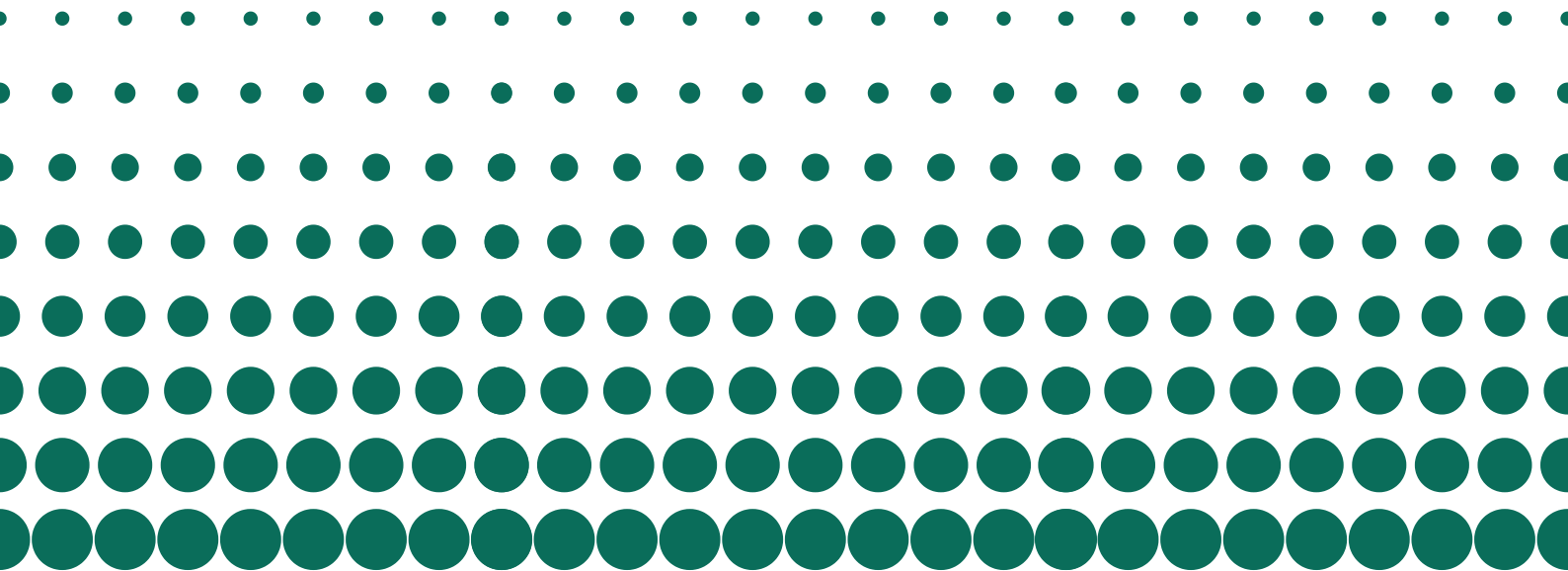




BURY
VOLUNTARY,
COMMUNITY
& FAITH
ALLIANCE

Pulse Check Report June 2025

Volunteering Spotlight

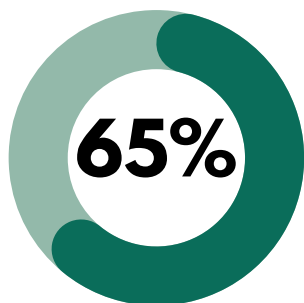


Headlines

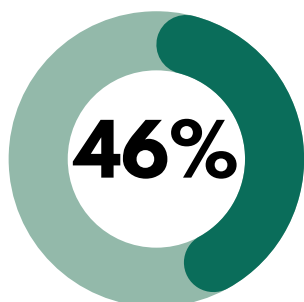
Headline findings based on the responses of voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in Bury



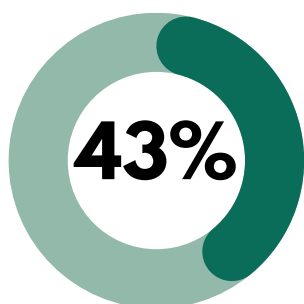
50% of respondents reported not having enough volunteers to deliver their activities.



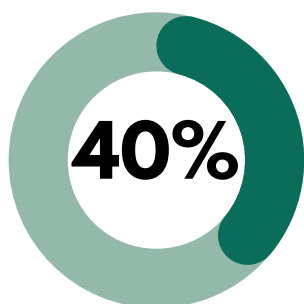
65% of respondents that employed staff felt that they were relying more on volunteers support service delivery, as a result of financial pressures and increasing demand.



46% of respondents state that in the last twelve months, the time contributed by volunteers has increased.



43% of respondents are having difficulties recruiting volunteers



40% of respondents have found increased family and caring responsibilities as the biggest barrier to volunteering

Key Findings

The Bury Pulse Check is an online survey that aims to gather a real-time snapshot of some of the issues affecting the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Bury and to help sense check national insight against our experiences as a place. The insight provided by the respondents is detailed in this report and shared with key partners, helping to shape future work around the sector, including the support we offer at Bury VCFA.

Introduction

Our very first pulse check back in 2023 was focused on volunteering and the needs of the sector. In the last 20 years, we have seen a sustained decline in volunteer numbers across all types of volunteering, based on national government insight. The government's Community Life Survey found the proportion of the UK population who had formally volunteered at least once a month in 2023-24 remains at a low of 16% (15% in Bury), with informal volunteering continuing to decline, with a drop to 24% for those informally volunteering once per month (although Bury scores slightly above average at 28%). With the Bury Volunteer Strategy due for refresh in 2026 it appeared the perfect time to revisit volunteering and the current picture in the borough



Key Findings

The Bury Picture

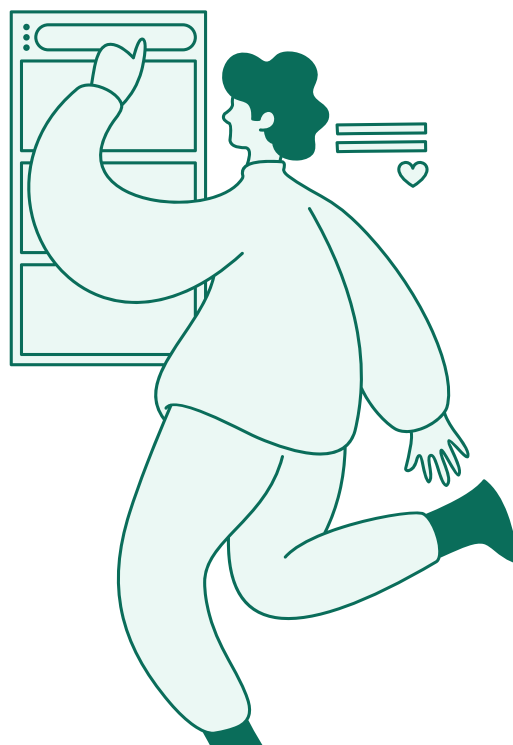
50% of respondents state that they do not have sufficient volunteers to meet their main objectives or delivery activities. This is a significantly difference response to the 2023 Pulse Check (down from 92%) but this does reflect national reports (VCSE Barometer 2024) where 4 in 10 organisations do not have enough volunteers to meet their primary objectives and potentially validates the concerns raised in 2023 regarding potential under reporting e.g. volunteers increasing hours to meet demand, or services being redesigned.

We did ask organisations that employ staff an additional question around if they felt that they were relying more on volunteers to support their service delivery as a result of the financial squeeze on the sector (increasing demand, cost of living, rising National Insurance costs etc.). Of those respondents who employ staff, 65% felt they were relying on volunteers more than ever before. When we cross referenced this response with the previous question over half of that 65% also stated that they did not have sufficient volunteers implying both capacity issues and potential workforce challenges.

Time Spent by Volunteers

Over the last twelve months 46% of respondent stated that the unpaid time contributed by their volunteers has increased, Indicating that the provision may be underpinned by a specific number of core volunteers.

This is similar to the national insight that says 1 in 3 charities (42%) report increased unpaid time from their volunteers. This difference may be explained by the national research having a different profile and capturing more medium and large organisations – 55% in national insight v 39% in our local response.



Key Findings

Recruitment

43% of respondents have had volunteer recruitment difficulties over the last twelve months. This is a slight increase from 2023 but still below national reporting (61% from the VCSE Barometer insight). 75% of those organisations experiencing difficulties with volunteer recruitment also lack sufficient volunteers for their activities.

Recruitment Methods

We asked respondents the main ways that they managed to recruit volunteers. Social media platforms were the highest response (86%), followed by “word of mouth” (72%). Considering that many of Bury's VCSE Sector are small organisations rooted in place, it came as no surprise that the importance of local connections came out highly, with in-person events also being used by 61% of respondents.

The impact of the revamped Bury Volunteer Bank was also evident in the survey, with 79% of respondents now using it (compared with 15% in the previous survey).

Despite the recent growth of national campaigns it has become clear that locally driven solutions and approaches are the key to further volunteer growth with only one respondent utilising them (who is linked to a national charity / franchise)

Barrier to recruitment

The key barriers to recruitment identified by respondents were

- Low response to volunteer adverts
- Applicants suitable to the role
- Financial resources
- Lack of organisational capacity

When we cross referenced with those experiencing decreasing volunteer numbers and those with recruitment challenges. The key common barriers were organisational capacity or financial resource and a low response to advertisements.



Key Findings

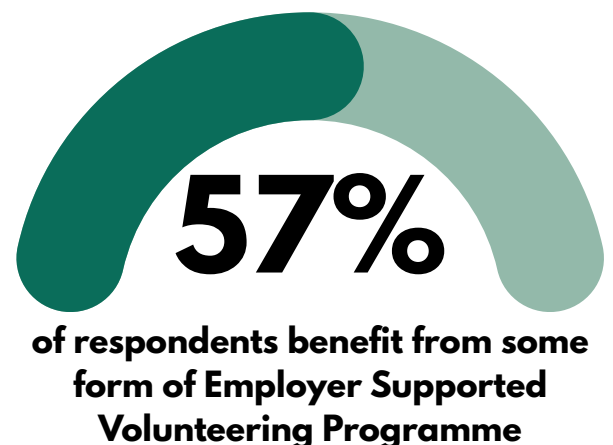
Micro Volunteering and Employer-Supported Volunteering

The Time Well Spent Insight (2023) highlighted that over a third of UK Adults stated that the most significant barrier to volunteering was “wanting to make an ongoing commitment.” Organisations are responding to this in Bury and are exploring ways to make volunteering more flexible, including micro-volunteering. 68% of respondents have developed a micro volunteering offer to support volunteer recruitment and retention.

Employer Supported Volunteering (ESV) is increasingly being used to support recruitment and capacity, but there is more work to be done. ESV, also known as corporate volunteering, is when employers allow employees to take paid time off to volunteer for charities or community groups. Although 57% of respondents benefit from some form of ESV, of those 62% have only benefited via team-based activities or single one-off events rather than ongoing support.

Those who haven't engaged or benefitted from ESV felt that it was not relevant to them or that it didn't meet their needs. Reasons for this included because they need more regular commitments than one-off activities or that they needed volunteers out of traditional working hours.

There is the need to reframe employer supported volunteering from traditional team building or event activities into potentially more frequent or longer term relationships. Although this will also require commitments from employers both in terms of policies and internal processes.



Key Findings

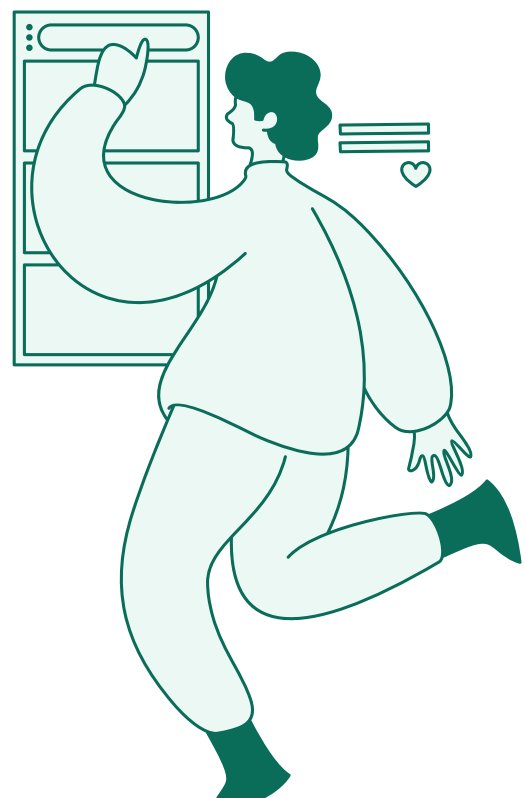
Supporting and Retaining Volunteers

In Bury, only 21% of respondents reported difficulty retaining volunteers, which is slightly below the national average of 33%. In Bury, the most significant challenges to volunteer retention reflect the national insight. Respondents consider volunteers' family and caring responsibilities (40%) to be the most important barrier to volunteer retention. While the cost of Living (32%) and work responsibilities (29%) continue to present considerable challenges.

Respondents are utilising a variety of methods to aide retention. 71% of groups providing training and development opportunities and 25% provide career and employability guidance highlighting the key role VCSE volunteer involving organisations can play supporting individuals into employment.

Concerningly only 64% of respondents are offering volunteer expenses. We know that an increasing number of individuals have been put off volunteering as they are worried about out-of-pocket expenses. However, this finding is unsurprising given the responses around funding support further in this report (particularly around expenses and core running costs).

Nationally 1 in 3 charities are reporting decreased volunteer wellbeing. In Bury, the figure is slightly more positive, decreasing only 11%. With 50% reporting increased wellbeing. However, we should not become complacent and further insight is need to explore the reasoning behind this.



Key Findings

Volunteer Recognition

Recognition is an important part of the volunteer experience. Nationally, four in ten recent volunteers felt that receiving recognition for their help and support was important. In Bury, all of the respondents provided some form of reward or recognition. The most common forms of support included internal celebrations (60%), social activities (57%) and thank you gifts and vouchers (43%). Just over a third of respondents showcased volunteers work and contribution via case studies and social media. Whilst a similar number used traditional thank you letters and cards. Nominating for an external award or honour was the least popular with only one in ten respondents opting to do so.

To explore potential methods of support we asked groups to rank the four of the most commonly suggested pieces of work for Bury VCFA around volunteer recognition. The results were:

1. An ongoing Lets Value Volunteers small grants programme
2. A central volunteer hours recognition scheme (producing certificates / thank you cards etc)
3. An annual Bury Volunteer Awards ceremony
4. Sessions /support explaining how to nominate individuals for the UK honours system

The response is a testament to the success of the Let's Value Volunteers Grant scheme, ran in December last year.



Key Findings

Bury VCFA support to organisations

We asked respondents about the Bury VCFA Volunteer Managers / Coordinator meetings. 57% of respondents currently attend on a regular basis. Feedback from those who attended found the sessions most useful for mutual support, sharing ideas, networking with other organisations and getting information on funding opportunities.



Those attending rated it 4 or 5 stars

“I’d like to thanks Bury VCFA for all the support I think doing a really good job and I use the email as my to do list.”

The main reason for not attending was linked to time and capacity due to work commitments. We are constantly looking at how to improve our services, including embedding volunteering support into our growing “Community Connectors” sessions aimed at small groups who may struggle with time or travel due to other commitments.

The groups also shared their top support needs which we will be looking at supporting as a team and through our community connectors and forums in the coming months:

- Funding (particularly volunteer expenses)
- Support around vetting and DBS checks
- How to market / promote volunteer opportunities
- Working with businesses (Employer Supported Volunteering)
- Increasing the number of young volunteers





**A huge thank you to all the groups and
organisations who completed the
survey**

Further Reading / References

[VCSE Data and Insights National Observatory - Present Struggles, Past Origins: Current Challenges in Volunteering Amidst Two Decades of Decline](#)

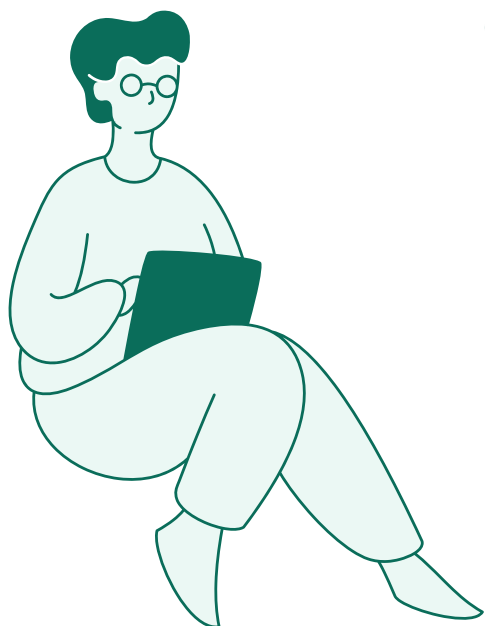
[Department for Culture, Media and Sport - Comparing national enabling environments for volunteering](#)

[Department for Culture, Media and Sport - Community Life Survey 23/24](#)

[NCVO Report - Time Well Spent 2023](#)



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