteers the London Living Wage.

We explored the recruitment of volunteers and trustees further in our stakeholder conversations with VCFS organisations. This generated a number of interesting observations.

#### **Regarding volunteers...**

A great deal of value is placed by the VCFS upon volunteers and the support they provide, which ranges from one-to-one and group-based beneficiary-facing work to back office support, marketing and promotion.

There are mixed experiences of attracting and retaining volunteers and supporting them to operate in ways that meet the needs of contemporary society within Bexley. The following quotes reflect the mix of responses.

*...considerable success in engaging and sustaining volunteers: Volunteers are offered a minimum of 6 months to remain with the organisation. Most stay longer. Some current volunteers have served one, two and three years. Longest serving has been with us 6/7 years.*

*...volunteers tend to be a mix of philanthropists and career volunteers (getting experience to help them to find and get work). We get mainly philanthropists – about 80% - who tend to be the longer stayers, but have had both. Balance is tipping increasingly towards career volunteers.*

*... Getting the best volunteers is a competitive business. Hard for VCISOs to compete with the likes of the perceptions of the NHS...[NHS] often prove more attractive to volunteers than smaller charitable organisations – volunteers think they will get a more rounded and*



*reputable range of experience from well known, well established, often statutory, organisations – incorrect, but that's the way it is.*

*...volunteering is a helpful means to test attitudes and attributes. Volunteers tend to develop into good staff members but don't necessarily interview best.*

*...Combination of approaches to get volunteers. Most is through word of mouth. We do use BVSC, but this tends not to be a major route. We sometimes leaflet at stations – a successful approach to enlisting folk who work in London [thus, broadening the skills base]. Sometimes a struggle to attract males....we advertise locally and nationally...*

*...it will become more of a challenge to enlist trustees reflective of Bexley's communities/their beneficiaries. More BAME's needed to reflect beneficiary mix. And more males required. Have tended, traditionally, to have a higher representation of females amongst volunteer community – now 35% male. Also more traditional for them to be white.*

*... [the goodwill and efforts of volunteers can be misleading]...there is a widespread perception that VCSO support is free, run by volunteers and has no or little on-costs. Also, the degree to which volunteers are valued is questionable.*

*...[recruiting from communities with lived experience can be challenging in terms of supporting volunteers]...most volunteers have mental health issues.*

*...[expectations on volunteers are increasing]...we need our volunteers to be more technically savvy...[in support of record keeping and broader efficiency efforts]... Also seeking different skill sets and we have a commitment to 'give more for more'... Many can be set in their ways. Now getting a different type of volunteer in – more men, more BME, more economically active, greater range of experience. Diversification in large part due to changing offer – more flexible/fits in better with volunteers' lives. We've tried this on two projects, and likely to extend this to more.*

The London Borough of Bexley has a clear commitment to driving up volunteering, cited in its draft Connected Communities Strategy. Acknowledging that BVSC has made strides in developing frameworks for engaging and placing volunteers, the Council favours taking this to the next level. The aspiration is for a simple, clear management process offering swift access to succinct, distinct potential volunteer asks, which incorporate flexibilities to maximise volunteer access and potential participation; put simply, 'two clicks to volunteering'.

The prioritisation of volunteering by the Council is encouraging. However, this points to a wider issue around roles and responsibilities for supporting the sector as a whole in Bexley; namely, how will the Council and BVSC collaborate in order to ensure that each plays to its relative strengths in driving up the performance of the VCFS in Bexley.



## Regarding trustees...

The importance of the role of trustees was acknowledged and reinforced. In addition to providing challenge, support and focus around charitable objects and ensuring quality and appropriate procedures are maintained, additional aspects highlighted included acting as support and sounding board for senior staff – particularly in an environment where stress is increasingly evident across organisations - and the potentially powerful impact of the presence of trustees in negotiations around funding and contracting.

There are, again, mixed experiences of attracting and retaining trustees. The following quotes reflect the mix of responses.

*...Consistently successful in attracting trustees with the right qualities and skills. Once engaged, trustees attend two 'pilot' board meetings, as a test as to whether they like/are suited to the job. Currently have a good mix [demonstrating relevant sectoral and broader skills and experience].*

*...Trustees' role increasingly difficult – in addition to Bexley-related shifts, [the organisation] is changing nationally and people need to adapt to new practices... they are having to take on an increasingly large basket of responsibilities. [The organisation is seeking different skill sets. Some potential Trustees] tend to be 'old school' and need to be thinking differently and in line with current environments and directions of travel.*

*...Attracting trustees: increasingly, good people are tied up... turn up for one meeting and disappear.*

*...We advertise sometimes, but generally strategically approach appropriate potential trustees.*

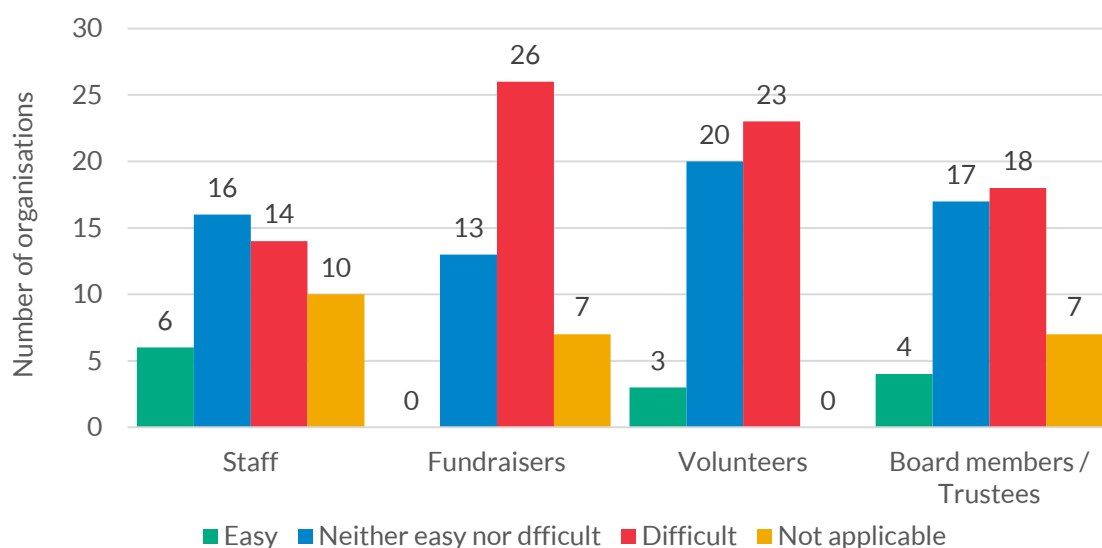
*...We do find them and they have the right skills. But, they not as diverse as I would like – need more younger people, BME, people with physical disabilities, capacity for diversity in terms of thinking.*

## Recruitment

It is clear that the sector faces significant challenges around recruitment, with only 13% of organisations saying that they found it 'Easy' to recruit staff and even fewer finding it easy to recruit volunteers or board members. None of the organisations found it easy to recruit fundraising staff. On average across the four recruitment categories, 20 out of 46 organisations find recruitment 'Difficult'.



Figure 17: Challenges in recruiting by type of position



## 5.5 Property

While the results from the survey suggested that the majority (78%) of respondents described their property status as ‘secure’, when we tested these findings in the VSCO workshop, a very different picture emerged. One organisation described premises as “[their] biggest challenge”.

In part, it was thought that while many VCFS organisations may have accommodation that is currently secure, organisations have concerns regarding the suitability of their premises. Participants in the workshop raised the following factors as impacting on whether or not they would consider their premises secure and suitable for their needs:

- Affordability / whether the Council is paying the rent
- Long-term security (e.g. length of lease)
  - Whether the landlord is reasonable, responsive and effective
- General condition (including health and safety)
- Accessibility, particularly for some beneficiary groups
- Ability to keep open at appropriate hours for beneficiaries to use services
- Whether they have access to the space on a full-time or part-time basis.

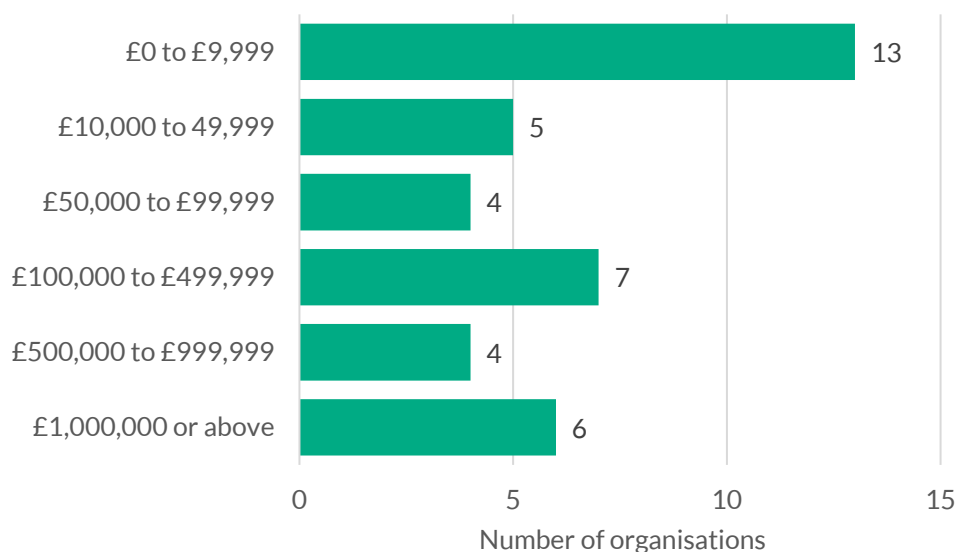
Given the relatively small sample size of the survey, it is likely that further research will be required to ascertain the availability and appropriateness of premises in Bexley, forming the basis for a strategy to ensure that the VCFS has access to accommodation that is fit for purpose in the future.



## 5.6 Income

We asked organisations to tell us about their income, funding sources and relative confidence in the current and future funding environment.

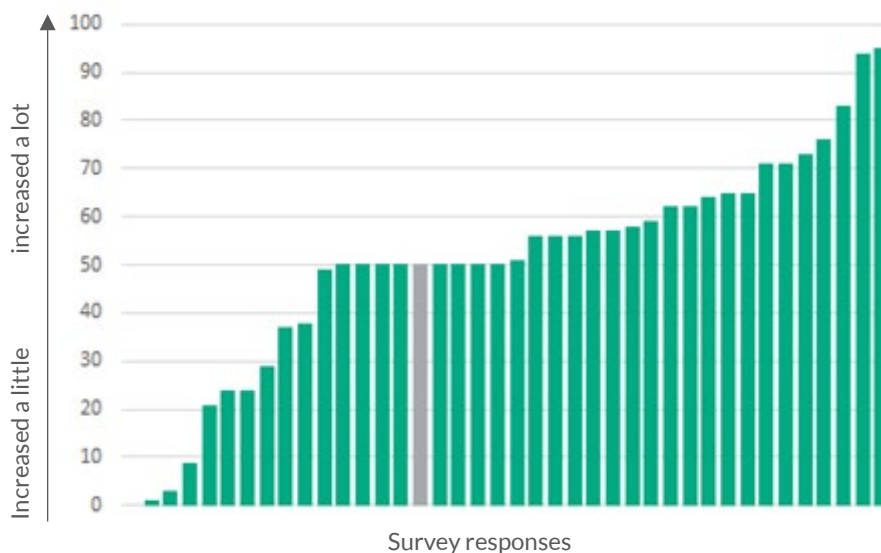
**Figure 18: Annual income of respondents**



84% of respondents were able to quote their annual income, which spanned a wide range of income bands. This is encouraging, not only because of the snapshot it provides, but it suggests that comments made across all survey questions is representative of the experiences of a wide range of organisations across Bexley; income level (along with size) being a key determinant of factors and trends affecting the health of organisations.



Figure 19: Changes in income over past three years



Respondents were asked whether their income had changed in the past three years' and responded on a scale, from minus 100 to 100, to indicate the extent to which they felt there was a change (with minus scores indicating a decrease and positive scores an increase). They were also asked, on the same basis, to predict change over the next three years. The results are set out in the graphs above and below.

The green bars represent the score of an individual organisation whilst the grey bar provides the average score among respondents.

Figure 20: Expected income change over next three years

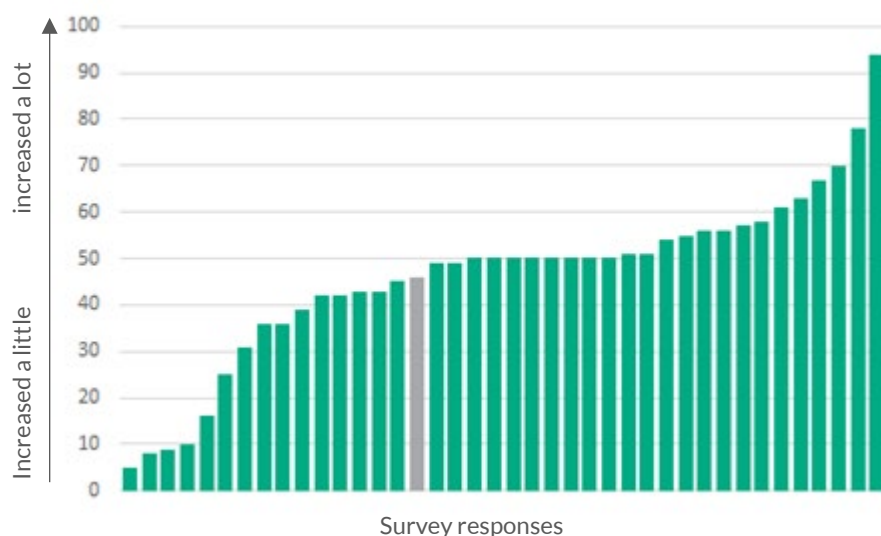
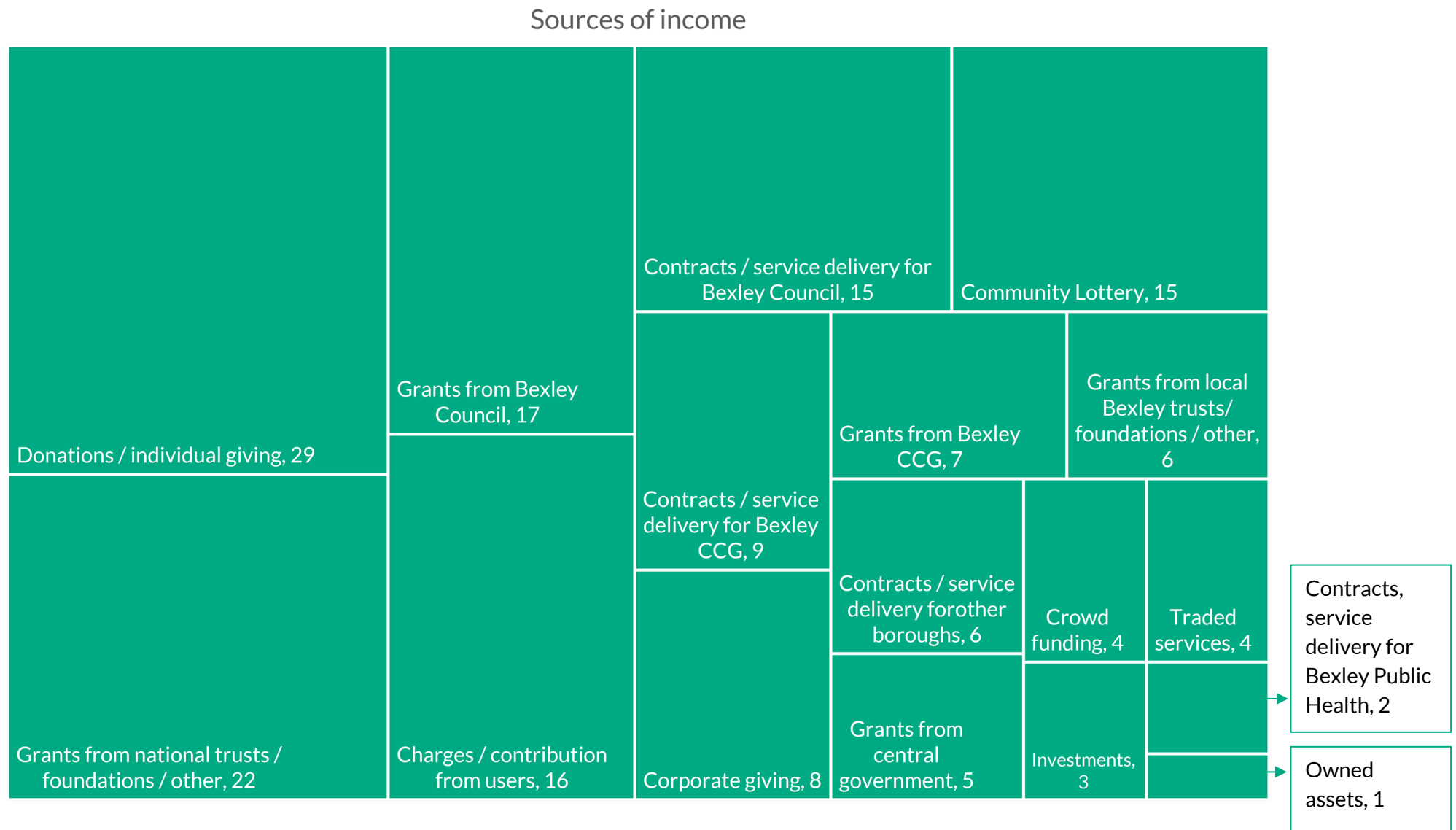






Figure 21: Sources of income

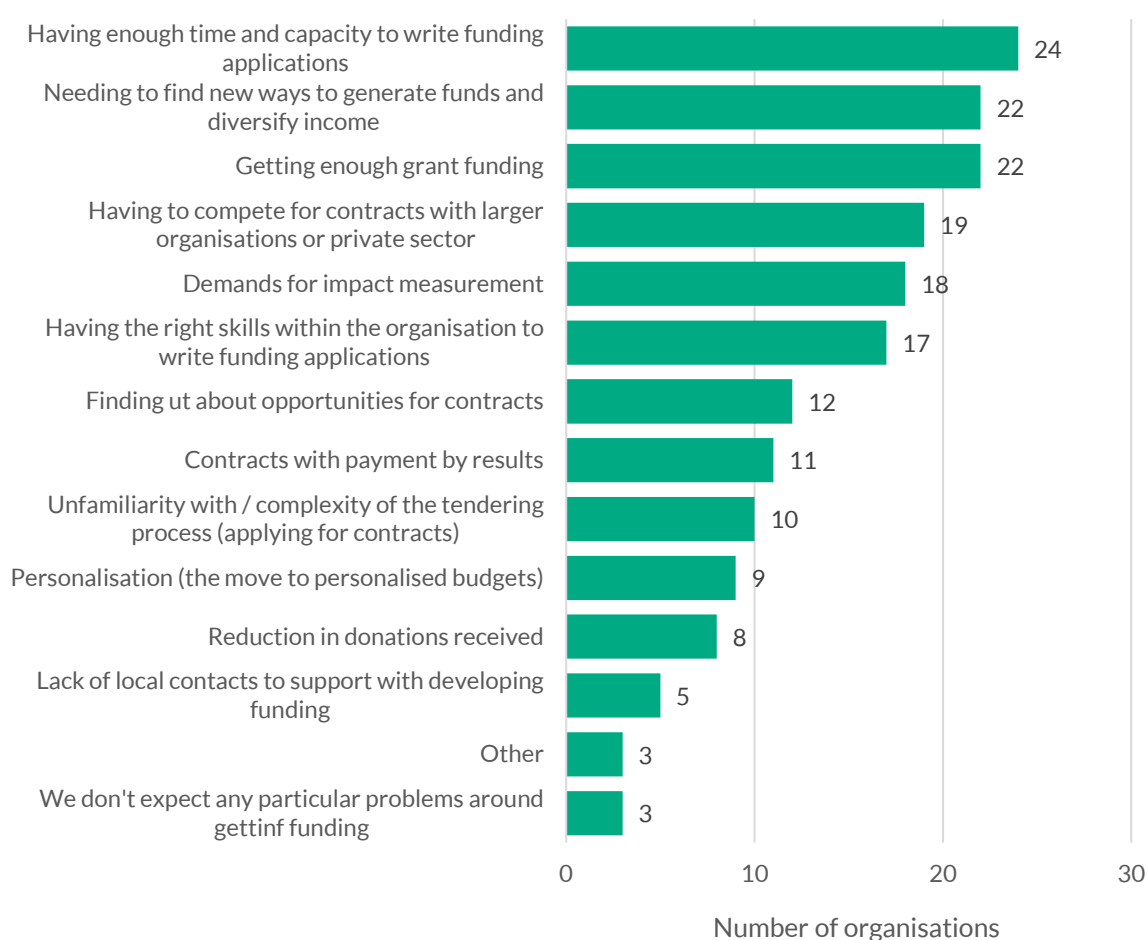




It is interesting that the largest proportion of respondents quoted 'donations and individual giving' as being part of their income streams, followed by 'grants from national trusts/foundations/other'. This reinforces the importance of VCFS organisations' having the knowledge, capability and skills to access philanthropic giving and highly competitive trust regimes.

Three quarters of respondents said they were either Very or Fairly concerned about the sustainability of their funding. Over the next year, the key challenges that they anticipated around funding are set out below.

**Figure 22: Funding challenges VSFOs expected in the next year**



The key needs articulated focus, in the main on a lack of time, capacity and skills to prepare applications as well as intelligence on funding sources. Competing for contracts and definition of impact measures are also quoted as important factors.

In order to try to establish what might be the major stumbling blocks to obtaining funding, we asked respondents to tell us about any feedback they had received on applications for grants or contract funding. With two exceptions, which focused upon ineligibility for criteria and general poor quality,



feedback focused more around oversubscription to funds and general constriction in funding available. The latter would, however, drive up the need for high quality drafting of applications. Rollover of approvals was quoted as undermining success in gaining contracts/revising outcomes and associated income levels.

### Funding from Select External Grant Regimes

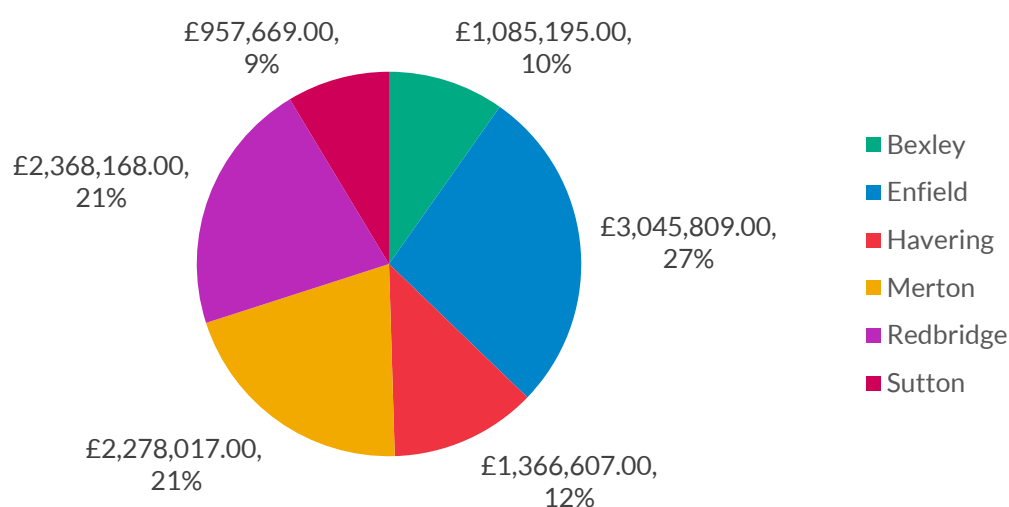
Organisations are dependent upon mixed models of funding. There will always be a need for a mixed local economy of grants, contracts and asset-based investment - as articulated in Julia Unwin's typology of "giving, shopping, investing" - in order to sustain the diversity of a local VCFS. In a local relationship which is no longer founded on the Council grant funding sections of the local voluntary and community sector, it is incumbent on all parties to work together to lever additional sources of funding for Bexley from external sources. (See: [The Grantmaking Tango](#)<sup>4</sup>).

As part of the Review, we looked at some of the key sources and levels of external funding which have come into Bexley in recent years via the VCFS by way of a barometer of relative success. The following diagrams present data from Big Lottery Fund, City Bridge Trust and Trust for London to show how Bexley fares and compares to London boroughs that are generally viewed as its 'statistical neighbours'; boroughs exhibiting similar socio economic characteristics.

### Big Lottery Fund

Using data obtained from GrantNav, the below analysis presents the funding awarded by the Big Lottery Fund from 2015-16 to 2017-18 and compares Bexley with its statistical neighbours.

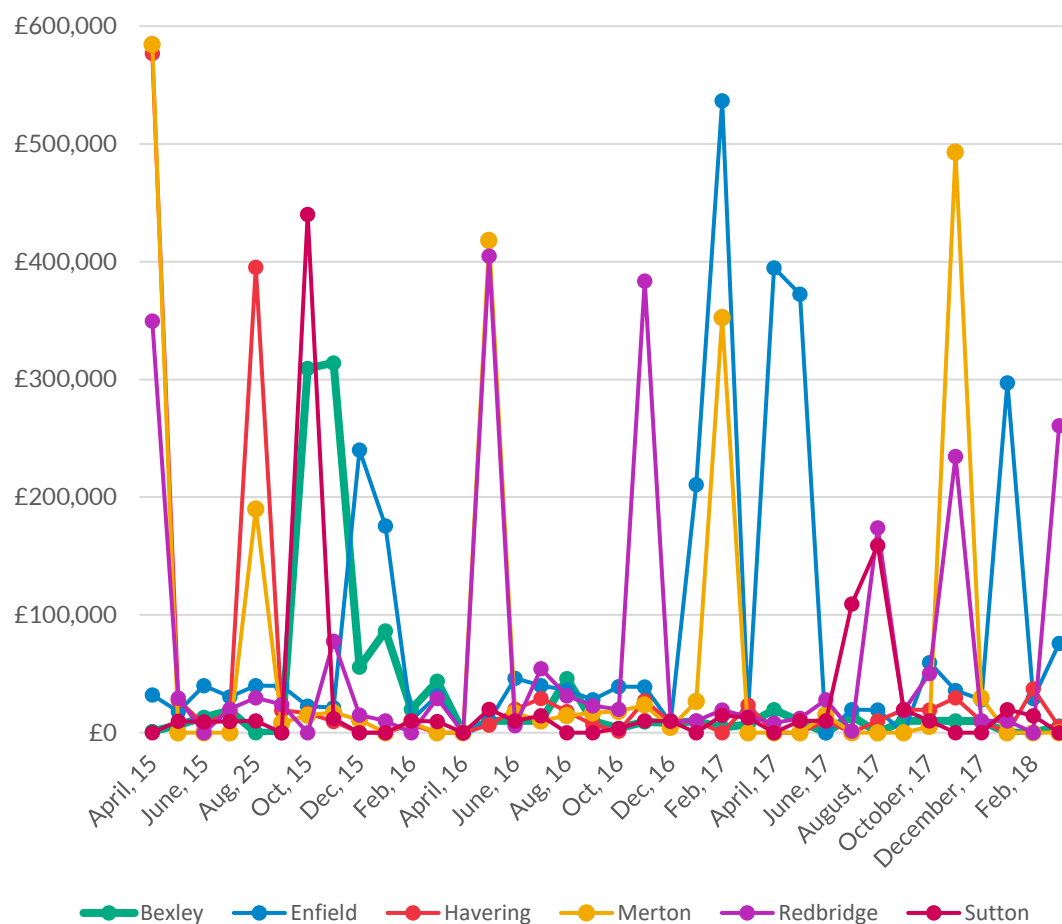
**Figure 23: Funding received from the Big Lottery Fund, April 2015 to March 2018**



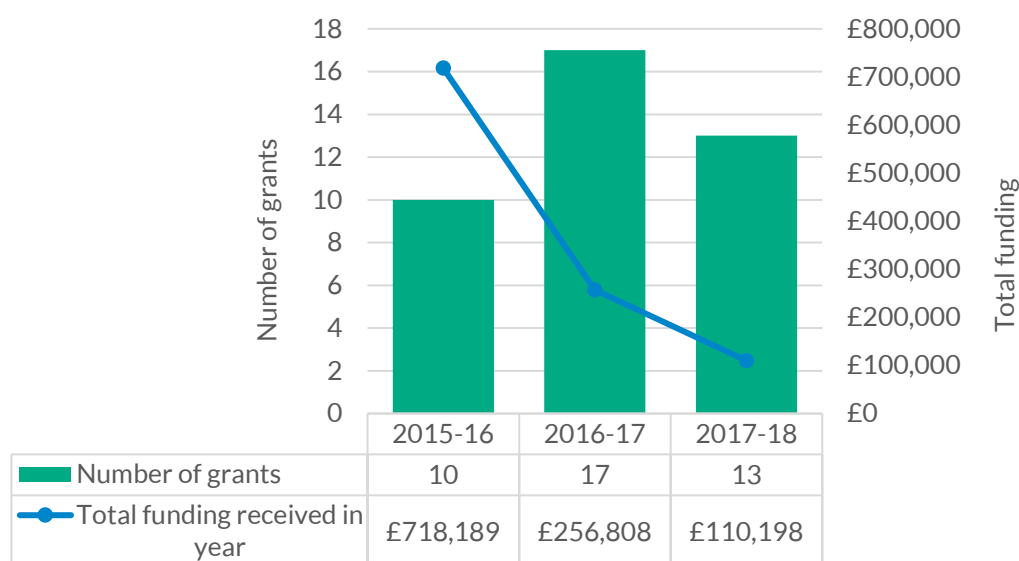
<sup>4</sup> The Grant Making Tango, June 2004, Julia Unwin. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/grantmaking-tango-issues-funders>



**Figure 24: Funding received from the Big Lottery Fund - timeline, April 2015 to March 2018**



**Figure 25: Funding received by organisations in Bexley from the Big Lottery Fund**



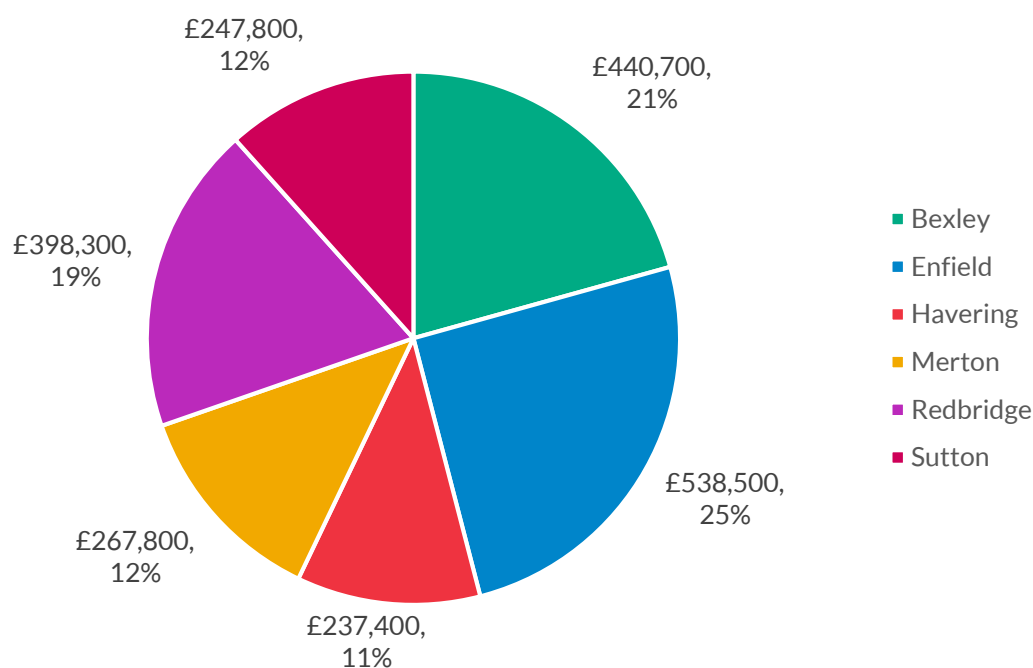


With the exception of Havering, Bexley has fallen short of four its statistical neighbours in attracting Big Lottery funding. While there has been some fluctuation in the number of grants awarded by the Big Lottery Fund, there has been a significant reduction in the value of individual grants awarded.

The average value of grant dropped from £71,819 to £15,106 between financial years 2015 – 2016 and 2016-17. This was due, largely, to the inclusion of two large grants in 2015-16, both worth just over £300,000. With the exception of these, the Big Lottery Fund has not allocated a grant over the value of £100,000 within the period reviewed. If the two large grants are removed from the analysis, the total funding awarded in 2015-16 falls to £98,644 and the average grant value to £12,331. There was a drop in the number of grants awarded between 2016-17 to 2017-18 and the average value of these grants fell from £15,106 to £8,477. No grants exceeding £10,000 were awarded in 2017-18.

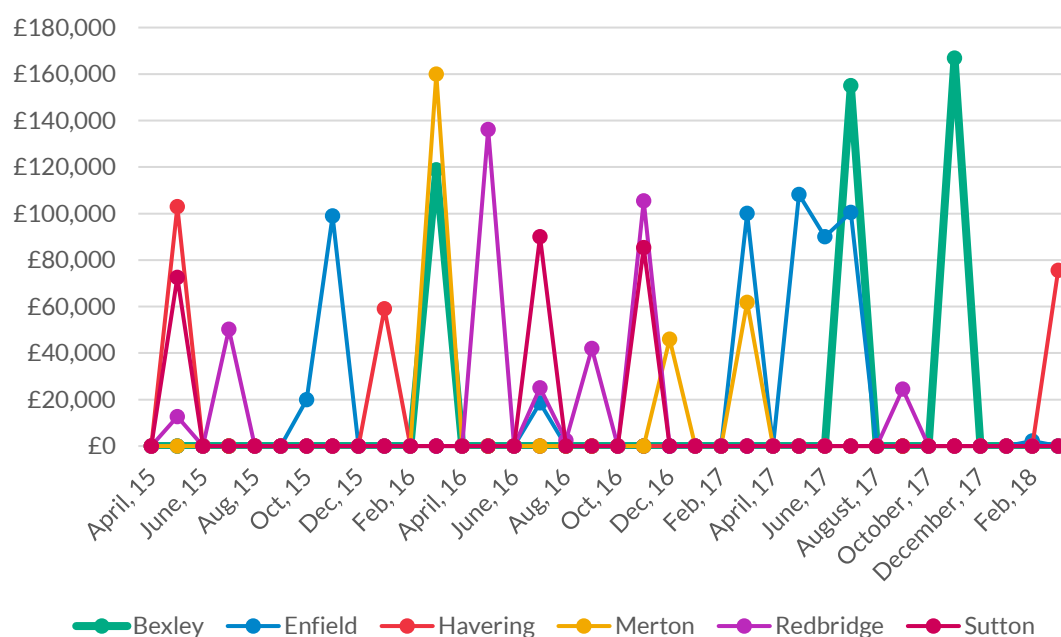
## City Bridge Trust

Figure 26: Funding received from City Bridge Trust, April 2015 to March 2018





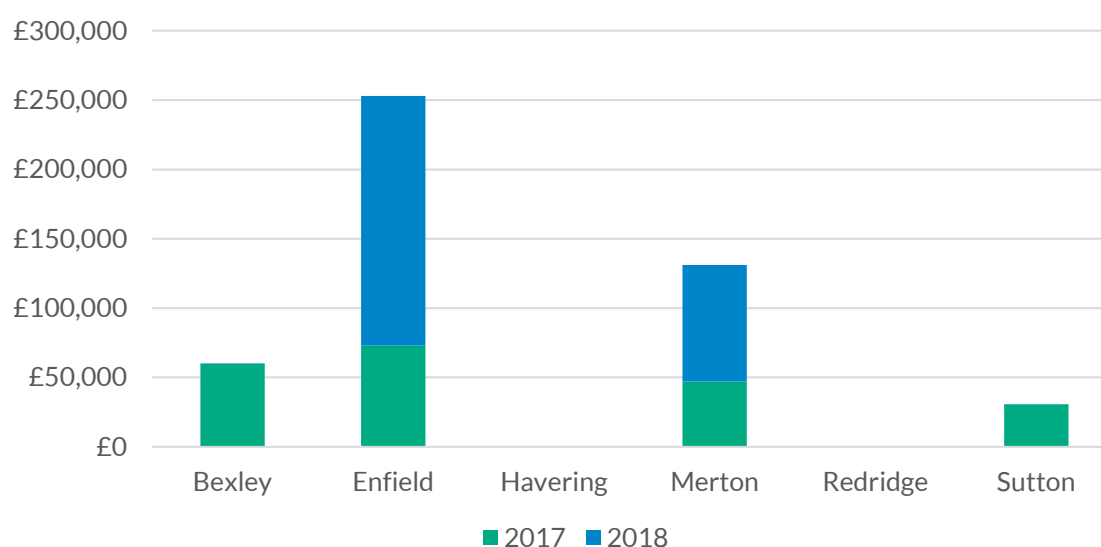
**Figure 27: Funding received from City Bridge Trust - timeline, April 2015 to March 2018**



Bexley has fared better in attracting City Bridge Trust grants, although only one grant was received in each financial year shown in the graph above (corresponding with each peak).

## Trust for London

**Figure 28: Funding received from Trust for London**





Again, Bexley fared better in attracting Trust for London funding, but the total level of grant awarded is low and there were no successful bids awarded in 2018.

It is clear that there is considerable room for improvement in attracting external funding into the borough.

## 5.7 Partnering, collaboration and commissioning

We explored how, and to what extent, VCSF organisations work with others within and beyond the sector.

**Figure 29: Working relationships, how charities work with other organisations in the sector – average scores**

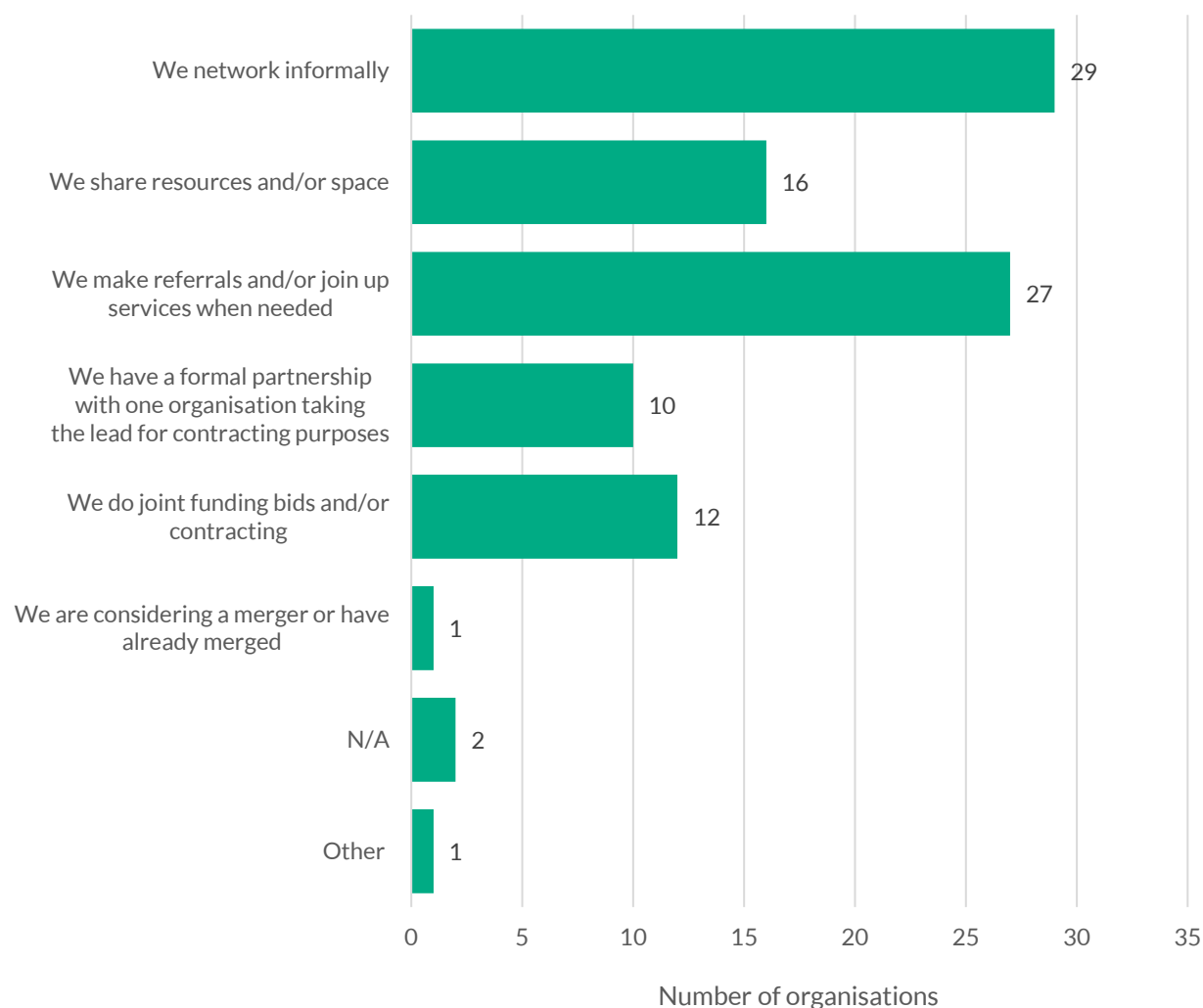
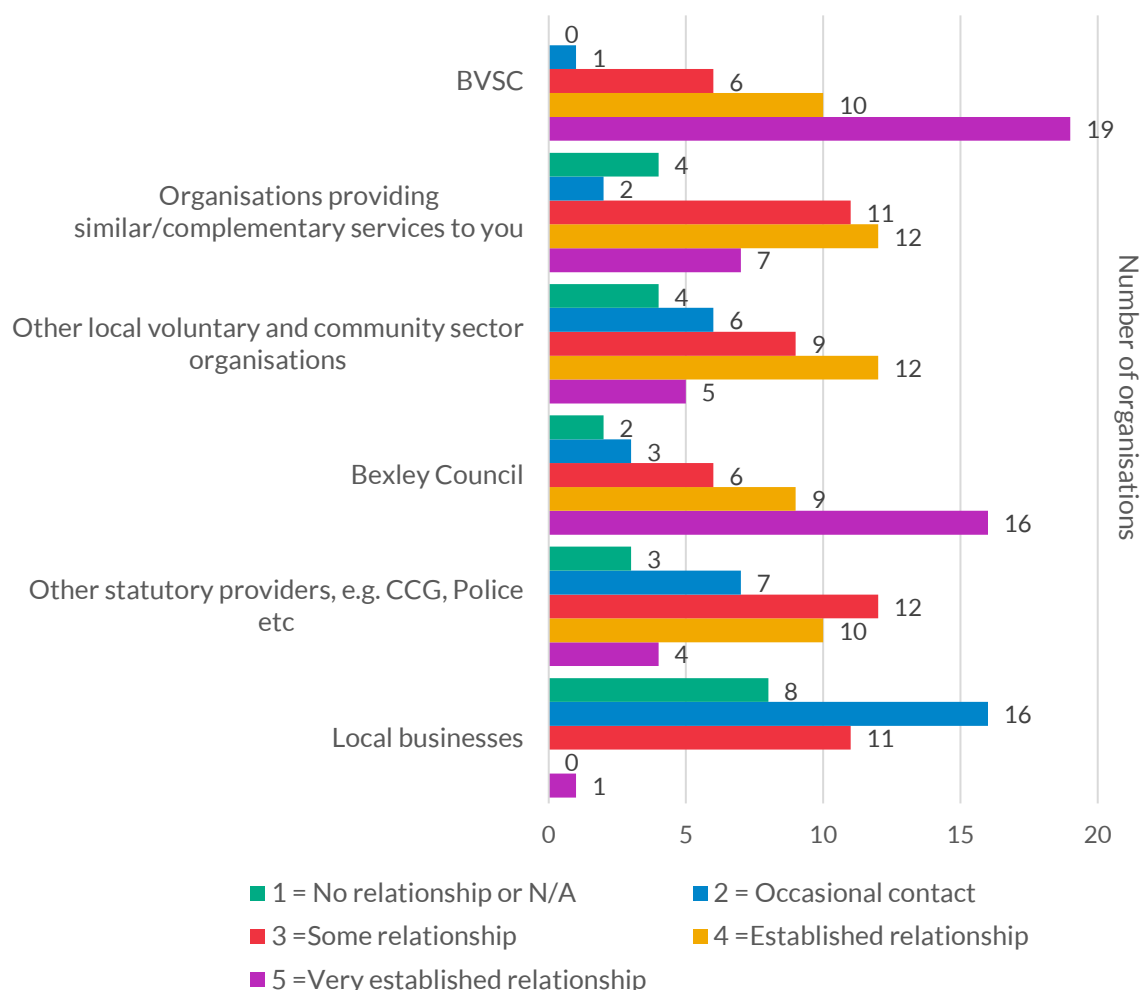




Figure 30: Working relationship with selected organisations, average scores



Informal connections with, and referrals between, other VCFS organisations were significantly more prevalent than relationships that involved high levels of inter-agency collective working.

With regard to relationships with external organisations, the strongest relationships were with Bexley Council and BVSC. The strength of the relationship with BVSC is to be expected given that the survey was distributed to BVSC's database. The least well established relationships were with business; reflected in comments provided at the VCSF workshop.

We explored partnering and commissioning in our discussions with stakeholders. The following quotes reflect the mix of responses on opportunities and challenges, with particular regard to commissioning.

*...Once in a lifetime opportunity to devolve statutory responsibilities and deliver at the heart of communities. Past pilots are now national and local priorities – for example, social*





*prescribing. The local authority is now actively considering devolution of 'trusted assessor' responsibilities, with considerable associated risks on both sides*

*... We are in transition from commissioner/deliver to a partnership of equals; difficult territory for both commissioner and provider in terms of creativity, flexibility, openness, having sufficient time to consider and agree needs and goals. Statutory providers are feeling challenged in having to step back. The sector feels 'pulled from pillar to post'*

*... Statutory sector aspires to VCFS stepping into the space of 'system thinker' and co-producer, but patchy opportunity for VCFS and statutory authorities to step up and collectively plan, set objectives and realistic outcome targets. Need to create the 'space' for this to happen*

*... We need a clear, shared understanding of need, what excellence looks like and what it takes to get there – who, what, when and with what results (national and local outcomes)*

*... Introducing social value calculations into contracts is a real challenge. What does it mean and how do we articulate it?*

*... The sector will need to get smarter at communication and monitoring. [There needs to be] real time progress tracking and impact demonstration... There will be rules and regulations, commissioning rigours, systems and processes, recording, impact assessment and communication*

*... Collaboration rather than competition – easy to say... but when it comes to commissioning and contracting, this isn't negotiable*

*... Person-centred approach – paramount accountability is to service users*

*... No set view on what structures a successful commissioning model should look like. But, will need to embrace partnership (within VCFS and potentially cross sector), collaboration, consistency of service ('One Bexley') and market segmentation in terms of playing to strengths – and accept being part of a collective – potentially with lead partners*

*... Opens up an opportunity to cross subsidise the sector through performance (over) achievement, generation of profit and investment back into the sector*

*... The VCFS needs to be truly representative, not self-serving*

*... Needs to take ability to be fleet of foot to next level*



Asked to define what they perceive to be the 'Social Value' that the VCFS can offer, stakeholders said...

*... Knowledge of local communities – needs, aspirations, opportunities and individuals*

*... Knowledge of what works on the ground*

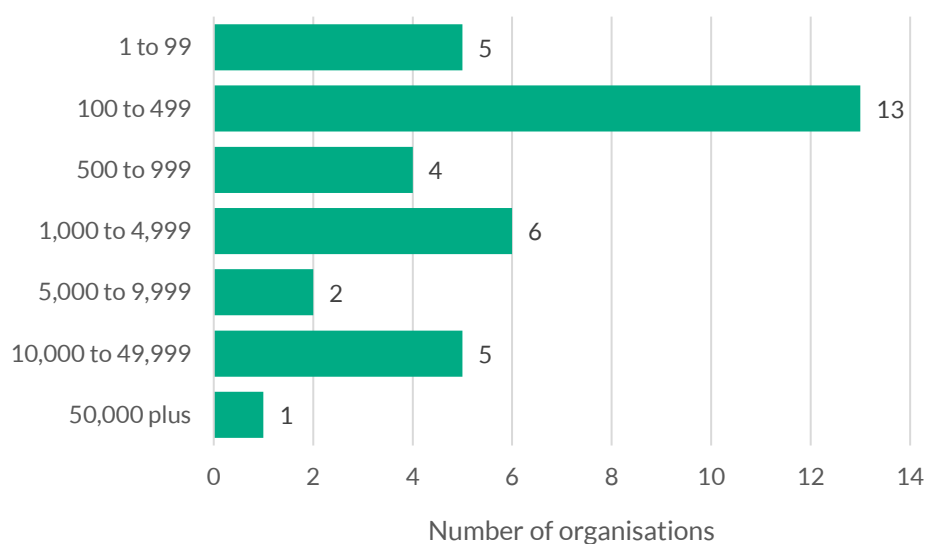
*... Advocacy and connections to communities great boost to prevention efforts, potential service efficiencies and creation of multi-faceted support packages*

*... Contracting with VCFS can provide added value via ability to tap into additional services offered – e.g. Age UK's befriending service.*

*... Holistic view of community makes it much more able to tap into needs in the round – statutory bodies generally limited to tapping into groups with specific needs (e.g. particular disabilities or age-related)*

## 5.8 Social impact

Figure 31: Charities by the number of individuals they directly support





**Figure 32: Charities by the number of individuals they indirectly support**



We asked those surveyed to tell us what the sector as a whole offers to Bexley. The key themes that emerged were:

Plugging gaps in, and adding value to, statutory services...

*...fill a huge number of gaps in service, preventing escalation of need in many cases... The Local authority could not replicate what we do and it would also cost them a lot more.*  
*...With the reduction in local services and funding from local council the voluntary sector play a huge part in helping not only to sustain services that meet the needs of local residents but also in being proactive to bring help and support where it's needed.*

*...The sector is passionate about the work supporting the community and often is able to build relationships quicker than other services due to the image that we have.*

Prevention activities, saving the public purse...

*...Meeting needs and providing services prevent an escalation of health and wellbeing to doctors and hospitals*

The lifeblood of communities...

*...[We are] the culmination of Bexley communities ideas, needs, experience, values and celebration.*

*...We provide some of the things that make life most worth living.*

*...The VCS underpins the health and wellbeing of Bexley residents...In short, it saves lives.*



Customisation of approaches to local communities...

*...[We provide] services that the community can rely on, that are designed with them in mind.*

*...It's not just about running services, which is massive, but it's about how the VCS works.*

Connecting with isolated and vulnerable communities and creating stronger communities...

*...The trust that is built with the most vulnerable or communities that are not engaging, for a whole host of reasons. The VCS are the glue that bind our communities together, that build social capital and create resilience enabling people to have a voice and feel part of the wider community.*

Providing jobs – paid and voluntary

*... good at recruiting and managing volunteers*

A boost to specific sectors and demographic groups...

*[We play] a significant role in the health economy and there are undoubtedly more opportunities going forward.*

*...Running much needed activities for targeted age groups unfortunately, currently not run by the Council.*

*...There is such scope for charities to work alongside [the employees of] businesses and statutory bodies to give people the help that they require and also to enrich their lives - so giving them a sense of well being and less likely to require health and mental health services.*

Playing a role of a scale that is frequently unrecognised and tricky to define...

*A substantial [role] though one that is probably hard to quantify given the size of most agencies and the level of informal support that is given*

*Faith groups in the area play a huge role in delivering services that help those most in need and at risk.*

A source, and sharer, of expertise...

*Understanding of the commissioning landscape...Guidance with impact reporting...Provider of one to one support to (a significant care provider) management team.*



*[We offer] knowledge, expertise, specialism and offer value for money...[and we are] flexible and responsive.*

## 5.9 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

The first of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) summaries below are drawn from open responses provided by the survey and the second, from the stakeholder interviews.



Figure 33: SWOT analysis from survey responses

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <p>“We are the only [organisation] providing [...] in the area”</p> <p>“We meet the needs of lots of local people”</p> <p>“the sector is often able to build relationships quicker than other services”</p> <p>“The local authority could not replicate what we do and it would also cost them a lot more”</p> <p>“Significant specialisms, resource and skills”</p> <p>“The VCS underpins the health and wellbeing of Bexley residents”</p> <p>“Big focus on mental health and children and young people</p> <p>“Bexley Council know what we do and support us”</p>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <p>“We have had to stop doing important work because of lack of resources”</p> <p>“Council/CCG/Public Health does not take much interest in supporting our outcomes”</p> <p>“Reputationally, the withdrawal of services in key parts of the borough has not been received well”</p> <p>Most people said they had a good understanding of council/CCG priorities but a few said they had “no idea” or “very limited understanding”</p>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <p>“Borough is growing, more housing, better transport links”</p> <p>“More online focus and better joined up care between services”</p> <p>“Changes in demographic will mean we need to develop a broader cross-cultural awareness”</p> <p>“An increase in collaborative working”</p> <p>“Decline in local services more unemployment - might give us more volunteers”</p> <p>“schools getting increasing individual autonomy. This can be useful but also very hard... we can’t work closely with about 70 individual schools”</p> <p>“[cuts to funding] has forced us to diversify and to work smarter”</p>	<p><b>THREATS / CHALLENGES</b></p> <p>“I expect to see funding getting tighter and more expected for less money as the council’s budgets are squeezed”</p> <p>“Any potential economic difficulties associated with Brexit are a concern”</p> <p>“The sector as a whole is jittery and unable to plan for the future. This in turn places a strain on the staff and governance of a charity”</p> <p>“Further financial challenges, increased demands from an ageing population putting increasing pressure on capacity for the voluntary and statutory sectors. Continued closures...”</p> <p>“Growth in Bexley – impact on community cohesion and borough identity”</p> <p>“Client needs are becoming more complex – staff are required to be skilled in mental health issues or signpost to more relevant services”</p>



**Figure 34: SWOT analysis from stakeholder comments**

<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety, longevity, commitment, bastion of local intelligence and understanding of communities – ‘a passion that is gold dust’</li> <li>Ability to step back, view communities and need holistically</li> <li>Connections/ reach into communities – gateway to localism</li> <li>Significant civil society activity already underway – building blocks for more</li> <li>Independent funding the sector attracts enables piloting, testing, creating</li> <li>Bexley VCFS easier to work with than in many other boroughs</li> <li>Contracting with the sector buys so much more than procured services - added value</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Variety in support quality, client organisational focus</li> <li>Persistence of tensions and competitive behaviour</li> <li>Some duplication and unhealthy competition</li> <li>Representativeness and ability to support new communities</li> <li>Takes on too much – need to define and play to strengths</li> <li>Not enough about successes...more visibility required</li> <li>Gaps: equalities, employment routes for vulnerable groups, care leavers and carers, intergenerational activities, environment, work ins chools, young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uniquely placed to make prevention reality</li> <li>Once in a lifetime opportunity to devolve statutory responsibilities and deliver at the heart of communities</li> <li>Increasing trajectory towards co-production, based on excellent intelligence</li> <li>Statutory sector aspires to VCFS stepping into the space of ‘system thinker’</li> <li>Opportunity to cross subsidise the sector through performance and (over) achievement</li> <li>Expansion of volunteering and routes to civil society actions</li> <li>Housing Associations as partners</li> <li>The recent emergence of a revitalised, more focused and effective BVSC</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS / CHALLENGES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rationalise target driven with needs driven/person-centred</li> <li>Fleet of foot hampered by targets and hard outcomes</li> <li>Lack of sustainable resource ...grant based income shrinking</li> <li>Lack of capacity to step back, review, re-configure</li> <li>Tensions between 1) influencing/advising and 2) delivering</li> <li>Understanding of policy implications for how VCFS works</li> <li>Clear, shared understanding of need and what is excellence</li> <li>Communication and monitoring – real time progress tracking</li> <li>Social value difficult to define</li> <li>Need to embrace partnership, collaboration, collective action</li> </ul>



The VCFS workshop, which took place on 6<sup>th</sup> March, provided an opportunity to reflect upon the findings of the survey and stakeholder interviews and take these to the next level, culminating in a number of ‘asks’ of the themselves, as a sector; commissioners and funders; and BVSC. These are summarised below:

Bexley VCFS	Commissioners/Funders	BVSC
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to share information on what we do and who/how to contact us</li> <li>• Create a space for partnerships to be formed?</li> <li>• Attend the networks/forums to raise concerns/issues. Better and consistent engagement!</li> <li>• Can we pool resources for ‘departments’ HR, legal, IT, Payroll, admin, etc.</li> <li>• Collect and promote case studies.</li> <li>• Raise our profile on social media.</li> <li>• Better use of digital technology to let people - especially young people - know what we do.</li> <li>• Prepare partnership bids.</li> <li>• Develop a community directory.</li> <li>• Keep BVSC updated on issues/challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to the collective intelligence we have. Work with us to plug gaps. Get more involved in our sector meetings... ‘Meet the Sector’...?</li> <li>• Trust us – we have expertise, skills... we know what’s needed.</li> <li>• Turnover of Council staff (especially senior) means loss of organisational memory and incoming officers that want to ‘make their mark’. Disruptive and time consuming to engage with this!</li> <li>• Give us opportunities to get round the table to take part in the debate, to tell you what you want and need to know.</li> <li>• Make opportunities to meet service users and ask opinions.</li> <li>• Are you able to respond to complaints? Work with us and you will get less and we can help you deal with them swiftly and efficiently and create changes to head off future problems.</li> <li>• Commissioning - look beyond the ‘gloss’ and slick presentations and focus on skills, knowledge and community relationships; monitoring needs to be proportionate; outcomes need to be realistic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign, lobby, mediate for funders to understand sector needs.</li> <li>• Have a voice when established groups are losing funding/contracts.</li> <li>• Facilitate ‘partnerships’ including bids.</li> <li>• Facilitate ‘Meet the Sector’ meetings for funders/commissioners and translate sector discussion findings into action</li> <li>• Extend relationships with Housing Associations</li> <li>• Facilitate sharing of back office work.</li> <li>• Advocate to extend and embed great work.</li> <li>• Mediate for small groups with the Council.</li> <li>• Facilitate the ‘pool resources function’?</li> <li>• Training for ‘story-telling’; case studies and conveying impact.</li> <li>• Provide social media training.</li> <li>• Promote and highlight ‘group of the week’.</li> <li>• Help to engage the private sector to support our efforts</li> </ul>

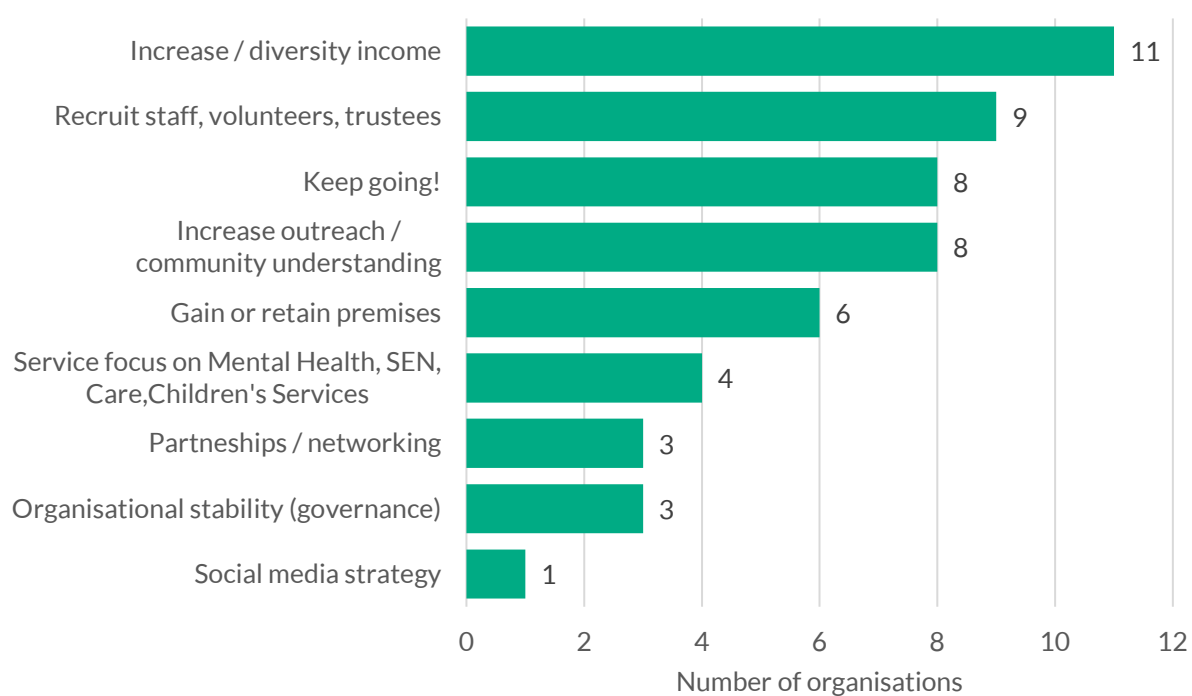




- Recognise the realistic costs of our services and the value we provide.

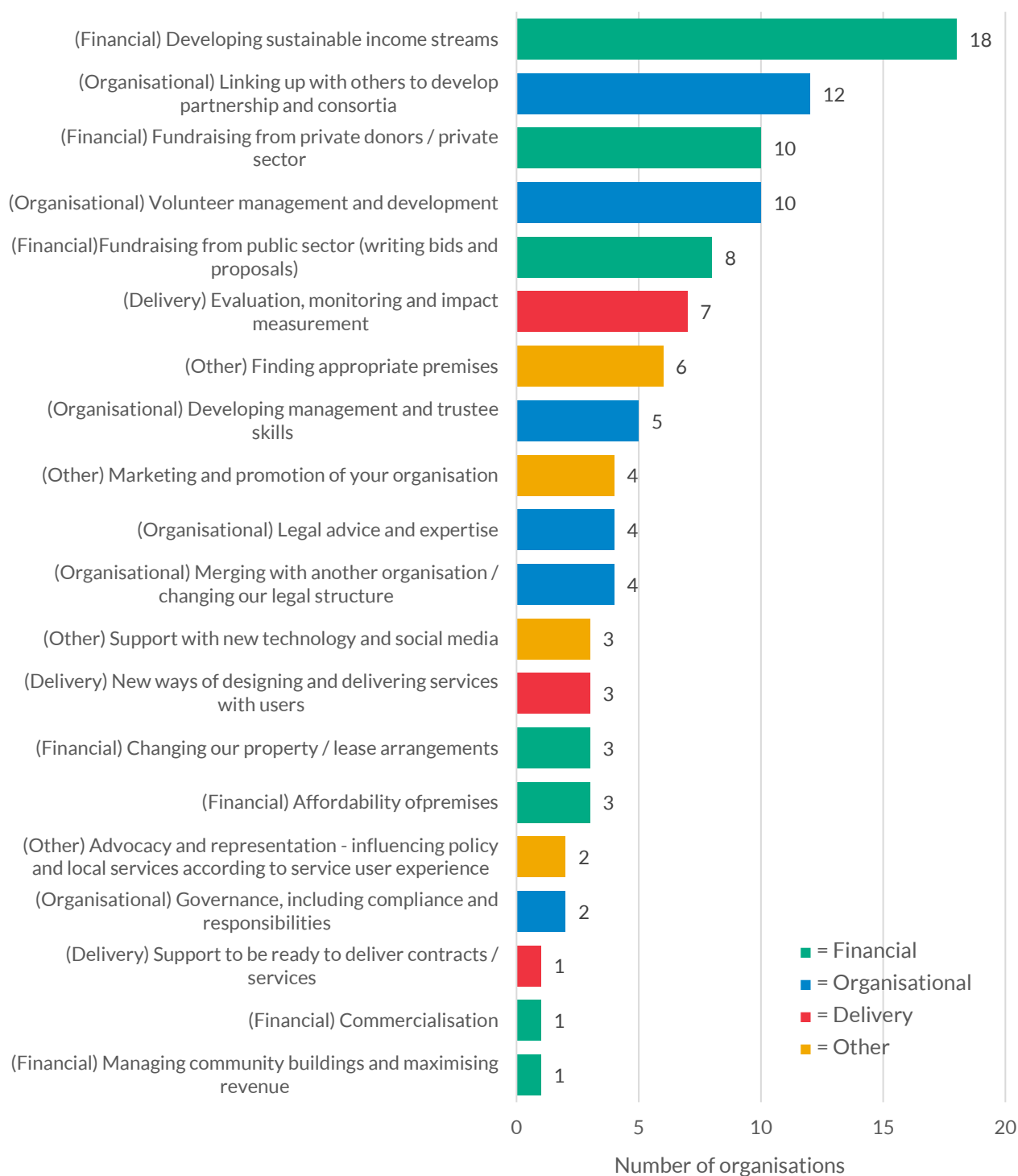
## 5.10 Priorities and support needs

Figure 35: Priorities over the next three years





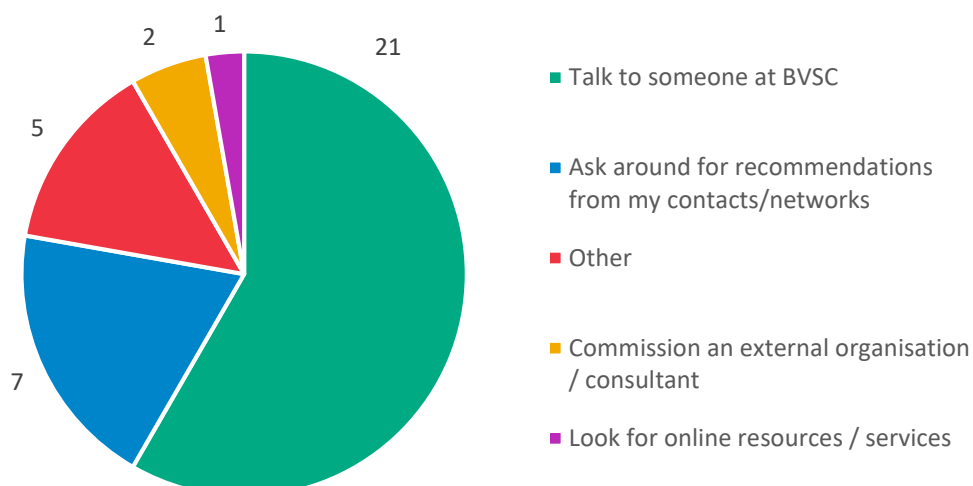
**Figure 36: Support needs over the next 12-18 months**





Income-related support needs are prevalent across survey respondents, followed by governance and collaboration support.

**Figure 37: Where charities would first look for support**



The majority of survey respondents would look first to BVSC for support, followed by peers and contacts; demonstrating reliance and trust in local VCFS relationships.



## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This review has revealed a rich seam of insights from the VCFS and wider stakeholder groups regarding key strengths and challenges facing the sector if it is to respond, effectively, to supporting communities within perhaps the most complex and dynamic operational environment for decades. Expectations of the sector are, arguably, greater than they have been for a significant period in time, as are the associated challenges for BVSC in its capacity building and advocacy roles.

The following key conclusions emerged from the review that have shaped the recommendations set out below:

- **A diverse sector:** The VCSF as a whole in Bexley is diverse in size, beneficiary and activity focus. 56% of registered charities generating an income of less than £25,000 and around 7% generating in excess of £1,000,000 suggests that a significant proportion of organisations have a strong dependence upon volunteers and vulnerability to income fluctuations, but also, the presence of a good proportion of organisations – some of which are local services of large national charities - with capacity to become involved in commissioning; either in partnership or independently. The prevalence of smaller organisations, with a predominantly local focus, does indicate potential to provide a rich network of organisations with the knowledge and connections to engage communities with services and each other, in support of a stronger civil society.
- **A confident, experienced and knowledgeable sector:** A powerful and compelling theme emerged around the commitment and unique qualities that the VCFS consistently demonstrates in order to drive up community engagement and the general wellbeing of communities across Bexley. This confidence, expressed by the VCFS and statutory stakeholders alike, provides a strong framework for taking the sector's work to the next level,
- **Strong links between activity focus and need, but a recognition that the emerging national context and local change requires new and different:** There is a strong VCFS activity and beneficiary focus upon health and mental health, young people, children, families, parents and older people. This chimes with key community needs and characteristics prevalent within Bexley, which drive service requirements and the ways in which organisations need to work effectively in response. There is also a strong correlation between the gaps in provision quoted and needs and requirements for new and different ways of working emerging from national policy shifts around creating a stronger civil society and local socio-economic and demographic changes, including the need to recruit staff reflective of new communities; calls to arms around civic engagement; and a need to better understand government priorities and associated changes in the way that the statutory sector will need to work. This reflects a growing understanding across the VCFS regarding the national and local contextual shifts and the need to adapt to them.



- **Growing needs and demands for services:** It is clear that there has been a significant uplift in demand for services over the last three years. Combined with real concerns expressed over income sustainability - and the associated prioritisation of support needs around fundraising and partnership/consortia development - as well as the availability of appropriate and affordable accommodation for the sector to operate effectively, the VCFS is clearly being stretched and tested more than ever in order to both meet demand and safeguard its own future.
- **A need for space to build statutory and VCFS partnerships:** There is a consensus amongst VCFS and statutory sector stakeholders that opportunities are emerging for productive shifts in the relationship between the VCFS and statutory service providers, towards a partnership of equals around knowledge sharing, co-design, service delivery collaboration and learning. However, in order for this to become a reality, there is a need to develop a platform whereby each can learn from the other around local community need and engagement, what works, priorities and objectives, measuring and demonstrating impact and effective communication approaches.
- **A need for space to build cross-VCFS organisation partnerships:** The propensity for informal connections with, and referrals between, VCFS organisations was significantly more prevalent than relationships that involve high levels of inter-agency collective delivery. This points to a need to drive up trust and openness between organisations and an ability to spot, and take forward, situations where collective working can add value and impact.
- **Awareness raising on the VCFS in Bexley:** Although there is acknowledgement on the part of the statutory sector that the Council and CCG's awareness of the VCFS is increasing, there is a need to raise the profile and convey the potential of the sector further and place it firmly on the Council and CCG horizons in order to develop partnerships and engender trust in the VCFS. There is an associated need to broker relationships between the VCFS and advocate strongly for its potential as a partner to participate productively in support of the Council and CCG's transformation strategies.

The output from the workshop, in particular, highlights a number of areas where, BVSC could helpfully focus in order to take the sector's performance to the next level. Although the recommendations below do not reference, comprehensively, each of these items, it is suggested that BVSC reviews carefully each of the calls to action assigned to each interest group – the VCFS, Commissioners/Funders and BVSC - to identify what could, practically, be included within BVSC's portfolio of work, playing to its strengths as an advocate and influencer, as well as actions that could be taken forward by the local authority in particular.

The recommendations below focus upon some key strategic actions, having regard to responding both to specific local needs and the direction of travel of the wider policy environment. Many of these are contingent upon full and active co-operation by the London Borough of Bexley in terms of adding



weight to BVSC's efforts, co-operating in its pivotal role as change agent for the way in which services are commissioned in Bexley and as a potential connector to the private sector and Housing Associations.

A suggested lead for each recommendation is assigned to either Bexley VCFS organisations, BVSC or the London Borough of Bexley.

**Extend and embed actions to drive up: VCFS collaborations; capacity to diversify income streams; demonstrate successes and impact; and sharing of intelligence on need and 'what works'**

**Lead: Bexley VCFS**

- Drive up partnership working and collaboration; an openness and commitment to 'better together'
- Take practical action to reduce reliance upon statutory and grant funding and apply greater focus to diversifying sources of income and building capacity to compete successfully for funds. This includes taking full advantage of the income support training provided by BVSC
- Dedicate additional resource to the development of case study materials in order to demonstrate successes and impact
- Embrace the opportunities that greater use of digital technology and social media presents for operational efficiencies, reaching communities and profile raising
- Help BVSC to help the VCFS by consistently supplying to BVSC intelligence on local community needs; issues and challenges facing individual organisations or service sectors/sub-sectors; opportunities that will drive up the quality and breadth of service delivery; and case studies on successes and impacts that will help to raise the profile of the sector and pinpoint value that clearly demonstrates to statutory partners the benefits of engaging and partnering with the VCFS

**Drive up grant income: Identify, lobby for and co-ordinate all place-based funding coming into the Borough.**

**Lead: LB Bexley/BVSC**

**LB Bexley/BVSC**

- Establish a 'Bexley Giving' scheme as a vehicle for mobilising/co-ordinating local funding and resources and attracting additional external investment, providing a focus for driving up giving from funders and business. London's Giving, established by City Bridge Trust and inspired by Islington Giving, offers free support to all Boroughs wishing to establish place-based giving schemes



**Establish a framework to develop a full and effective role for VCFS in commissioning, focusing particularly upon advocating for social value-based commissioning.**

**Lead: LB Bexley**

**LB Bexley/CCG/BVSC**

- Organise externally facilitated VCFS/Council commissioning workshops; a space for shared dialogue and agreement of shared priorities and delivery outcomes

**LB Bexley/CCG**

- The Council and the CCG to identify goods and services that could be procured directly from the VCSE or where the sector could add value to broader delivery partnerships

**BVSC**

- Consider and suggest to the Council and CCG how social value may be factored better into the tender assessment process, inspiring the statutory and VCFS alike by providing examples of 'what works'

**LB Bexley/BVSC**

- Pool LB Bexley and VCFS data and intelligence to help build and act upon a shared picture and understanding of needs in Bexley, linked to a co-produced and shared Outcomes Framework to underpin a new Council/CCG relationship with the VCFS

**Engage with the Council to develop a strategy to maximise use of community assets/hubs:**

**Lead: LB Bexley**

**LB Bexley**

- Develop a strategy for assigning property and assets for use by the VCFS

**BVSC**

- Provide practical examples of how the Council can review its policy on rents/assets in relation to the VCFS with a view to a clear, consistent policy of asset-based support for locally based VCFS organisations. This would enshrine a set of principles for the availability of an asset to the sector at a reduced rent or other favourable terms recognising the unique position of the sector (e.g clear delivery of Council service priorities, evidence of need, leverage through the attraction of additional funding/volunteer resources)



**Build and extend private sector connections:**

**Lead: LB Bexley**

**LB Bexley/ BVSC**

- Identify priorities as a basis for reaching out and inspiring businesses to engage with support for thriving communities in Bexley; incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility actions, but extending this ambition into broader philanthropic activity and promoting good growth and shared value in Bexley
- Facilitate strategic connections with one or two significant businesses in Bexley to facilitate knowledge sharing and the development of a mutually relevant and productive agenda of investment by the private sector. It is recommended that a specific project around developing a framework for VCFS sharing back office resources across organisations be taken forward as a pilot
- Engage more, and more regularly, with the Bexley Chamber of Commerce in order share intelligence on need and opportunity with local businesses and engage them in specific initiatives to support projects; notably volunteering opportunities for individual organisations but also the application of skills and expertise to take the sector forward strategically, like marketing and promotion, intelligent use of social media

**Extend the robust framework that BVSC has already developed to promote and embed volunteering.**

**Lead: BVSC**

**BVSC**

- Develop a London Borough of Bexley Employer Supported Volunteering Strategy

**Drive forward key actions to sustain VCFS infrastructure support in Bexley and ensure that key statutory agencies and the sector are playing a full and informed role in**

**LB Bexley/BVSC**

- Instigate a focused dialogue between BVSC and the Council's Community Partnerships team in order to define the respective roles of each party, to ensure that both partners to play to their strengths, duplication is avoided and clarity is maintained from the perspective of Bexley's VCFS





**support of a healthy civil society.**

**Lead: LB Bexley**

**BVSC**

- Consider ways in which to bring the Bexley Compact to life; including the provision of guides articulating what good practice in compliance looks like from the perspective of VCFS and statutory agencies

**Raise the profile and awareness of the sector**

**Lead: BVSC**

**BVSC**

- Collate and disseminate case studies and vignettes, showcasing the breadth and range of the VCFS in Bexley, focusing upon its potential and its successes and share insight with VCFS organisations into effective ways to do this
- Incorporate social media training into support for the VCFS, empowering organisations to scale up their own promotional activity and target younger digital media-savvy groups
- Facilitate 'meet the sector' meetings for businesses and public sector bodies
- Incorporate partnership development and collaboration into BVSC's portfolio of forums

**Broaden and deepen relationships with Housing Associations**

**Lead: LB Bexley**

**LB Bexley**

- Engage with, and connect, Housing Associations with BVSC in order to extend VSFS connections with residential communities and facilitate joint working



## **Appendix A – Stakeholder Interviewees**

Guy Stevenson – Age UK

Tom Brown – Bexley Care

Anne Bennett – Bexley Moorings

Teresa O'Neill - L.B. Bexley

Stuart Robotham – L.B. Bexley

Jane Richardson – L.B. Bexley

Toni Ainge – L.B. Bexley

Ginny Hyland, Sophie Leedham, Princess Adeosun – L.B. Bexley Community Partnerships Team

Dr. Siddarth Deshmukh - CCG

Andrew Fairhurst - CCG

Annie Gardiner – CCG

Lotta Hackett – CCG

Valerie Shanks-Pepper - CCG

Richard Tipping – CCG

Kate Heaps – Greenwich and Bexley Hospice

Peter Cutin - London Fire Brigade

David Palmer – Mind in Bexley



## **Appendix B – Worksop Attendees**

Zebunnessa Abedin – AAWO

Yeukai Taruvinga – Active Horizons

David Mirimu – Age UK Bexley

Nadia Akram – Asian and All Women's Organisation

Tania Bushell – Bexley Deaf Centre

Linda Bellingham – Bexley Diabetic Support Group

Diana Sprowles – Bexley Scouts

Julie Atkinson – Bexley Voice

Clair Johnson – Bexley Women's Aid

Yannick Nyah – Blackmajor.org

Vicky Kelly BVSC

Shaan Sangha - BVSC

Carole Penny – BVSC

Karen Jeffrys - CRiBS

Teresa Haverty – SLCF

Amy Glover - SOLACE

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