

Community Anchor Organisations in Tameside 'Temperature take' - January 2021.

Introduction

We have tried to keep in touch with as many Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) groups as possible throughout the COVID 19 pandemic, to offer one to one support raise awareness of help e.g., COVID emergency grants, COVID guidance and link groups to one another and the public sector to find share insight and solutions together e.g., Food Solutions network, BAME network etc. Our local VCFSE sector 'stepped up' and has kept going throughout the pandemic to support the most marginalised in our communities, from new mutual aid groups to established organisations and the hundreds of volunteers who have supported our responses.

One group of VCFSE organisations has been particularly key throughout the pandemic, we call these 'Community Anchor Organisations'. These independent community led organisations are generally defined as delivering multiple services or activities with and on behalf of local people within:

- A defined locality - place
- A specialist area of expertise and/or
- Represent a particular community of identity.

These anchors are rooted in the local area and have been there for years. In Tameside they are usually small organisations that employ staff and work with volunteers from their local community to deliver their activities and run their organisation. We know that they have been struggling for some time with shorter funding cycles, less grant monies available and an increased demand for their services. We were particularly keen to hear from them as to the impact of COVID on their organisation's sustainability. We spoke to 33 Community Anchors during this research, our findings can be seen in the following.

Our Findings.

1. Spread of responses.

33 groups provided feedback, fairly spread across the four neighbourhoods in Tameside and by size of group as demonstrated below.

Graph 1.1 - Spread of responses by neighbourhood.

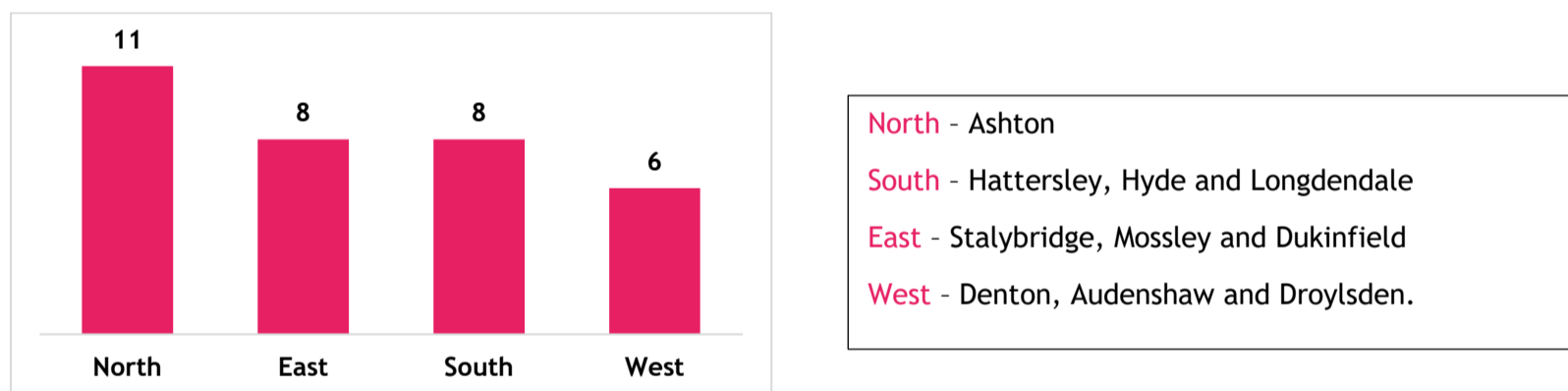
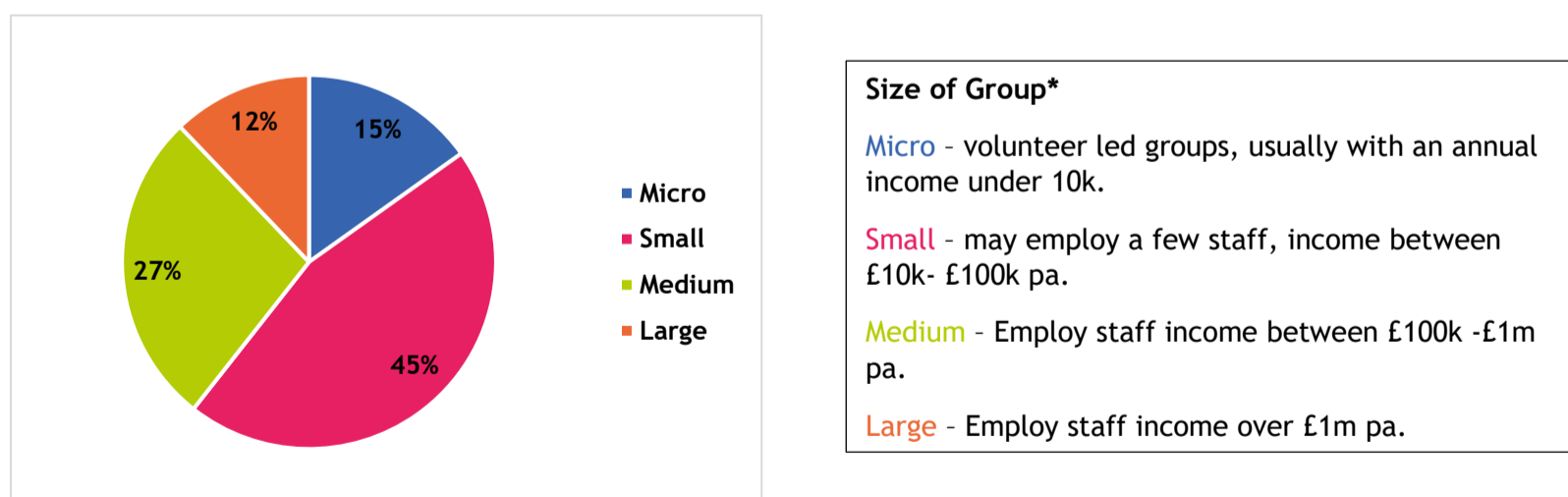


Fig 1.2. - Spread of responses by size of group



* Please note, the size of group is estimated based on our knowledge of the groups, based on parameters in the State of the VCFSE research conducted in 2017, we suspect many of the groups we have placed in Medium and Large categories will have had significant reductions in their income this year. Last years' State of the sector research findings will be released in March 2021.

2. Themes

2.1. Adapting delivery models

Just under half of the organisations (42%) felt that their main challenge is **not being able to deliver their services or having to restrict their delivery**. The reasons for this are:

- Unable to implement Covid-secure measures fully.
- Loss of staff/volunteers (either because they are shielding or the fear of leaving homes)

- The barriers that the communities face in accessing/adapting to other new ways of connecting to the offer (e.g., digitally).

This is ultimately having a negative effect on both organisations’ and communities’ education/skillset, mental health and general health.

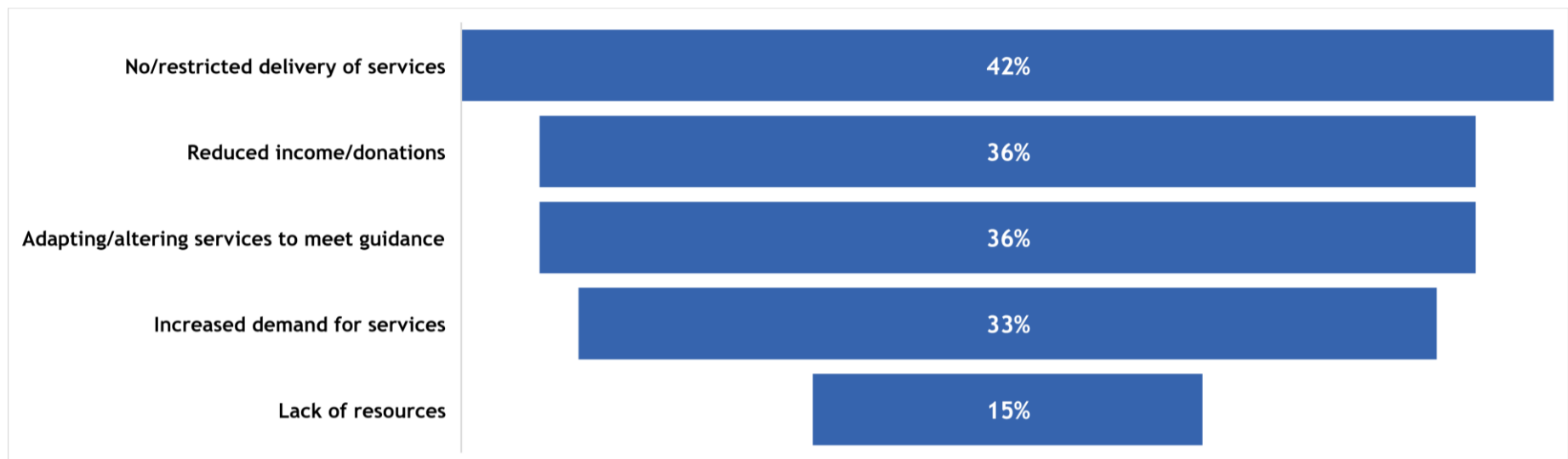
Just over a third of the organisations (36%) felt that the constant need to adapt and alter services and demonstrate **versatility to meet guidelines is a challenge, although some organisations embraced the changes** to service delivery and felt positive towards learning a new skillset and *“thinking outside the box”*.

2.2. Resources

A significant percentage of organisations (36%) heavily rely on the income they receive (other than grants/funding), either through **donations, memberships, sales or rent**. This is a challenge for organisations who are now exhausting any reserves due to this.

15% of organisations fed back that the **lack of resources meant that they are unable to deliver services of the same calibre or quantity** as they did before the pandemic. They are now unable to support specific communities or projects.

Graph 1.2 - Themes



2.3. Finances

Anchors were asked about their current financial position and what their financial forecast could look like over the next 12-18 months. We have categorised this into risk levels:

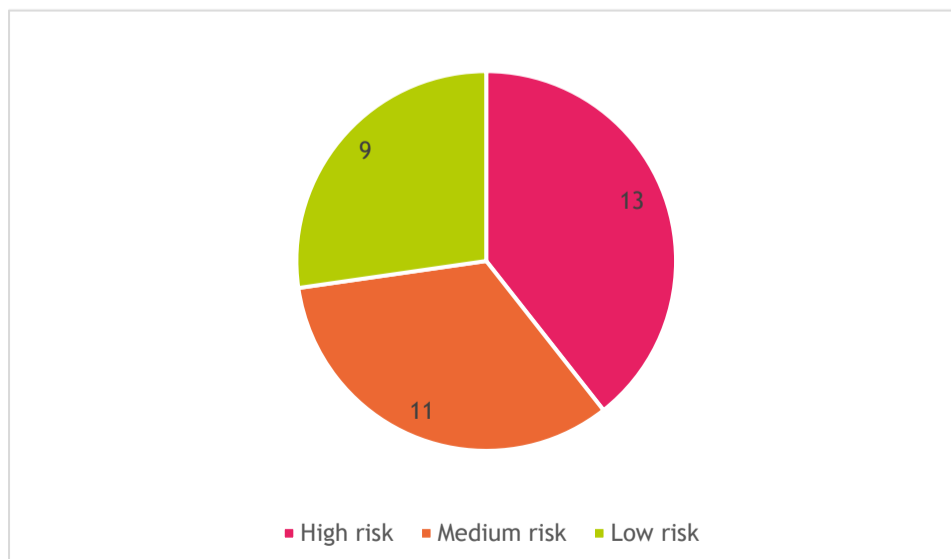
- **Low risk** - Organisations who feel that they are in a **good financial position and are confident that they won’t face any financial risks over the next 18 months**.
- **Medium Risk** - Organisations who have some concerns regarding their financial position but are currently stable. These organisations forecast that they **may not be financially stable over the next 18 months**. Some of these organisations are now **exhausting their reserves and have reduced their services**.
- **High risk** - Organisations who are very concerned with their financial position, and **without a considerable financial increase in the next 3-6 months they are at risk of either closing, dramatically reducing key services and/or losing staff**.

A significant number of organisations (n13) fed back that they are at a high risk, and these organisations are predominantly those larger organisations who need medium/large cash injection to keep afloat (i.e., core funding).

Those organisations who fed back that they are at some risk (n11) are generally organisations who have received small-medium sized Covid-19 funding to sustain them over the next year, or smaller organisations who do not have substantial core costs.

The organisations who fed back that they are not at risk (n9) are made up of small organisations who do not have substantial core costs and are self-sufficient, organisations who have received large/several pots of funding to sustain them for 18+ months and interestingly a third of these organisations have some form of Council/Housing Association support.

Graph 1.3 Risk levels



3. What would help?

3.1. Better funding arrangements locally

Unsurprisingly, the majority of organisations (n22) fed back that funding/more revenue streams would aid their organisations into a stronger position.

- Of these organisations 9 fed back that they would benefit from longer term funding (3 years as opposed to 6-12-month stints) as this would provide the investment stability needed to sustain organisations and their projects. The longer-term funding must also accommodate for **core costs**.
- 6 of these organisations fed back that they would like to be part of the strategic commissioning conversations as this would ensure that local services are commissioned, and ultimately the sector will be 'equal' partners. Terms such as 'Third Sector' are not helpful.

It is worth noting that this was predominantly fed back by those larger and growing organisations who are delivering services across Tameside that have a large footfall and impact on communities and are fulfilling strategic priorities/gaps within statutory provision.

3.2. Ideas from smaller community anchors

Other ideas that were fed back were from organisations that operate locally/on a smaller scale and were organisation specific:

- More suitable venue to deliver from
- Completing quality assurance checks (i.e., QiAA)
- Looking at new and interactive ways of keeping people engaged
- Ideas/tips of how to generate income.
- Networking and building connections with other organisations.
- Introduction to other investors i.e., Social Investors and local business support
- Encourage people to access outdoor activity.
- Clear stability/resume to the norm/A vaccine!
- Support for leaders

This will be shared with our Community Development team who can deploy the relevant support to those specific organisations' suggestions.

4. How can Action Together support further?

Most organisations expressed gratitude for the level of support/support package received from Action Together, with specific reference to the Community Development team and the advice/regular updates they receive. Some suggestions of further support can be seen in the table below, also we have added elements that are already being worked on:

Feedback	Context	What are we doing about it?	Action Together Lead
Funding - support			
More support with funding applications, specifically the larger type, and more communication when funding opportunities arise.	We have several relationships with national funders and can offer mentoring to put bids into these. We promote these opportunities through our funding bulletin (see below).	Good relationships with the Lottery. Funding mentors available to help. We have access to funding central - as part of our NCVO membership, for those that aren't NCVO members, we can search on your behalf	Karen McLauchlan Speak to Karen and see what the opportunities are and discuss your support needs.
A more user-friendly funding webpage.	There are external (to Tameside) opportunities available, particularly linked to COVID, but there are too many to currently share effectively i.e., our last funding bulletin was 80 pages long! Our funding page has a search facility, this is useful if you know what you are looking for.	We are reviewing how the funding bulletin and website work. In the interim we are asking our development workers to understand the content of the opportunities in the funding bulletin and share relevant opportunities directly with the groups they work with.	Roma Hashim/Karen McLauchlan/Development workers.
Training			
Training opportunities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Hygiene • Resilience • Fundraising • Bid-writing. • Level 3 (or a more advanced) Safeguarding Adults. Develop a more advanced Safeguarding Adults policy/relationship. 	The majority of these courses are part of our usual training offer - but there is an obvious need to do this differently at the moment. Two new areas are more advanced safeguarding, particularly for adults, and resilience.	Sign up to our 'Wednesday Weekly' courses, most of the topics have/are already covered there. If you want something more bespoke, speak to us. We have been offered 40 plus courses for local volunteers through Tameside college including some of the topics highlighted. about it. We will follow up the level 3 safeguarding with the local Board. We are working with groups to develop a shared approach to supporting the resilience of our staff and volunteers, and our leaders through VSIG. Including peer support, coaching etc.	Roma Hashim Sian Goodwin Karen McLauchlan Karen McLauchlan
Networking / Community Development			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More networking events to build connections, e.g., Valued Partner Network meetings. 	During the pandemic we have introduced and re-purposed a range of networking	We are reviewing our networks in terms of bringing thematic working; solution focussed, insight gathering and	Anna Hynes/Karen McLauchlan/Dawn Acton

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer support sessions. Continue to work together (with Action Together) Continue supporting groups with organisational development such as supporting organisations to find suitable venues. A tailored approach to support offered to organisations. Managing the support package offered to people/communities. Focus on BAME communities to ensure inequalities do not increase. 	<p>opportunities based around thematic issues and challenges, particularly in terms of poverty and inequality. Our Valued partner meetings have stopped for the time being, to focus on these priorities.</p>	<p>influence, and will be sharing the plan for this with these networks in early 2021, including the newly launched BAME network we developed with DMNW last year.</p> <p>We have reviewed our support for groups, using the development workers to provide a relationship management approach - a point of contact for support, who will bring together different elements of what we do to support groups.</p> <p>Our venue directory will be reviewed and updated - we are hoping to be able to link this to the website.</p>	<p>Sian Goodwin</p> <p>Sian Goodwin</p>
Connecting (the sector)			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting with local businesses Extend support for other associates of the VCFSE sector. Extend platform for advertising/campaigning, i.e., supermarkets, local radio. Support organisations in promotion/advertising/campaigning 	<p>Some groups have really well-established relationships with local businesses, the majority do not.</p>	<p>Work with the sector to do this collaboratively and be clear what the ambition and outcome we are seeking is.</p> <p>We have re-organised our impact, communications and marketing offer internally, so there is scope for us to better share tools and templates and training and use our relationships with local media to better promote the sector.</p>	<p>Anna Hynes/Karen McLauchlan/VSIG.</p> <p>Anna Hynes/internal coms and marketing team.</p>
Strategic Investment in the VCFSE			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influence commissioners Reignite PACT - has it lost its influence? Guidance/support on how to make full sense of the government procurement system. 	<p>The COVID response, the role the VCFSE played has renewed appetite for the PACT from our public sector partners.</p>	<p>During COVID we have been working on the PACT principles 'behind the scenes', sharing insight on how the sector responded and what our challenges are now and galvanising support from key leaders. Next we are developing shared spaces to work collaboratively on this between sectors and have just finished a review and recommendations for the Community Wellbeing Investment programme, that aims to bring in the wider discussion about long term, core funding across the locality.</p> <p>We will put on a training session to look at procurement. We have recent tender we could use to show the process from beginning to end and have agreement from STAR procurement to deliver a session to local groups.</p>	<p>Anna Hynes</p> <p>Anna Hynes</p>

5. What now?

This snapshot will be shared with our VCFSE leadership group to sense check findings. It will also be shared with key leaders within the local system as part of the work we are shaping on VCFSE investment for the longer term, but also **to draw attention to the immediate financial issues facing these groups.**

Many of the issues and ideas highlighted are already being worked on and the findings here will be added to Action Together's operational plan for this year, and progress fed back through our existing networks.