

A Realist Evaluation of the State of the
**Tameside Voluntary,
Community and Social
Enterprise Sector 2021**



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Foreword

For over a decade Action Together have joined other community and voluntary infrastructure organisations across Greater Manchester to conduct the State of the Sector research. Over that time we've seen big changes to the sector, but never more so than in the last year. COVID-19 has changed all aspects of our lives, and with it the way the voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector works – during a time when charities and volunteers were essential in the response to the pandemic. The overall size of the sector hasn't dramatically changed, but it is fragile and still struggles with short term funding, high competition for grants, and securing the resources it needs to grow.

The sector is resilient and by its nature diverse, doing incredible and essential things that help to tackle inequality, reduce hardship, and enrich people's lives. In this report, you'll learn about the important work that the sector does, and the support it needs to continue benefitting our communities.

The report emphasises the importance of micro and small organisations embedded across neighbourhoods in Tameside, with 69% of organisations in the Borough receiving an annual income of less than £10,000. Many VCSE groups are local anchor organisations, with a focus on place and strong roots and ties to the community. These links and knowledge were invaluable in communicating with and supporting local communities throughout the pandemic, though these groups are also the most fragile, often relying on individuals or a small number of supporters to stay afloat.

Even before the pandemic, we continued to see a large number of groups across Tameside focused on community development and health and wellbeing. The survey tells us 48% of groups list Community Development as a main area of work, with 28% doing some form of work in Wellbeing, Health and Social Care and 36% in Physical Activity. These groups form a key link in our asset-based community development and social prescribing work through the Tameside Community Wellbeing programme. Our social prescribing service took over 1,000 referrals from people struggling in the first lockdown, helping them to access everything from practical support to getting food and essentials while shielding to support with their mental health.

Alongside these findings, it's instructive that 44% of groups surveyed were formed in the last decade. This demonstrates how smaller groups are setting up to fill gaps in community wellbeing and support.

The network of groups we work with was vital throughout the pandemic, from the early days of the first lockdown through test and trace and into the vaccination programme. VCSE groups showed their flexibility and openness to change by continuing to deliver services and activities during the pandemic, being quick to adapt to new services and ways of working, and few used the option to furlough so they could continue to meet the needs of local people.

The sector also demonstrated its ability to lead during a crisis, particularly in the community work that it is best placed to deliver. Local anchor organisations in Tameside showed their value through the COVID community champions work, forming a key part of community engagement in the mass vaccination roll out. Investment and support in these organisations is shown to pay off in the knowledge and trust they share with the communities they work in.

Alongside changing ways of working, organisations had more pressure on their services. This came from increased demand and different asks as new service users came into contact with the sector. We saw this when Action Together worked alongside local food banks, while our Community Development workers organised neighbourhood volunteering teams to support the emergency response, including 'doorstep donations', where local people organised collections of food and essentials to support local food banks. Seventy volunteers collected thousands of bags of food to redistribute during this project. We also created a Food Solutions Network working with the local authority to support food banks, pantries and mutual aid groups to get the help they needed to meet demand. While this activity and the survey show the sector in Tameside was responsive and adaptable to the pandemic, often out of necessity, it's unsustainable for the sector to continue to adapt without further support and investment.

It's also important to recognise the incredible voluntary response to the pandemic. At Action Together we've registered a record number of volunteers in the last year, while also seeing a new profile of volunteer coming forward, often as a result of the furlough scheme. Action Together has also given extensive support to the new mutual aid groups that sprang up across the borough. This points to a public eagerness to be involved in community action, and we adapted our volunteer process and roles to make it easier and quicker for people to get involved in the emergency response.

The pandemic exacerbated a number of long-standing challenges for the sector, with funding continuing to be the main area where support is most needed. In the report you'll see a low number of local organisations accessed reserves – this is due to them not having reserves to call on. 42% of groups reported decreased earnings last year, and we know the groups Action Together work with have had to stop their usual fundraising activities or close venues, hitting their ability to raise money. Action Together's funding support is consistently the most requested by local groups, and we launched a £40,000 small grants scheme in the initial phase of the pandemic to help groups access immediate financial support to diversify. This included buying technology, food and essential items for delivery to those that needed them and developing their service offers to move away from face-to-face provision. While we've helped more groups access funding than ever before, it's still a fraction of what is needed.

The pandemic has, unequivocally, shone a light upon the inequalities that exist across communities in Tameside. Community insight and experiences of inequality and the Public Health England Disparities report, in terms of disproportionate impact of serious illness from COVID-19, transmission, and later vaccine take-up have demonstrated how existing issues of inequality had been exacerbated and the urgent action required. The VCSE in Tameside has played a critical role in supporting communities where inequalities are present, and also in amplifying the voice of people's experiences in communities.

COVID intensified existing issues of inequality, and for VCSE groups this has also included inequalities around funding and how the time has come for actions to match words. Action Together has developed a diversity network to promote better joint working between sectors on equality during the pandemic, with a particular focus on support for communities experiencing racial inequalities. Our refugee and asylum seekers network also continued to utilise the connections made before the pandemic to continue to provide support in Tameside. Our Children and Families Project worked directly with 123 families to help them access the help they needed from across VCSE and public sector services.

There are green shoots of recovery as we aim to build back better. Partnership working continues to develop, with key connections being made through the pandemic. The report includes some interesting findings about community partnership models. Groups have learnt new skills in digital working, and at Action Together we've been able to reach more people through an enhanced digital offer. Mutual aid points to a new profile of groups and way of working, and we did extensive work early in the pandemic to identify and map the new mutual aid groups across Tameside. We need to harness and build on the work of social enterprises and cooperatives that contribute to community wealth, provide pathways to work for the most excluded, and provide a means for local people to access and share buildings and other assets. And the significance of the paid and unpaid workforce of the VCSE sector should not be overlooked – we need to drive forward large-scale organisational development to ensure the sector can transform and adapt its offer for the benefit of a changing country.

Thank you to all the charities, voluntary groups, organisations, and staff who helped produce this report. At Action Together we're passionate about people power and amplifying the voices of people that often go unheard - this will be essential if collectively we are to realise the recommendations of the recent GM Independent Inequalities Commission report and work together to help our communities build back better.

Liz Windsor-Welsh

Chief Executive at Action Together CIO



Executive Summary

The State of the VCSE Sector 2021 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

Tameside

**1,223**

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



annual income
<10K

68%

are micro organisations

**14%**

of the sector identify as
being a social enterprise

£

**£43.5
million**

total income of the sector
(2019/2020)

**81%**

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

**33%**

of the organisations have
used their reserves in the
past 12 months (68%
due to COVID)

**37,327**

volunteers (including
committee/board members),
giving 152,304 hours each
week valued at £75 million
per annum (based on Living
Wage £9.50 per hour)

**82%**

have had some direct
dealings with other VCSE
organisations, 78% with
Tameside Council and 54%
with private organisations

Realist Evaluation Approach

The web-based survey was distributed across Tameside and a total of 196 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 Enterprise 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 6.3 percentage points of the true values.

Secondly, on a number of occasions the analysis in this report has followed the methodology provided by Sheffield Hallam in their previous research. As such, certain statistics presented here have been extrapolated from the survey responses to provide estimates of totals for all organisations. These include: total income; the number of organisations with at least one source of private sector income; the number of volunteers/committee and board members; the number of hours they contribute; the number of employees and full time equivalents; and the numbers of clients, users and beneficiaries of the sector.

In each case, a four-stage method was applied to calculate the overall totals:

- ▶ Stage one: calculate the Greater Manchester averages for each of the four size bands of organisations, namely, 'micro', 'small', 'medium' and 'large' (column A in Table 1 below)
- ▶ Stage two: estimate the number of organisations in each borough using the distribution provided by Sheffield Hallam (column B)
- ▶ Stage three: multiply the estimated number within each size band by the average income to give the total income for each size band (column C)
- ▶ Stage four: sum the income for each size band to give a sector-wide total (total in column C)

Table 1: Worked Example of Extrapolation (Total Income)

	Average income by size (A)	Estimated no. of organisations (B)	Total income (C)
Micro	£1,199.96	1,444	£1,733,087.70
Small	£35,588.15	341	£12,123,819.46
Medium	£221,123.89	192	£42,391,192.08
Large	£2,269,172.54	45	£102,875,939.08
Total			£159,124,038.31

As well as enabling comparisons, this method also helped quieten the statistical 'noise' caused by a number of large organisations that would, if this method had not been applied, have produced upwardly biased estimates. In other words, a small number of large organisations produce a high mean value, which is not representative of the sector, which is estimated to overwhelmingly consist of 'micro' organisations. So, not taking account of differences by size of organisation would have produced higher estimates for the sector. It has been assumed that estimated averages for Greater Manchester organisations are representative of organisations within Tameside. In the table above, for example, it is assumed that the average income for a small Greater Manchester organisation is representative of a small organisation in Tameside. Using the distribution of organisation size from Sheffield's research enables a better comparison across time.

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, communities experiencing racial inequalities 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 and community sector in Tameside'. The sector is also often referred to as the 'third sector' whilst the current government often refers to 'civil society'. In this report, we have used the same definition used in the previous State of the Sector report (Damm et al 2017). In this report we refer to and use the term 'voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE)' which embraces "voluntary organisations, charities community groups, the community work of faith groups, and those social enterprises and community interest companies where there is a wider accountability to the public via a board of trustees or 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 2021 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 VCSE 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: Tameside 2017–19

In 2017, the State of the Sector report indicated the Borough was home to 1,167 organisations, or 7.3% of the GM total [15,890]. This put it in the same group as Bury [1,135] and Rochdale [1,180]. A total of 93% of organisations were classified as 'micro' or 'small', the highest proportion across all 10 boroughs, while the 1,300 FTE paid staff employed was the lowest total of any borough. Almost half of all VCSE organisations in Tameside had a core focus on Health and Wellbeing, a third on Community Development and Sport and Leisure, and a quarter on Education, Training and Research (including information, advice and guidance).

Tameside ranked 28th out of 317 English local authorities on the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation. In comparison with its nearest geographical neighbours, this made it less deprived than Salford, Rochdale, Manchester and Oldham but more deprived than Bury, Wigan, Stockport and Trafford. On the main IMD domains, the Borough ranked 19th for Health and Disability, 12th for Crime, 35th for Employment, 37th for Income and 61st for Education, Skills and Training, with Barriers to Housing and Services [267th] the strongest performance. Tameside ranked 44th on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). (1)

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's analysis of the IMD reported that Tameside was one of 13 local authorities that had seen a rise in deprivation 'of at least five rank places'. In fact, Tameside [along with Oldham and Preston] had seen the most significant increase in relative deprivation, continuing a downward trend observed since 2004. (2019: 56–61) (3) Local Government Association analysis concluded a fifth of LSOAs were among the 10% most deprived, although this deprivation was concentrated in the north of the Borough. (1)

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Tameside 2017/18 stated that 'the health and well-being of people in Tameside is generally worse than the England average'. Comparisons with other GM boroughs suggested Tameside performed worse on adult smoking prevalence [including smoking during pregnancy] and smoking at age 15. It had the second highest level of self-harm in Greater Manchester, while another area of concern was hospital admissions among under-18s for alcohol-related conditions. The borough had the second highest emergency admission rate for hip fractures, low rates of breastfeeding initiation, and higher rates of looked-after children. (4) However, the 2019 Public Health England 'Fingertips' profile demonstrated that the Borough was only significantly out of step with regional and national values with regard to the mortality rate from all cardiovascular diseases and the overall under-75 mortality rate from all causes. The higher rates on the range of smoking indicators also remained an issue, (5) although LGA analysis suggested these were still behind those in Oldham and Manchester. The latter confirmed the rate of looked-after children (in comparison with Manchester, Oldham and Stockport), but Tameside performed better than its neighbours on indicators such as the number of households on the housing waiting list and the number of households living in temporary accommodation. (2)

The JSNA noted the variance in health and wellbeing outcomes within the Borough, with significant inequalities facing the residents of St Peters, Gamesley and Hadfield North wards regarding disease prevalence and premature mortality. Estimates for children living in low-income families ranged from 23% of under-16s in Tameside and Glossop (4) and just under 19% of children in Tameside (5) to 22.3%. (1) Analysis by Tameside Council suggested that poverty was concentrated in the areas of Ashton and Hyde Godley. (6)

The NOMIS Labour Market Profile for Tameside showed that the Borough had a higher percentage of workless households (18% over Jan–Dec 2019) and slightly higher levels of out-of-work main benefit claims. Data for Jan–Dec 2019 also highlighted that the Borough had considerably lower percentages of residents qualified to NVQ Levels 3 and 4 (in comparison with the North West and England as a whole). (7)

Sources and References

1. Local Government Association, Indices of Deprivation 2019. Report for Tameside generated by LG Inform, October 2020.
2. Local Government Association, LGA Research Report. Headline Report for Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, generated by LG Inform, October 2020.
3. Noble et al. (2019) The English Indices of Deprivation 2019. Research report, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.
4. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust, Tameside and Glossop Care Together and Tameside and Glossop CCG (n.d.) Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Tameside 2017/18, Summary of Health and Wellbeing.
5. Public Health England, Local Authority Health Profile 2019 – Tameside.
6. Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council Tackling Poverty in Tameside. Available online at: www.tameside.gov.uk
7. NOMIS Labour Market Profile for Tameside. Available online at: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1946157088/report.aspx?town=Tameside>

Tameside: 2020

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 third sector has in supporting communities. Moreover, in the later Marmot (2020) report, Greater Manchester was recognised as a city-region 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 ill-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 importance of the VCSE sector in a range of strategy documents to ensure that the work of the sector in improving health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities is promoted. During 2020, the work of the VCSE sector in promoting health and wellbeing was key in supporting communities and individuals. COVID-19 highlighted how the VCSE sector has been impacted and, significantly, the health and wellbeing impact on communities. In the North West, this is particularly relevant as mortality rates are higher than the national average, as are suicide rates. The Local Authority Health Profiles for Tameside suggest that outcomes for other key indicators such as heart disease and life expectancy are worse than the national average. However, suicide rates are similar to those in the rest of England.

Since the last State of the Sector Survey (2017), the VCSE Health and Wellbeing programme has been launched (April 2017). This involves 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 Tameside Locality Plan (2020), which reports that:



'Putting people and communities genuinely in control of their health and wellbeing requires an integrated response that focuses on preventative approaches and a shift away from the medical model of illness towards a model of care which considers the expertise and resources of people and their communities. The VCFSE/VCSE sector are vital delivery components of a modern public service. Anchored in "place", VCSE sector organisations exist to support and enhance the lives of people and the environment.'

The VCSE sector 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 enabled people to become more active in their wellbeing and engaged with the VCSE sector to produce social 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 10 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. This 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 was 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 the VCSE sector's 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 Salford. 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 2021 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 as a sector on the 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 groups supporting communities facing racial inequalities groups 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 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 COVID-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=EqAI in 2020.

In January 2021, GM=EqAI 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%3DEqAI%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 BAME community 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 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 the 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.

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 36.7% of the respondents indicated that they had fully repurposed their services. A larger percentage (46.4%) indicated that they had not repurposed their services. Combined with the qualitative data, the responses of VCSE organisations in Tameside 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 Tameside was responsive to the crisis and was able to adapt (where needed) to ensure that communities and individuals were supported.

We asked participants to describe their responses to COVID-19 and the changes that were made as a result. A number of different activities were described, but, overall, the general consensus was that the VCSE sector was able to respond quickly, as the following extract illustrates:

'I think we've seen the power of the voluntary sector more than ever before. I think on the whole the voluntary sector reacted quicker than many other areas of society in trying to get to the front line and help people immediately.'

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 March 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.

Out of 195 organisations who responded:

- ▶ 86% reported that they did not have to furlough any employees.
- ▶ A smaller percentage (7%) of organisations reported that they had furloughed up to 30% of employees.
- ▶ A total of 2% of the organisations had furloughed between 31% and 50% of employees.
- ▶ Only 3% of organisations had furloughed between 51% and 99% of employees.
- ▶ A total of 2% 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 Tameside was 196. This response rate allows for a 6.3% margin of error based on a 95% confidence interval. This limits comparability with the previous State of the Sector report, and 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 Tameside Does

In estimating the total number of organisations in Tameside, we used the national Register of Charities in England and Wales. To estimate the total population of Tameside, 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 Tameside is 226,493.
- ▶ According to the UK Register of Charities in England and Wales (in 2020), there are 246 registered charities in Tameside.
- ▶ 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 829 BTR organisations in Tameside. This represents an increase of 18 BTR organisations operating in Tameside since the last State of the Sector survey in 2017. 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 148 social enterprises operating in Tameside.

A total of 196 organisations responded to the survey question about organisational size. The estimated percentage of social enterprises operating in Tameside is 14%. 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.

Combining the number of registered charities in Tameside (246) with the estimated number of BTR organisations (829) and the total number of social enterprises (148), it is estimated that there are 1,223 organisations operating in Tameside. This figure is greater than the number reported in the 2017 report, which estimated that there were 1,167 organisations operating in the VCSE sector in Tameside.

Size, Number and Types of VCSE Organisations in Tameside

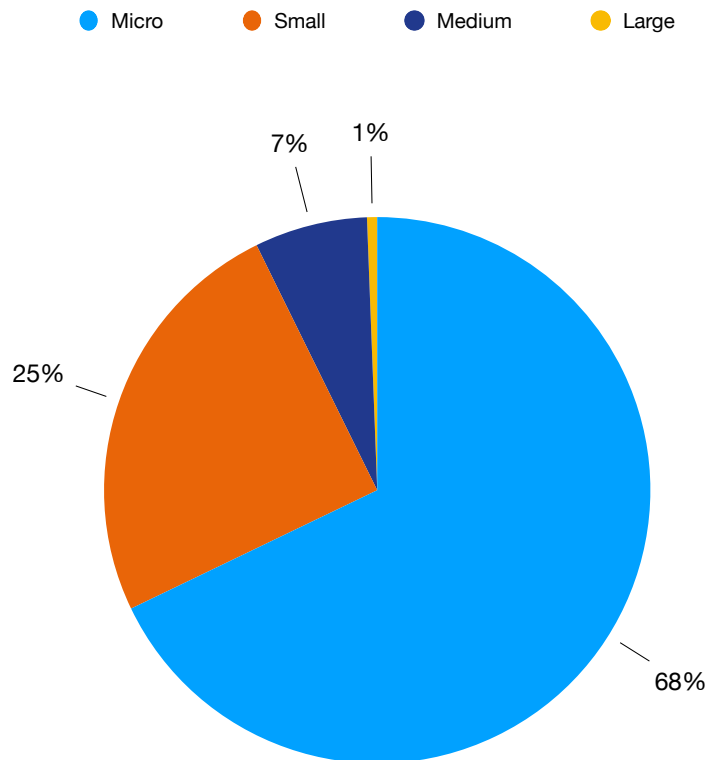
We used the NCVO Almanac (2020) categories to calculate the size of the organisations. Classifications were based on the following criteria:

- ▶ 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 830 organisations were classified as micro. This represents the majority of organisations and reflects the trend in the 2017/18 NCVO Almanac. A total of 304 organisations were classified as small, a further 82 organisations were classified as medium, and 7 were classed as large (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Size of Organisations in Tameside



These figures are the same as those reported in the 2017 survey, which suggests that the organisational categories in the VCSE sector have not changed despite the increase in the number of organisations.

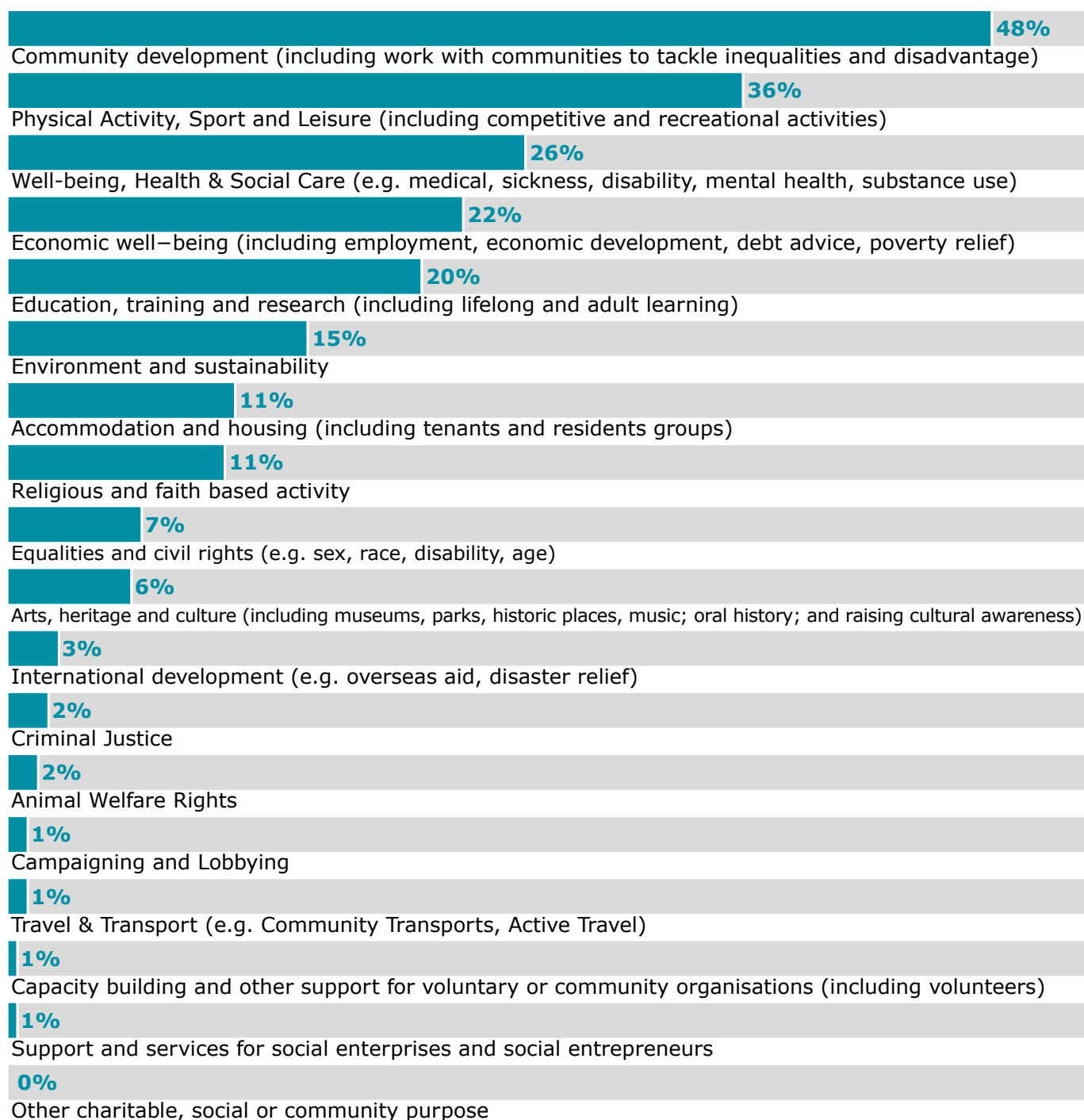
How the VCSE Sector Makes a Difference to People

The VCSE sector in Tameside 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 (see Figure 2).

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

- ▶ Wellbeing, Health and Social Care (26%)
- ▶ Community Development (48%)
- ▶ Physical Activity (36%)
- ▶ Economic Wellbeing (22%)

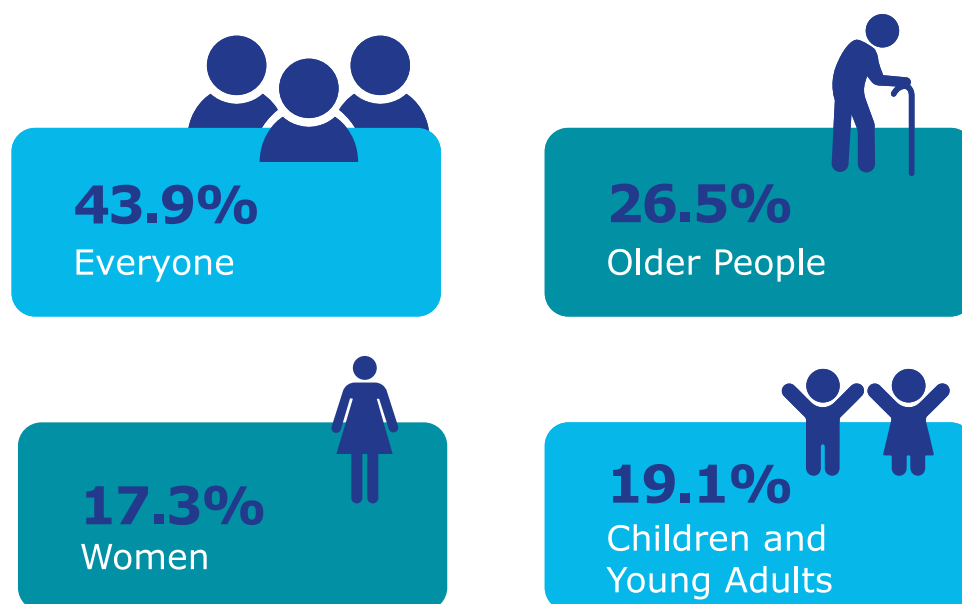
Whilst these findings are similar to those reported in 2017, the margin of error limits their comparability. The previous top four areas were Health and Wellbeing (46%), Community Development (33%), Sport and Leisure (34%) and Education, Training and Research (24%).

Figure 2: Main Areas of Work in the VCSE Sector

Main Clients/Users/Beneficiaries of VCSE Organisations in Tameside

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', and 'Women Specifically'.

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

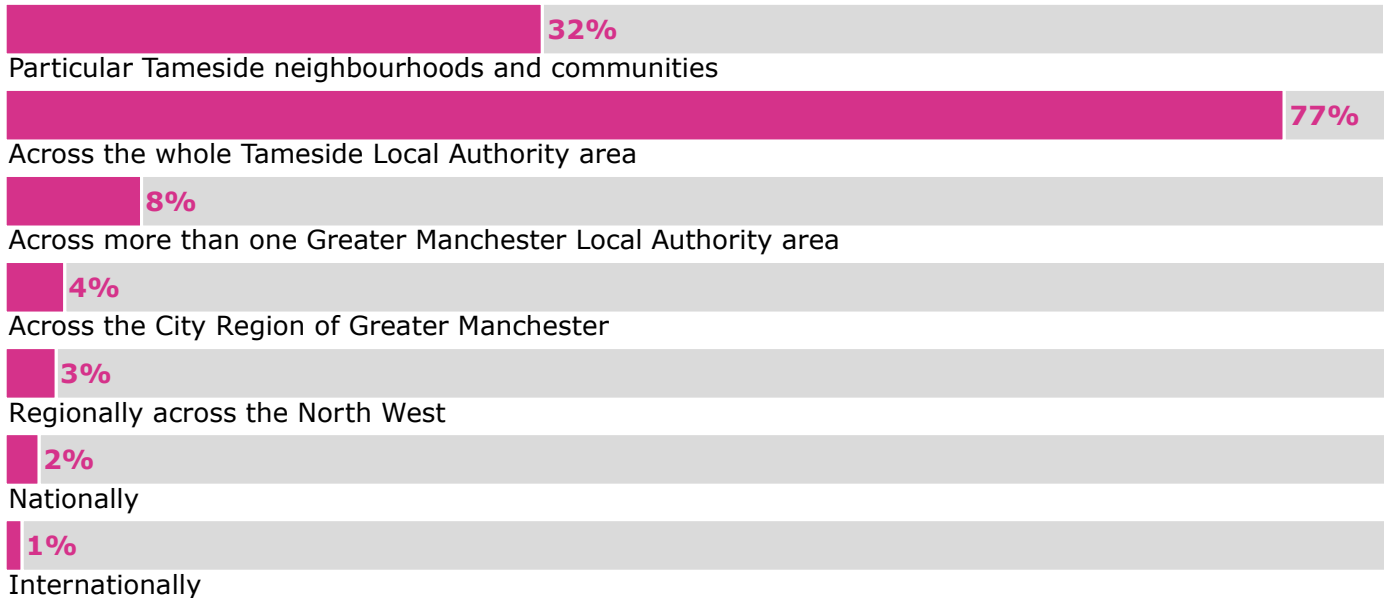


These figures are different from those reported in 2017, which indicated that the four main client groups were everyone (38%), children and young adults (28%), older people (16%) and women specifically (15%). Whilst these findings are different from those reported in 2017, the margin of error limits their comparability. 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 Tameside

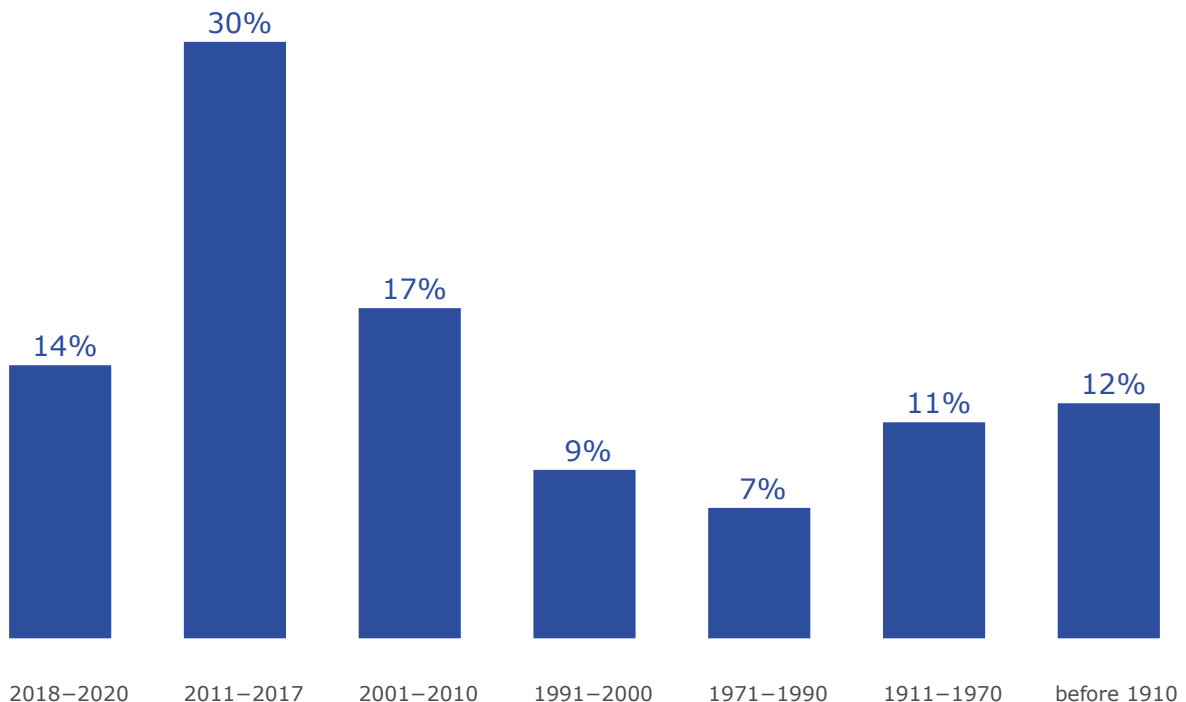
Survey respondents were asked to indicate the main geographical areas in which they operate. The response options provided included particular neighbourhoods, local authority, across more than one GM local area, regionally, nationally and internationally (see Figure 4). We asked respondents to select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

- ▶ Less than half (32%) of the respondents indicated that they worked across particular Tameside neighbourhoods.
- ▶ The majority of respondents (77%) indicated that they worked across the whole of the Tameside local authority area.
- ▶ Only 3% of those who responded reported that they worked across the region.
- ▶ Only 1% of respondents indicated that they worked internationally.

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 Tameside. A large number of organisations (44%) in Tameside were formed post 2011, whereas 39% were formed prior to 2000. 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 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Organisational Maturity

Income and Expenditure

In the same way as the 2017 report, this section describes organisations' reported income, expenditure and sustainability. However, since the last report in 2017 there have been a number of factors that have affected the level of funding VCSE organisations receive. This is not just in terms of growth or decline but in markets and funders shifting a focus for funding. The interaction between these factors creates a complex and dynamic environment, which creates challenges for the comparison of individual snapshots over time. We based our estimations on the average (mean) income of respondents to the survey across Greater Manchester and used the same assumptions that were used in the previous 2017 report to estimate the total number of organisations in Tameside.

The total income for the Tameside VCSE sector in 2019/20 was estimated to be £43.5 million.

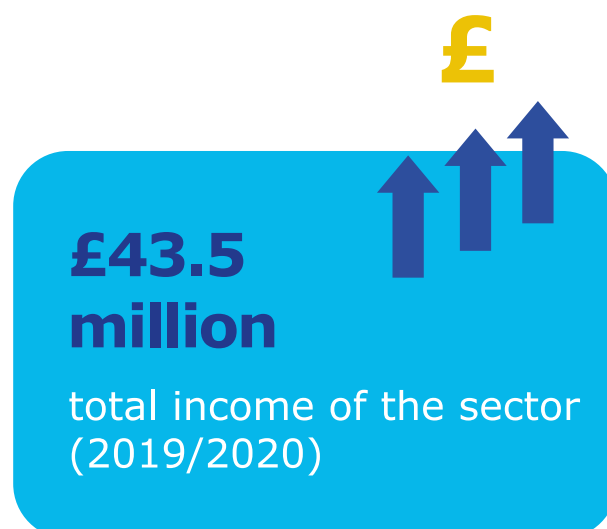
The latest income figures (2016–20) have been estimated on the basis of the distribution by size of organisation and provide a robust estimate, as we were able to draw on the previous report from 2016/17. The breakdown of income by organisational size was not available for 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15, and we are not able to show the estimated figures for 2015/16. So, to demonstrate the estimated trajectory of income over the past eight years, we have included the estimated totals from 2012/13 and 2013/14 and included income by organisational size for 2016 onwards (see Table 3).

The previous 2017 report showed some fluctuations in income between 2012 and 2015 and a small increase in income in 2014/15. However, there was a significant decrease in income between 2014/15 and 2016/17 of £14 million. There was a small recovery from 2017/18 to 2018/19 of £3 million, but a decrease in income totalling £4 million has been reported for the 2019/20 financial year; however, the margin of error limits comparability. Please refer to table 2 for income representation in percentages.

Table 2: Income Representation in Percentages

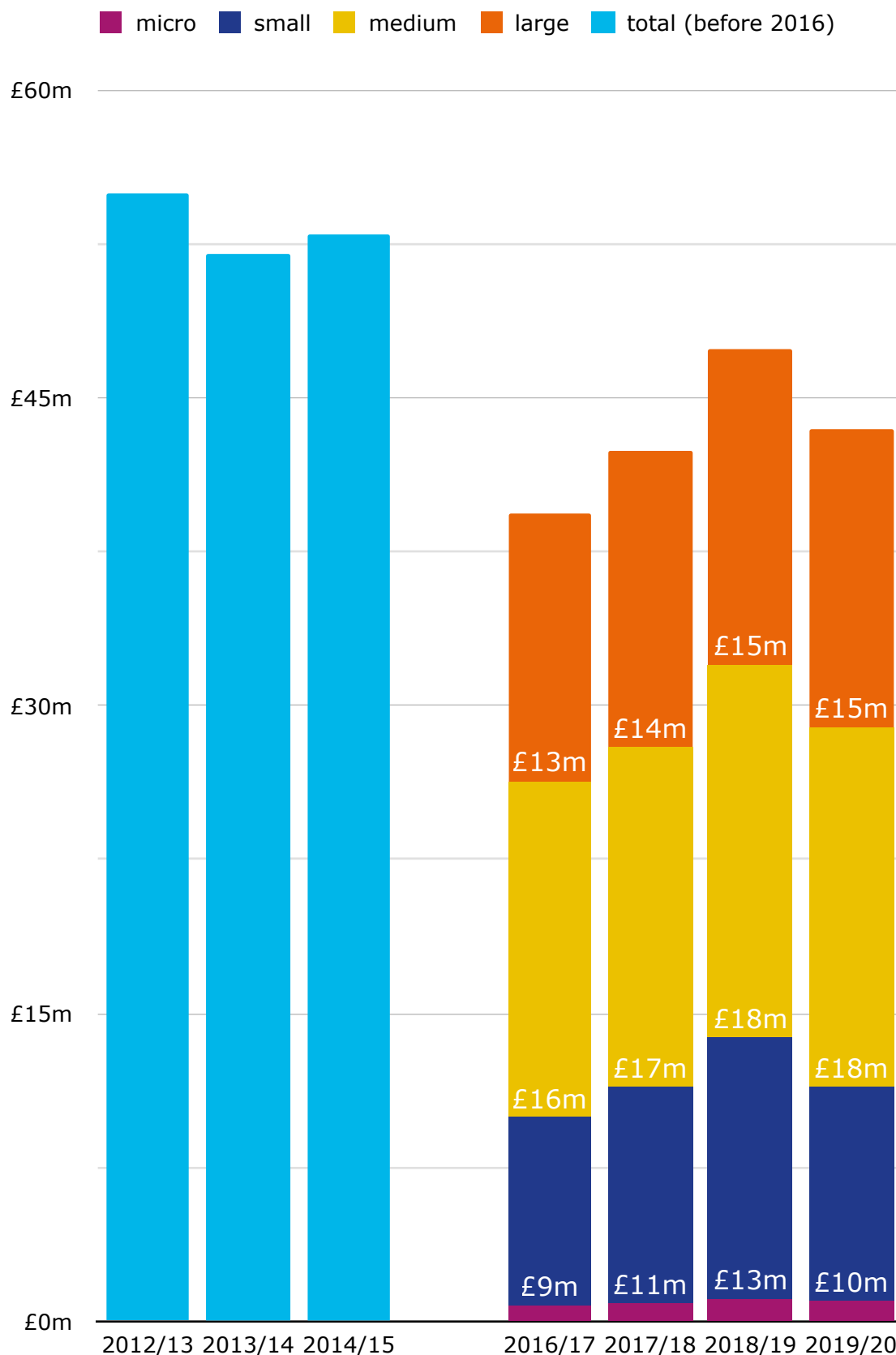
Tameside Income by Organisation Size

	2016/17	% change	2017/18	% change	2018/19	% change	2019/20
Micro	£0.8m	11%	£0.9m	26%	£1.1m	-13%	£1m
Small	£9.1m	15%	£10.5m	21%	£12.7m	-18%	£10.5m
Medium	£16.4m	1%	£16.6m	10%	£18.2m	-4%	£17.5m
Large	£13.1m	10%	£14.4m	7%	£15.4m	-5%	£14.5m
Total	£39.4m	8%	£42.4m	12%	£47.3m	-8%	£43.5m



The figures in Table 3 present an analysis of income data from survey respondents across Greater Manchester, and variations were also observed by organisation size. The data demonstrates yearly changes and an estimated percentage reduction in income across the different sized organisations. The downward variation represents a trend across the organisations and sizes.

Table 3: Income 2012–20



The current financial picture reflects some aspects of national research such as the NCVO Almanac (Hornung et al 2020), in that, whilst larger organisations are smaller in number (3% of the sector) and micro organisations represent the majority of the sector in GM (71%), the latter have the least income. The larger charities continue to have a significant amount of the income. However, in Tameside smaller organisations have the majority of the income.

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 (57.7%) of the VCSE sector's income in Tameside originated from grants administered by Action Together. Our findings also indicate that Tameside and Glossop CCG and Tameside Council also account for a moderate proportion of the income.

- ▶ Action Together was the most frequently identified source of funding (57.7%).
- ▶ The second most common source of funding was through Tameside Council (53.6%).
- ▶ A smaller percentage of respondents (42.3%) indicated that Tameside and Glossop CCG were the third most common source of funding.

Of those receiving funding, it is estimated that 30.6% of organisations received less than 10% of their funding from Action Together. Tameside and Glossop CCG provided 42.3% of the organisations who responded with 10% or less of their funding, and Tameside Council provided 53.6% of organisations with less than 10% of their total income.

The 2017 survey reported that the top two funders were Tameside Council and Action Together. On the basis of these figures, the findings from 2020 were similar, but the margin of error limits any comparability:

- ▶ 30.6% of organisations reported funding from Action Together was less than 10% of their total income.
- ▶ 7.7% of organisations reported funding from Action Together was at least 10% but less than 20% of their income.
- ▶ 6.1% of organisations reported funding from Action Together was at least 20% but less than 50% of their income, and 5.6% reported that funding from Action Together was at least 50% but less than 75% of their income.
- ▶ Action Together provided 100% of the total income of 2.6% of the organisations who responded.

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). Our findings suggest that, although a large number of organisations received significant funding from the public sector, at least 81% of organisations were bringing in funding from another source, providing added value to the Borough and residents (see Figures 6 and 7).

- ▶ **Fundraising (e.g., crowdfunding events, donations):** 22.4% of respondents received income through this type of funding, 17.3% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 8.2% received at least 20% but less than 50%. Only 0.5% indicated that they received 100% of their annual income through fundraising.
- ▶ **Membership fees:** 15.3% of respondents received income through this type of funding, 7.7% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 3.6% received at least 20% but less than 50%. Only 7.7% indicated that they received 100% of their annual income through membership fees.
- ▶ **Grants from charitable trusts and foundations:** 20.9% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 19% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 6.1% indicated that they received at least 20% but less than 50%. Only 1.5% indicated that they received 100% of their annual income through grants from charitable trusts and foundations.

- Charging for goods and services:** 16.8% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 3.1% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 3.6% received at least 50% but less than 75%. Only 1.0% indicated that they received 100% of their annual income through charging for goods and services.
- Grants from National Lottery distributors (e.g., BIG):** 4.6% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 10.2% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 0.5% received at least 20% but less than 50%.
- Business donations or sponsorships:** 15.3% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, 18.9% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way, and 0.5% received at least 20% but less than 50%.
- Interest (e.g., bank endowments, investments):** 10.2% of respondents indicated that they received this type of funding, and 13.3% indicated that they received less than 10% of their income in this way.

Figure 6: Other Sources of Funding

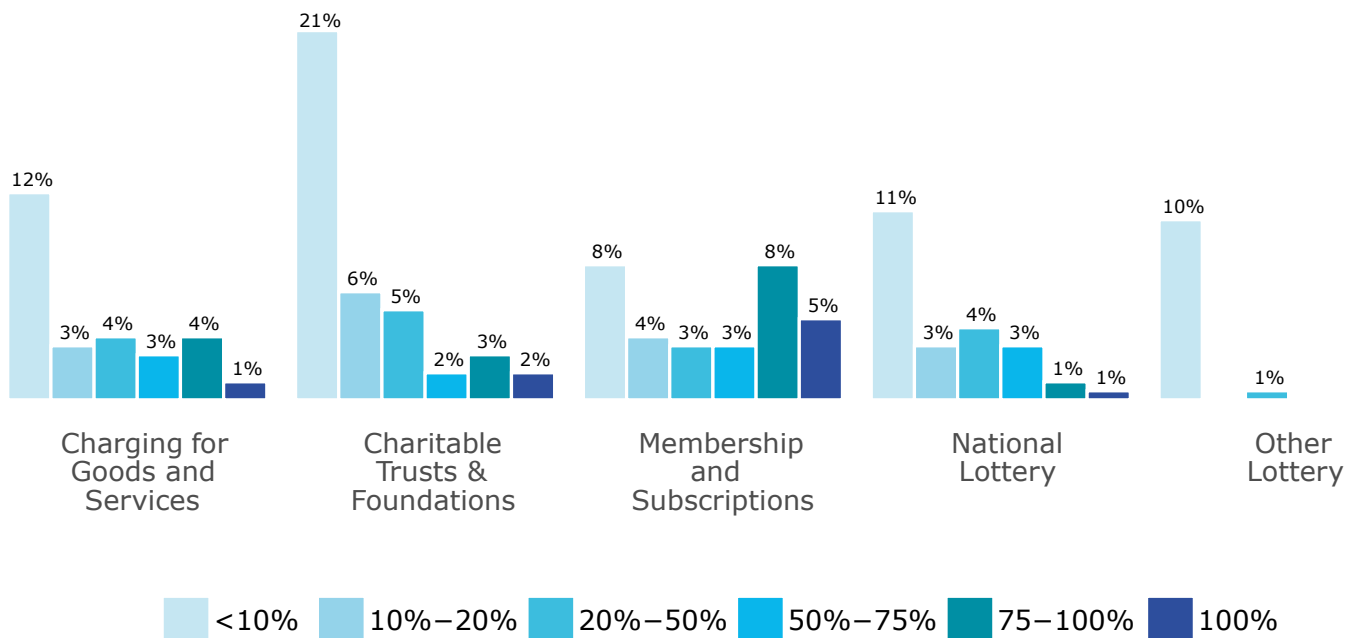
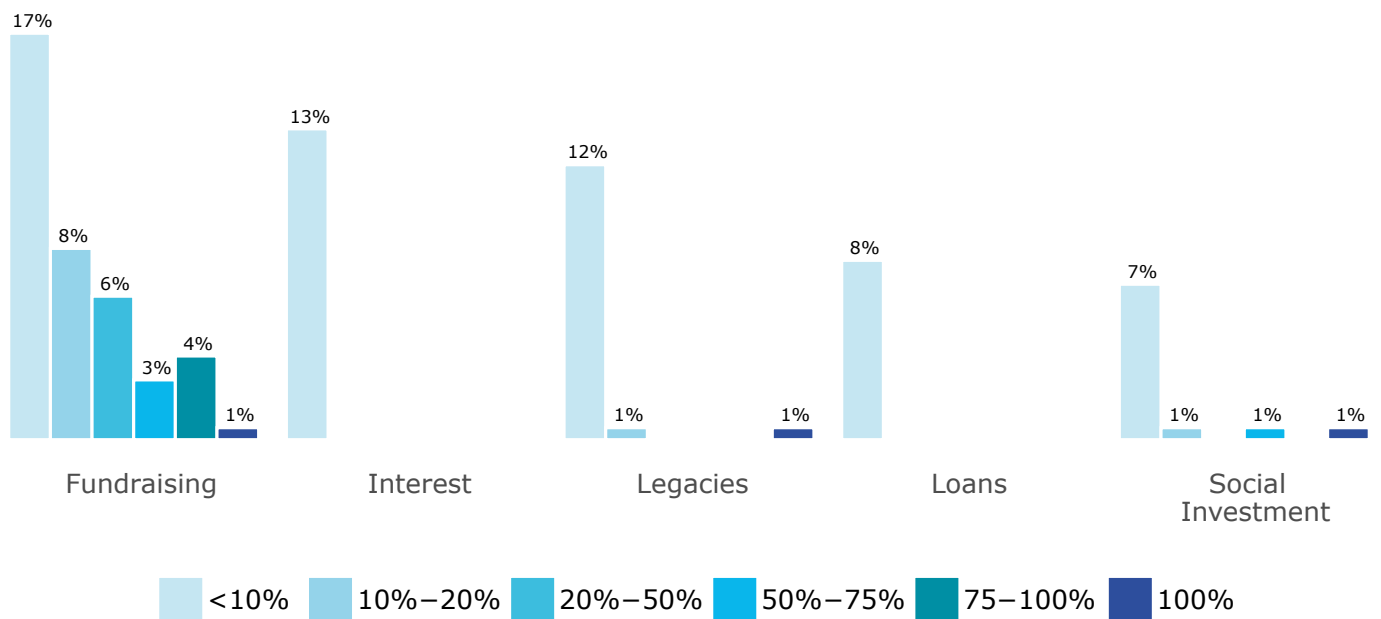


Figure 7: Other Sources of Funding

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

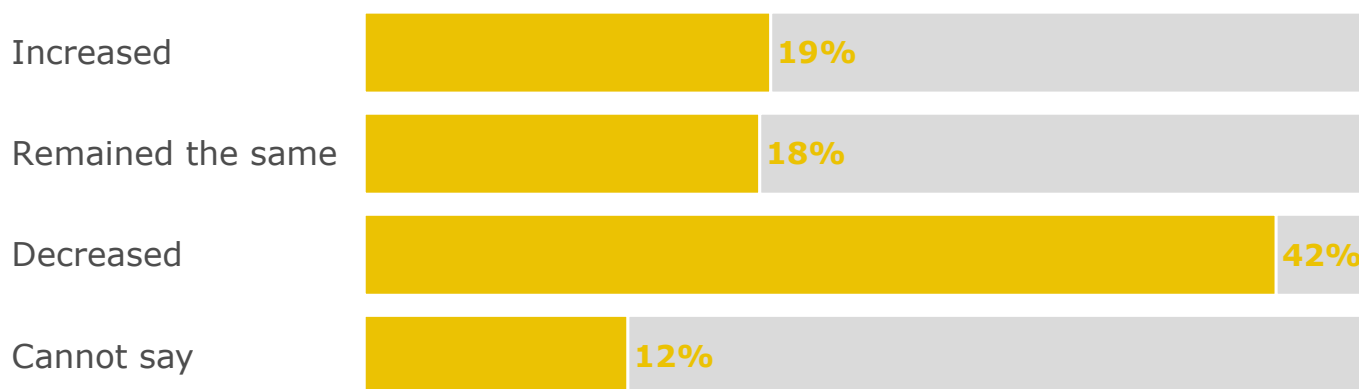
We asked respondents to indicate if they received European funding. Only 16 organisations responded; of these, the majority (81%) received less than 10% of their funds from European sources. Approximately 13% received between 20% and 50% of their funding in this way, and a smaller percentage of respondents (6%) received at least 10% of funding from European sources.

Financial Sustainability

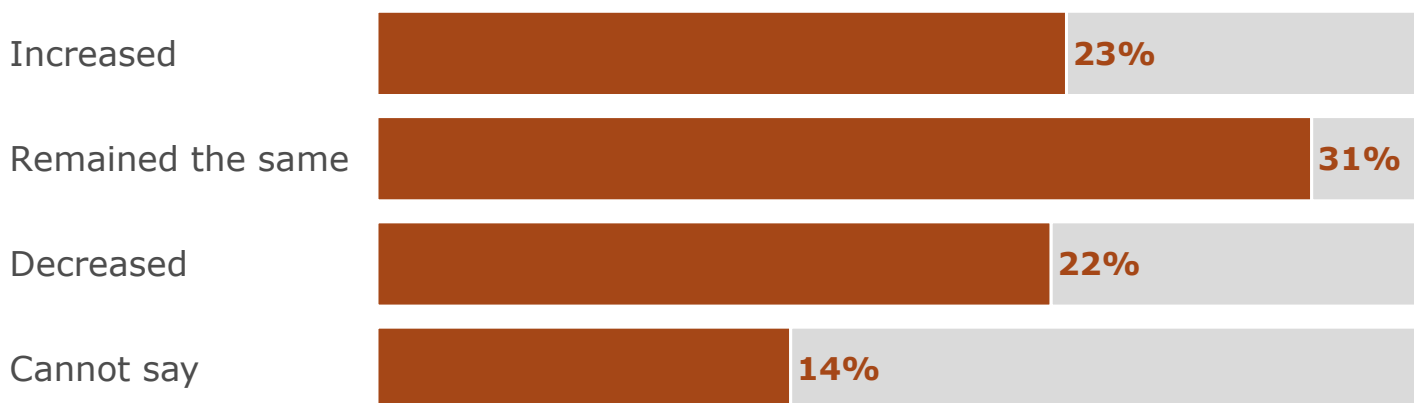
The survey asked respondents about how their organisation's financial situation had changed in the past 12 months (i.e., during the current financial year). The results use the total annual, use of reserves, expenditure and total annual income (reported separately below) to provide a picture of financial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

Changes in Total Annual Income

The respondents were asked about changes in their annual income. A total of 19% of organisations reported an increase in their annual turnover, whilst a further 18% reported no change in their income. The percentage of organisations stating that their income had decreased was 42%, and 12% of organisations were unsure (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Changes in Total Annual Income**Changes in Total Annual Expenditure**

We asked the respondents about changes in their annual expenditure, and just over a third of the organisations (23%) reported an increase in their expenditure, whilst a further 31% reported no change in their expenditure. Just under a quarter (22%) reported that their expenditure had decreased, and 14% of organisations were unsure (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Changes in Total 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 (57%) of respondents had not used their reserves in the past 12 months; however, 44% reported that they had used reserves. Of those who had used reserves, 21% used reserves to cover a gap in funding, and 6% used reserves to cater for an increased demand. Others reported that the use of reserves was to cover unplanned costs (11%) and change the way that they work (6%). Of the 61 respondents who had used reserves, the majority (47) reported that this was as a result of COVID-19. A total of 28% of respondents indicated that their reserves had decreased. A smaller percentage (14%) reported an increase in the level of reserves, and 27% reported that their reserves had remained the same.

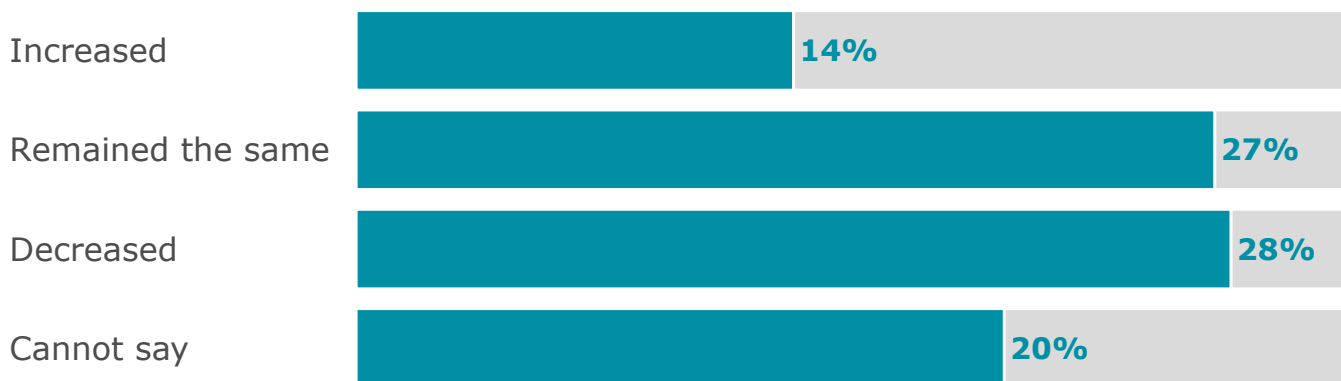
It should be noted that an organisation not using their reserves is not necessarily an indicator of financial stability. Smaller and newer organisations may not yet have established reserves due to their limited maturity, whilst similarly some larger organisations may not have been able to utilise their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



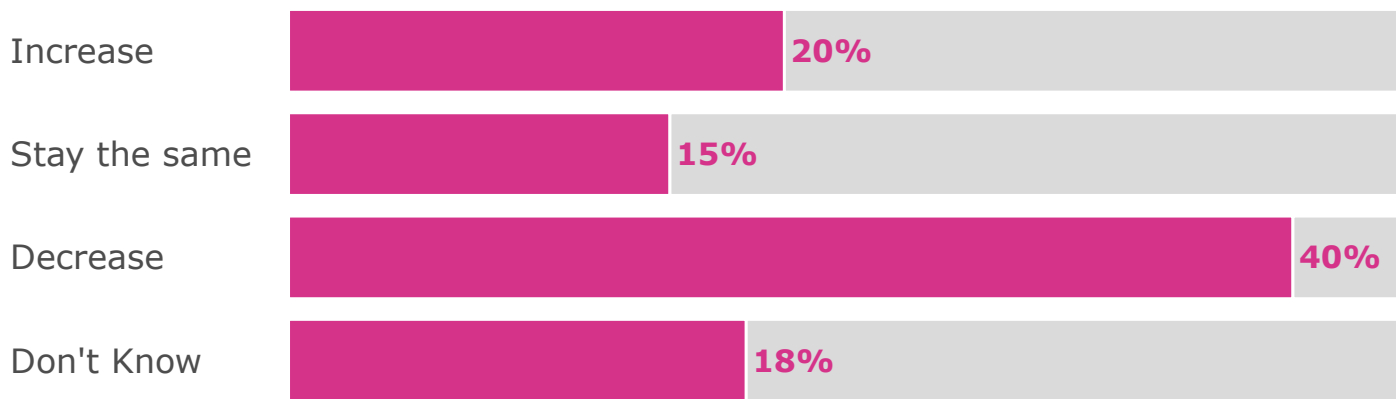
33%

of the organisations have used their reserves in the past 12 months (68% due to COVID)

Figure 10: Changes in Level of Free Reserves



The respondents were asked about their expectations regarding income for the next 12 months. The highest proportion of organisations (40%) estimated that their income would be reduced, 20% of organisations anticipated an increase in turnover, whilst 15% predicted that it would remain the same. A comparatively high number (18%) of organisations didn't know if their financial situation would improve or not (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Financial Turnover**Summary of Financial Situation.**

Our findings suggest that overall income was thought to have been reduced for 42% of the survey respondents, compared with an increase in income for 19%. Similarly, 23% of the respondents indicated an increase in expenditure, but 41% reported that their expenditure had decreased. Whilst the majority indicated that they had not used reserves, a total of 28% of survey respondents indicated that they had a drop in reserves. The largest percentage (40%) of respondents predicted their level of sustainability would decrease in the next 12 months, and 20% thought that the financial outlook over the next 12 months would improve. 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 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 Tameside has worked with VCSE organisations in Tameside and across GM and the influence on organisational success.

Working Relationships with Tameside Borough 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. Tameside Borough 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 Tameside Borough Council decisions that are relevant to their organisation/group. The responses indicate a mixed experience of working with the Council.

- ▶ 9.2% of respondents were very satisfied, and 21.9% were fairly satisfied; however, 25% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
- ▶ 8.2% were fairly dissatisfied, and 7.7% were very dissatisfied.

Success of Bidding or Applying for Funding from Tameside Borough 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 Tameside Borough Council. The findings suggest that organisations had been fairly successful, with 23.5% indicating that they had been successful and 10.2% indicating that they had been very successful. A total of 18.9% 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:

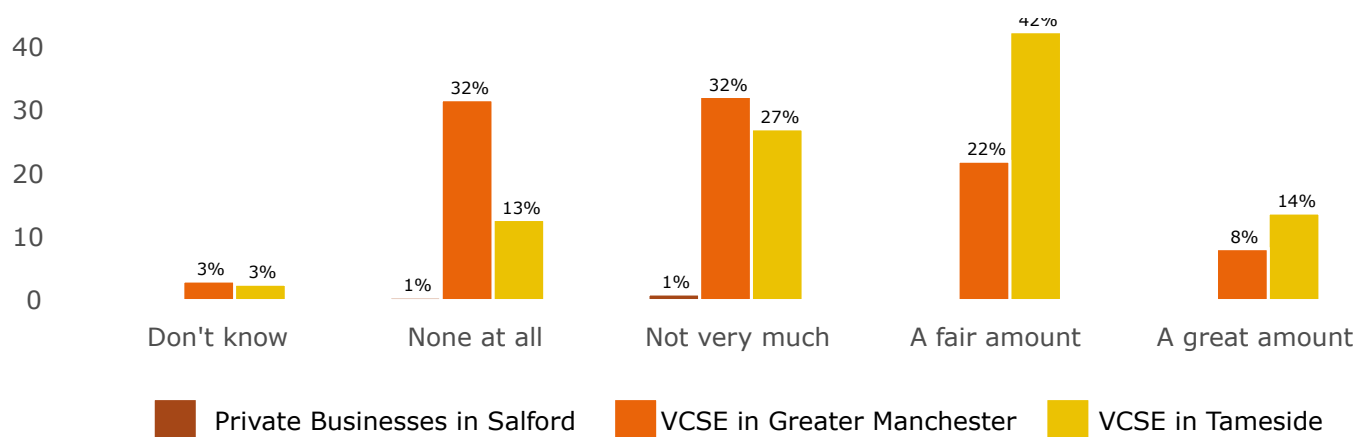
- ▶ **Tameside Council:** 14.3% of respondents had had a great amount of dealings with Tameside Council, and 21.4% had had a fair amount of dealings.
- ▶ **Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care:** 7.1% of respondents had had a great amount of dealings, and 8.7% had had a fair amount of dealings.
- ▶ **Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust:** 5.6% of respondents had had a great amount of dealings, and 6.6% had had a fair amount of dealings.

Our report highlights that Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care was one of the top three bodies, but this wasn't included in the 2017 report as it had not been formed at that time.

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

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

- ▶ **GM Working:** 8% of respondents worked with other GM VCSE organisations a great amount, and 22% estimated that they worked across GM a fair amount.
- ▶ **Tameside VCSE Working:** 14% of respondents worked with Tameside VCSE organisations a great amount, and 42% estimated that they worked across Tameside VCSE organisations a fair amount.

Figure 12: Direct Dealings with Private and VCSE Organisations

Our findings reflect the 2017 survey, which highlighted a relatively small percentage of relationships with private organisations; however, the margin of error limits any comparability. This is also highlighted in the qualitative focus group findings in Tameside and across the other localities, which have highlighted some inequity in partnership working with the private sector, particularly in relation to funding opportunities.

The VCSE Workforce in Tameside

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 2,712 paid employees in the Tameside VCSE sector, of which 1,654 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 £30 million per annum.

The percentage of paid staff per organisation size was also estimated. Whilst the number of large organisations (n=7) was small in the locality, they employed a significant percentage of the total number of staff, equating to 29% of the total number of staff employed in the sector. There were a total of 82 medium organisations in the sector, which employed 41% of the total number of staff. Collectively, our findings indicate that, despite only representing 7% of the total number of organisations in the sector, medium and large organisations accounted for 70% of the total number of staff employed, but the smallest percentage of volunteers (17%).

We asked survey respondents to indicate whether their organisation paid all staff at least the Living Wage (as per the Living Wage Foundation) at the time of the survey. A total of 46% of respondents indicated that they paid the Living Wage, 35% indicated that this question was not applicable, and a small percentage (10%) indicated that they did not pay the Living Wage and 9% did not know. Although this is not a representative sample, it reflects the commitment from Tameside 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. Our findings suggest that there are a total of 37,327 volunteers supporting the VCSE sector in Tameside. We also asked survey respondents to estimate the total number of volunteer hours per week. Our findings suggest that volunteers in Tameside provide over 152,304 hours per week. The total numbers of hours provided by volunteers per organisation size each week are estimated below:



37,327

volunteers (including committee/board members), giving 152,304 hours each week valued at £75 million per annum (based on Living Wage £9.50 per hour)

- ▶ 21,328 volunteers in micro organisations provide 108,683 hours per week, representing 71% of the total hours of volunteers in the VCSE sector.
- ▶ 9,605 volunteers in small organisations provide 33,526 hours per week, representing 22% of the total hours of volunteers in the VCSE sector.
- ▶ 4,418 volunteers in medium organisations provide 8,775 hours per week, representing 5% of the total hours of volunteers in the VCSE sector.
- ▶ 1,977 volunteers in large organisations provide 1,321 hours per week, representing 0.87% of the total hours of volunteers in the VCSE sector.

When calculating the estimated economic contribution based on the total number of hours per week and using the national Living Wage (£9.50 per hour), we determined that the estimated economic burden for volunteer hours and for volunteers working in committees and boards per annum is £75 million.

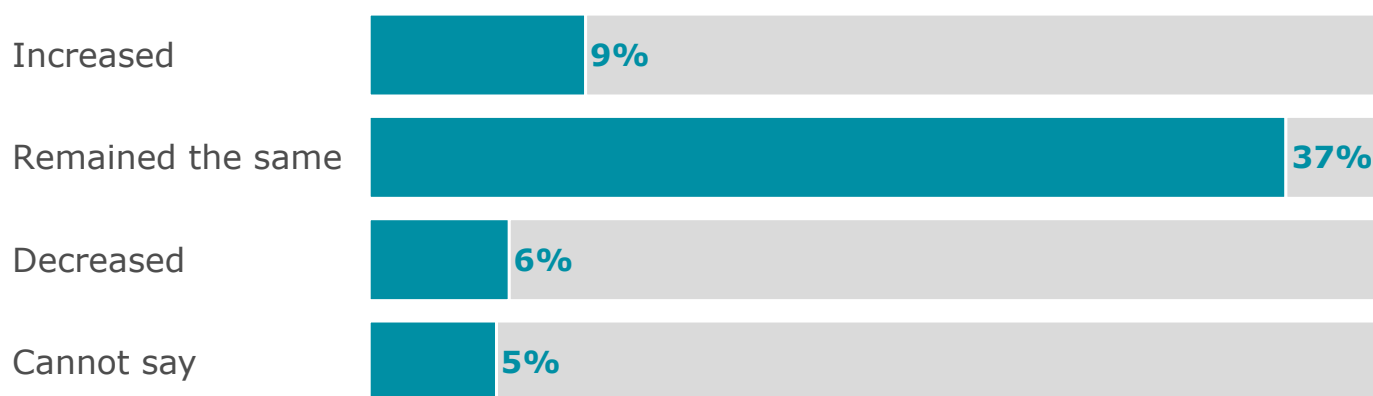
Changes in the VCSE Sector during the Last 12 Months

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

Changes in Total Number of Employees

The respondent figures for employees in Tameside indicated that in the largest number (37%) of organisations the workforce had remained the same. A total of 6% of respondents indicated that the workforce had decreased, and a total of 9% reported that the workforce had increased. It was reported that the impact of COVID-19 on the workforce was not applicable by 42.9% of the respondents. Only a small percentage (4.1%) indicated that COVID-19 had had an impact, and 11.7% 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.

Changes in Total Number of Volunteers

The largest number (42.9%) of respondents indicated that the volunteer workforce had remained the same. A total of 24% indicated that the volunteer workforce had increased, 1% could not say, and 24.5% 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 16.3% of the respondents. A total of 16.8% of respondents reported that COVID-19 had not had an impact on volunteer numbers; however, the largest number (20.9%) 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.

Impact of COVID-19

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

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 Tameside

We asked what the primary impact of COVID-19 had been. Three key themes emerged: 'Loss of contact', 'Funding and resources' 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. 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; physical activity was reduced, and there was an increase in levels of social isolation (see Illustration1).



'We're just trying to diversify and make sure we can still keep helping in the community in this time, but in different times we're unsure what the best way would be to proceed. So, we're just keeping our options open and trying to be as flexible as possible, which I think is all we can really do right now, to be fair'

Participants described how the 'Mutual Aid' model helped by supporting collaborative working for a common goal. The following extract illustrates this:



'I think the Mutual Aid model has been an absolute godsend in that we've been able to react and respond to things really quickly. There hasn't been lots of committees and going to a board, and then it goes to somebody else and sits in a place, and nobody's made a decision. We've just acted, and with both hats on, both a statutory and a voluntary sector, I think for me it's shown that the two things can work quite well hand in hand if people are willing and people are prepared to work together.'

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

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, 'Funding', 'Closure but open' and 'Keeping in touch'. 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.

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, 'Income reduction', 'Health and wellbeing' and 'Connections'. 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



Participants in the focus groups described how they helped to support people in the community through a range of activities such as enabling people to access food and funding and connect with others. However, a common issue that arose was digital exclusion and recognising that some people could not access the digital support.



'We're supporting particularly older people, and our whole ethos is around trying to combat social isolation and loneliness, which was a massive issue before COVID and has become an even bigger one. I think there are a lot of things that have been highlighted which are issues that were there before the pandemic that people just weren't aware of particularly, so things like food poverty, fuel poverty and digital poverty. There are lots of projects now looking to get people devices, which is great, but it's not good if you've no internet access, you still can't use it.'

Innovative approaches were used by participants to ensure that people were not excluded, as the following extract highlights:



'We kept in touch with them on the phone, made little groups, and our volunteers kept in touch with them. Our volunteers are all over-60s, and the main problem was the digital. We applied for some funding for the digital, and we got the tablets, but they are not very good, because the sound quality is not very good. We tried to get the – most of the things that other people have said, I agree with them.'

Qualitative Survey Responses Regarding the Impact of COVID-19 on VCSE Organisations

There were a total of 220 unique responses that described the impact of COVID-19 on VCSE organisations in Tameside. Key quotes have been included to reflect the three core themes that emerged from Tameside's qualitative 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 have had to lock our fruit garden. The funding we applied for was put on hold, and now we are having to reapply, so the garden we had planned to create this year has not been able to go ahead.
- ▶ Funding for extra cleaning needed in order to use the building in which we operate. Possible need to pay rent for use of building due to church losing income from regular rentals.
- ▶ Drop in revenue from rental, sales. Delayed progress in implementing medium- to long-term development plans. Reduced capacity to secure new/alternative funding.
- ▶ Having to close, but no income coming in from subs; also had to cancel two major fundraising drives or bag pack and fundraising night.
- ▶ We have suffered a 50% loss of income from private trading with care homes, schools and NHS and corporate clients. We have had to spend to adapt premises and bought outside workspaces. We have had to reduce the number of clients attending our base in Tameside. We have had to design and promote a new online service. We have been unable to access emergency funds. Staff are returning from furlough to reduced hours.
- ▶ Reduced income. No work for sessional staff. Increased workload for core staff. Staff morale: not being able to do enough for the children and adults who need our support. Fear of subsequent lockdown.

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 Greater Manchester localities.

Promote service online, both web presence and social media platforms. Setting up online support and meetings.

We have been closed as a library but have been providing weekly activity packs for children and weekly Lego challenges online. We have just reopened to provide a book exchange only.

We have not been able to meet, so all of our activity has had to move online. Building of local community has been good. We have developed phone support networks, COVID-19 response groups and continued to host and support the local food bank.

- ▶ Providing tech support, equipment, freephone number for people without Wi-Fi, for people to continue to access creative workshop, now online.
- ▶ We have tried to use online facilities, but only 20% of members have accessed this. Increased support emotionally/mentally/spiritually. 2. Adapting as many of our activities/services as possible, moving online, thinking creatively. 3. Increased crisis support.
- ▶ Tried to online scouting; however, failed due to over half the families having no access to IT equipment. Tried for three weeks and stopped.
- ▶ Online Zoom meetings with young people. Getting young people on mental health training.

Young people getting in meetings with health professionals to upskill them in COVID-19 info, so they become ambassadors in their community. Social media updates and keeping in touch with young people. Detached youth work, which has helped us to maintain relationships within the local area with young people and the wider community.

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.

- ▶ Increase in demand. Loss of income. Organisation redesign, as most of our activity is social, face to face.
- ▶ Food, essential items; liaising with social workers – at times we felt we were taking on their roles – 24/7 helpline; individuals and group calls; bespoke activity packages; care packages; support to carers and families; a voice at the end of the phone and video chats; updating of the 'rules'; encouraging individuals to understand their roles within the lockdown.
- ▶ Adapted to provide a food delivery service for those most in need that didn't have support from local council or any other services, including groceries and hot meals. Doorstep mental health support for those most in need, including those that have suffered bereavement direct from COVID-19. Picked up individuals that have been left completely isolated from lack of other service provision, including statutory services/unable to access support from local council.



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 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 (53.6%) reported that the recruitment of staff was not applicable to their organisation, and 8.7% reported that the recruitment of volunteers would 'greatly assist' their organisation.

- ▶ **Ability to retain staff/staff turnover:** 4.6% of organisations responded that the ability to retain staff would greatly assist their organisation.
- ▶ **Ability to retain volunteers/volunteer turnover:** 8.7% of organisations responded that the ability to retain volunteers would greatly assist 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. The participants in the qualitative focus groups described the importance of a policy that embedded workforce development and included innovative approaches that had been created as a result of COVID-19. The following extracts highlight how this should support future volunteers and the VCSE sector:



'What is your recovery plan? Again, it should be a collective policy on a recovery plan, because, if we're all going to recover, which we will do, one group might recover at a slower rate than another. Some will be quick to recover, and we need to identify these routes, but rather than being all off/on – if we're spreading ourselves that thin, we will become ineffective. It's got to be a more collective policy amongst all the good work that's being done, but it needs to be more focused if we're going to make an impact. Our volunteers are here for one reason: they believe in community and they believe that community is the key to a society, to a caring society.'



'Zoom has been quite a handy tool to have, I think, at our networking events, but I think, going forward, to develop a structure, yes, people have got so many good ideas. The thing is ideas are great, it's putting them ideas into practice is where the funding will need to come in. Putting them ideas into practice will need dedicated teams of volunteers, which is marvellous, but I think we need to have a more structured approach, which is – and having a strong influence on funding for all these groups, who essentially are really only firing on two cylinders until they can get the proper support.'

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 Tameside. 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:** 25% of organisations responded that this would assist their organisation, and a further 12.8% indicated that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.
- Engagement with other public organisations:** 19.4% of organisations responded that this would assist their organisation, and a further 8.7% indicated that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.
- Engagement with other private organisations:** 13.1% of organisations responded that this would assist their organisation, and a further 4.1% indicated that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.

Partnership working was highlighted as a significant aspect of the future of the VCSE sector by participants in the qualitative focus groups. In particular, the intention to reach out to communities experiencing racial inequalities and integrate as a wider community was described, as the following extract highlights:



'So, I think there's an issue there about us working, again, collaboratively and trying to get people involved. In Tameside we've got a large Bengali community, and they're quite wary of us in a way. So, we've tried, we set up the food bank, and we tried to work with them. I think there's still a lot of work to be done on integrating people rather than having separate groups that support their own communities. We need to say, "Well, we're all part of the community, and we all need to work together."'



'Then, as part of our ESF delivery we're in a massive group of providers from all over GM, and having those Zoom calls with people like that, which we've been forced to have because of COVID, I think has made us network a lot more actually. So, I'm seeing some really good partnerships coming out of those.'

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 anxiety about the funding and operation of many VCSE organisations. We asked the survey respondents to estimate to what extent funding from grants, the local economy and other sources would either assist or constrain funding and, in particular, the ability to secure contracts and the impact of the wider economy.

- ▶ **Ability to secure contracts from public sector bodies:** 8.7% of respondents indicated that this would assist their organisation, with 3.6% responding that this would 'greatly assist' their organisation.
- ▶ **Impact of the local economy:** 15.8% of respondents anticipated that this factor would constrain their organisation over the next year.

The percentage of responses was small, suggesting that grant capture from these sources was not viewed as a significant enabler. However, the qualitative focus groups explored how the local infrastructure could be supported, and partnership was highlighted as opposed to securing contracts. The changes in funding as a result of COVID-19 were highlighted in the qualitative focus groups, and it was recognised that the wellbeing of communities and individuals should not be overlooked in future funding strategies, as the following extract highlights:



'then all of the funding bids that we'd got lined up – Heritage Lottery, National Lottery, whatever, whatever – they all just closed down and focused on what they interpreted as COVID response. The COVID response seemed to be very much, in my mind, quite short-sighted really. It was good in the fact that it covered food poverty, food banks, all the things that – but it seemed to really overlook the fact that people's wellbeing and people coming together and feeling part of a community is still really important.'

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.

- ▶ 1% of respondents anticipated that Brexit would greatly assist their organisation.
- ▶ 41% of respondents indicated that the influence of Brexit was not applicable to their organisation.
- ▶ 8% of respondents anticipated that Brexit would seriously constrain their organisation.

To explicate a more in-depth understanding of the impact of Brexit, we encouraged discussion in the qualitative focus groups. Our findings were similar to the survey quantitative data, which indicated that Brexit was not a key concern:



'I'm not as concerned, and seeing the impact of Brexit, because that's still not measurable yet, the impact... it is pure speculation for me, the impact on it, even though there's a lot of evidence to say that things could get really bad. Just touching slightly on Brexit, it's very difficult for us to comment on that at this stage, simply because we don't know what it's going to mean.'

The quantitative survey data highlighted that only a few organisations would be impacted by Brexit. For those that did receive EU funding, the future was uncertain, as the following extract highlights:



'Well, it was just to say that the European Social Fund through the community grants has been a real lifeline for my charity and for the one I was at last time as well. So, I think that particularly is something that we'll miss.'

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 Greater Manchester 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, driving social change and enabling recovery.

In Tameside, local VCSE organisations across Greater Manchester generate over £43.5 million of income, creating a range of services and activities as diverse as our communities. In doing so, VCSE organisations employ 2,712 people and mobilises 37,327 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 14% 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 Tameside. As a sector we continue to have strong relationships with our public sector colleagues including the Local Authority but also have a growing connection with businesses (54%). 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, VCSE sector income is in decline and many 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 has been 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 Tameside, 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 economy and skills, 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 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, with the VCSE sector leading on behalf of the system when it is best placed to do this.

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 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. The VCSE sector has a unique ability to gather intelligence at a neighbourhood level and across communities of place, interest and identity. We are powered by passionate local people who are committed to amplifying the voices of the most marginalised. 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. There is a need to support citizen and system leadership to harness the full potential of this substantial workforce.

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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