A Realist Evaluation of the State of the

Bury Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector 2021

BURY VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY & FAITH ALLIANCE

10GM

University of Salford MANCHESTER

Authors

Michelle Howarth

Philip Martin

Graeme Sherriff

Paul Hepburn

Roze Witkam

Design and Graphical Rendering by Samuel Beswick

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The research team would like to thank the State of the Sector Steering Group for their support in developing the survey and tireless efforts to ensure that this survey reflected the work of the VCSE sector. We would also like to thank all of the VCSE organisations who participated in this survey and the focus groups.

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Contact Information

For Centre for Social and Health Research

Dr Michelle Howarth

Address:
University of Salford,
Mary Seacole Building,
Frederick Rd Campus,
Salford,
Manchester
M6 6PU

Tel: 0161 295 2873
Email: m.l.howarth2@salford.ac.uk

For Bury VCFA

Neil Gibson

Address:
St John's House,
155–163 The Rock,
Bury BL9 0ND

Tel: 0161 518 5550
Email: neil.gibson@buryvcfa.org.uk

Foreword

Welcome to Bury VCFA's first State of the Sector report, highlighting the role of the VCSE (voluntary, community and social enterprise) sector in local voluntary and community action in the Borough of Bury. Our member organisations, groups and volunteers work tirelessly to make Bury a safe and vibrant place.

This research was undertaken in late 2020, and publication of the report has been slightly delayed due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Most VCSE groups were closed or not able to work, and this is reflected in the low response rate to the survey. It has been an extremely difficult year for our sector, and many smaller community groups who rely on activities and the subs income that these generate for survival are now on the verge of closure. Many of our members have had to subsidise their operating costs by utilising reserves.

The COVID crisis has clearly demonstrated that the need and value of the VCSE sector is critical in local communities. Bury VCFA provides vital support to the VCSE groups and volunteers, thus strengthening all communities in Bury. The Bury VCSE sector in 2019/20 secured over £3 million in funding from multiple sources, bringing a significant investment into the Bury economy.

VCFA is the main point of contact between VCSE organisations and strategic partners such as Bury Council and Bury CCG. We are determined to build better relationships between VCSE organisations and our stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

The VCSE sector have responded to overcome the significant challenges to better support communities during the COVID crisis. This report confirms that there is considerable pressure on the VCSE sector. Overall, the VCSE sector in Bury continues as a large, diverse and active movement with considerable social and economic impact. Many organisations are adapting and developing to meet new needs and ensure their own sustainability.

Finally, this report and other 2020 key point surveys conducted by Bury VCFA confirm what we already know from our own data and outcomes: we have a really vibrant and active VCSE sector in Bury that plays a vital role in supporting and enriching the lives of Bury residents.

Sajid Hashmi MBE
CEO, Bury Voluntary, Community and Faith Alliance

Executive Summary

The State of the VCSE Sector 2020 Survey included eight key sections, which encouraged respondents in each of the 10 Greater Manchester localities to describe their organisations, workforce, volunteers and impact, the work that the VCSE sector undertook in each of those localities and the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic on their work and communities.

In total, the survey comprised 104 questions designed to capture accurate and representative data about the state of the VCSE sector. We sought to establish essential findings for each locality and also for Greater Manchester as a whole.

Headlines for Bury

1,249

voluntary organisations, community groups and social enterprises making a difference in Bury

annual income <10K

71%

are micro organisations

13%

of the sector identify as being a social enterprise

91%

have had some direct dealings with other VCSE organisations, 88% with Bury Council and 80% with private organisations

85%

of organisations have at least one source of non-public sector funds, bringing significant value

50%

of the organisations have used their reserves in the past 12 months (53% due to COVID)

Realist Evaluation Approach

The web-based survey was distributed across Bury and a total of 77 were returned during July - October 2020 which includes partial completions. The survey was undertaken as part of the wider survey across all 10 localities in Greater Manchester and forms part of the data set for the Greater Manchester State of the Sector report. The questionnaire was based upon that developed by Sheffield Hallam University for the 'Greater Manchester State of the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterpries Sector 2017' research undertaken in 2017 (Damm et al. 2017). The University of Salford's approach has been to build upon this work done by Sheffield, thereby enabling a comparison over time, but by employing a more realist methodology Salford has emphasised a qualitative analysis to describe the particular context within which agencies are working and, in doing so, help illuminate any prescriptive policy intervention.

The survey used an overarching realist evaluation methodology to understand the sector in three dimensions: Context, Mechanisms and Outcomes. This has facilitated rich descriptions of all aspects of the VCSE sector, including what activities take place (Mechanisms), what impacts these have on relationships, funding, communities and individuals (Outcomes) and the contextual factors, including scale and scope, that underpin these mechanisms and outcomes (Context). We have triangulated data from focus groups across 15 organisations to ensure that the changing social, political and economic environment is presented. To capture the impact of COVID-19, we included specific questions in both the survey and the focus groups to fully understand the implications of the global health crisis for local organisations. This survey was undertaken during the COVID-19 global pandemic, which led to unprecedented changes in society, employment, education and healthcare systems. It is likely that many organisations who would typically respond to such surveys may not have been able to complete this due to adverse circumstances.

When reading this report, it is important to acknowledge two key points. First, the results reported are based on the survey responses received. Accordingly, it is possible that if a different sample of organisations had participated in the survey different results might have been obtained. It is estimated that the results reported within this report are within 10.93 percentage points of the true values.

The report is divided into five key sections, which describe the context, mechanisms and outcomes. Section 1 describes the context, which includes the definition of the VCSE sector, the context for the research, detailing the impact of COVID-19, and a focus on the VCSE sector's contribution to wellbeing. Section 2 describes the work of the VCSE sector, including the number of organisations, geography, organisational maturity, numbers of clients, interventions and income. Section 3 describes the partnership working, workforces, response to COVID-19, and the future. Section 4 describes the future of the VCSE sector in terms of the funding, partnerships and workforce developments needed to sustain the sector. Section 5 provides a call to action based on the report findings.

Section 1: Context

Definitions

This report is about the state of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Bury. At various times, the voluntary sector has been known as the 'voluntary and community sector' or the 'third sector', whilst the current Government talks a lot about 'civil society'. In this report, when we talk about the voluntary sector in Bury, we mean voluntary organisations, charities, community groups, the community work of faith groups, and those social enterprises where there is wider accountability to the public via a board of trustees or a membership and all profits will be reinvested in their social purpose.

Context for the Research

For over 20 years, the NCVO's Civil Society Almanac has monitored the overall health and shape of the VCSE sector. Over the past decade, it has recorded a consistent growth in the size of the UK's VCSE sector. By 2017/18, the sector had begun to recover from a significant contraction following the financial crash in 2008, with the largest ever workforce (909,088 employees) recorded in the 2020 report. (1)

The 2020 Almanac indicated that, despite a slight drop in the number of organisations, the sector's overall income had increased to its highest ever levels; however, the proportion of that made up by government funding [£15.7 billion in 2017/18] had decreased to its lowest share.(1) Despite ministers declaring austerity over in 2019, the amount of money being provided to local authorities and other major public services has continued to decline, with a drop of nearly £16 billion over the period between 2010 and 2020. As a result, the Local Government Association reported that local authority 'support for the voluntary sector has been reduced'. (2) The Almanac noted that even though the vast majority [81%] of organisations continued to be micro and small, the proportion of larger VCSE organisations [with an income of over £1 million per annum] continued to grow.

It estimated that the VCSE sector as a whole contributed £18.2 billion to the UK economy, with Children and Young People 'the most common beneficiary group'. (3)

Sources and Further Reading

1. National Council of Voluntary Organisations (2020) The UK's Civil Society Almanac 2020. Data. Trends. Insights.

2. Local Government Association (2018) Local government funding: Moving the conversation on.

3. Maitland et al., The UK Civil Society Almanac 2020. What can the latest data tell us about charities' challenges now and the future? Presentation, 9 June 2020.

At Greater Manchester city-region level, this picture was reflected in two important documents published by the Greater Manchester VCSE Leadership Group in January 2020. The Leadership Group was set up as a 'coalition of the willing', seeking to promote the role and involvement of the VCSE sector and communities in Greater Manchester devolution. Members of the Leadership Group act as 'catalysts and connectors' on behalf of the sector and advocate at a strategic level for the role of the VCSE sector in all ten localities and across the city-region. 'A Greater Manchester VCSE Policy Position Paper' (1) and the 'Greater Manchester Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Commissioning Framework and Delivery Plan' (2) were written and published in January 2020 following significant engagement with the breadth of the VCSE sector in Greater Manchester.

The Position Paper noted the impact of the national political context at city-region level: that the VCSE sector was under growing pressure due to cuts in public funding since 2010. This was driven by both reduced investment and increasing demand from communities, leading to many VCSE organisations finding themselves in a cycle of responding to crises while struggling to survive. In 2019 it was estimated that local government spending in Greater Manchester had fallen by £582m. While the majority of this was not spending allocated to VCSE organisations, it has limited the capacity of councils to maintain existing funding and develop new areas of activity. It has also meant that the range of local government services has been under severe restrictions and so individuals and communities have been required to self-fund activities and services previously delivered directly by local authorities – or simply do without services that they would normally have accessed. In some cases this has undermined the attempts to implement early intervention and preventative approaches in order to reduce the costs of more acute services. These pressures, alongside the introduction of greater constraints on welfare benefits, have meant that existing VCSE organisations have had to significantly adapt their operating models, and new organisations have formed in order to address an increasing range of unmet needs.

The Position Paper recognised this challenge as one that was shared across the ecosystem of 'services for the public' (i.e. not only the 'public sector'). The Paper set out a roadmap for how the VCSE sector would become more recognised and engaged as a partner in the delivery of services for the public, embedded within public service governance, consultation and commissioning as well as delivery. It envisioned an approach to the development of the VCSE sector which aligned with key strategic documents such as the Greater Manchester Strategy. The Position Paper sought to describe a VCSE Ecosystem Model paralleling the 'Unified Public Services' approach outlined in the Greater Manchester Model White Paper, which promoted integrated neighbourhood-based services.

This Policy Position Paper was accompanied by the GM VCSE Commissioning Framework and Delivery Plan, which set out a series of recommendations with the aim of placing the VCSE sector 'as essential partners and providers within the commissioning process' [p. 6], alongside the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), and the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP), which manages the devolved health and social care budget for the city-region.

These papers built upon other strategies whose scope stretches across all 10 localities of Greater Manchester and that have significant impacts on VSCE organisations. These include the Greater Manchester VCSE Accord, a trilateral arrangement agreed in 2017 by the VCSE sector, the Mayor of Greater Manchester and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

Sources & references

1. Greater Manchester VCSE Leadership Group (2020) - Voluntary organisations, Community groups and Social Enterprises (VCSE) in Greater Manchester – the next 10 years. A Greater Manchester VCSE Policy Position Paper, published January 2020.

2. Greater Manchester VCSE Leadership Group (2020) - Greater Manchester Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Commissioning Framework and Delivery Plan, published January 2020.

Retrospective: Bury 2017–19

The 2017 State of the Sector report calculated that there were 1,135 VCSE organisations in Bury (equivalent to 7.1% of the GM total). The small number of returns received during the survey prevented a calculation of the proportion that were classified as large, medium, small or micro by income or the numbers of full time equivalent (FTE) staff working in the Borough.

Using data from the Bury Directory, the Bury JSNA Neighbourhood Profiles mapped the location and focus of VCSE services in the Borough, showing that agencies working in care services, childcare and general provision dominated the sector. (1) The Neighbourhood Profiles also indicated that while Bury had much higher rates of coronary heart disease and circulatory disease than England as a whole, these were disproportionately concentrated in the Bury East neighbourhood. Similarly, although the Borough as a whole had a lower standardised hospital admission rate for alcohol-related harm, Bury East performed much worse, and the neighbourhood displayed much lower educational attainment at Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2 (reading, writing and maths) and secondary school Attainment 8 than both Bury in general and England overall. (1)

The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranked Bury 95th out of the 317 English local authority areas. This placed it seventh out of the 10 GM authorities, with only Wigan, Stockport and Trafford less deprived. Only 1 in 10 of its LSOAs fell into the 10 per cent most deprived in England, well below the level in neighbouring boroughs such as Manchester, Salford, Bolton and Rochdale. On none of the IMD's main domains of deprivation did it rank worse than 50th. The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index estimated that 16.9% of children in Bury were living in income-deprived families, which placed it 119th out of all 317 authorities in England, while its score of 14.5% on the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOPI) gave it a rank of 108th. (2)

LGA analysis showed that Bury had lower rates of permanent exclusions, looked-after children and NEETs aged 16/17, smaller numbers of households on the housing waiting list and fewer households in temporary accommodation than its geographical neighbours. The Borough performed far better when it came to the percentage of people who took up the offer of an NHS Health Check, and it had lower rates of hospital admissions for alcohol-related issues, which was an issue of concern in many other boroughs. An elevated spend on adult social care was accompanied by far fewer days' delay for patients transferring to social care. (3)

National labour market data showed that just under 40% of the working age population were qualified at NVQ Level 4 and above or the equivalent. This compared positively with the rates of 27% recorded in Rochdale and Oldham and 28% in Tameside but was lower than the rates for Manchester (43%), Stockport (45%) and Trafford (over 50%). (4)

Tracking the employment trajectories of men born between 1986 and 1988, the Social Mobility Commission (5) indicated that significant pay gaps existed between those who grew up in the most deprived families in Bury and those who grew up in the least deprived, even where educational achievement at 16 was similar.

Public Health England profiles indicated that Bury outperformed both local and national comparators in many areas. The only area of concern lay in the worsening statutory homelessness rate. (6)

Sources and References

1. Bury Council, JSNA Neighbourhood Profiles. Accessed at: https://www.bury.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=15624

2. Local Government Association [LGA], Indices of Deprivation 2019. Downloaded from LG Inform, October 2020. https://lginform.local.gov.uk/

3. LGA Research Report. Headline Report for Bury Metropolitan Borough Council. Downloaded from LG Inform, October 2020. https://lginform.local.gov.uk/

4. NOMIS, Labour Market Profile – Bury (accessed at: www.nomisweb.co.uk, 17 December 2020)

5. Social Mobility Commission (2020) The long shadow of deprivation: differences in opportunities across England.

6. Public Health England (2020) Bury Local Authority Health Profile 2019. Accessed at: https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/health-profiles

Wellbeing of Communities and Influence of the VCSE Sector

In 2010, the Marmot report argued that the ability of the third sector to reach out and work collaboratively across communities provides a unique opportunity to support networks, partnerships and the community infrastructure needed to support resilience. The work through the community infrastructure, predominantly based on unpaid and voluntary endeavour, highlights the major role that the VCSE sector has in supporting communities. Moreover, in the later Marmot 2020 report, Greater Manchester was recognized as a city with one of the lowest life expectancies in England – however, the development of the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership in 2016 has led the strategic direction of the region. In doing so, the GMCA works with a devolved health and care system, using a place-based system to help tackle social determinants of health and reduce inequalities. According to NHS England, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector "is an important partner for statutory health and social care agencies and plays a key role in improving health, well-being and care outcomes". The Department of Health and Social Care have embedded the import of the VCSE in a range of strategy documents to ensure that the work of the VCSE in improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities is promoted. During 2020, the work of the VCSE in promoting health and wellbeing was key in supporting communities and individuals. COVID-19 highlighted how the VCSE sector has been impacted, but significantly, the H&WB impact on communities. In the NW, this is particularly relevant as mortality rates are higher than national average, as are suicide rates. The Local Authority Health Profiles for Bury suggest that outcomes for other key indicators such as heart disease and life expectancy are worse.

Since the last State of the Sector Survey (2017), the VCSE Health and Wellbeing programme was launched (April 2017). This involved a partnership with the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England to enable a collaborative approach to improving wellbeing and reduce inequalities through a programme of transformation which influences local level arrangements. Thus, the VCSE sector has an important role to play in the wider Bury Locality Plan (2020), which reports:

'Empowered and enabled local communities and local people, supported by a vibrant Voluntary and Community Sector, who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, confidence, connections and resources to play a more active role in remaining healthy for longer' (Bury Locality Plan 2017–2021, p. 2)

The VCSE sector works in partnership to help deliver early interventions through asset-based approaches that can improve the wellbeing of the community and has worked as part of the Greater Manchester Population Health Plan, to support a Person and Community Centred Approach (PCCA) which was designed to provide support for individuals to develop resilience, knowledge and confidence to manage their own wellbeing. The PCCA approach enabled people to become more active in their wellbeing and engaged with the VCSE sector to produce social and added value to deliver wider benefits to the community. Social prescribing is a key component of GM Person and Community-Centred Approaches, and the VCSE sector has had a huge part to play in embedding effective social prescribing arrangements into the GM health and social care system. Since 2015, the PCCA Team has been supporting the ten Localities of Greater Manchester to utilise community assets to 'take on, sustain and go further in adopting the core characteristics of person and community centred approaches'. Social Prescribing Link Workers often support beneficiaries by connecting them into local activity and provision tailored to them. It is also an approach that embeds capacity building elements to support the VCSE ecosystem through volunteering and voluntary action.

It is recognised that, during 2020, COVID-19 had a significant, often negative impact on the VCSE sector in terms of income generation, loss of staff through furlough and reduced functionality as a result of social distancing measures. The impact on the wellbeing of communities and individuals is significant which has subsequently influenced the State of the Sector survey. Findings from this 2020 survey have therefore taken into consideration this impact and qualitatively described the effect and VCSE response to the crisis.

Current Context: COVID-19

Coming in the existing context of increased pressures on services and activities, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged as the biggest threat to the VCSE sector across the UK. Much government and charitable funding has been directed towards priorities related to COVID-19 and away from other activities. The lockdowns and restrictions enacted to tackle the spread of the virus has not only meant many VCSE organisations have not been able to deliver services in the same way, but the wider economic stress has significantly reduced the charitable donations and investments flowing to it, at the same time, there was a need for the VCSE sector to make rapid transformations and respond at local level in order to support communities during the pandemic. Over the last thirteen months the sector has responded not only to health issues arising as a result of the pandemic, but to the new economic and social pressures arising from lockdown, such as an increase in domestic abuse and mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. (It should be noted here that, unlike other parts of the country, Greater Manchester has been under the most restrictive measures almost constantly since the first lockdown started in March 2020.)

The surge in unemployment since the pandemic began may be one indication that the demand placed on the VCSE sector will rise, even after the current roadmap to the lifting of restrictions ends. Between March and October 2020, the UK saw a rise of 1.4 million (112%) in the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits. (4)

An increased demand for support around health and wellbeing issues - particularly anxiety related problems, but also the long-term physical effects of the pandemic and the legacy of interrupted care and treatment is evidenced by a number of early studies, (5 & 6), including one based on data from Bury. This is likely to mean that many more people will seek help from the VSCE.

The impact of the pandemic will have long-term effects on the sector. The supposed boost to funding in key areas for the VSCE sector, such as adult social care, identified in the 2019 Spending Review, may be short lived due to the huge financial pressures on government budgets. This is all the more important given that nationally over one third of the VCSE workforce are focused in the social work arena. (7)

A number of surveys have been undertaken since March 2020, which provide a range of headline data against which the VCSE sector in GM can be measured. An early report in March 2020 by the Institute of Fundraising and others (1), assessing the initial impact on the charity sector, estimated that charities would see their annual income fall by a third, even though demand was predicted to rise. Revised estimates from the survey in April and May (2) suggested total income would fall by a quarter (or £12.4 billion for the sector as a whole).

Headlines from the September COVID-19 Charity Tracker Survey (3) included:

- Nearly half of the participating charities indicated their financial prospects were worse than they had previously forecast. This disproportionately affected smaller charities, nearly two thirds of which revised their forecasts downwards, whereas only two fifths of larger organisations did.

- 25% of respondents had already made staff redundant, with more expecting to do so. Redundancies were concentrated in larger organisations. Overall, 43% of respondents were reducing posts.

- In the final quarter of the year, should the pandemic increase again and more restrictions be implemented, over half of organisations expected they would not be able to meet demand, due to either mounting calls on the service or their own reduced capacity. A greater proportion of small charities expected to be in this position.

- A third of all organisations surveyed had only 1-3 months of reserves. According to NCVO 9% of organisations either have no cash reserves or not enough to last them a month (NCVO Barometer Data 2020).

A report by The Small Charities Coalition (4) suggested a third of respondents had funding for no more than 12 months, and that while only one in 10 expected to make redundancies, a quarter planned to reduce staff hours in the near future. Only 37% were already set up for remote working, and many did not have the IT capabilities or resources to do so. The report also noted concerns that digital-only services could potentially exclude a range of clients for a variety of reasons including digital poverty and exclusion.

Current Context: Brexit

It is acknowledged that Brexit has created huge challenges with regards to immigration, workforce and volunteers. The State of the VCSE Sector 2020 survey was undertaken whilst Brexit negotiations were still underway, resulting in much economic uncertainty. In addition, the majority of VCSE organisations did not have access to free or affordable legal advice to help them plan for the impact of Brexit. Though we are yet to understand the full impact of our withdrawal from the EU, partnerships and resources maybe negatively impacted for those charities who receive EU funding, resulting in a shortfall of funding. Coupled with the global pandemic, the pressure on VCSE organisations, and the sector as a whole, to continue supporting communities is heightened. This survey takes account of the political and economic climate and reports, where possible, on the impact on VCSE organisations within each locality.

Current Context: Black Lives Matter

A significant number of VCSE organisations are delivered within, and by, people from communities experiencing racial inequalities. In June 2020 the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis led to prominent global campaigns and protest and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. At the same time, many communities experiencing racial inequalities were struggling to cope with the impact of the first wave of COVID-19. In recognising the impact and severity of both COVID-19 and inequalities experienced by these communities in GM, the Greater Manchester VCSE Leadership Group published the following statement in June 2020:

All Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, and BAME-led organisations, are an integral part of the fabric that makes up Greater Manchester (GM)…The GM VCSE Leadership Group welcomes the GMCA proposal to establish a Race Equality Panel (3 June 2020). We also support a GM-specific review of the impact of COVID19-19 on BAME communities. We pledge to play our part in ensuring this agenda moves from words to actions. GM-VCSE-Leadership-Group-BAME-Statement.pdf (vcseleadershipgm.org.uk)

The GM VCSE Leadership Group established a VCSE sector equalities alliance in 2016, which became GM=Equal in 2020.

In January 2021, GM=Eqal released a language guidance toolkit which recommended the disuse of BAME as a term. The language now used in the report includes 'Communities Experiencing Racial Inequalities' rather than 'BAME'. This change in language has been supported by the partners who commissioned this research. However, the survey was undertaken prior to the change in language, which has resulted in the inclusion of BAME as a terminology in relation to the raw data originating from the survey and the focus groups. Where possible, the language has been corrected in core statements in the reports, but direct quotes and raw data have retained the term 'BAME'.

https://www.gmcvo.org.uk/system/files/GM%3DEqAl%20Inclusive%20Language%20Summary%20Slide%201_0.pdf

To capture the impact of COVID-19, we included specific questions in both the survey and the focus groups to fully understand the implications of the global health crisis for local organisations. To capture the impact that this has had on the VCSE sector, we triangulated qualitative responses from the survey with data from the focus groups. We also held a Greater Manchester focus group specifically for people from communities experiencing racial inequalities to discuss the work of the VCSE sector. This next section provides insight into the impact of COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter on the communities experiencing racial inequalities within the VCSE sector.

Findings: Impact of COVID-19, Brexit and Black Lives Matter

Our findings suggest that COVID-19 has brought existing needs of communities experiencing racial inequalities to the forefront; for example, challenges – such as mental health problems, domestic violence and food poverty – have been exacerbated in areas that were already experiencing deprivation and poverty. Moreover, it became clear from the focus groups that the rates of COVID-19 infections were higher in people from communities experiencing racial inequalities due to various reasons, including health inequalities and socioeconomic factors.

We explored the impact of Black Lives Matter within the focus groups across the localities. In one of the focus groups, one of the participants stated that

> ***'local authority organisations, public organisations want to talk and they want to get in the room';***

However, it was stressed that it is important that the problems are not only talked about, but also addressed. Participants in the focus groups agreed that more work needs to be done; but that it is a work in progress. One participant stated

> ***'a focus group is positive in terms of measuring and recording what's happening. But then it's also important to follow up and actually take some sort of action with those in power so that there can be a long-lasting change and move towards transformative social change within society'.***

Another issue highlighted in the focus groups was the increase observed in hate crime; for example, in the Chinese community hate crime has increased since COVID-19 emerged. Similarly, the Hate Crime Awareness programme has identified that a lot of hate crime incidents are not reported, because many of the victims do not know how to report them. In our focus groups, one participant added that in her locality race crime has increased too. However, she also stated that when victims report it, there is no feedback to the victim; the victim does not feel valued.

There were significant issues relating to funding, particularly in communities experiencing racial inequalities. Much of the discussion focused on funding security and being able to continue delivering vital services to the community. Issues relating to funding insecurity from within the focus groups highlighted a number of examples, as follows:

> ***'My biggest shout across to commissioners is: whilst there's all of this going on, actually in your contracting, in your grant programmes, how many BAME communities are in there? Actually what does the next six months, approach the end of this financial year and beyond mean?'***

> ***'Look funders, look central government, look local authorities, we are providing vital services to your constituents and to your residents and to your voters and to your taxpayers. What are we getting in return? Please, please don't forget us in your policies.'***
> ***'When you look at the organisation in itself – like **** mentioned – it's a massive struggle. Who supports us? But we're supporting hundreds and hundreds of people behind us, with little or no resources.'***

> ***'But there needs to be more of a coordinated effort in terms of health, smaller, medium enterprises and smaller voluntary and not-for-profit organisations – and also other ones as well – come together and be able to bid for and tender for contracts from the government. It seems like a lot of black minority groups are often the ones who are not in those kind of streams because they may not have the financial background, or they may not have the contract readiness ability or the staffing resources, so they can't actually apply for these type of contracts.'***

Around the time of the focus groups, there was significant national discussion taking place regarding funding for communities experiencing inequalities. In April 2020, the campaign group Charity so White called on funders to centre communities experiencing racial inequalities in their COVID response and commit to ring-fencing 20% of funds towards VCSE organisations working with these communities. Following this, organisations such as Comic Relief, Lloyds Bank Foundation and National Survivor User Network adjusted their funding portfolios to ring-fence allocations.

There were also suggestions from with the focus groups that the VCSE infrastructure organisations within Greater Manchester could provide more support and assistance around contract readiness; providing training so that organisations can apply for contracts and tenders. Although this comment may actually be symptomatic of bigger challenges faced by the sector including an increasing competitive environment linked to changes in public sector spending and commissioning approaches.

Brexit was also discussed. Although at the time of the focus groups there was still significant uncertainty regarding the Brexit deal and the practical implications on individuals and communities. This combined with the impacts of COVID-19 resulted in limited insight on the topic beyond the concerns surrounding refugees, migrants and asylum seekers from an Eastern European background post-Brexit.

These findings suggest that there is a recognition that partnership working is integral to VCSE organisations to enable the sector to function effectively and maximise its impact. There is a need therefore, to ensure that commissioners offer flexible approaches that can support collaboration within VCSE organisations to ensure a sustainable, impactful VCSE sector.

Interestingly these observations very much dovetail with the work of the GM VCSE Leadership Group and the recommendations of their VCSE Commissioning Framework and Delivery Plan, published in January 2020 VCSE Commissioning Framework and Delivery Plan | www.gmcvo.org.uk. This report builds on the 2017 State of the Sector, but places a focus on the way in which the VCSE sector has worked in partnership to support local communities and individuals through unprecedented times, resulting from the COVID19 pandemic.

Repurposing of Organisations in Response to COVID-19

We asked the survey respondents to indicate if they had repurposed their services in response to COVID-19, and 41.1% of the respondents indicated that they had fully repurposed their services. A slightly smaller percentage (39.4%) indicated that they had not repurposed their services. Combined with the qualitative data, the responses of VCSE organisations in Bury to COVID-19 were split, and whilst many organisations had repurposed, the qualitative data indicates that this was predominantly due to the loss of contracts and funding and increased demand. The triangulated findings suggest that the VCSE sector in Bury was responsive to the crisis and was able to adapt (where needed) to ensure that communities and individuals were supported.

We asked participants in the qualitative focus groups about the challenges and how they had adapted their services. Participants described how they had initially developed digital methods to support people but later also recognised that, for many of the most vulnerable, digital support was either not enough or was inaccessible, as the following extracts illustrate:

> ***'Six months ago, I would have been sceptical that we could organise a board meeting, or a training session, or a team meeting through Zoom. Now we are doing it as second nature. It forced us to make some real rapid learning, and that's been quite helpful for the organisation, and much of that we want to retain. We've gone through the pain, and we can see the gain, so we want to keep it where we can.'***

> ***'We feel our most vulnerable clients have lost out. There are lots of very vulnerable clients who need assistance to come forward, who need people to prompt them about their problems, who need to be reminded about what the advice was when they get home, who have confidence issues, have low-grade mental health issues that don't feel they can communicate to everyone. All of those clients have lost out by not being able to get face-to-face work, so we were really pleased that over the last month or two we've reintroduced face-to-face work in a limited fashion, in a COVID-secure fashion, but it's still people are back, so that's quite positive.'***

As a result of COVID-19, the UK Government implemented the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which enabled all employers who had employees on PAYE to furlough some workers. The Government provided financial support of up to 80% of an employee's salary to help reduce redundancies. The scheme was introduced in March 2020 and is due to complete at the end of September 2021, and it may have impacted on paid staff within the VCSE sector. We therefore included a survey question that asked respondents to indicate the maximum percentage of employees furloughed at any one time.

Of those organisations who responded:

- 78% reported that they did not have to furlough any employees.
- A smaller percentage (10%) of organisations reported that they had furloughed up to 30% of employees.
- A total of 4% of the organisations had furloughed between 31% and 50% of employees.
- Only 2% of organisations had furloughed between 51% and 99% of employees.
- A total of 6% of organisations had furloughed 100% of employees at any one time.

Section 2: Mechanisms and Processes

This section discusses the mechanisms and processes used to support the VCSE sector. The section will describe the work of the VCSE sector, the number and size of the organisations, the geography in which organisations operate, the number of clients and beneficiaries and the types and numbers of interventions provided. The final part of this section will provide a descriptive analysis of the sector's income and expenditure.

Estimated Strength of the Survey

The total number of survey responses for Bury was 77. On the basis of previous State of the Sector population figures, this return allows for a 10.93% margin of error based on a 95% confidence interval. This suggests caution needs to be applied with the findings as, if the survey were repeated, it may yield different results.

What the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector in Bury Does

In estimating the total number of organisations in Bury, we used the national Register of Charities in England and Wales. To estimate the total population of Bury, we utilised the ONS estimates of population in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (2019) data sets. To estimate the number of social enterprises, we used the Greater Manchester Social Enterprise Survey (2020).

- The estimated population of Bury is 190,990.
- According to the UK Register of Charities in England and Wales (in 2020), there are 306 registered charities in Bury. We are unable to provide a comparison with the 2017 data as the number of registered charities was not reported in 2017.
- It is estimated that there are 3.66 below-the-radar (BTR) organisations per 1,000 population (Mohan et al. 2010), which indicates that there are approximately 699 BTR organisations in Bury. It is possible that these organisations are not represented in the total number of survey responses.
- According to the Greater Manchester Social Enterprise Survey (2020), there are 244 social enterprises operating in Bury.

A total of 77 organisations responded to the survey question about organisational size (see figure 1). A total of 26% of the organisations who responded to the survey in Bury considered themselves to be a social enterprise. Combining the number of registered charities in Bury (306) with the estimated number of BTR organisations (699) and the number of social enterprises (244), it is estimated that there are 1,249 organisations operating in Bury. This figure is higher than that in the 2017 report, which estimated that there were 1,135 organisations operating in the VCSE sector in Bury. Social enterprise has grown, both in charities and voluntary organisations undertaking trading activity (including public service delivery) and distinct social enterprise organisations. In their survey of 2019, Social Enterprise UK estimated that 42% of social enterprises were less than five years old, with the vast majority growing their income or covering costs. This creates a very dynamic environment and makes comparisons with previous years more challenging as the sector changes.

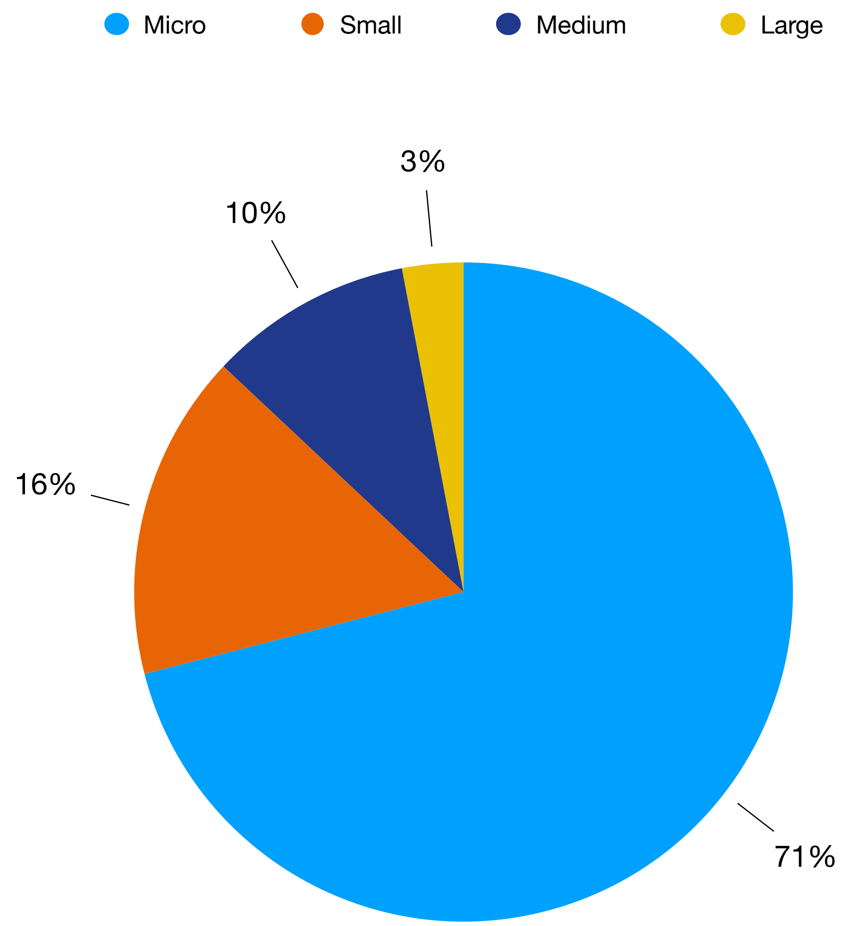
Size, Number and Types of VCSE Organisations

We used the NCVO Almanac (2020) categories to calculate the size of the organisations. Classifications were based on the following criteria:

- Micro – less than £10,000 per annum
- Small – less than £100,000 per annum
- Medium – less than £1 million per annum
- Large – over £1 million but less than £10 million per annum

Our analysis indicates that a total of 889 organisations were estimated to be micro. This represents the majority of organisations and reflects the trend in the 2017/18 NCVO Almanac. A total of 124 organisations were estimated to be small, a further 200 organisations were estimated to be medium, and 36 were estimated to be large (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Size of Organisations in Bury



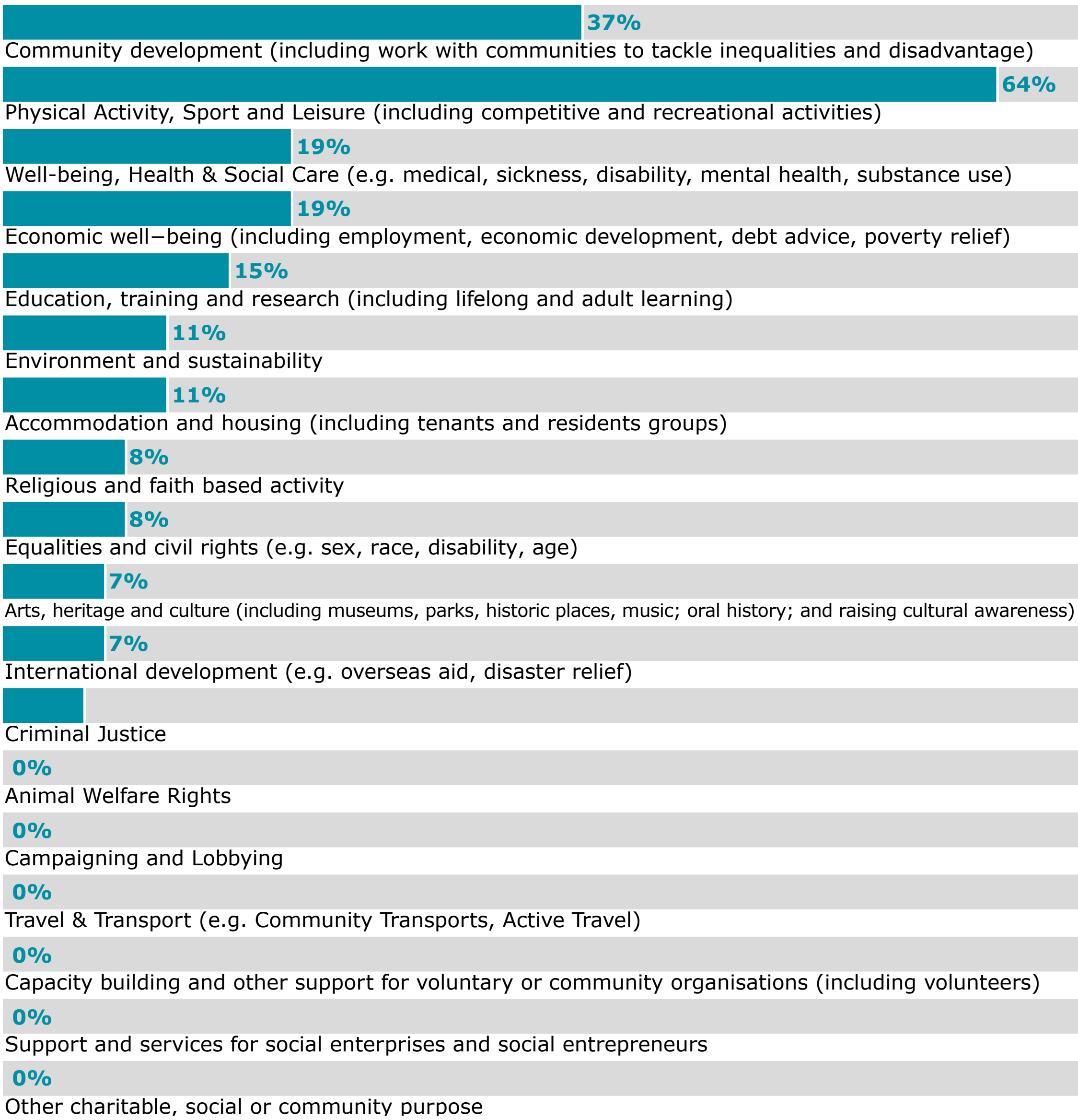
How the VCSE Sector Makes a Difference to People

The VCSE sector in Bury makes a difference to people's lives by helping to improve wellbeing; working with communities to develop resilience; supporting and encouraging physical activity; empowering individuals through education and training; and supporting sustainability through supporting employment opportunities and key skills development. Through the survey, organisations were asked to identify their main areas of work (Figure 2).

The top four main areas of work identified by survey respondents in Bury were:

- Physical Activity, Sport and Leisure (64%)
- Community Development (37%)
- Wellbeing, Health and Social Care (19%)
- Economic Wellbeing (19%)

Figure 2: Main Areas of Work in the VCSE Sector



Main Clients/Users/Beneficiaries of VCSE Organisations in Bury

Respondents were asked to select up to three main beneficiaries/clients that they worked with (Figure 3). For those who responded, the four most common client groups were: 'Everyone', 'Older People', 'Women' and 'People with Disabilities'.

Figure 3: Main Clients/Users/Beneficiaries of the VCSE Sector

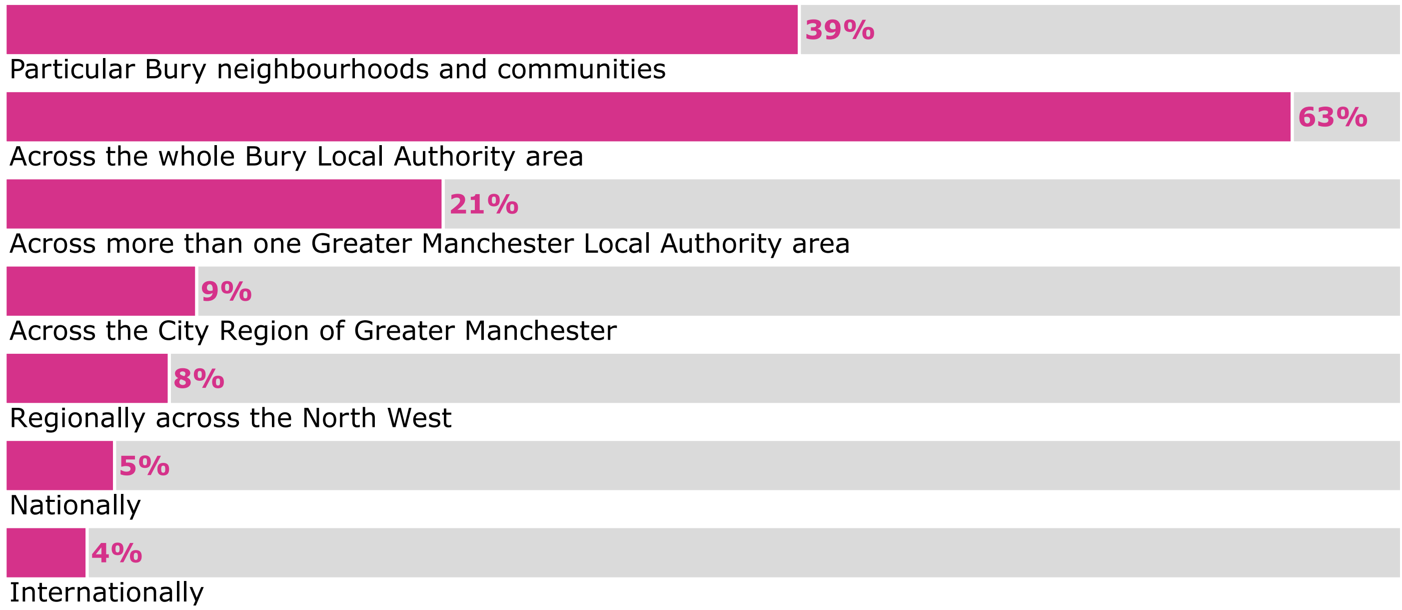
The data suggests that organisations work with a diverse population, often with mixed groups providing flexible support for a range of people.

Geographical Area Within Which the VCSE Sector Operates in Bury

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the main geographical areas in which they operate. The response options provided included particular neighbourhoods, local authority, across more than one GM local area, regionally, nationally and internationally (Figure 4).

- A total of 63% of respondents were estimated to be working across the whole of the Bury local authority area.
- A total of 21% of respondents worked across more than one Greater Manchester local authority area.

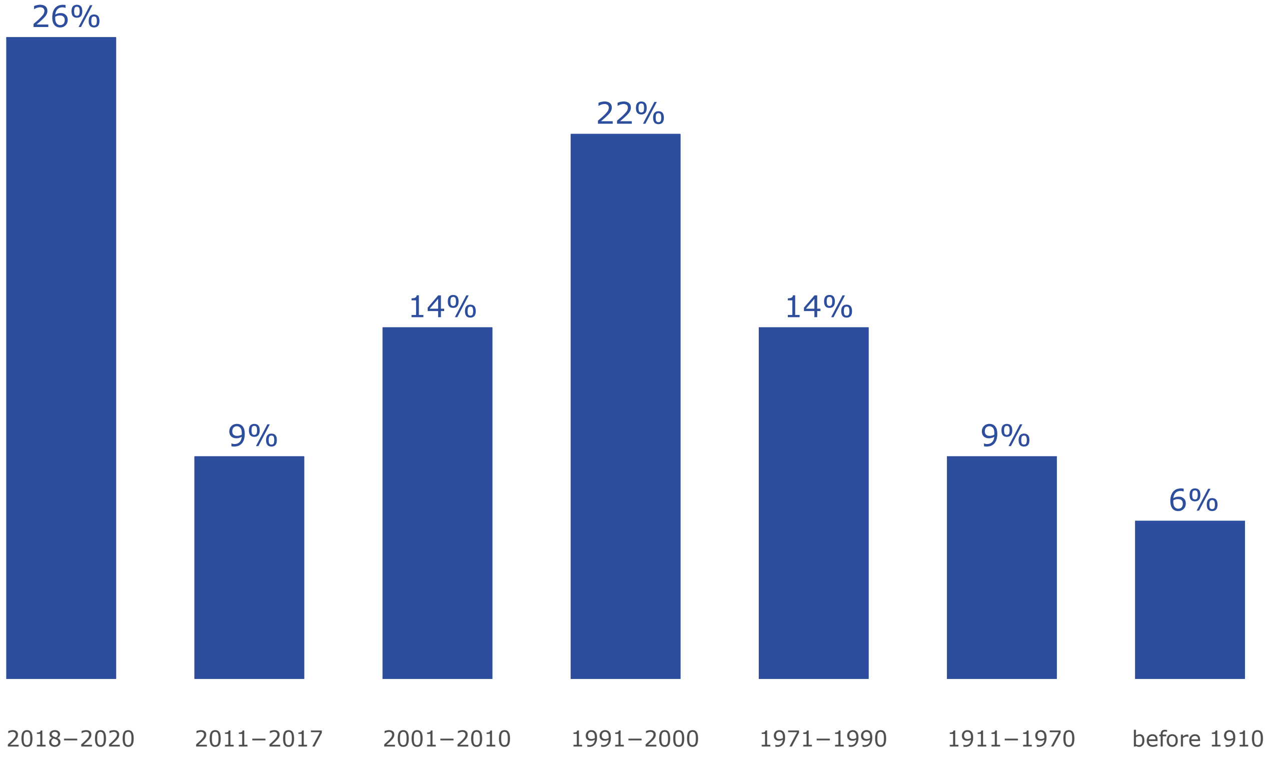
Figure 4: Main Geographical Areas of Work



Organisational Maturity

We asked respondents to indicate in which year their organisation was formed. This was to ascertain the level of organisational maturity as an indication of how established the VCSE sector is in Bury (Figure 5). A total of 23% of organisations were formed between 2001 and 2017. During the past 30 years, 71% of organisations were established. Similar developments were reflected in the 2017 survey, and caution should be taken with the interpretation of the estimates, as the survey by its nature only tracks the organisations that are currently operating in the Borough. As a result, it does not monitor sector churn, e.g., those organisations that have closed or withdrawn from the Borough or may have merged with other organisations.

Figure 5: Organisational Maturity



Income and Expenditure

This section describes organisations' reported income, expenditure and sustainability. The data reports on the use of reserves, changes in income and expenditure and financial sustainability.

We are unable to compare the estimated incomes with previous reports or extrapolate income estimates for this report due to the low number of surveys received. However, we can note, on the basis of data from other localities and the report for Greater Manchester as a whole, that the Bury VCSE sector's income has decreased since the last survey in 2016. Although the sector across Greater Manchester exhibited income growth in 2017/18, decreases occurred in 2018/19 and 2019/20, with an overall estimated decline in income of between 3% and 13% based on averages of other areas.

Estimated Sources of Public Sector Income

In 2019 it was estimated that local government spending in Greater Manchester had fallen by £582 million. The majority of this reduction was not spending allocated to VCSE organisations, but it has limited the capacity of councils to maintain existing funding and develop new areas of activity. In addition, with the range of local government services restricted, this has required individuals and communities to self-fund activities and services previously delivered directly by local authorities. Existing organisations have had to change to adapt, and new organisations have developed in order to address unmet needs.

We asked the respondents to estimate what proportion of their organisation's/group's total income each source represented. A significant percentage of the VCSE income in Bury originated from grants administered by Bury Council. Our findings also indicate that Bury NHS CCG and Pennine Care also account for a moderate proportion of the funding:

- Funding administered by Bury Council was the most frequently identified source of funding (72.7%).
- The second most common source of funding was Bury CCG (59.7%).
- A smaller number of respondents (54.5%) indicated that Pennine Care was the third most common source of funding.

Of those receiving funding, it is estimated that 31.2% of organisations received less than 10% of their funding from the Council. Conversely, 1.3% of those receiving funding from Bury Council received 100% of their income in this way.

Estimated Other Sources of Income in Most Recent Financial Year

We asked survey respondents to estimate what proportion of their organisation's/group's total income each source represented for each of the sources of other income their organisation/group received in the most recent financial year (i.e., 2018/19 or 2019/20) (Figures 6 and 7). Our findings suggest that, although a large number of organisations received significant funding from the public sector, at least 96% of organisations were bringing in funding from another source, providing added value to the Borough and residents.

- **Fundraising (e.g., crowdfunding events, donations):** 32% of respondents received income through this type of funding, 21% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 7.8% received at least 20% but less than 50%.

- **Membership fees:** 30% of respondents received income through this type of funding, 22% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 4% received at least 20% but less than 50%. Only 3% indicated that they received 100% of their annual income through membership fees.

- **Grants from charitable trusts and foundations:** 47% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 17% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 20% indicated that they received at least 20% but less than 50%.

- **Charging for goods and services:** 29% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 18% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 5.2% received at least 50% but less than 75%. Only 1.3% indicated that they received 100% of their annual income through charging for goods and services.

- **Grants from National Lottery distributors (e.g., BIG):** 23% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 14.3% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 3.9% received at least 20% but less than 50%.

- **Business donations or sponsorships:** 20% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 25% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 8% received at least 20% but less than 50%.

- **Interest (e.g., bank endowments, investments):** 12% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, and 13% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way.

Figure 6: Other Sources of Funding

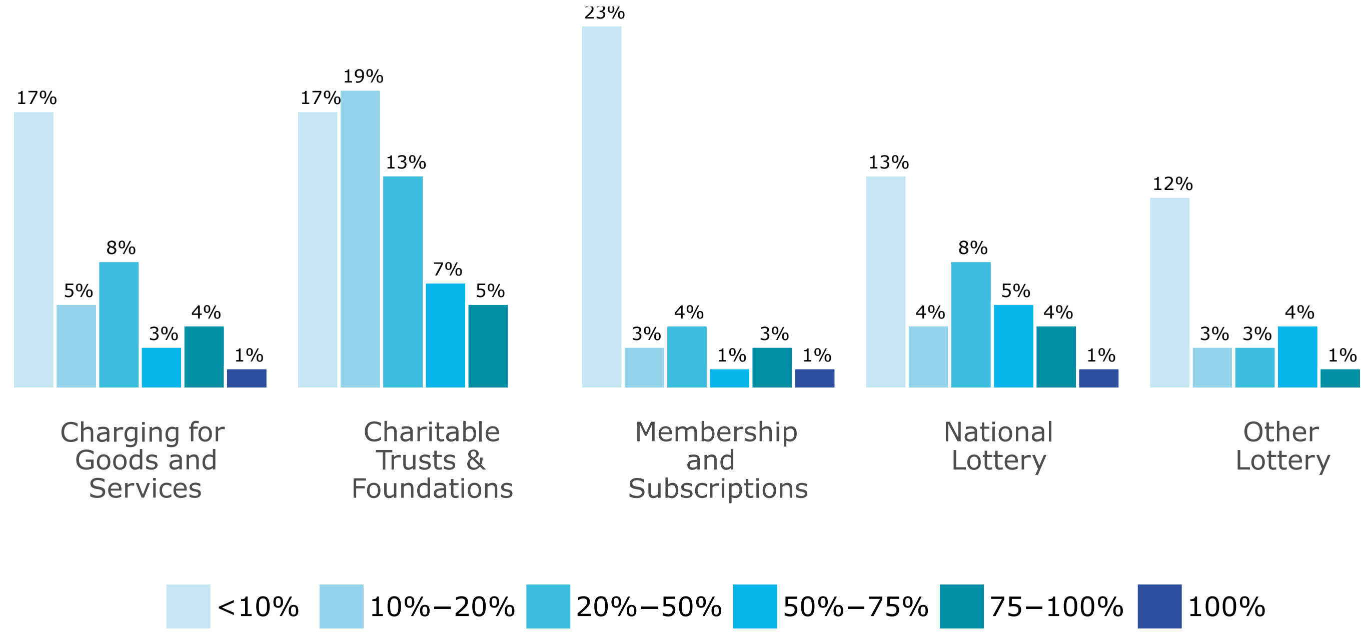
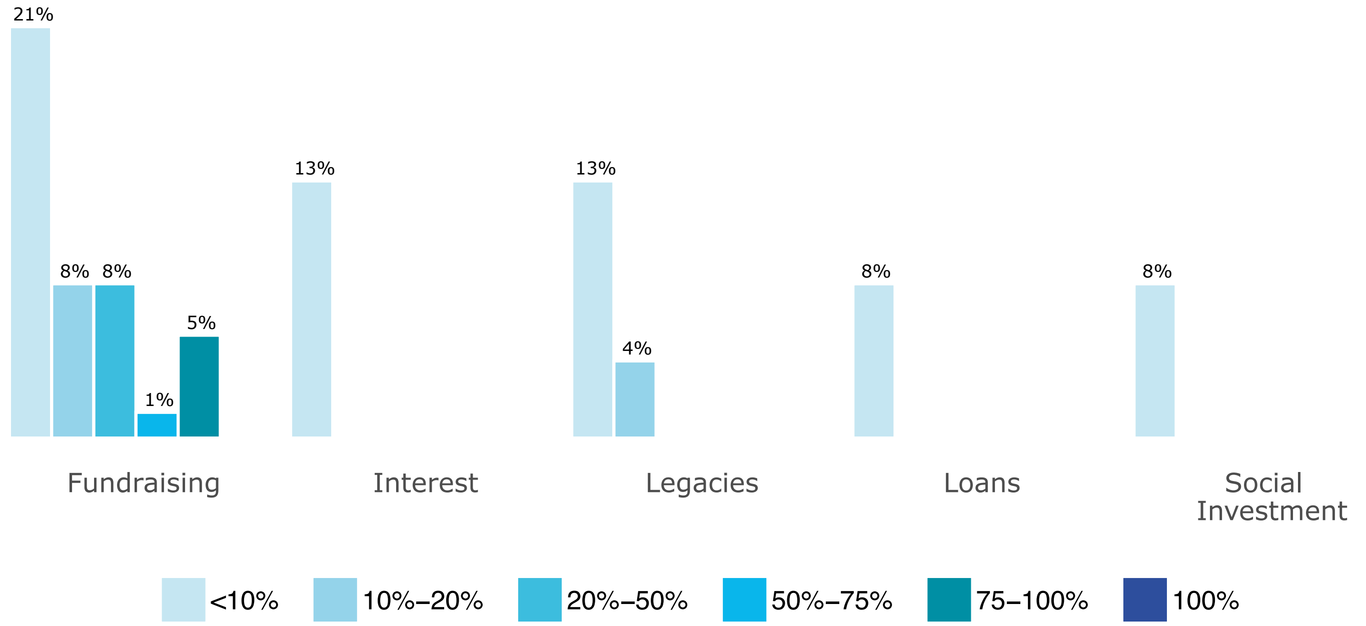


Figure 7: Other Sources of Funding



In recent years, there has been considerable interest in the role that community activity can play in reducing demand on public services. This has seen a shift in some funding from treatment services to more preventative social action. This can be seen in the inclusion of a significant programme of social prescribing in the NHS Long Term Plan of 2019. This has seen much more funding for community-level activity but also investment in public sector activity, such as social prescribing link workers in NHS Primary Care Networks.

European Funding

We asked respondents to indicate if they received European funding. Only 10 organisations responded; of these, the majority (90%) received less than 10% of their funds from European sources.

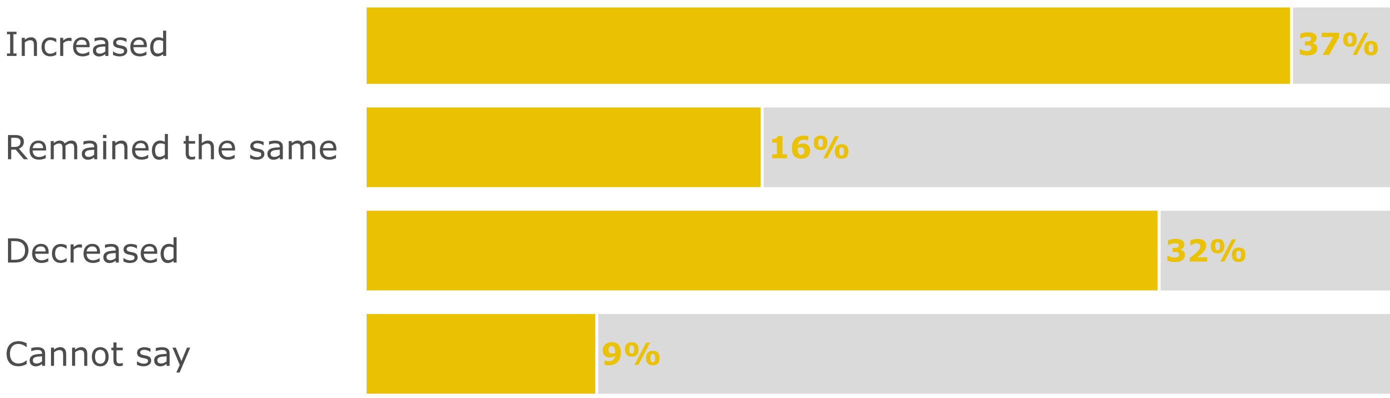
Financial Sustainability

The survey asked respondents about how their organisation's financial situation had changed in the past 12 months (i.e., during the current financial year). The results use the use of reserves, total annual expenditure and total annual income (reported separately below) to provide a picture of financial sustainability.

Changes in Total Annual Income

The respondents were asked about their annual income. A total of 37% of organisations reported an increase in their annual turnover, whilst a further 16% reported no change in their income. A larger percentage (32%) of organisations reported that their income had decreased, and seven organisations (9%) were unsure of the change in their income (Figure 8).

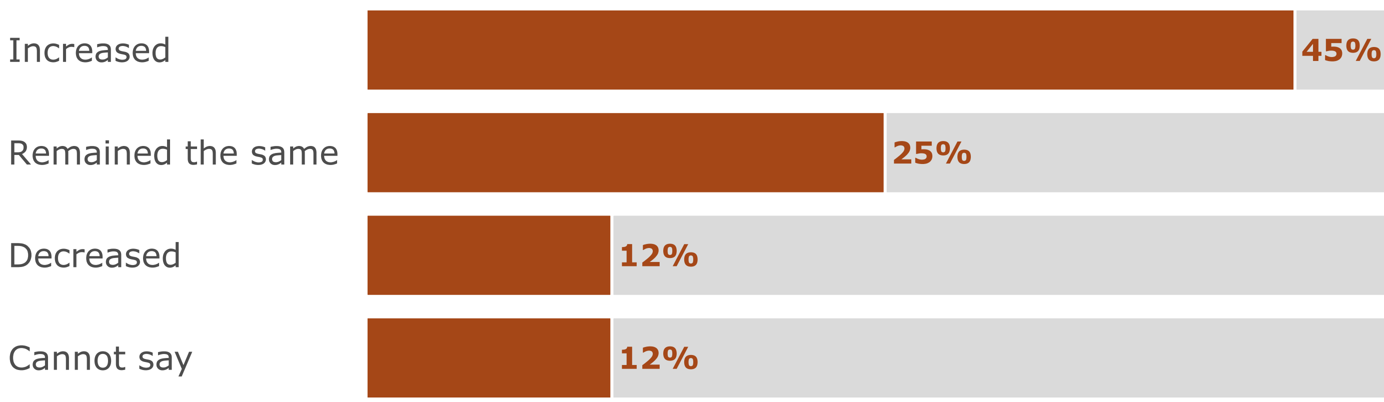
Figure 8: Changes in Annual Income



Changes in Total Annual Expenditure

The respondents were asked about their annual expenditure. A total of 45% of organisations reported an increase in their annual expenditure, whilst a further 25% reported no change in their expenditure. A smaller percentage (12%) of organisations reported that their expenditure had decreased, and 12% of organisations were unsure of the change in their expenditure (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Changes in Annual Expenditure



Reserves

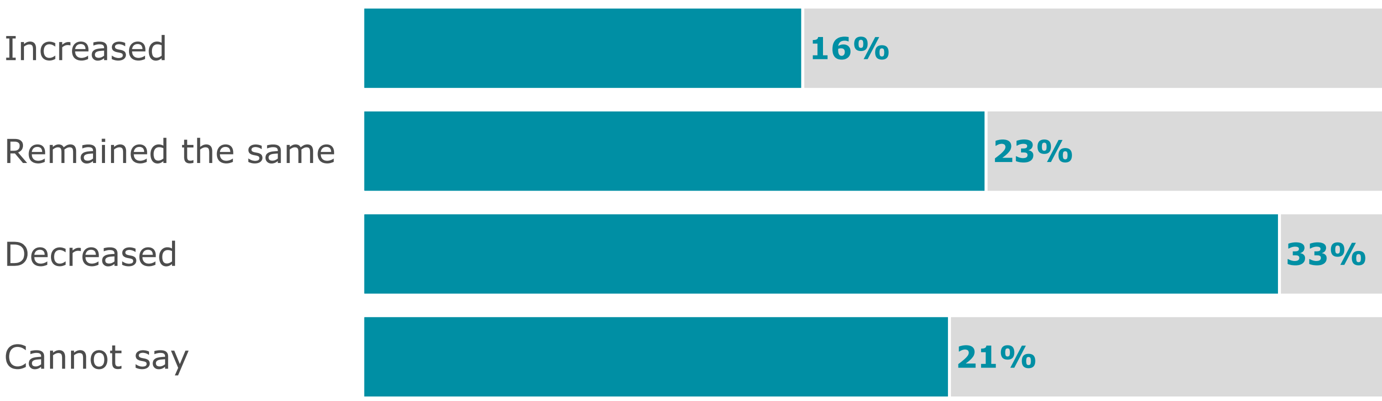
The data later reports on the use of reserves in the past year and changes noted in overall income across all groups. The majority (56%) of respondents had used their reserves in the past 12 months; however, 44% reported that they had not used reserves. Of those who had used reserves, 32% used reserves to cover a gap in funding, and 8% used reserves to cater for an increased demand. Others reported that the use of reserves was to cover unplanned costs (12%) and change the way that they work (4%). Of the 34 respondents who had used reserves, just over half (19) reported that this was as a result of COVID-19. A total of 33% of respondents indicated that their reserves had decreased. Only a small percentage (16%) reported an increase in the level of reserves, and 23% reported that their reserves had remained the same.

50%

of the organisations have used their reserves in the past 12 months (53% due to COVID)

It should be noted that an organisation not using their reserves is not necessarily an indicator of financial stability. Smaller and newer organisations may not yet have established reserves due to their limited maturity, whilst similarly some larger organisations may not have been able to utilise their reserves due to the requirement of their reserves policy to maintain certain levels to remain solvent (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Changes in Level of Free Reserves



The respondents were asked about their expectations regarding income for the next 12 months. A total of 20% of organisations estimated that their income would stay the same, 28% estimated that it would decrease, and 23% of organisations anticipated an increase (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Financial Turnover

Summary of Financial Situation

Our findings suggest that 32% of respondents thought that overall income had decreased, compared with who indicated that there was an increase in income. Similarly, 45% of respondents indicated an increase in expenditure, and only 12% reported that expenditure had decreased. A total of 33% of survey respondents indicated that they had had a drop in reserves. A total of 23% of respondents predicted their level of sustainability would increase in the next 12 months, with 28% predicting a decrease and 23% uncertain. These findings raise some concerns about financial sustainability in the next 12 months. Moreover, our findings do not report on 2020/21 data, which is likely to have significant reductions forecast as a result of the ongoing global pandemic and its negative impact on the wider UK economy.

How organisations have responded to the ongoing pandemic is still somewhat of an unknown and is partly what this research seeks to uncover. Many organisations have seen reductions in funding, especially those unable to trade due to lockdowns. When responding to the crisis, some have taken advantage of support through government loans and furlough schemes to weather the crisis, whilst others have used funding from reserves in order to meet new demands. In addition, public and independent funders have launched a number of funding approaches to support responses and community activity, each with different targets. This has created a set of differential impacts on resource levels, which are not easily understood at this time.

Section 3: Sector Outcomes

This section describes the partnership working that operates in the VCSE sector, which has enabled the provision of a complex range of interventions. The work of paid employees and the number of volunteers is described to provide a picture of the partnerships needed to support the workforce, and the overall estimated size of the VCSE sector workforce.

Partnership Working

The Marmot report (2010: 161) reported that 'Partnership working has played a key role in policymaking to address health inequalities'. Partnership working is also crucial to help manage increasing demand for services when challenged by limited resources. Successful partnerships lead to improved outcomes from the same resources that can support communities. The VCSE sector operates in diverse communities and contexts and as such relies on successful partnerships to underpin high-quality activity. Hence, VCSE organisations work in partnership with a range of organisations, including private, public and others in the VCSE sector. This section reports on the extent of partnership working with the private and public sectors. We also consider the way in which organisations in Bury has worked with VCSE organisations in Bury and across GM and the influence on organisational success.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate how satisfied they were with partnership working. Our findings suggest that, overall, most organisations were satisfied with their partnership with Bury Council.

Working Relationships with Bury Council

It is understood that local authorities support the VCSE sector through flexible and responsive grants that can help empower resilient and thriving communities. The relationship between the VCSE sector and the respective local authority is significant and plays a vital role within the health and social care context. During 2020, this relationship became even more important as our financial data suggests that many organisations struggled due to the constraints created by the global pandemic. Bury Council are a key commissioner/funder of the VCSE sector. We asked the survey respondents to estimate, overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with their ability to influence Bury Council decisions that are relevant to their organisation/group. The responses indicate a mixed experience of working with the Council.

- 10.4% of respondents were very satisfied, and 24.7% were fairly satisfied; however, 22.1% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- 16.9% were fairly dissatisfied, and 7.8% were very dissatisfied

Success of Bidding or Applying for Funding from Bury Council

The current uncertain economic climate caused by the global pandemic has had far-reaching negative impacts on the VCSE sector. On the basis of emerging evidence from research that has surveyed the impact of COVID-19, there is a need to ensure that VCSE organisations are supported to bid for funds and that investment should be easy to access, creating a level playing field with other sectors. Respondents were asked to indicate the estimated level of success with applications for funding from Bury Council. The findings suggest that organisations had been fairly successful, with 24.7% indicating that they had been very successful and 28.6% indicating that they had been fairly successful. A total of 26% of organisations estimated that they had been either not very successful or not at all successful. This data suggests that the majority of applications from the VCSE sector to the Council had been successful.

Relationships with Local Public Sector

We asked respondents to describe their direct dealings with local public sector bodies. The three most prominent organisations were:

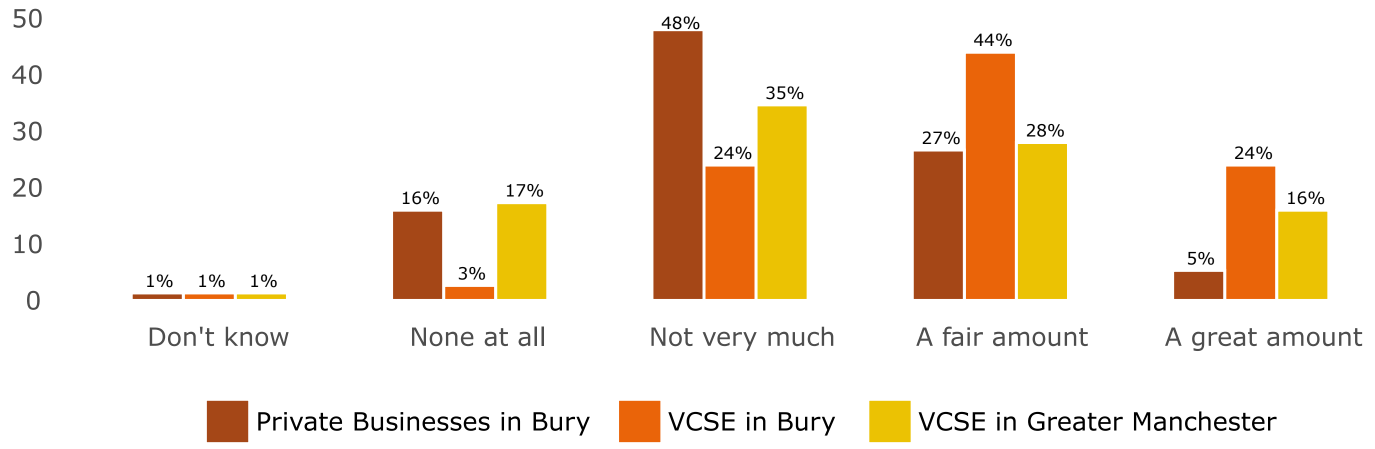
- **Bury CCG:** 9.1% of respondents had had a great amount of dealings with Bury CCG, and 15.6% had had a fair amount of dealings.
- **The Primary Care Network:** 5.2% of respondents had had a great amount of dealings, and 10.4% had had a fair amount of dealings.
- **GM Police:** 2.6% of respondents had had a great amount of dealings, and 27.3% had had a fair amount of dealings.

Partnerships with Other VCSE, Private and Other Organisations across Greater Manchester

We asked respondents to estimate their relationships with other VCSE organisations in Bury. We also asked the respondents to identify the organisations that they worked with. Our findings suggest that organisations were diverse and the Bury VCSE sector collaborated across GM well (Figure 12).

- **GM Working:** 16% of respondents worked with other GM VCSE organisations a great amount, and 28% estimated that they worked across GM a fair amount.
- **Bury VCSE Working:** 24% of respondents worked with Bury VCSE organisations a great amount, and 44% estimated that they worked across Bury VCSE organisations a fair amount.

Figure 12: Direct Dealings with Private and VCSE Organisations



The VCSE Workforce in Bury

This section describes the workforce of the VCSE sector. We have calculated the number of paid employees and FTE. The VCSE workforce is also made up of a large number of volunteers. We have estimated the size of the volunteer workforce based on the survey responses and calculated the estimated economic burden based on the current UK living wage.

Paid Employees

We used the ONS data to estimate the number of paid employees (Employment in public, private and non-profit sectors - Office for National Statistics ons.gov.uk). The ONS data suggests that there are 4,019 paid employees in the Bury VCSE sector, of which 2,452 are FTE. We estimated the economic contribution of the workforce by establishing the number of hours worked and calculating the cost using the UK national living wage (£9.50 per hour) as the baseline. Using this calculation, we estimated that the contribution of the paid staff in the VCSE sector equates to £44 million per annum

The percentage of paid staff per organisation size was also estimated:

- 3% were employed in micro organisations
- 3% were employed in small organisations
- 31% were employed in medium organisations
- 62% were employed in large organisations

These results reflect figures from other localities in Greater Manchester.

We asked survey respondents to indicate whether their organisation paid all staff at least the living wage (as per the Living Wage Foundation). A total of 44% of respondents indicated that they paid the living wage, 49% indicated that this question was not applicable, and a small percentage (11%) indicated that they did not pay the living wage. Although this is not a representative sample, it reflects the commitment from Bury VCSE organisations to be good employers and to ensure a quality of living for their employees.

Volunteers

We asked respondents to indicate how many volunteers provided time for their organisation. There was insufficient data to extrapolate this across all organisations within the sector, but on the basis of the findings of the Greater Manchester survey we suggest that as a conservative estimate there are at least 26,229 volunteers supporting the VCSE sector in Bury and providing approximately 131,145 hours each week. When calculating the estimated economic contribution based on the total number of hours per week and using the 'real' living wage (£9.50 per hour), we determined that the estimated economic contribution of volunteers in Bury equates to at least £65 million per annum.

The total numbers of volunteers per organisation size are estimated below:

- Volunteers in micro organisations represented 3% of the volunteers in the VCSE sector.
- Volunteers in small organisations represented 5% of the volunteers in the VCSE sector.
- Volunteers in medium organisations represented 85% of the volunteers in the VCSE sector.
- Volunteers in large organisations represented 7% of the volunteers in the VCSE sector.

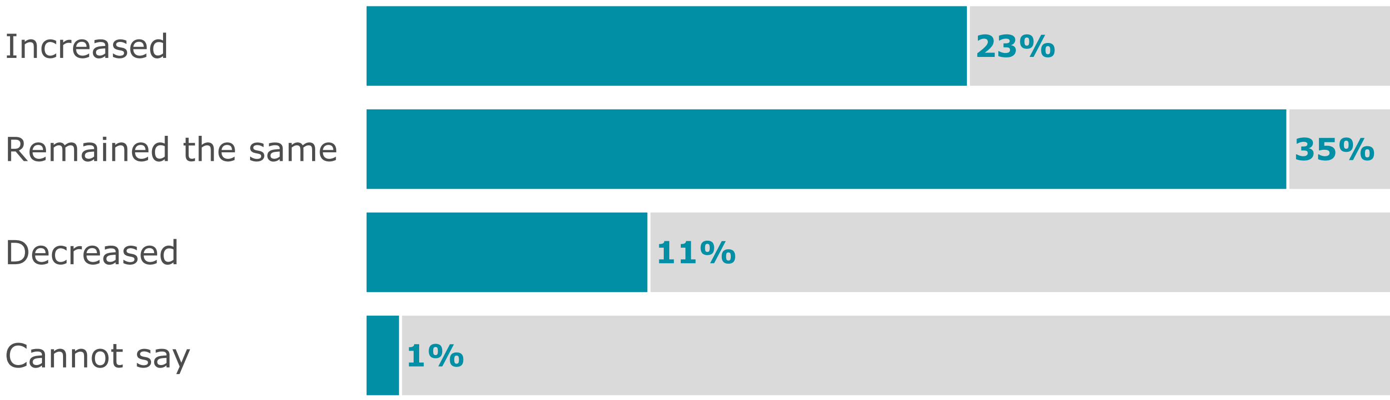
Changes in the VCSE Sector during the Last 12 Months

Respondents were asked to indicate how the VCSE sector had changed in the past 12 months.

Changes in Total Number of Employees

The largest number (35%) of respondents indicated that the workforce had remained the same. A total of 11% of respondents indicated that the workforce had decreased. A larger percentage (23%) reported that the workforce had increased. It was reported that the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce was not applicable by 33.8% of the respondents. Only a small percentage (9.1%) indicated that COVID-19 had had an impact, and a larger percentage (18.2%) indicated that the change in the workforce was not due to COVID-19 (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Changes in Total Number of Employees



The potential lack of impact of COVID-19 relating to the paid workforce is covered further in some of the qualitative insight in response to COVID-19. During the time of the survey, full job retention (furlough scheme) was in place. However, as the research indicated, this was not utilised by a large number of organisations, partly due to the fact that not all staff were actually eligible due to the criteria behind the scheme but also because ultimately it gave organisations a tough choice between financial income and mothball provisions, which was explained to the charities via an open letter from several national leaders within the sector.

A total of 31.2% of respondents indicated that the volunteer workforce had remained the same. A total of 44.2% of respondents indicated that the volunteer workforce had increased, 1.3% could not say, and a larger percentage (20.8%) of respondents reported a decrease in the number of volunteers. It was reported that the impact of COVID-19 on the volunteer workforce was not applicable by 6.5% of the respondents. A total of 13% of respondents reported that COVID-19 had not had an impact on volunteer numbers; however, a larger percentage (26%) reported that the change in the number of volunteers was as a result of COVID-19.

Interestingly, the majority of organisations (n=70) reported that the volunteer workforce had remained the same. Given the current global COVID-19 epidemic and other VCSE sector reports, the change doesn’t seem to reflect other VCSE sector research. These findings are also echoed in the qualitative responses, which suggests that, whilst organisations adapted to change, the actual volunteer workforce remained the same. The qualitative data also highlights the increase in demand as a result of COVID-19.

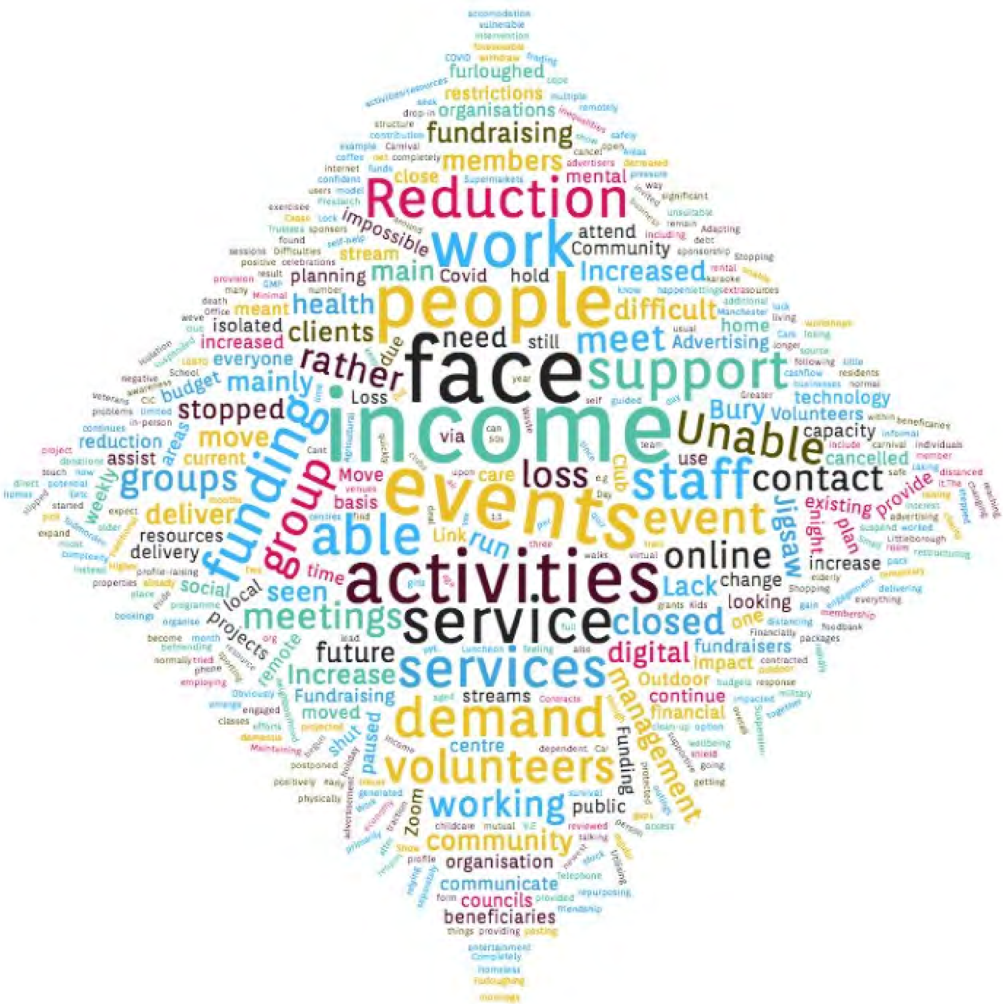
Primary Impact of COVID-19 on the VCSE Sector in Bury

We asked survey respondents to describe the primary impact that COVID-19 had had and also the impact on organisations and individuals. A thematic analysis of the raw qualitative data was undertaken to identify common themes. This section reports the qualitative data obtained. Word clouds have been used to highlight the most frequently reported feedback. We have also triangulated qualitative data from the focus groups to illustrate how COVID-19 has impacted on organisations and individuals and the response of the VCSE sector.

Primary Impact of COVID-19 on VCSE Organisations in Bury

We asked what the primary impact of COVID-19 on VCSE organisations in Bury had been. Four key themes emerged: 'Impact on funding', 'increased demand', 'Loss of connection' and 'Closure'. For many, COVID-19 led to a suspension of face-to-face delivery, leading to the need to adapt service provision and delivery. Whilst many organisations had had to close, a significant number continued to operate, but using adapted methods through the creation of online delivery. Some services were limited through the reduction in funding, the lack of opportunity to fundraise and the inability to generate income. This was despite an increase in demand caused by the impact of lockdown on mental wellbeing, reduced physical activity and increased social isolation (see Illustration 1).

Illustration 1: Primary Impact of COVID-19 on VCSE Organisations



Similar themes arose in the focus group. The suspension of face-to-face delivery had led to digital advancements, enabling organisations to continue supporting the most vulnerable. One participant mentioned:

> ***'Since March we have gone remotely, so we are providing social welfare needs. If there's benefits issues, we continue providing our support remotely, providing – doing the form filling, doing the education side as well. We've changed our ESOL classes online. Also exercise and yoga is going online as well'***

Primary Response to the Impact of COVID-19 on VCSE Organisations in Bury

The survey also asked respondents to describe the primary response of their organisation to COVID-19. Three key themes emerged from the qualitative responses, namely, 'Loss of funding', 'Move to digital support' and 'increased demand'. These findings are similar to qualitative data from other localities. Many organisations were faced with needing to adapt their service provision through implementing remote working and repurposing funds to enable a reimagined organisational focus. Organisations were able to respond quickly and adapt to the pandemic, providing food banks, telephone services and delivery of care packages.

Organisations described how digital technology facilitated innovative developments, resulting in classes and activities being held online via Zoom, which enabled organisations and individuals to keep in contact. Whilst organisations 'closed', their work was ongoing, and many used the 'downtime' to develop new strategies for supporting the most vulnerable in their communities. Keeping in touch was integral to ensuring that those who were shielding and others who were at risk of becoming socially isolated and lonely were supported. Organisations described how they set up telephone services and peer support and introduced individuals to digital services to enable them to remain connected.

The word cloud below illustrates the most frequent qualitative responses for Bury.

Illustration 2: Primary Response to the Impact of COVID-19 on VCSE

Organisations

Participants in the qualitative focus group described similar responses to those reported in the survey. Participants described how they had adapted their services to meet new demands through the use of Facebook. The following extract highlights this:

> ***'We used our Facebook page quite a lot. We were very, very fortunate that small businesses in the local community generally, communities, neighbourhoods, jumped on board... which was absolutely overwhelming. As we built on that support, we were able to branch out and reach more and more people. At the height of COVID, we were supporting about 200 people a week, and again, as the shielding started, as the whole thing started and we ended up in lockdown, our numbers started coming down, so overnight we became a food provider'***

Impact of COVID-19

Primary Impact of COVID-19 on the People that VCSE Organisations Serve

One of the last survey questions asked respondents to describe the impact that COVID-19 had had on individuals. Three key themes emerged from the qualitative thematic analysis, namely, 'Mental health', 'Increased demand' and 'Isolation and adaptation through implementation of digital resources'. For many, the main impact of COVID-19 was on income generation. Many faced redundancy, whilst others were furloughed. Food poverty became an issue through a lack of employment, which resulted in a significant rise in food banks and delivery of food parcels by the VCSE sector.

The health and wellbeing of individuals and staff were negatively affected, resulting in fatigue, increased stress, higher levels of depression and reductions in physical activity. The increase in mental health issues led to an increased service demand as many people experienced fear, anxiety and increased vulnerability. Loss of connections with others exacerbated levels of loneliness and increased feelings of social isolation. Individuals were no longer able to meet up in groups, which impacted on general mental and physical wellbeing. The response of the VCSE sector may even have prevented a worst-case scenario through the quick and responsive ways in which organisations adapted to change to ensure that communities and individuals were supported. The word cloud below illustrates the most frequent qualitative survey responses.

Illustration 3: Primary Impact of COVID-19 on the People that VCSE

Organisations Serve

The participants in the qualitative focus groups described the impact of COVID-19 on the community and, in particular, highlighted the impact on some of the most vulnerable, such as older people. The following extract illustrates this point:

> ***'many of those are over 50, and when the lockdown hit they automatically went into shielding. Our first challenge there was, we've got people with no support network, they're not online, the phones they have are not smartphones, they're pay-as-you-go phones, and they have no access to the internet, so can't do the supermarket shopping or don't have bank accounts to pay for the shopping. They were all the things that we discovered very, very quickly as a result of COVID. We put all our resources into meeting the needs of our community, and the first thing we did was make sure our [unclear words 0:10:18.4] had top-ups on their phones, because we need to keep in touch with them, that was our first priority. Then we put emergency food in place and did weekly telephone checks, and weekly'***

Equally, those with existing mental health problems began to suffer from lockdown, and the participants described the support that was provided in the following extract:

> ***'our mental health group, we needed to bring them back because they were very isolated and their health problems were increasing, and they had overnight hostel support network.'***

Qualitative Survey Responses: Impact of COVID-19 on VCSE Organisations

There were a total of 73 survey responses that described the impact of COVID-19 on VCSE organisations in Bury. Key quotes have been included to reflect the three core themes that emerged from the qualitative survey data set.

Loss of Funding

As was the case in other localities, the impact of COVID-19 had led to a significant reduction in funding across a range of sources. This was in part influenced by forced closure of services, buildings and activities. The loss of income from membership fees and 'subs' was highlighted in the qualitative data, coupled with loss of income from service charges and inability to trade.

> ***'We are dependent upon three main streams for income: 1. Fundraising; 2. Outdoor event management; 3. Advertising. Fundraising: Our fundraising is mainly profile-raising events in public areas such as supermarkets, shopping centres, outdoor and sporting events. Obviously, due to current restrictions, we can no longer organise or attend the events we had been invited to. We had started a weekly quiz night and two karaoke events per month as additional fundraising streams, which we have had to cancel for the foreseeable future. Outdoor event management and entertainment: We have been raising our profile as an event management option for local groups and organisations to use and had been contracted to attend the following events that have now been cancelled or postponed'***

The Move to Digital Support

The enforced social distancing measures, coupled with 'lockdowns', resulted in reduced connectivity with clients/beneficiaries. This had significant implications for some of the most vulnerable. Many organisations responded by replacing face-to-face contact with virtual meetings, activities and support. A similar impact was reported across the 10 GM localities.

> ***'All Jigsaw and Jigsaw Link outings have been cancelled. Care packages provided for Jigsaw Link members. Telephone befriending continues. Zoom activities taking place.'***

> ***'Maintaining sources of funding. Utilising time to restructuring organisation. Adapting and repurposing existing project funding, for example, delivering online work.'***

> ***'We have not been able to have direct face-to-face contact with our service users. We've not been able to continue activities we normally would' do. Reaching out to everyone has been difficult, as not everyone has access to the internet.'***

Increased Demand

As highlighted in other VCSE sector reports, lockdown, the closure of community centres and meeting places and the inability to meet face to face exacerbated feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression. This was also prevalent in the loss of income and the increasing need for people to access food banks and other sources of support. This resulted in an increased demand on VCSE organisations, many of which responded through supporting food bank services, setting up support shops and implementing innovative ways in which to engage with and support communities in need.

> ***'We had to pick up quickly on where there would be gaps for people within our community and run with it. The food bank we assist with was run mainly by people that had to shield, so we stepped up to assist to stock, source, pack and deliver. We found people with multiple problems who would have slipped through the net: vulnerable, mental health, isolated, debt, living in unsuitable properties. People moving into the area from other councils with no resources available. Homeless in temporary accommodation'***

Section 4: The Future

In this section we have drawn on the qualitative responses from the focus groups and triangulated these with responses from the survey questions that asked what factors will assist or constrain future delivery.

Estimated Factors Influencing Future VCSE Work

We asked organisations to estimate the extent to which funding, staff and partnership working will either assist or constrain the future work of their organisation. The findings are reported separately below.

Workforce

To understand how the workforce may be affected in the future, we asked survey respondents to estimate the factors affecting or constraining the VCSE workforce in Bury. In particular, we asked the survey respondents to estimate the extent to which recruitment and retention of both voluntary and paid staff would constrain or assist the VCSE sector.

The majority of respondents reported that the recruitment of staff was not applicable to their organisation, and 18.2% reported that the recruitment of volunteers would 'seriously constrain' their organisation. The following questions relate to the impact that the retention and recruitment of staff/volunteers would have on organisations.

- Ability to retain staff/staff turnover: 13% of organisations responded that the ability to retain staff would assist their organisation.

- Ability to retain volunteers/volunteer turnover: 21% of organisations responded that the ability to retain volunteers would constrain their organisation.

The percentage of responses across the survey data was small; however, the workforce was also discussed in the qualitative focus groups. Participants discussed how the ability to support the workforce would enable a more sustainable VCSE sector that could meet future demand. The VCSE sector was perceived to be a strong ally and in time of need had demonstrated how the workforce had supported the most vulnerable, as the following participant highlighted:

> ***'I think the future is that the voluntary community sector has never been more important than it has been now'***

Partnerships

The unpredictable political, economic and societal environment means that partnerships across a range of sectors will play a key role in the success of the VCSE sector. To understand how relationships may be affected in the future, we asked survey respondents to estimate the factors affecting or constraining the VCSE workforce in Bury. In particular, we asked the survey respondents to estimate the extent to which relationships with other VCSE, public and private sector organisations would assist or constrain the VCSE sector.

- Engagement with other VCSE organisations: 14% of organisations responded that this would assist their organisation, and a further 27% indicated that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.

- Engagement with other public organisations: 10% of organisations responded that this would assist their organisation, and a further 26% indicated that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.

- Engagement with other private organisations: 7% of organisations responded that this would assist their organisation, and a further 17% indicated that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.

In addition to the survey responses, we also explored the future needs of the VCSE sector through the qualitative focus groups. For some, partnerships and a strong infrastructure were key to the success of the VCSE sector. Participants in the qualitative focus group described the need for future partnership working to ensure that the work of the VCSE sector was sustained. However, as in the case of other qualitative feedback, the participants highlighted the need for equity and the recognition that the voluntary sector is an equal partner, as the following quote highlights:

> ***'We're treated now more as a partner than a paid servant. I think there's always been this power imbalance between statutory services and the voluntary sector. People think the word "voluntary" means "amateur", and it doesn't. Some of the most professional organisations I deal with are other voluntary sector organisations, and they do that on an absolute shoestring. I think there's a lot to celebrate about the sector, but there needs to be a cultural shift'***

Other focus group participants suggested that the VCFA presents an opportunity to help drive future partnerships forward:

> ***'We need an organisation like the VCFA to champion our cause, and we need the council to fund it long-term and actually empower it to deliver more... if there's a silver lining, it's improved communication between groups and between communities, there's more working together. I think the voluntary sector, we're at the forefront of that, and the NHS and the council quickly followed on behind'***

The need for equal partnerships between organisations, particularly with private organisations and applications for funding, was also highlighted in focus groups in other localities, which suggests that this is a common area of concern.

Funding

Economic uncertainty caused through Brexit and restrictions imposed as a result of COVID-19 have resulted in changes in the funding and operation of many VCSE organisations. Funding is critical to the success of the VCSE sector. We asked the survey respondents to estimate to what extent funding from tenders, the local economy and other sources would either assist or constrain funding.

- Ability to secure contracts from public sector bodies: 22% of respondents indicated that this would assist their organisation, with 12% responding that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.

- Impact of the local economy: 14% of respondents anticipated that this factor would constrain their organisation over the next year.

The vulnerability of funding was one of the main themes that was discussed. There is a feeling among VCSE organisations that councils 'need to reflect on the value that the sector brings to the table'. Investing in local organisations that know the communities they support brings huge value, but it is currently not reflected in council policies. As one participant mentioned:

> ***'We need an organisation like the VCFA to champion our cause, and we need the council to fund it long-term and actually empower it to deliver more.'***

One positive outcome of COVID-19 was that there was an increase in communication between the statutory organisations and the VCSE sector:

> ***'We're treated now more as a paid partner than a paid servant'.***

The Council has recognised the value of the VCSE sector, and, specifically, it has identified organisations who are providing valuable support on the ground. Going forward, there is a need for increased recognition in terms of funding from the local council. Two quotes from the participants include:

> ***'If our local council doesn't fund us, that doesn't look good as well, the Council doesn't support them. It's very, very important the Council and the VCFA should identify the organisations going forward, also fund them, even small amounts, 100, 200, 300, whatever, so at least the local councils are showing their support to the organisations doing fantastic jobs and making sure that people have positive life changes'***

> ***'I think one of the problems we've got within Bury is that some officers think that – they've said they can get resources from external funders without recognising the difficulty we've got. There's a mindset in Bury Council, from low-level officers, that the sector doesn't need support from the Council because they get external moneys, that actually supports what they're doing.'***

The triangulated data suggests that partnerships were key to creating equal funding opportunities, which also involved raising the profile of the work of the VCSE sector. We also asked the survey respondents to estimate to what extent Brexit would assist or constrain funding. The findings below suggest a mixed perspective of the impact of Brexit; most organisations suggested that this wasn't applicable. This also corresponds with earlier survey data that highlighted the small percentage of organisations in receipt of European funding.

- 2% of respondents anticipated that Brexit would greatly assist their organisation.
- 11% of respondents indicated that the influence of Brexit was not applicable to their organisation.
- 20% of respondents anticipated that Brexit would seriously constrain their organisation.

Uncertainty is the main theme when discussing the potential impacts of Brexit on the VCSE sector. Employment laws and tendering processes will change, but the uncertainty of what will change and how makes it difficult to plan for the future. However, one organisation had already noticed significant effects:

> ***'We do have a fairly sizeable cohort of people who originate from the EU, so that has been... Whilst Brexit was on the forefront of people's minds, we saw quite a number of our European staff return back to their country of origin because of the uncertainty about employment, particularly Polish staff; that was particularly apparent. Since Brexit has been discussed, the number of European staff that have been recruited has reduced by about 90 per cent.'***

These findings suggest that VCSE sector organisations who participated in the survey and qualitative focus groups appeared generally unconcerned about Brexit; however, common concerns about equal partnership working and the impact on funding opportunities were identified. Similar findings are reflected across all 10 GM localities.

Section 5: Conclusion, Afterword and Recommendations

Conclusion

The data and evidence in this report are clear: the VCSE sector makes a significant contribution to our city-region – preventing need, reducing hardship, supporting those in crisis and driving social value.

In Bury, local VCSE organisations generate over £48.3 million in income, creating a range of services and activities as diverse as our communities. In doing so, VCSE organisations create 4,019 jobs and mobilise 26,229 volunteers. The vast majority of VCSE organisations are neighbourhood based, rooted in local communities and addressing significant inequalities in the day-to-day of what they do. The strong return on investment provided by the VCSE sector is also well evidenced, with preventative and early intervention work reducing the strain on the public purse in the longer term.

In recent years the VCSE sector has become even more enterprising. While more traditional VCSE organisations have generated new trading approaches and are diversifying their income streams to support their long term sustainability, over 13% now define themselves as social enterprises, reinvesting or donating their profits to create positive social change. This is a sector which is evolving and finding new ways to create change and bring additional resources and value into Bury. In fact, this research shows that 88% of organisations have partnerships with businesses and 80% with the public sector. These partnerships are driving wider conversations about what an inclusive economy that works in our communities' interest could look like.

This places the VCSE sector as a key player in revitalising and rekindling social and economic activity following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organisations have adapted to new forms of work, mobilised increasing numbers of volunteers and developed creative solutions to the challenges of the pandemic. There is a significant opportunity to build on the learning and innovative practice developed over the last year and channel this into the creation of a better, fairer, and greener economy in which citizens are empowered and there is greater social ownership of wealth, land and assets by communities.

However, this report shows that despite this increased entrepreneurialism, the income of the VCSE sector in Bury has declined, and 51% of VCSE organisations have needed to use their reserves in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst simultaneously weathering uncertainty about the long term future of contracts and grants which enable them to do their vital work. Over time, this will inevitably reduce their ability to bear risk, to respond to demand and adapt to further change. As seen across the country, fundraising has been significantly disrupted and many charitable funders have invested in responses to the pandemic with longer term project funding deprioritised. There are significant opportunities and benefits in supporting a thriving local VCSE sector and equally significant risks of losing much valued and needed activity if no action is taken.

The past year has prompted great reflection on the nature of our society and what we can do collectively to improve health and wellbeing, reduce entrenched inequalities, and create a fairer world. This is why we have created a set of recommendations below which lay out our vision for how we make this happen.

Afterword and Recommendations

As with previous State of the Sector reports, this report once again demonstrates the vital and central role that the VCSE sector occupies within Bury, not only in the last year through the COVID-19 pandemic, but in the years preceding it. Our sector has long recognised the importance and value of prevention, population health work, and the economic requirements to reduce poverty levels. It has strived to reduce the structural inequalities experienced by marginalised communities. As we slowly enter into the recovery phase of the pandemic, it is essential that we transform learning into action: providing urgent support and intervention where needed, while developing longer term sustainable solutions to social and economic inequities. There is now a time-critical opportunity to support the work of the VCSE sector as a means of increasing that impact within and across communities.

Firstly, it is now clearer than ever that **the VCSE sector should be embedded as a strategic partner as part of all local recovery plans and future emergency planning.** As the report shows, partnership working is a strength of the sector and this was never more evident than during the pandemic, with strong examples across Greater Manchester. We need to build on this as we enter recovery. This should include all recovery areas, from mental health and domestic abuse support, to employability and interruptions to care. Local decision and policymakers have widely recognised the VCSE sector’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and ability to develop innovative solutions at speed. Now is the time to draw on the knowledge and expertise of our sector to address the other great issues of our time: the climate crisis, poverty and structural inequalities. This may involve places on formal public sector boards and strategic groups but it is much more about building the strategic relationships between sectors. Our sector has repeatedly shown its ability to create broad coalitions from across the public, private and VCSE sectors and a commitment to genuine partnership working where we can redress power imbalances, respectfully challenge each other when needed and come together to achieve our shared ambitions.

Alongside this, **the VCSE sector is a critical part of local economies and should be recognised as such.** As highlighted by the report, our sector is an income generator in its own right, a significant employer, and a demonstrated leader in responding to crises and challenges. While discussions about economic recovery often place emphasis on “anchor institutions”, as organisations rooted in place (literally written into their constitution), the role of VCSE sectors as employers, enterprises and enhancers of the economic potential of places is frequently overlooked. The cultural and play spaces, the leisure, learning and community activities run by VCSE organisations are contributors to the attractiveness of Greater Manchester as a place to live, grow and invest. As part of the ecosystem of place, therefore, the VCSE sector must be supported, along with other aspects of local economies, to recover financially from the COVID-19 pandemic. This means bringing together the VCSE, public and private sectors to facilitate connections, partnerships and innovations. These partnerships should focus on collaborative efforts to address the economic and social challenges during the recovery period while also enabling VCSE organisations to rebuild their reserves, diversify their income streams, and increase their fundraising capacity.

Thirdly, the report shows that sustainable funding is a concern and as we move beyond COVID-19 **there is a need to review commissioning and grant-based approaches** to enable VCSE organisations – which are led by local communities - to not just continue to run local services but to grow and innovate as part of an inclusive economy. The Greater Manchester VCSE Commissioning Framework, published in 2020, offers a vision for a fundamental shift in culture, investment and process for the benefit of communities. Last year we saw the benefits of a flexible and agile approach to commissioning, as many funders removed restrictions on spending, allowing funding to be channelled to where it was needed. This meant that the VCSE sector could target resource appropriately, mobilise thousands of volunteers, and respond to rapidly changing needs within communities through the different cycles of the pandemic. Going forward, we recommend that commissioners use the framework to embed these approaches as a strategy, incorporating social value and co-design principles. Longer term contracts would also support improved long term planning and address the current funding uncertainties. This would create further opportunities for collaboration not competition amongst VCSE organisations, and maximise the sector's ability to invest time, effort and resources in increasing their impact.

Furthermore, in line with the recommendations of the Greater Manchester Independent Inequalities Commission, there must be **meaningful mechanisms put into place to make co-design of local services the norm.** As the report highlights, our sector is rooted in place and in the communities it supports. We are powered by passionate local people who are committed to amplifying the voices of the most marginalised in communities of interest, identity and place. By ensuring people with lived experience have a seat at the table and can meaningfully influence the decisions which affect them, we can begin to address structural inequalities and build services which meet the needs of those they serve. This must be done in a way that recognises inherent power imbalances and uses tested co-production principles to design and review public services.

Within the focus on economic recovery, there should a **greater focus on community-led enterprise** (including social enterprises, co-operatives and mutuals) as an enabler of economic inclusion. The entrepreneurial capacity in the VCSE sector is clearly shown in this report through the diversification of income approaches which the sector has developed during challenging times. A programme to build on this, equipping more individuals with skills and knowledge around enterprise and a strategic approach to fostering purpose-led enterprises can create new markets, new employment and greater economic inclusion for the city's diverse communities.

There is great potential for **building productive relationships between private business and VCSE organisations** to address inequalities. Businesses in all sectors need to live and breathe as part of the community they inhabit. While good Corporate Social Responsibility policies are welcome, we believe that there is a need to invest in brokerage programmes for business and VCSE organisations to explore joint action and increase adoption of social value approaches, with our GM Social Value Network well positioned to lead on this. There is also an opportunity to focus on **public engagement with the local social economy** as never before: encouraging local people in donating time, donating financially (not just to VCSE organisations but also to community-led funds to support others facing hardship). This would involve collaborative work within the VCSE sector on local fundraising strategies and a "Be Local, Be Social" programme around buying from local purpose-led enterprises.

Finally, we recommend a new approach to supporting and retaining the paid and voluntary VCSE workforce. VCSE sector staff and volunteers have worked tirelessly to respond to a soaring demand for services, often against a backdrop of uncertain funding. Workforce wellbeing and sustainability were highlighted through the focus groups as a growing concern.

We believe there is a unique opportunity to build on the massive appetite shown by the public to engage as active citizens through volunteering and social action: we are committed to continuing to work with those who have developed new community-led approaches to support in neighbourhoods. Our sector, however, while primarily voluntary, is also an employer and must be able to support, develop and nurture its workforce. We urge funders to recognise the value of being able to pay staff a real Living Wage, and to be able to invest in proper training and support for staff and volunteers who dedicate their time to improve people's lives (which in turn delivers additional benefits for wellbeing and personal development). Through our local VCSE infrastructure bodies we also recommend investing in significant organisational development programmes where they don't currently exist, so that the sector can continue to innovate and adapt to emerging community need.

Underpinning all of these recommendations is the principle of collaboration. Shared effort, shared investment, and insight enable greater collective impact: the response to the pandemic was at its best when it leveraged a wide variety of resources from across sectors to create the support services, the communications networks, the practical organising and the access to care that communities have needed. It has created space for innovations which will change the way all sectors work and collaborate: lowering the cost of starting businesses by supporting innovations like shared workspaces, shared commercial kitchens, community-financed start-ups and community-owned spaces. There is scope for social and economic innovation to create a more inclusive approach at the heart of which we will need a thriving and sustainable VCSE sector.

We firmly believe that enacting each of the recommendations above will support this aim. We offer our support in enabling you to implement these recommendations - our flexibility, our ability to adapt to reach, and our experience in reaching parts of our local communities who are often untouched and unheard by decision-makers. By working in partnership, we can increase our communities' resilience, begin to deconstruct structural inequalities, reduce demand on public services, increase employment and engagement and build healthier, safer, and more equal communities for all.

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