Salford CVS
Making a difference in Salford

10GM
A joint venture to support the local VCSE sector in Greater Manchester

Salford State of the VCSE Sector

2026



Acknowledgements

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We thank the organisations and groups that completed the survey and everyone who participated in the focus group. Their willingness to share their experiences, including the challenges of keeping support available for their communities, provides the foundation for this report.

Authorship and editorial responsibility

In this report, the foreword, conclusion, and highlighted reflections at the beginning of sections 3, 4, 5, and 6 are authored by Salford CVS. The executive summary is co-authored by Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and Salford CVS. All other sections are authored by NTU. Salford CVS reviewed the main report and proposed changes. NTU considered these suggestions and decided which to incorporate, retaining academic independence and responsibility for the analysis, interpretation and final wording of its sections.

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Foreword

Salford Community and Voluntary Services (Salford CVS) are proud to present this Salford State of the VCSE Sector 2026 report. Following on from our previous reports in 2010, 2013, 2017 and 2021, the narrative highlights the social and economic impact of voluntary organisations, charities, community groups, social enterprises, and the community work of faith organisations (VCSE) operating in the city of Salford. Salford CVS have been established in Salford since 1919, playing an important anchor role in our city through good times and bad, and I am really pleased that once again we have been able to lead a collaborative approach to this work on behalf of 10GM (www.10gm.org.uk), working with partners from all of the other Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) across Greater Manchester.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of the VCSE groups and organisations that took the time to complete the survey, and also those who contributed their thoughts via the focus group we ran. That we have been able to produce this report, working with colleagues from Nottingham Trent University, at a time of challenge and change, represents a real achievement.

Salford's VCSE sector is one of the city's greatest strengths. It is where people organise around local need, build relationships, and create spaces of belonging to enable people to 'live well' and step in when people and communities need support. This report gives us a clearer picture of that contribution in 2026: its scale, its value, its local roots, and the pressures that must be understood if the sector is to survive, and thrive. A lot has changed since our last full report in 2021 – we've seen the back of the COVID-19 pandemic, lived through the aftermath, experienced an ongoing cost-of-living crisis, a world in turbulence, and significant political changes internationally and more recently nationally, in our city region, and locally here in Salford. But some things stay the same too – and the essential role and critical value of the VCSE sector in Salford remains a constant.

As we outline in the report that follows, the VCSE sector in Salford continues to grow – despite a hostile operating environment – and has become increasingly diverse, meeting local needs and reflecting the changing demographic make-up of our city. As this research demonstrates, the VCSE sector in Salford is truly made up of the people and communities it seeks to represent and support.

I hope that readers find the report useful and that it can be practically utilised to help influence politicians, partners, funders, commissioners and supporters in Salford. As one of the custodians of Salford CVS – an anchor organisation in Salford with a 107-year-old unbroken history of supporting our sector, our city, and our communities – I am pleased we can play a role in highlighting the State of the VCSE Sector in Salford in 2026.

Alison Page
Chief Executive, Salford CVS

Executive summary

Across the UK, voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations are an essential part of community life and public service infrastructure. They provide practical help, specialist services, community spaces, social connection and opportunities for people to take part in their communities, often working through trusted relationships with people who may be less visible to, or less comfortable accessing, statutory services. This work is taking place in the long aftermath of COVID-19 and a cost-of-living crisis, alongside wider economic and social disruption that has increased demand for support. For many organisations, this means responding not only to more people but to needs that are increasingly complex and interconnected. At the same time, many grants and contracts have not kept pace with rising costs, formal volunteering remains below pre-pandemic levels, and organisations are increasingly being asked to prevent problems escalating while relying on short-term funding, reserves and stretched staff and volunteers.

Salford sits within this national context as a young and rapidly growing city. Its population increased by more than 15% between 2011 and 2021, the largest rise in the North West, and its median age fell from 35 to 34. [1] Growth and investment have transformed parts of the city, but prosperity has not been shared evenly. Salford is the fourth most deprived borough in Greater Manchester and the 24th most deprived local authority in England. More than a quarter of residents live in neighbourhoods among the most deprived 10% nationally, while health deprivation is particularly severe. [2] A third of children live in relative poverty after housing costs. [3] The sector's work responds to these inequalities through health and wellbeing support, learning, community activity and help for people experiencing financial hardship.

This report provides an up-to-date picture of Salford's VCSE sector in 2026, considering where and how organisations and groups work, the communities they support, their contribution to Salford, and the pressures that must be understood if the sector is to survive and to thrive. It draws on 168 usable survey responses, focus groups, wider local and national evidence, and informed estimates of the sector's overall scale and contribution.

An estimated **1,936 VCSE organisations** and groups operate in Salford, generating around **£328 million** in annual income and supported by approximately **60,000** staff, volunteers and trustees / Board members. Together, they provide around **1.05 million** contacts or episodes of support each year. The findings from this report show a sector playing a key role across the city, delivering work in health, wellbeing, education, and community development and inclusion.

Its organisations are often trusted first points of contact, not only within communities but through strengthened partnership working with other VCSE organisations and public services. Many people are referred or signposted to VCSE organisations because of their local knowledge, flexibility and relationships which enable them to reach people and adapt support to changing needs. While this reflects the role Salford's VCSE organisations already play within communities and wider support systems, it also means that pressures elsewhere increasingly reach them. Three in five organisations report supporting more people than last year while operating in an increasingly competitive funding environment that often fails to provide multi-year terms or uplifts to cover rising costs, leaving many drawing on reserves to plug gaps in funding and cover general operating costs.

Many organisations report capacity constraints alongside these funding challenges. Two in five organisations find volunteer recruitment difficult, and almost half of those experiencing workforce difficulties report increased stress or burnout among staff and volunteers.

Salford does, however, have established local initiatives that provide a basis for responding to these pressures. Salford CVS's grants programme provides an established route for funding community activity, while the development of Live Well centres and spaces builds on organisations and venues already known to residents. The renewed Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord, signed in March 2026, commits public bodies and the sector to involving communities in decisions and devolving power. Organisations with established relationships and leadership drawn from the communities they support can help bring those experiences into practical action.

These provide practical routes for funding and cross-sector partnership, but they do not in themselves resolve the capacity and financial pressures identified in this report. Sustaining the sector's role will require continued investment in both infrastructure support and the wider VCSE sector, alongside partnerships in which community organisations have a meaningful role in shaping decisions so that Salford's VCSE sector can continue to support communities, reduce inequalities and help the city thrive.



Glossary

This table provides a glossary of terms, abbreviations, and acronyms used in the Salford State of the Sector 2026 report. A detailed glossary can be accessed at: gmstateofthesector.org.

Term	Meaning in this report
Base / valid base	The number of respondents included in a percentage or analysis. A valid base excludes people who did not answer the relevant question and may also exclude invalid responses such as ‘don’t know’.
Below-the-radar (BTR) organisations	Informal or unregistered organisations and groups not captured on formal registers.
Full-time equivalent (FTE) / headcount	FTE expresses working hours as equivalent full-time posts: two people each working half-time equal one FTE. Headcount counts each employee individually.
Full cost recovery	Funding that covers direct delivery costs and an appropriate share of the organisation’s wider running costs.
Funding uplift	An increase in the value of a grant or contract to reflect rising costs.
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority, bringing together the city region’s ten councils and elected Mayor.
Instances of support	Contacts or episodes of support, rather than a count of different people. One person may receive support several times.
Local Infrastructure Organisation (LIO)	An organisation that supports, connects and represents the local VCSE sector, including through advice, training and help accessing funding.

Glossary

Term	Meaning in this report
Modelled estimate / extrapolation	A sector-wide estimate produced by scaling up survey findings using the estimated number and profile of organisations.
Multi-year funding	Funding lasting three years or more, as defined in this survey.
Paid-staff economic contribution / GVA	An indicative estimate of gross value added (GVA), calculated using estimated FTE employment and industry output benchmarks.
Real Living Wage	A voluntary hourly pay rate calculated from living costs, distinct from the government's statutory National Living Wage.
Reserves	Funds retained to support future activity or manage gaps in income and unexpected costs.
Social enterprise	An organisation that trades for a social or environmental purpose and uses most of its profits to further that purpose.
Social prescribing	Connecting people with community activities and support that address needs affecting their health and wellbeing.
VCSE / VCFSE	Voluntary, community and social enterprise. VCFSE explicitly includes the community work of faith organisations, which are also included within VCSE in this report.
Volunteer replacement cost	The estimated cost of replacing volunteer and trustee time with paid labour at the Real Living Wage. www.livingwage.org.uk/

1. Methodology

This report forms part of the wider 2026 Greater Manchester State of the VCSE Sector project. The findings presented in this report relate specifically to VCSE organisations based in Salford and include estimates of the scale and contribution of Salford's VCSE sector. The full technical methodology can be accessed at www.gmstateofthesector.org

Survey

The survey ran from January to April 2026 and received 168 usable responses from VCSE organisations based in Salford. It asked about organisations' activities, who they support, where they work, demand for services, staff and volunteers, and finances and funding. Salford CVS distributed survey links through its networks. An anonymous response option was available. NTU prepared and analysed the data.

Focus group

One focus group took place with Salford VCSE organisations between March and April 2026. It explored the role of organisations in communities, workforce and volunteering, and finances and funding. NTU developed the areas for discussion using early survey findings and input from the project's core working group. Participants were recruited through Salford CVS and follow-up contact with survey respondents. NTU analysed the discussions to identify common themes and understand participant experiences in more detail.

How to read the survey findings

Based on the 168 usable responses and an estimated 1,936 VCSE organisations in Salford, the indicative margin of error is around ±7.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For example, applying this margin to a finding of 60% gives a range of around 53% to 67%. This calculation assumes organisations were selected at random. However, organisations chose whether to take part, so this margin is only a guide and cannot account for differences between those that did and did not respond.

NTU compared the respondent profile with registered VCSE organisations in Salford. Estimated below-the-radar groups, which are not captured on formal registers, were excluded from this comparison because they could not be sampled directly. As part of the wider Greater Manchester analysis, NTU examined whether weighting by locality and organisation size materially changed the findings. Differences between weighted and unweighted findings were generally small and did not alter the overall patterns or conclusions. Survey percentages are therefore presented without weighting, meaning each organisation answering a question counts equally. Most percentages relate to the organisations answering the relevant question. Where a question applies only to a particular group, its findings describe that group.

Percentages are rounded to whole numbers. Combined percentages reported in the text are calculated from the underlying unrounded data, so they may occasionally differ by one percentage point from the sum of rounded chart values. Some questions allow more than one answer, so percentages can total more than 100%. Findings on changes in service delivery reflect organisations' own assessments. Income and expenditure source shares describe the average share across responding organisations. Success in funding applications describes experiences among applicants to each source rather than the value or number of awards.

How organisation size is defined

Organisation size is classified by reported annual income: micro (under £10,000), small (£10,000 to under £100,000), medium (£100,000 to under £1 million), large (£1 million to under £10 million), major (£10 million to under £100 million) and super-major (£100 million or more). [4] Large, major and super-major organisations are combined as 'large' when describing locality size profiles and comparing findings by organisation size across all reports, because of the smaller numbers in these bands.

Estimating the scale and contribution of the sector

Salford is estimated to have 1,936 VCSE organisations: 859 registered organisations and 1,077 groups not captured on formal registers, often described as below-the-radar (BTR). Registered organisations were identified through the Charity Commission, Companies House and the Financial Conduct Authority's Mutuals Register. Records were matched to Salford using postcode data, and duplicate entries were removed. Below-the-radar groups were estimated using Office for National Statistics (ONS) population figures and the population-based approach developed by Mohan et al. [5] This estimated number and profile of organisations is referred to as the study's 'sample frame'.

The estimates in Section 2.1 scale selected survey findings to this wider sector. The main approach is extrapolation: averages are calculated within organisation-size groups, multiplied by the estimated number of organisations in each group, and added together. This allows the calculations to reflect differences between smaller and larger organisations. To improve the stability of the Salford estimates, its estimated organisation-size profile was combined with Greater Manchester-wide averages or rates within the same size groups, rather than relying on smaller Salford subgroups. Numeric checks were undertaken prior to extrapolation, and winsorisation was used to limit the influence of extreme values by capping them rather than deleting them. Estimates for income, expenditure and instances of support use 90% winsorised means; volunteer hours and paid staff use 95% winsorised means; and volunteer and trustee totals use cleaned means.

The report includes two economic value indicators. The replacement-cost value of volunteering estimates what it would cost to replace annual volunteer and trustee hours with paid labour at the Real Living Wage. The economic contribution associated with paid staff applies ONS output-per-job figures to the estimated number of full-time equivalent staff, adjusted to reflect the range of activities of responding organisations. Both are indicative measures of economic value and should not be interpreted as audited financial figures.

2. Headline findings

The headline findings are presented in two parts. Section 2.1 presents modelled estimates for Salford's VCSE sector as a whole. These informed totals are produced using survey data and an estimate of the number and profile of VCSE organisations in Salford. The survey findings are scaled up from responding organisations to the estimated whole sector, so the figures should not be read as exact counts. Section 2.2 presents what organisations and groups in Salford told us directly through the survey.

2.1. Estimated scale and contribution of Salford's VCSE sector

1,936 organisations

Salford's VCSE sector is estimated to include 859 registered organisations and 1,077 below-the-radar organisations and groups not captured on formal registers.

Mostly micro and small

We estimate that micro-organisations and groups account for more than two thirds (68%) of the sector. Small organisations make up 17%, medium organisations 12%, and large, major and super-major organisations 3%.

1.05 million instances of support

Salford's VCSE sector is estimated to provide 1.05 million contacts or episodes of support to people and communities each year.

£328 million annual income

Salford's VCSE sector generated an estimated £328 million in income during 2024/25.

53,000 volunteer and trustee roles

The sector's work is powered by an estimated 42,200 volunteers and 11,000 trustees or Board members.

5.96 million volunteer and trustee hours

Volunteers and trustees contribute around 114,600 hours each week, equivalent to 5.96 million hours a year.

£80.16 million estimated value of volunteering

The estimated annual cost of replacing the time given by volunteers and trustees with paid staff earning the Real Living Wage.

5,393 full-time equivalent paid staff

This represents an estimated 6,966 individual employees working in Salford's VCSE organisations.

£271.67 million estimated annual economic contribution from paid staff

The estimated economic value generated each year through the services and activities delivered by full-time equivalent paid staff in Salford's VCSE sector.

2.2. What Salford organisations told us

168 Salford VCSE organisations made their voices heard, sharing their experiences of working with and supporting communities across the city.

> “I see our role as community engagement, community empowerment, facilitating sometimes quite drastic changes in people's lives.”

Demand is rising
Two in three responding organisations say demand for their services increased over the past year (67%), while three in five are supporting more people (61%).

Financial vulnerability
One in three describe their organisation as either vulnerable (21%) or struggling (11%), while only one in seven say their group or organisation is strong and secure (14%).

Volunteer capacity
Most organisations have enough volunteers to meet their objectives (69%), but almost a third do not (31%). Two in five find it difficult to recruit volunteers (39%), while almost a third face difficulties recruiting trustees (29%).

Reserves filling gaps
Among organisations using reserves, more than half have drawn on them to meet general operating costs (55%), while half have used them to pluggaps in funding (50%), and accomodate rising demand.

Funding risks
Almost three in five identify competition for funding as a leading financial risk (58%), followed by rising costs (51%) and short-term funding cycles (35%).

Funding not keeping pace
Among organisations receiving grant or contract income, more than four in five say less than half of their funding is multi-year (83%), and more than two thirds report no uplift to reflect rising costs (68%).



3. Salford's VCSE sector: what it does, where it operates, and who it supports

Salford CVS reflections

The VCSE sector in Salford makes a significant contribution to building a fairer, greener, healthier and more inclusive city. VCSE organisations deliver a diverse range of support to some of the city's most vulnerable people and communities. The social and added value created by the VCSE sector is immense; and the return on investment it provides is well evidenced. More than that, the thousands of volunteers and staff that make up such a vibrant sector truly demonstrate the 'Spirit of Salford'.

Salford is a rapidly growing city where regeneration and economic development have not removed deep-rooted poverty and health inequalities. Its population grew by more than 15% between 2011 and 2021, the largest increase in the North West, with particularly strong growth among young adults. [1] More than a quarter of residents live in neighbourhoods among England's most deprived 10%, and deprivation is particularly pronounced for health and disability. [2]

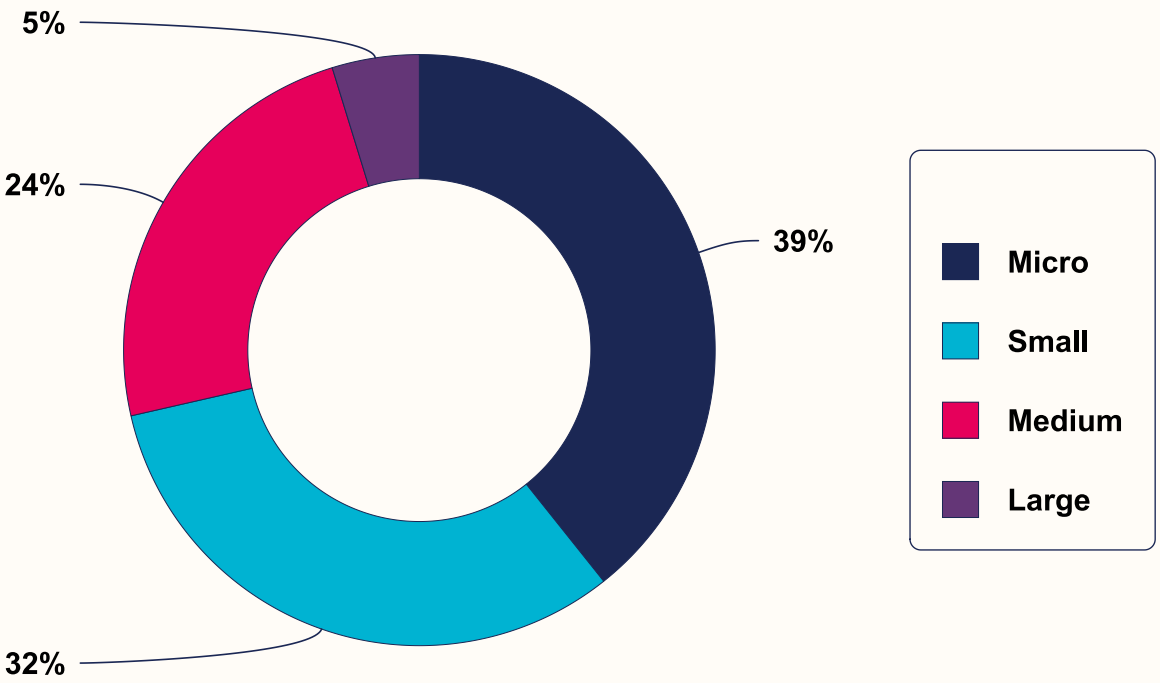
The work of Salford's VCSE sector reflects this combination of change and inequalities, supporting health and wellbeing while creating opportunities to learn, participate and build connections within their communities. Many are rooted in neighbourhoods, supporting younger and older residents, Disabled people and those facing financial hardship or exclusion.

By combining practical help with opportunities to build confidence, form relationships and develop skills, organisations help people become more involved in community life, including through volunteering, training and employment.

3.1. Size, legal form and organisational age

Just under three quarters of responding organisations and groups in Salford are either micro (39%) or small (32%). Almost a quarter are medium-sized (24%), while large, major, and super-major organisations account for the remaining 5%.

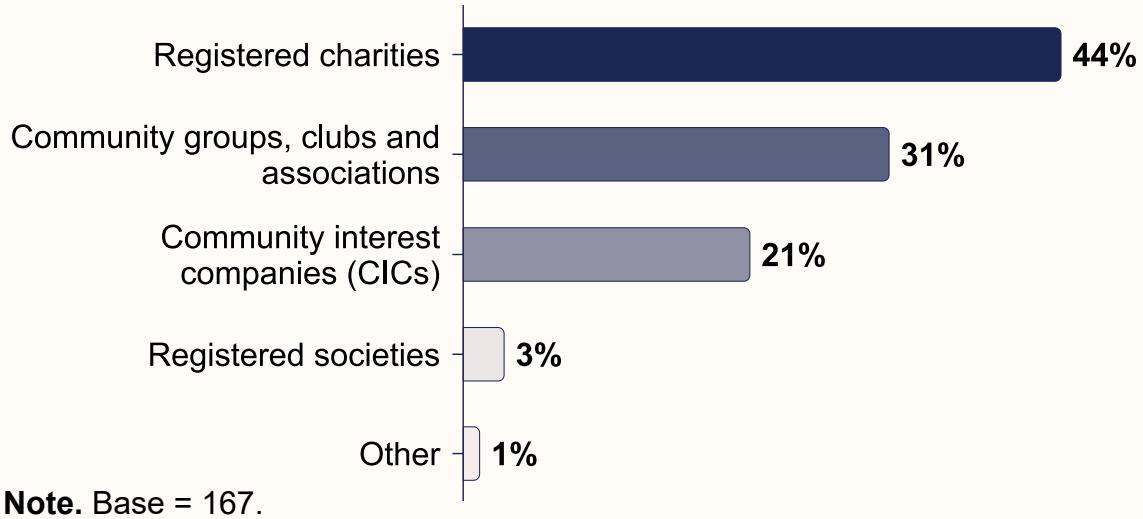
Figure 3.1. Proportion of responding organisations by size



Note. Base = 168.

Registered charities account for more than two in five responding organisations (44%). Almost a third are community groups, clubs and associations (31%), one in five are community interest companies (21%), and 3% are registered societies. More than two in five identify as social enterprises (43%), showing that trading and enterprise are part of how many pursue their social purpose.

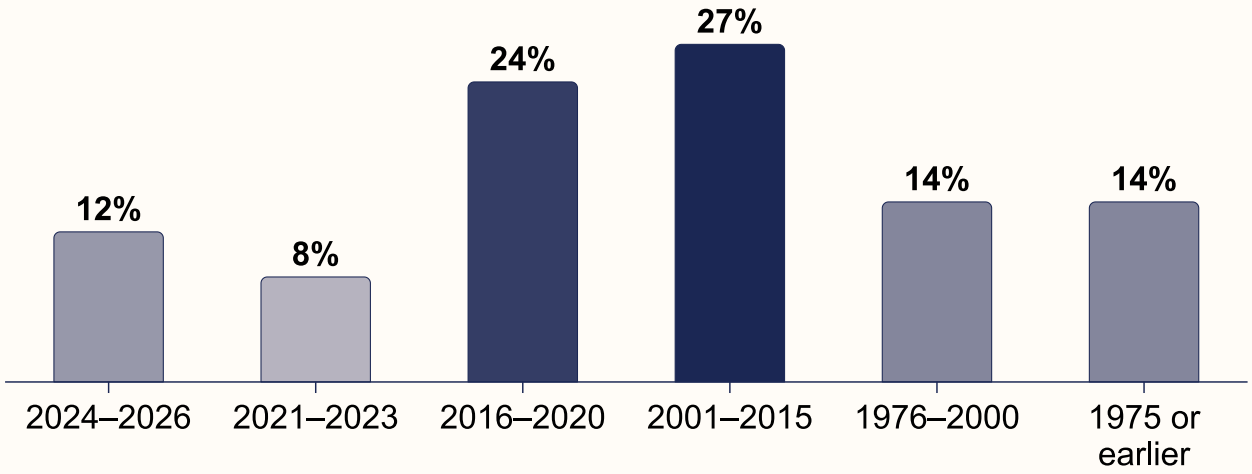
Figure 3.2. Proportion of responding organisations by legal status



Note. Base = 167.

One in five responding organisations were established within the past five years (20%). Almost a quarter were established between 2016 and 2020 (24%), while just over a quarter were established between 2001 and 2015 (27%). More than a quarter were established in 2000 or earlier (28%).

Figure 3.3. Year in which organisations were established



Note. Base = 167.

3.2. What organisations do

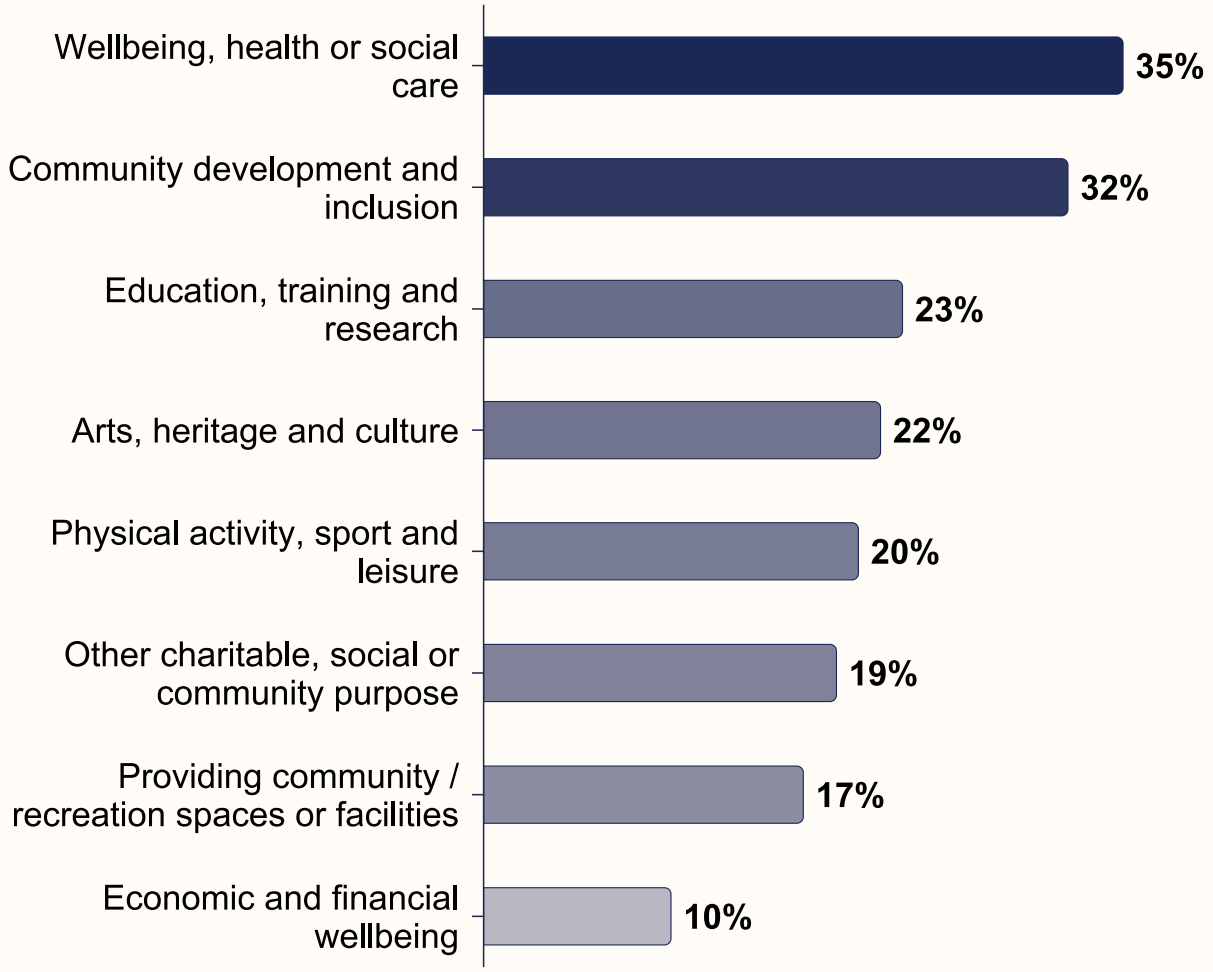
The breadth of Salford's VCSE sector reflects the diversity of the city and the needs of its communities. VCSE organisations in Salford carry out a range of work, often cutting across a number of areas. For instance, in the focus group, one organisation explained how its work helps people rebuild confidence and take part in community life, with support extending into learning, volunteering and employment:

> "We reconnect people and integrate them into their communities and provide onward pathways into training, employment, volunteering or leisure pursuits."

More than a third of responding organisations work in **wellbeing, health or social care** (35%), delivering important work in a city where almost two in five neighbourhoods are among England's most deprived 10% for health and disability (39%). [2]

Almost a third work in **community development and inclusion** (32%), supporting the Live Well Spaces of Hope and Connection approach of investing in community-led development. [6] Around one in five work in education, training and research (23%), arts, heritage and culture (22%), or physical activity, sport and leisure (20%). One in six provide community or recreation spaces and facilities (17%).

Figure 3.4. Main areas in which organisations work (top 8)

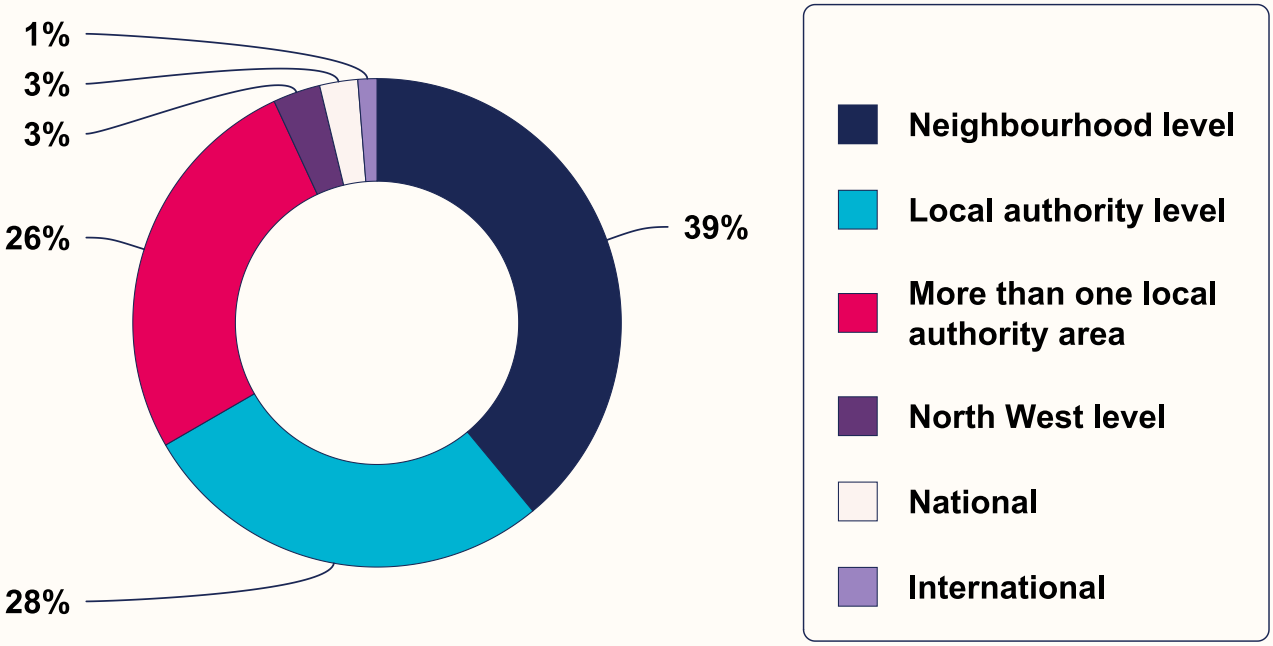


Note. Base = 166. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

3.3. Where organisations work

Many responding organisations work close to the communities they support. Two in five operate primarily at **neighbourhood level** (39%), while more than a quarter deliver most activities across Salford as a whole (28%). More than a quarter operate across more than one local authority area (26%), and fewer work mainly across the North West (3%), nationally (3%) or internationally (1%). This combination of locally rooted and city-wide organisations is important in responding to the changing needs of Salford's growing population.

Figure 3.5. Geographic scope of organisation's work



Note. Base = 159.

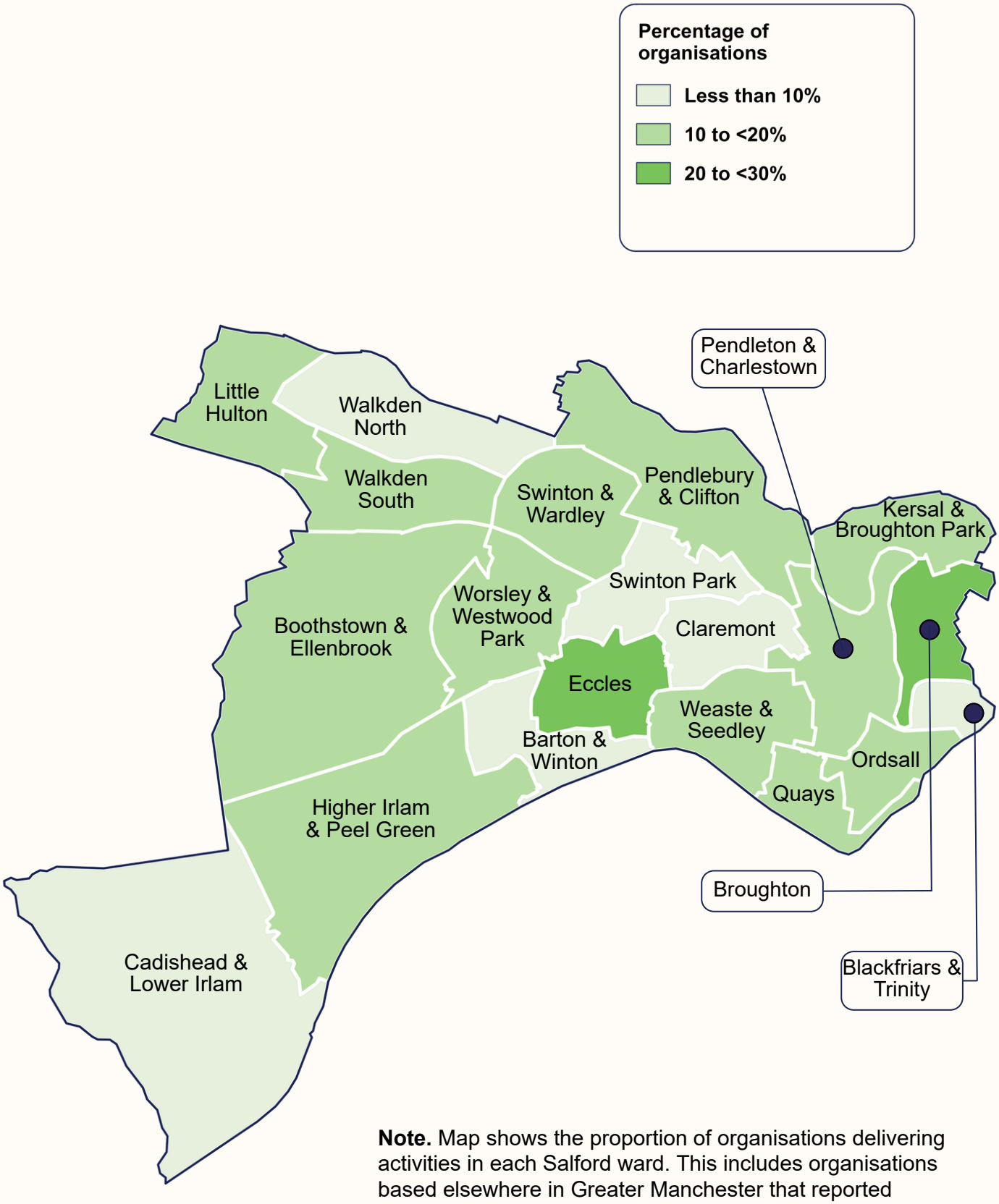
Residents of Salford are also supported from VCSE organisations based outside the city. We therefore asked all organisations that selected Salford as one of the main areas in which they carry out their activities which parts of the city they work in. More than a third say they operate across all of Salford (37%).

Respondents who did not select 'All of Salford' could identify one or more individual wards. Among this group, Broughton is the most commonly reported area of operation (28%), closely followed by Eccles (27%). Barton and Winton and Claremont were reported least often (both 7%).

This suggests that responding organisations are active in several of Salford's most deprived areas, such as Broughton, which has particularly high levels of deprivation across income, education, health and disability. [2] Lower reported activity in other wards may indicate uneven provision, but could also reflect the composition of organisations responding to the survey.

Figure 3.6 shows the proportion of respondents delivering activities in each Salford ward.

Figure 3.6. Ward-level coverage of organisations delivering activities in Salford



Note. Map shows the proportion of organisations delivering activities in each Salford ward. This includes organisations based elsewhere in Greater Manchester that reported operating in Salford.

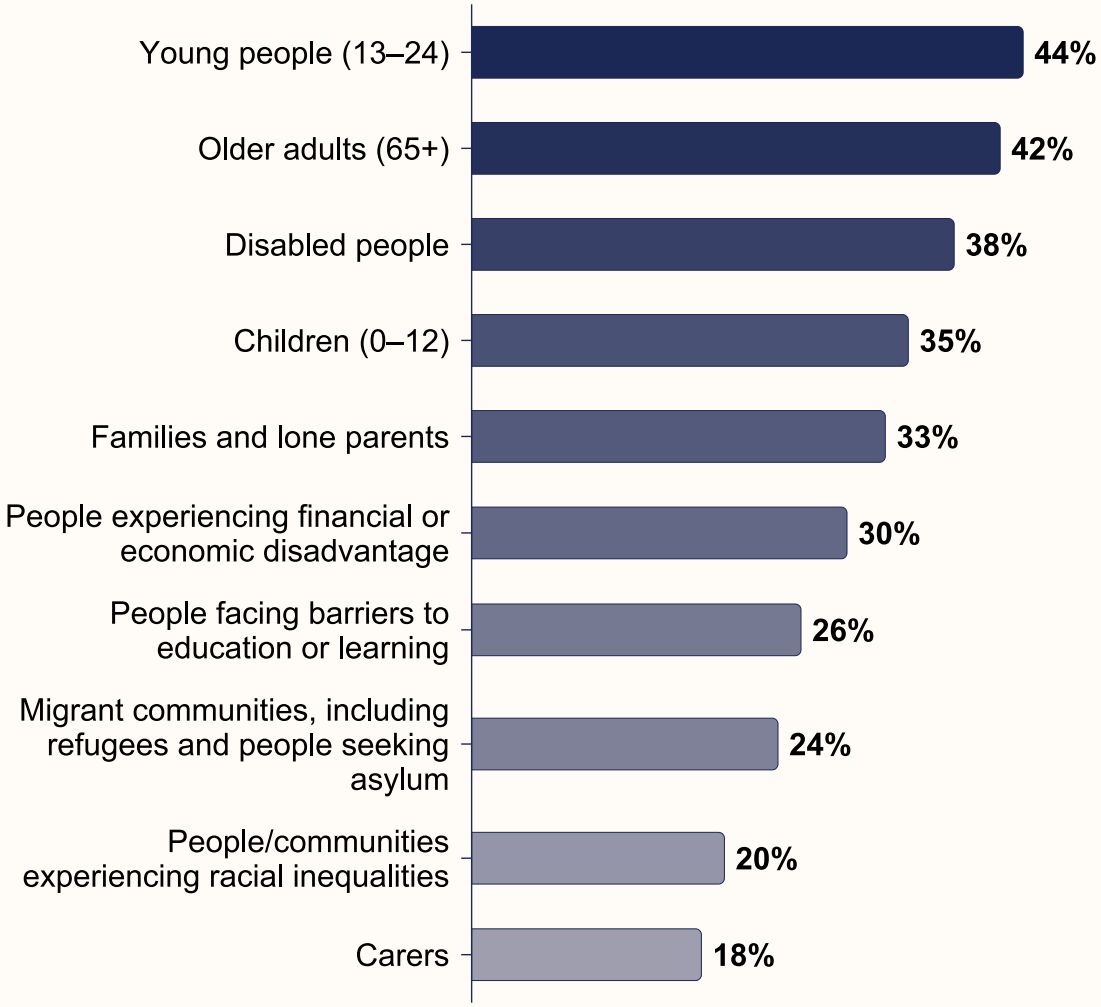
'All of Salford' uses the full valid base (N = 198); individual ward percentages use respondents who did not select 'All of Salford' (N = 124).

3.4. Who organisations support

Salford has one of Greater Manchester's youngest populations. Financial hardship is particularly acute for many children and families, while income deprivation also affects some residents in later life. Poor health, disability and long-term conditions can increase the need for accessible support, practical help and services that enable people to remain independent and connected to their communities. VCSE organisations and groups therefore support people at different stages of life, as well as communities connected by identity, background, place and shared experience.

Young people aged 13 to 24 are the most commonly supported group, reported by more than two in five respondents (44%), while more than a third work with children aged 0 to 12 (35%). A third of children in Salford live in relative poverty after housing costs. [3] This provides important context for the one in three organisations providing support for families or lone parents (33%) and people experiencing financial or economic disadvantage (30%). This work is important, particularly in Salford's inner urban areas, which contain some of the highest levels of income deprivation across Greater Manchester. [2]

Figure 3.7. The people and communities that organisations support (top 10)



Note. Base = 165. Respondents could select multiple options so percentages do not sum to 100%.

More than two in five responding organisations support older adults (42%). Although Salford has a relatively young population, it has the second-highest proportion of residents aged 60 or over experiencing income deprivation among Greater Manchester's boroughs, with almost a quarter of its neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% nationally for income deprivation affecting older people. [2]

Organisations also support communities connected by shared circumstances, experience, or identity, often including people who experience inequality and those facing additional barriers to services and community life. Almost two in five work with Disabled people or people living with long-term health conditions, including mental health conditions (38%), more than a quarter work with people facing barriers to education or learning (26%), almost a quarter support migrant communities, including refugees and people seeking asylum (24%), and one in five support people experiencing racial inequalities (20%).



4. Staff, volunteers and trustees

Salford CVS reflections

Organisations are made of people. In the VCSE sector, they are overwhelmingly local people coming together to take action on something that matters to them. The VCSE workforce includes paid staff, volunteers, trustees and Board members motivated by purpose, lived experience, social connection and commitment to their communities. Even in larger organisations with more paid staff, these are generally local people who have chosen work that aligns with their values.

This section looks at the people who make up Salford's VCSE workforce - the sector's main resource. Development of that workforce, beyond standard recruitment of paid staff and volunteers, is an area often neglected by funders and commissioners. Without enough people with the right skills and support, the services described elsewhere in this report cannot be sustained.

As cost-of-living pressures continue to affect communities, we see some reduction in volunteering - a pattern reflected nationally [7] - yet it remains a significant contribution to city life. As employers, the sector strives to be inclusive, for example through paying accredited Living Wage rates, but rising costs such as National Insurance, increased workloads, and limits on salaries and development opportunities are making it harder to recruit and retain skilled paid staff.

The people working in and with Salford's VCSE organisations are central to the sector's contribution. They include paid staff, volunteers, trustees or Board members, many of whom are motivated by purpose, lived experience, social connection and a commitment to their communities. Their work is both strategic and practical, and also relational: building trust, holding local knowledge, supporting people sensitively and sustaining relationships over time.

That commitment gives the sector much of its strength. It also creates risk when organisations rely on small teams, unpaid time and a limited number of people holding things together. The findings overleaf show both the scale of this contribution and the pressures attached to sustaining it.

4.1. Paid staff and employment

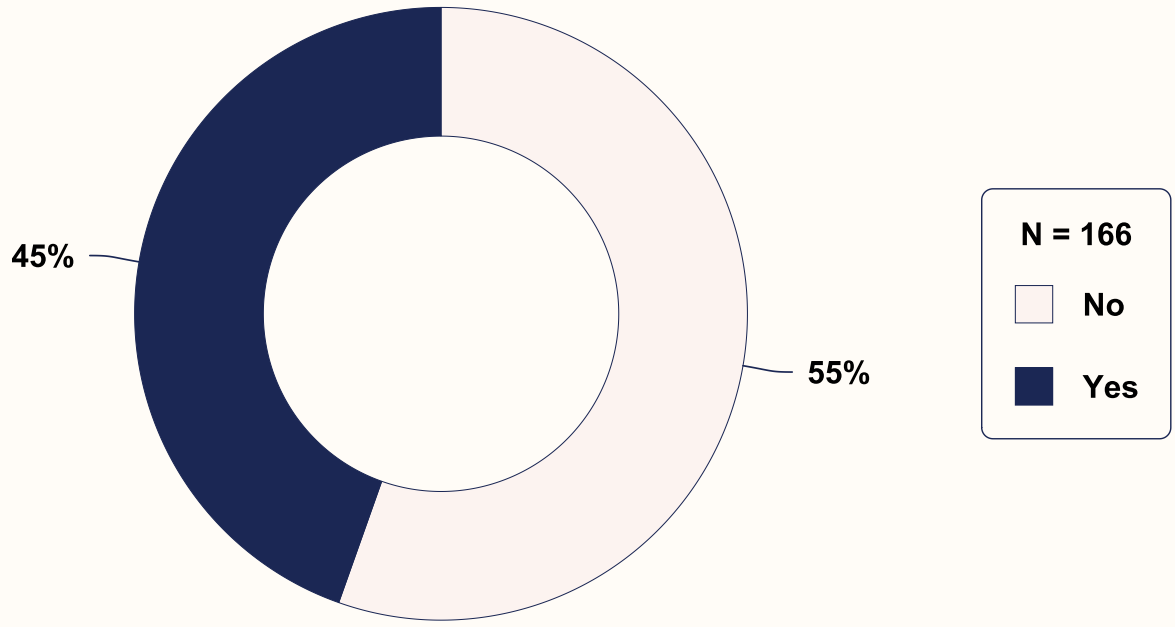
Salford's VCSE sector is estimated to employ **5,393 full-time equivalent paid staff**, corresponding to approximately **6,966 individual employees**. The work carried out by these staff is estimated to contribute **£271.67 million** to the economy each year through the services and activities they deliver. These estimates highlight that the sector is not only a vital source of community support but also a **key contributor** to inclusive economic growth, job creation, and local economic resilience across Salford.

5,393
full-time equivalent (FTE) paid posts in Salford's VCSE sector

Estimated contribution to the economy
£ 271.67 million p.a.

Just under half of responding organisations have paid staff (45%), and almost nine in ten of these organisations say they pay the **Real Living Wage** to all eligible employees (87%). Paid employment is concentrated in larger organisations: all large organisations and almost all medium organisations (92%) report a paid workforce, compared with fewer than half of small organisations (45%) and fewer than one in ten micro organisations and groups (9%).

Figure 4.1. Organisations with a paid workforce



Just over half of organisations with paid staff have fewer than five FTE posts (53%), while almost two in five have between five and 19 (39%). A smaller proportion have 20 or more FTE posts (8%).

Whilst the majority of organisations with paid staff report no difficulties with staff recruitment and retention, more than a quarter have found recruitment difficult over the past year (27%), while almost one in five have struggled to retain staff (19%).

Figure 4.2. Staff recruitment and retention difficulties



Note. Question shown only to organisations with paid staff. Base: recruitment = 67; retention = 67. Shows the proportion answering 'Yes'. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

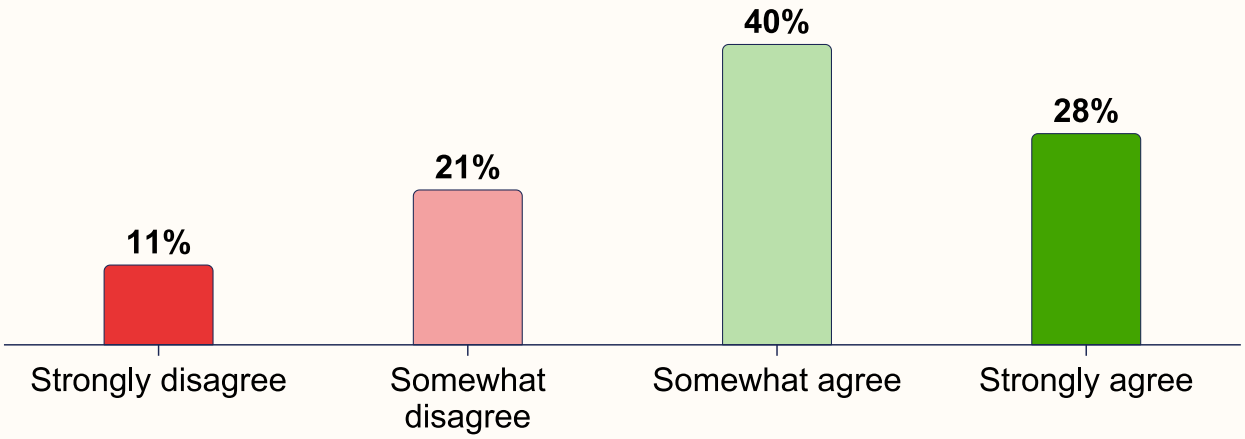
4.2. Volunteers and trustees

Across Salford, an estimated 42,200 volunteers and 11,000 trustees or Board members contribute around 114,600 hours each week. Over a year, this is equivalent to **5.96 million hours** spent supporting local people, running activities and governing organisations. Replacing that time with paid labour at the Real Living Wage would cost an estimated **£80.16 million** each year.

Half of responding organisations have fewer than ten volunteers (50%), while around a quarter have between either 10 and 24 (26%) or 25 or more (24%). The support organisations offer volunteers is both practical and developmental. More than three in five reimburse expenses (62%), more than half offer training, development or progression opportunities (55%), and half provide recognition or social activities (51%).

More than two thirds of organisations say they have enough volunteers to carry out their work and meet their objectives (69%), leaving almost a third that do not (31%). This pressure sits within a longer national decline in volunteering. In England, the proportion of adults volunteering formally at least once a month fell from 27% in 2013/14 to 17% in 2024/25. [7]

Figure 4.3. Whether organisations have enough volunteers to carry out work and meet their objectives



Note. Base = 159. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

Recruitment appears to be the greater pressure. Two in five organisations (39%) have found it difficult to recruit volunteers over the past year, compared to more than a quarter that have found it difficult to retain volunteers (27%).

Figure 4.4. Volunteer recruitment and retention difficulties



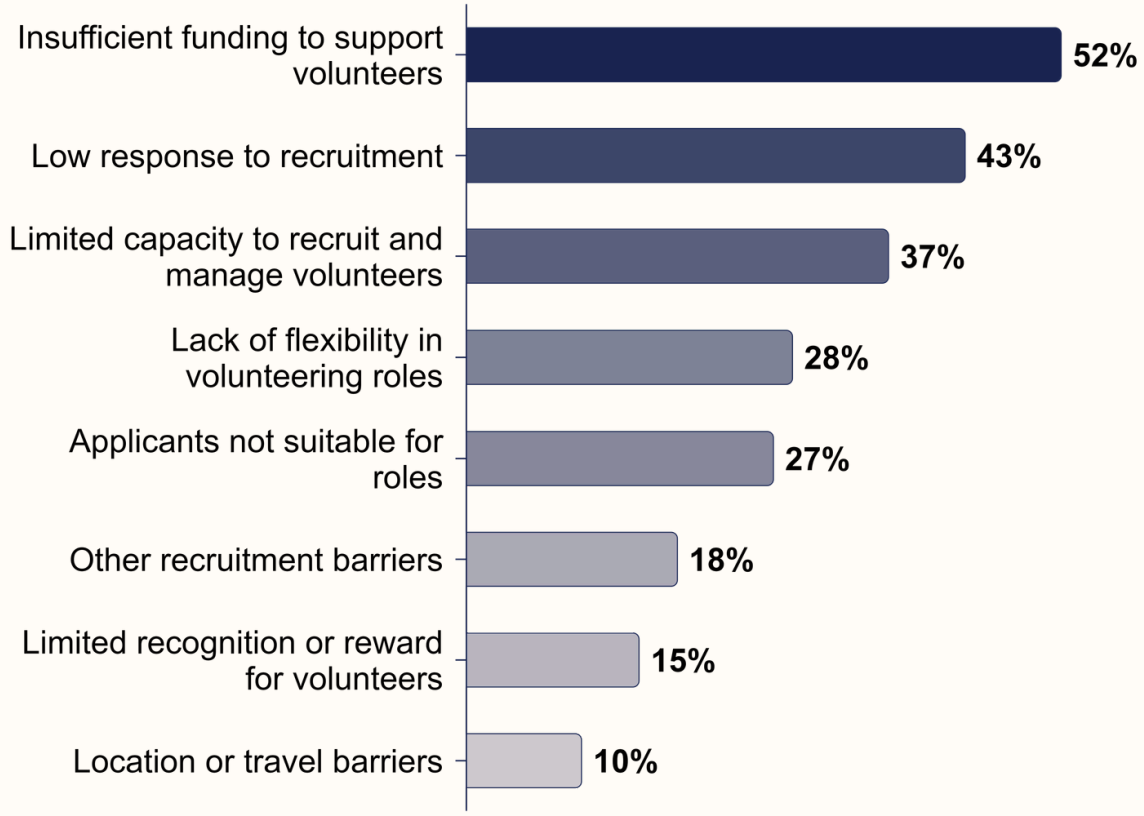
Note. Base: recruitment = 155; retention = 155. Shows the proportion answering 'Yes'. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

More than half of those experiencing recruitment difficulties say insufficient funding to support volunteers makes recruitment harder (52%), while more than a third point to limited capacity to recruit and manage them (37%). In the focus group, participants described this tension between wanting to involve more volunteers and having the time and resources to support them effectively:

> "Volunteering, we wish that we could have more volunteers, but the problem you have, you're stuck in this vicious cycle that if there's more volunteers, then you have more responsibility … it'd be great for us to get more volunteers, but that then the thought of that then gives more stress and more work for ourselves."

A low response to recruitment activities is also reported as a barrier by more than two in five responding organisations (43%), while more than a quarter point to the lack of flexibility in volunteering roles (28%) or unsuitable applicants (27%). Adults in the least deprived neighbourhoods are twice as likely to volunteer formally each month as those in the most deprived neighbourhoods, [7] and just over a quarter of Salford's residents (26%) live in neighbourhoods among England's most deprived 10%. [2] This points to another potential challenge for VCSE organisations: areas with greater need for support may also face lower uptake when recruiting local volunteers.

Figure 4.5. Volunteer recruitment barriers (top 8)



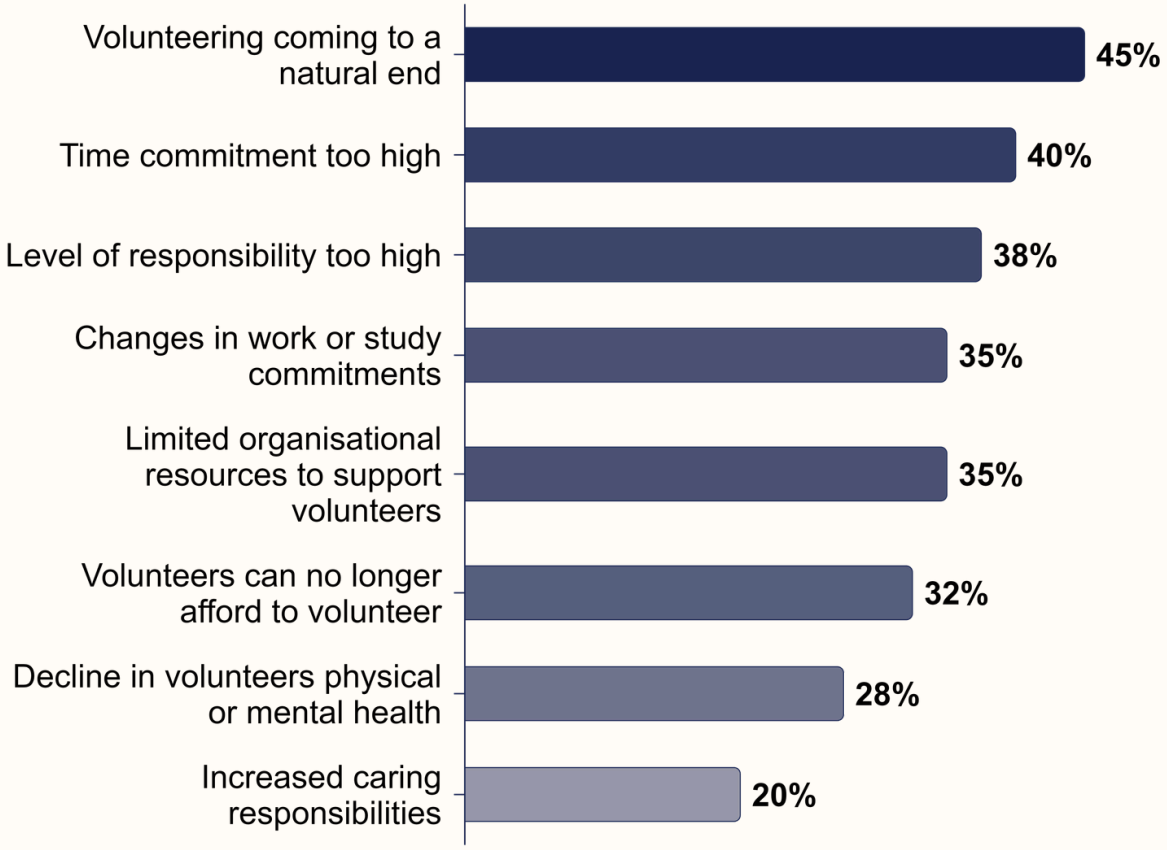
Note. Base = 60.
Question shown only to organisations reporting volunteer recruitment difficulties. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

While recruitment difficulties are more widespread, more than a quarter also found it difficult to retain volunteers (27%). This group linked retention difficulties to changing volunteer needs and motives, as well as the resources required to support them.

More than two in five say volunteering coming to a natural end (45%), such as a project ending or long-standing volunteers stepping back, makes retaining volunteers harder. Around two in five say that the time commitment (40%) and level of responsibility (38%) involved in volunteering make retention harder.

More than a third say that limited organisational resources to support volunteers (35%) has an impact, while a similar proportion point to changes in volunteers' work or study commitments (35%). This reflects wider national evidence showing that work commitments were the most common barrier among adults who did not volunteer at least monthly, reported by more than half (51%). [7]

Figure 4.6. Volunteer retention barriers (top 8)



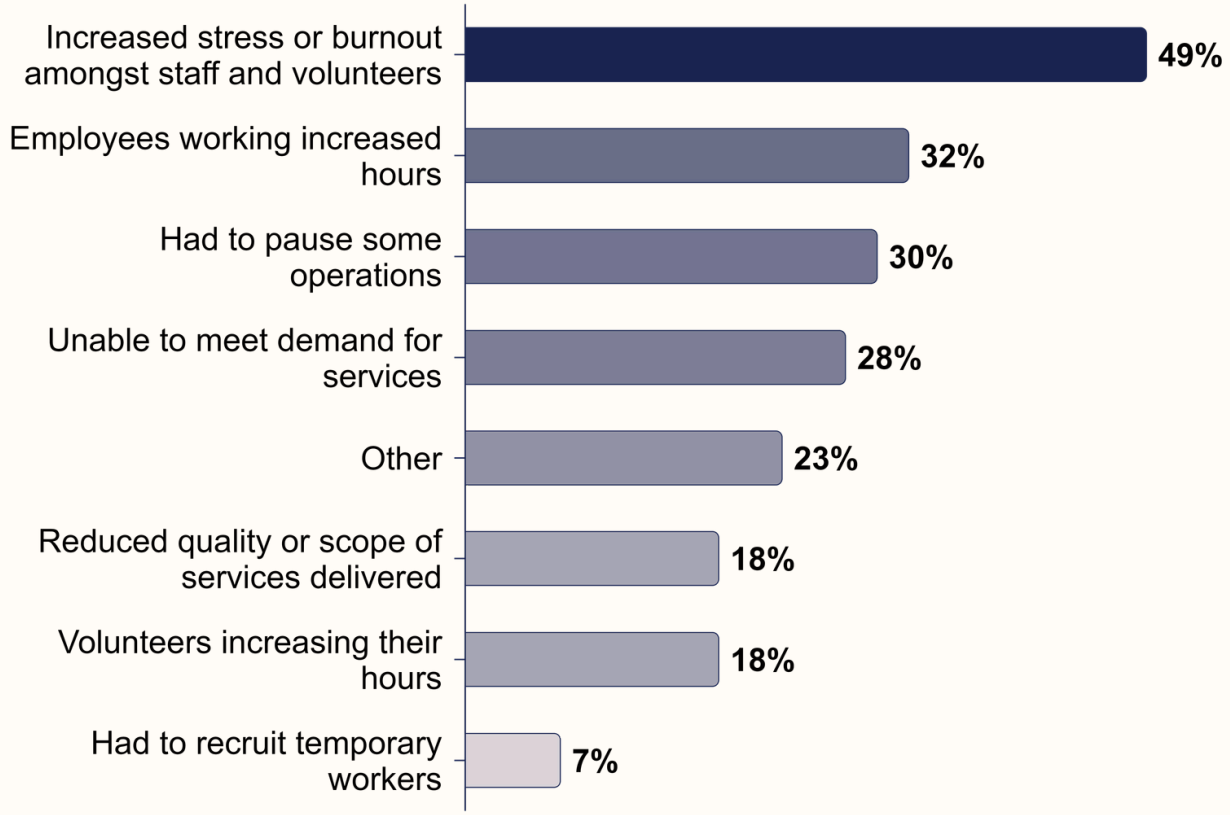
Note. Base = 40.
Question shown only to organisations reporting volunteer retention difficulties.
Figure shows the eight most commonly selected retention barriers. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

4.3. Consequences of workforce shortages

When asked how these workforce difficulties affect their organisation, respondents described both the human and operational impacts. When staff, volunteer or trustee capacity is stretched, demand does not stop. Services may continue because the people involved work longer or take on more responsibility, and the alternative is that organisations are unable to meet demand. We describe this as the cost of 'doing good': people within organisations absorb the strain to protect support for communities.

Almost half of those experiencing difficulties say staff and volunteers have experienced increased stress or burnout (49%) as a result. Almost a third say employees are working increased hours (32%), and almost one in five say volunteers are contributing more time (18%).

Figure 4.7. How recruitment or retention difficulties are affecting organisations (top 8)



Note. Base = 87.
Question shown only to organisations reporting recruitment or retention difficulties among staff or volunteers.
Figure shows the eight most commonly selected responses. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

These findings are supported by national evidence and reflected in consecutive Unite surveys of sector workers, which show that many experience stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion because of their work. [8,9]

These impacts are often felt most in smaller organisations and groups, where a few people are relied on to carry out both strategic and operational work. One focus group participant described balancing these responsibilities alongside their day job:

> “We don't have a workforce, day-to-day running… is myself and my partner… yesterday I was cleaning the toilets, making coffee, planning classes, invoicing, updating the website… I was thinking about the half programme that I need to manage for the summer… I was thinking where I am during the day because I do another job.”

This approach carries significant risk for those involved. In **Fair Collective**’s research with leaders of small organisations, 85% said their role had negatively affected their mental health, while two thirds (67%) had no budget to support their own or their team’s mental health.[10]

Alongside these pressures on staff and volunteers, just under a third of those experiencing workforce difficulties have had to pause some operations (30%) and over a quarter have been left unable to meet demand (28%) as a result of workforce shortages. This suggests that shortages are contributing to issues which affect not only staff and volunteers but also the communities they serve.



5. Communities supported, demand, and access

Salford CVS reflections

Although Salford has seen considerable population and economic growth in recent years, poverty and deprivation remain stubborn. The city is the fourth most deprived local authority in Greater Manchester and the 24th most deprived nationally. [2] This is the context in which Salford's VCSE sector works.

Salford VCSE groups and organisations provide an estimated **1.05 million** contacts or episodes of support each year.

Evidence from both the survey and focus group paints a picture of Salford VCSE organisations acting as **everyday social infrastructure**. They are places, people, connectors, relationships and trusted routes into support. One organisation in the focus group described VCSE organisations as the:

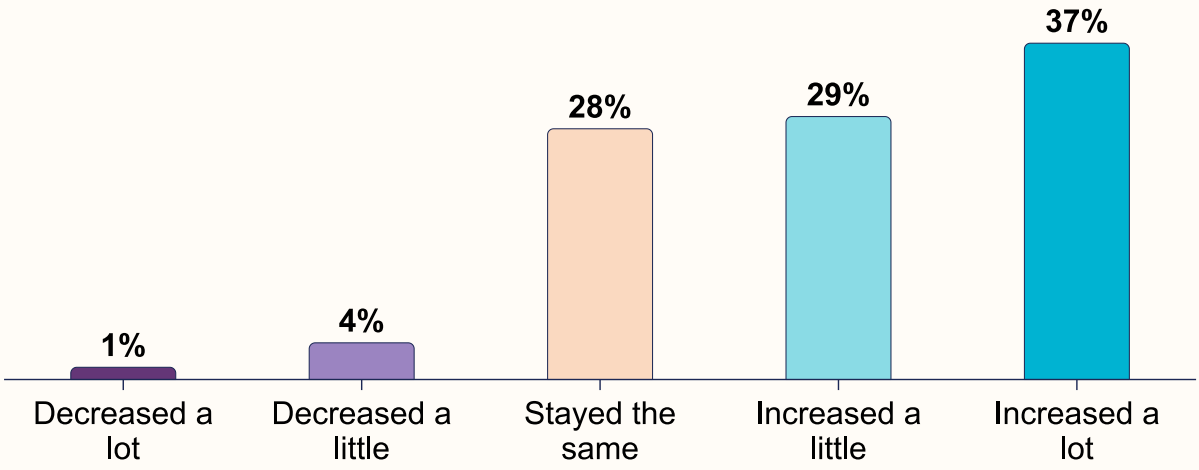
> “...conduit that proves to them that community is good.”

The findings show that Salford’s VCSE sector holds **strong local relationships within its communities**, with many people finding support through informal, local routes. However, demand for VCSE support in Salford is rising, and the number of people supported by organisations and groups has increased for three in five over the past year. Some of this support originates from referrals, both from other VCSE organisations and public services. While this demonstrates the growing recognition of the sector’s role in local support systems, referrals need to be accompanied by adequate resources and suitable expectations about what support VCSE organisations are able to provide.

5.1. Demand for services

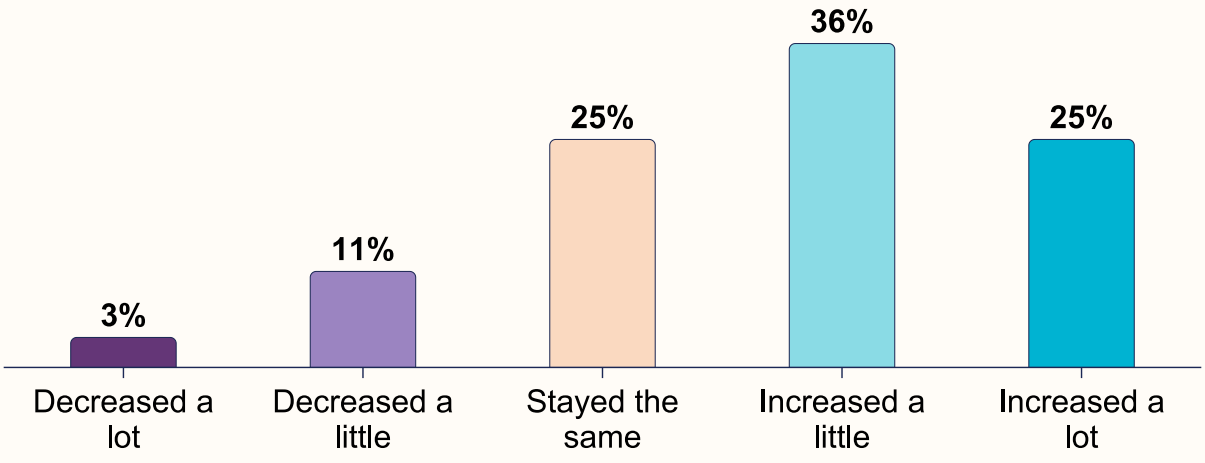
When asked how demand for services had changed over the past 12 months, two in three report an increase (67%), including just under two in five saying it has increased a lot. Three in five say the number of people they support has also increased over the past year (61%).

Figure 5.1. Change in demand for services, last 12 months



Note. Base = 147. 'Don't know' responses excluded. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 5.2. Change in the number of people that organisations support, last 12 months



Note. Base = 151. 'Don't know' responses excluded. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

In the focus group, participants described how increasing numbers of people were approaching them for mental health support after the pandemic, often when difficulties had become harder to manage:

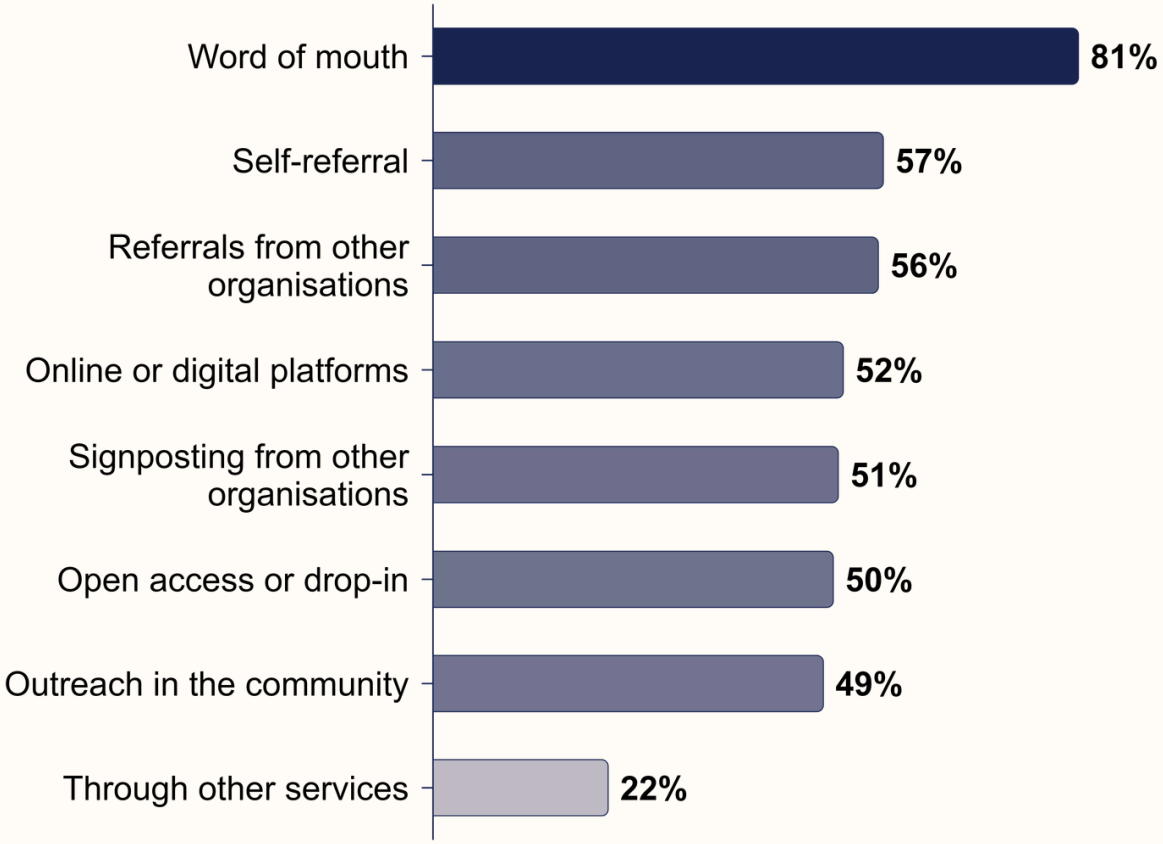
> “We were expecting a big insurge of people requesting mental health support almost immediately after [the pandemic]. But actually it seems like people have been trying to cope on their own and then eventually have reached breaking point and have sought out additional help… we are definitely seeing more complexity.”

Organisations remained involved even when recognising that the complexity of some issues fell outside the scope of the support they were able to provide.

5.2. How people find and access support

VCSE organisations described themselves as being **embedded, trusted and known routes into support within their communities**. Word of mouth is the most common way people find support, reported by four in five organisations (81%). More than half receive direct contact and self-referrals (57%) or referrals from other organisations (56%), while around half receive contact via online or digital platforms (52%), receive signposting from other organisations (51%), provide open-access or drop-in routes (50%), or carry out outreach in the community (49%).

Figure 5.3. How people come into contact with VCSE organisations (top 8)



Note. Base = 159. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%. Figure shows the eight most commonly selected responses.

Among organisations receiving referrals, **more than four in five receive them from other VCSE organisations or groups** (85%), almost three quarters receive referrals from public services (73%) and a third from the private sector (33%). Referrals most frequently originate from services related to social prescribing, health, adult social care, and children and family services.

73% Receive referrals from public sector organisations and services

These referral routes show that partnerships between statutory services and VCSE organisations, such as **Wellbeing Matters**, are helping to connect people to activities that support wellbeing and independence. [11] In the focus group, organisations echoed Greater Manchester's **Live Well approach** by recognising the importance of collaboration in making sure that people receive the right type of support at the time they need it:

> "Signposting is really, really essential, and that's where joined up services matter… we have to meet the needs of the people who trust us, but don't go too far out of our lane when that could be done by someone else. So if we're building up trust in services, we need to be that person who can pass them on and encourage them into other things."

While referrals are an important part of connecting people to trusted help, they also shift demand onto organisations that are already supporting more people and with fewer resources. **At least half** of organisations receiving referrals from public sector organisations or services say **that no funding is received** to accommodate them. Providing accessible support that is sustainable depends on adequate resources being provided to the organisations expected to deliver that support.

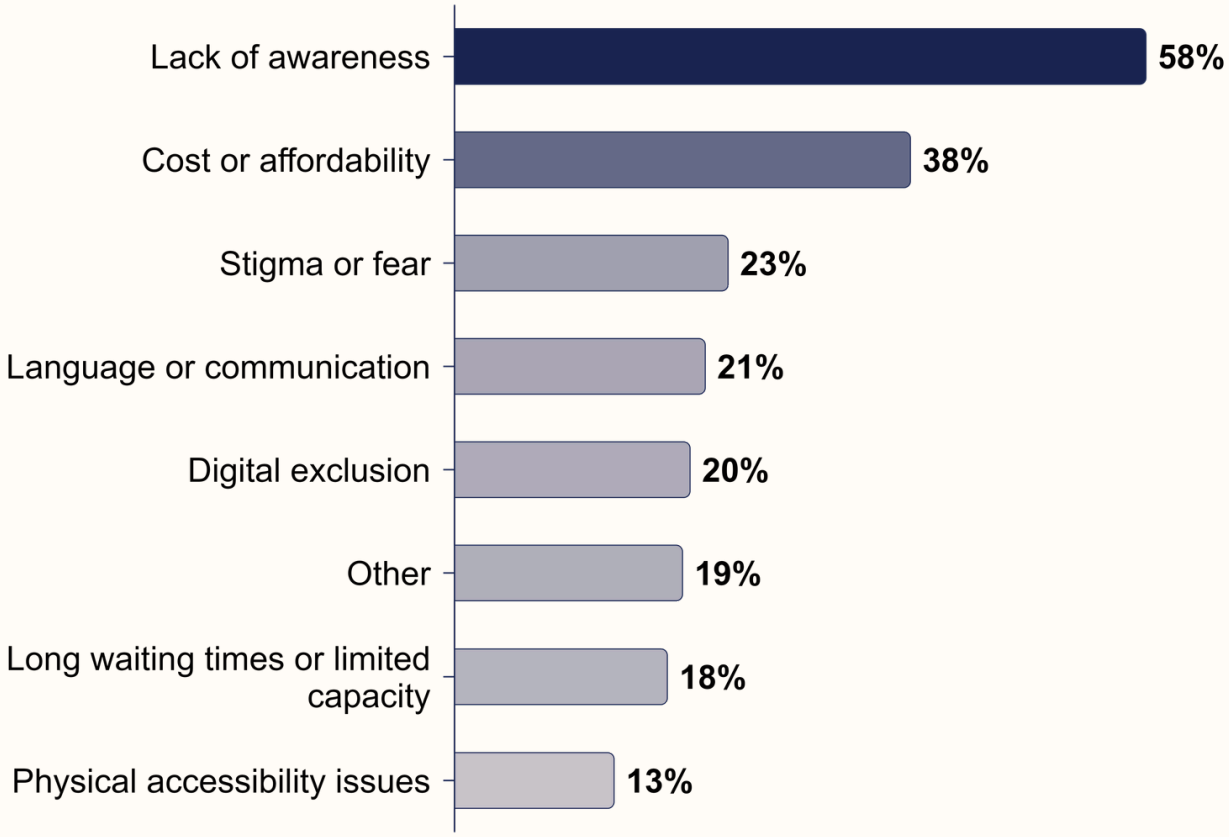


5.3. Barriers to access

Salford's VCSE sector supports a diverse range of communities, some of which face structural barriers to accessing services, while others encounter cultural or practical barriers that can make it harder to find or engage with support.

The most commonly identified barrier is a lack of awareness of available services (58%), followed by affordability or the cost of taking part (38%). More than one in five organisations identify stigma or fear (23%) and language or communication barriers (21%), while one in five point to digital exclusion (20%).

Figure 5.4. Barriers to accessing services (top 8)



Note. Base = 156. Figure shows the eight most commonly selected responses. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

5.4. Measuring impact and delivery quality

Organisations use a range of methods to understand and demonstrate what their work achieves. The most common are feedback from beneficiaries or service users (57%) and case studies or stories of change (51%). Almost half use reach or output data (47%) or informal observation and practitioner reflection (46%), while more than two in five use funder or contract reporting (42%).

Figure 5.5. How organisations measure impact

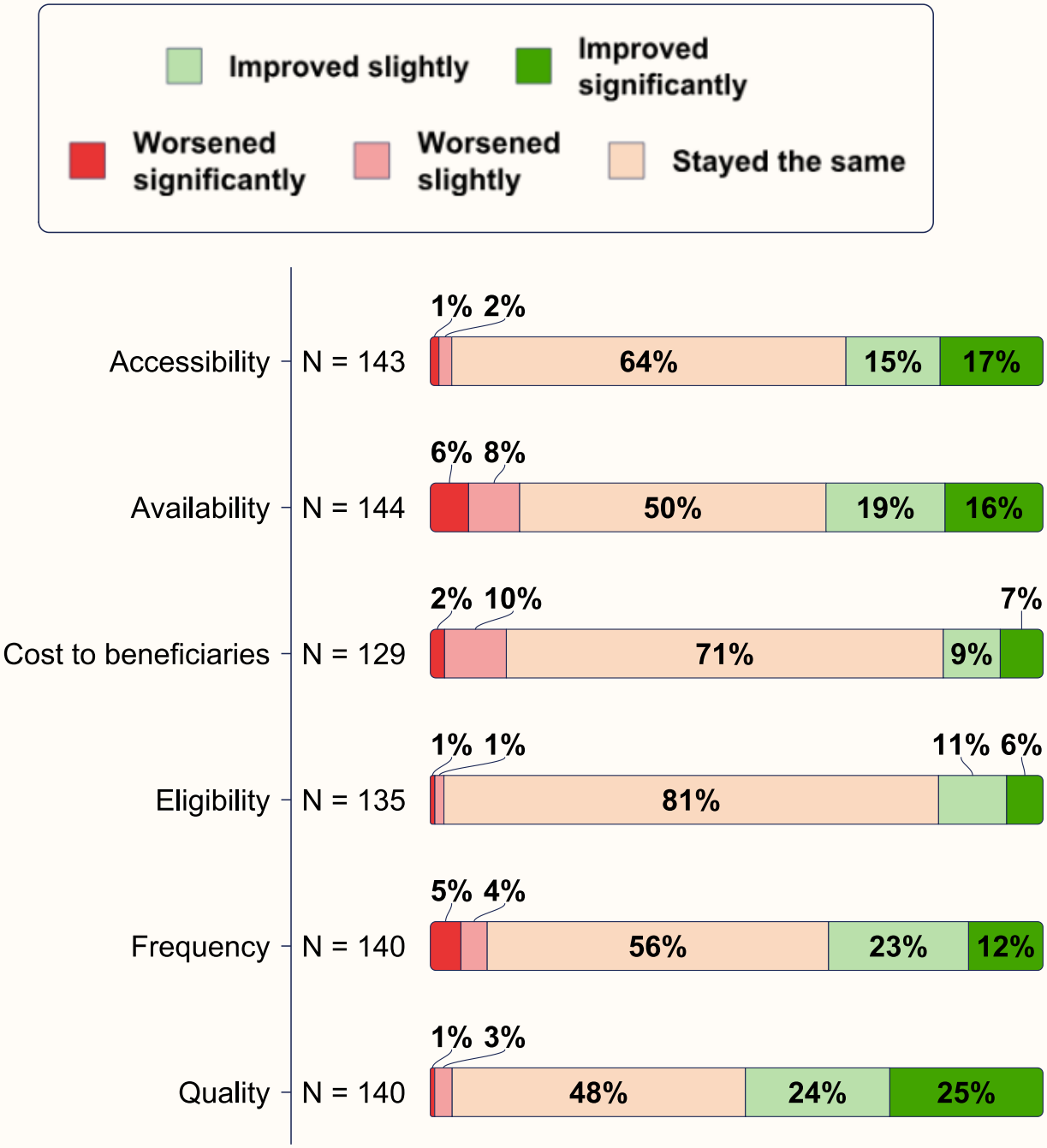


Note. Base = 156. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Findings from the focus group show why case studies remain a valuable way to capture voice and demonstrate impact. Many organisations described that much of the work is not easily captured in evaluation metrics, particularly for activities like gardening, lunch clubs, creative sessions, or providing a warm space.

Although many organisations are supporting more people compared to a year earlier, almost half of organisations report improvements in service quality over the previous year (49%). Around a third report better availability (35%), frequency (35%) or accessibility (32%) of their services or support. Fewer report deterioration in the support they offer. Around one in seven report worsening availability (14%), and one in eight say the cost of using their services has worsened (12%).

Figure 5.6. Change in services over the past 12 months



Note. Bases are shown in the chart and vary by metric. 'Don't know / not applicable' responses excluded for each metric. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

6. Finances and the funding landscape

Salford CVS reflections

Financial sustainability underpins everything else in this report: an organisation's ability to keep serving its communities depends on income, reserves and funding terms largely determined by others. A sustainable VCSE sector needs access to income that enables it to increase its impact over time – not only funding that keeps pace with rising costs, but also investment in organisational capability such as premises, back-office systems and workforce development. These are the hidden pressures, in addition to increasing demand, which put support and services at risk.

These pressures are compounded by a lack of transparent, consistent and equitable funding arrangements for VCSE groups and organisations across Greater Manchester and beyond. Poor commissioning approaches – including short-termism and failure to uplift values – alongside increasing demand for grant funding, mean the VCSE sector is experiencing choppy waters at a time when it is clearly still 'never more needed'.

VCSE organisations across the UK have been navigating an increasingly challenging financial and funding landscape in recent years. Shrinking public budgets and reduced donations have made it harder to generate income, while rising energy, wage and overhead costs have increased the cost of delivery. At the same time, the communities they support are facing greater pressures, driving demand during a period of constraint and uncertainty. [12,13]

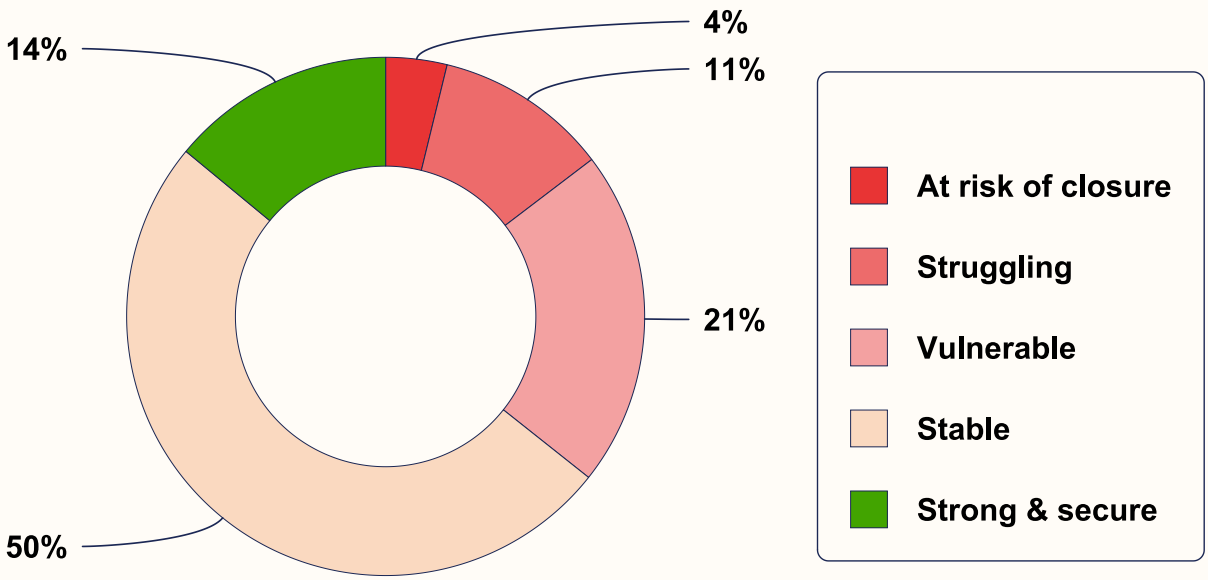
Salford's VCSE organisations face similar pressures, with funding that is often short term and does not increase as delivery costs rise. This leaves organisations seeking additional income to sustain existing services while limiting their ability to plan ahead. **Reserves are being used to cover routine costs and funding gaps**, and organisations are increasing fundraising or applying jointly for funding. Yet securing that income takes time and capacity, with competition and complex application processes adding to the workload. Most expect to maintain or expand their work, but few feel strong and secure, and some face difficult choices between maintaining services now and protecting their ability to continue in the longer term.

Salford's VCSE sector generated an estimated £327.78 million in income in 2024/25 and spent an estimated £321.44 million.

6.1. Financial position and reserves

These estimates describe the scale of Salford's VCSE sector, but they should not be read as a sign that individual organisations feel, or indeed are, financially secure. Half of respondents describe their organisation as stable but with concerns about the future (50%). More than one in five say they are vulnerable and facing significant pressure, with sustainability uncertain without changes being made (21%). Around one in seven say they are facing more serious struggles (11%) or at risk of imminent closure (4%). Only one in seven feel strong, secure and well-equipped for future challenges (14%).

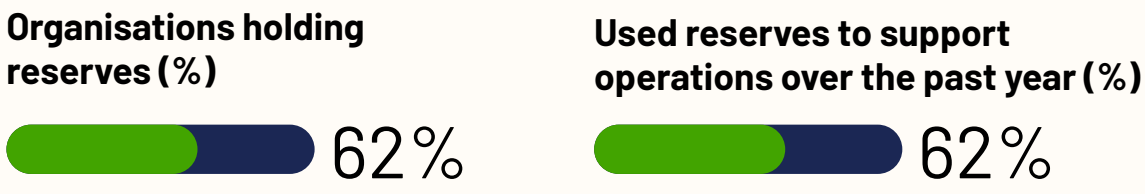
Figure 6.1. Organisations' current financial and operational state



Note. Base = 157.

More than three in five responding organisations hold reserves (62%), and among those that do, the same proportion have used them to support operations over the past year (62%).

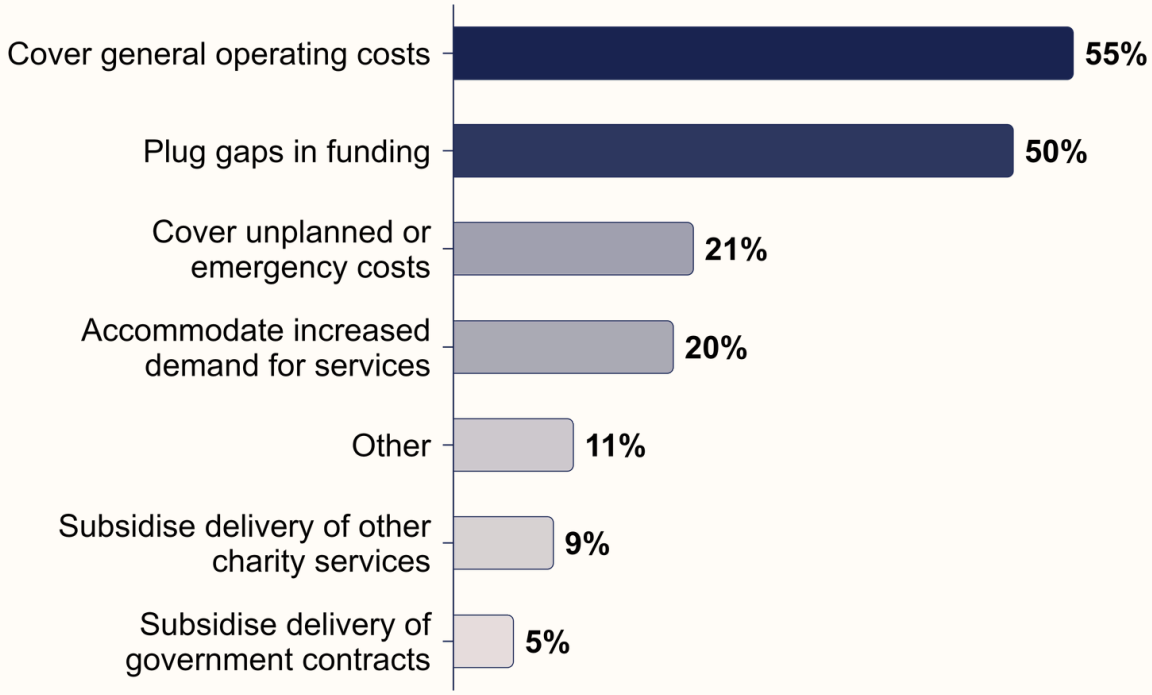
Figure 6.2. Use of financial reserves



Note. Base: holds reserves = 152; used reserves = 91. Figure shows the proportion answering 'Yes'. The 'used reserves' question was asked only of organisations that hold reserves.

More than half have drawn on reserves to meet general operating costs (55%), while half have used them to plug gaps in funding (50%). Around one in five have used reserves to cover unplanned or emergency costs (21%) or to accommodate increased demand for their services (20%).

Figure 6.3. Reasons for using reserves over the past 12 months



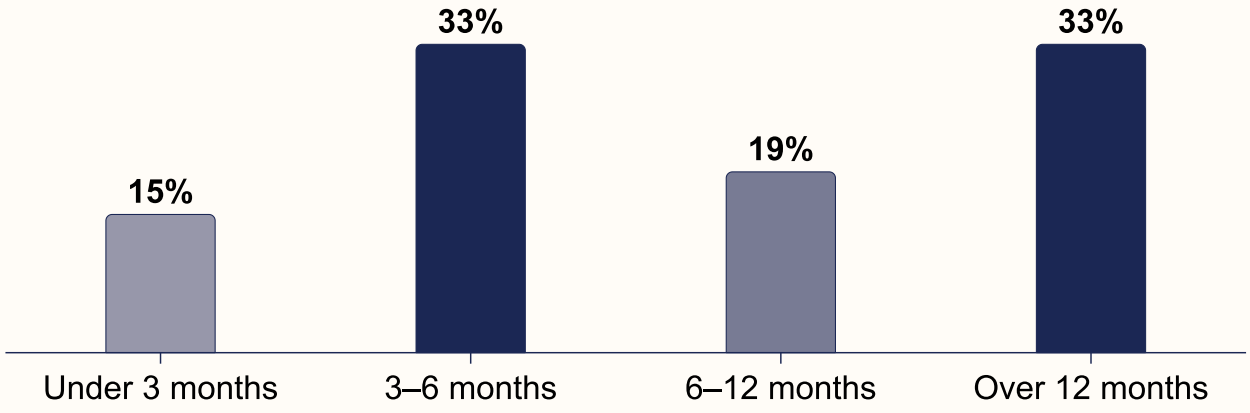
Note. Base = 56. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

This suggests that **reserves are being used to support everyday operations and plug gaps in funding** to keep support in place, rather than being held for emergencies or future investment. Using reserves in this way can protect services in the short term, but repeated use reduces the organisation's ability to absorb later shocks, manage delays in future funding, invest in development, or respond to emerging need. One focus group participant described being in this position: increasingly relying on reserves to cover day-to-day costs, and the difficult decision about continuing in the same way or reducing services to save money:

> "It came to a matter of, are we going to carry on and we only have four months worth in the bank, or are we going to cut our services in half and that will give us an extra year and a half…"

When asked how long they expect their reserves to last, based on current levels of income and expenditure, a third of organisations expect them to last more than a year (33%), while another third have between three and six months (33%). Around one in seven have less than three months (15%), and one in five have between six and twelve months (19%).

Figure 6.4. Number of months reserves are expected to last



Note. Base = 88. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

6.2. Sources of income and expenditure

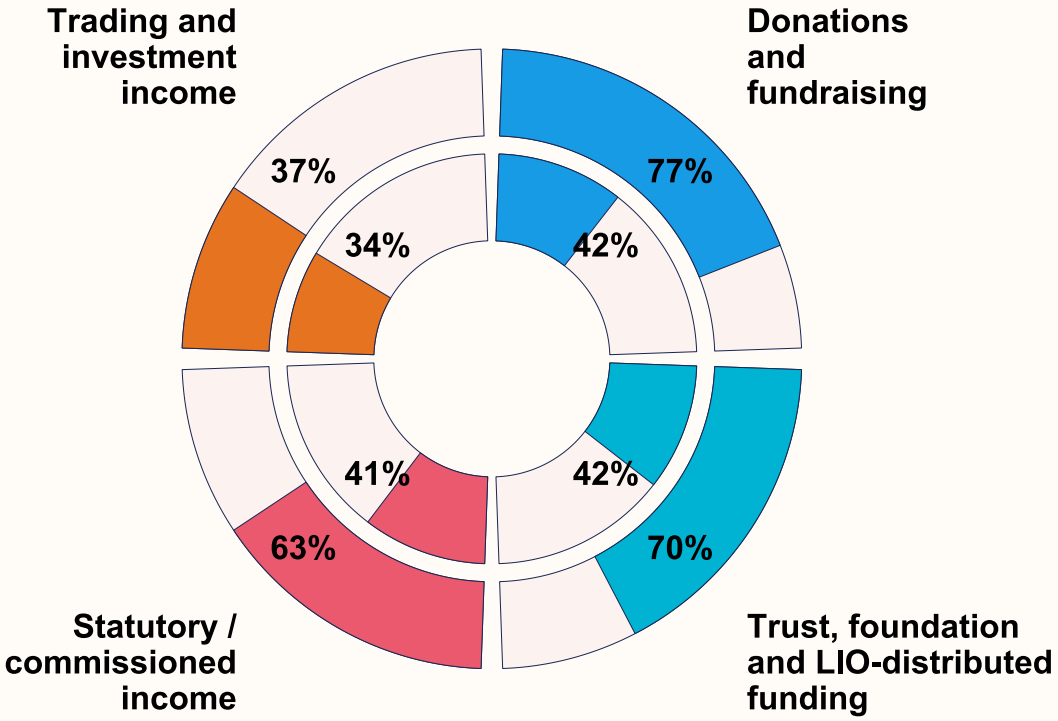
The ways in which VCSE organisations generate income have changed in recent years. Nationally, the number of people donating has fallen by around six million over the past decade, and the total value of public donations in 2025 was 10% lower than the previous year. [14] Some organisations are looking to legacy fundraising, a source with long-term growth potential but uncertain time horizons. [15] While the number of government contracts delivered by VCSE organisations has increased, [16] evidence shows that these often do not cover the true cost of delivering services. [17]

We asked organisations where their income comes from and how much each source contributes to their overall income. Income sources were grouped into four categories: statutory and commissioned income; funding from local infrastructure organisations, trusts and foundations; donations and fundraising; and trading and investment income. For each category, we calculated both the percentage of organisations receiving income and its average share of their total income. Organisations receiving no income from a category were excluded from that category's average, so the averages do not add up to 100%.

Survey findings suggest that responding organisations draw on a mix of income sources rather than relying heavily on any single stream. More than three quarters receive income from donations and fundraising (77%), seven in ten from trusts, foundations or LIOs (70%), and over three in five from statutory funding and commissioned income (63%).

On average, income is relatively evenly distributed across these sources. Donations and fundraising (42%), funding distributed by LIOs, trusts and foundations (42%), and statutory and commissioned income (41%) each account for a similar share of organisations' total income. Trading or investment income is less common, received by just under two in five organisations (37%), and also accounts for the smallest average share (34%).

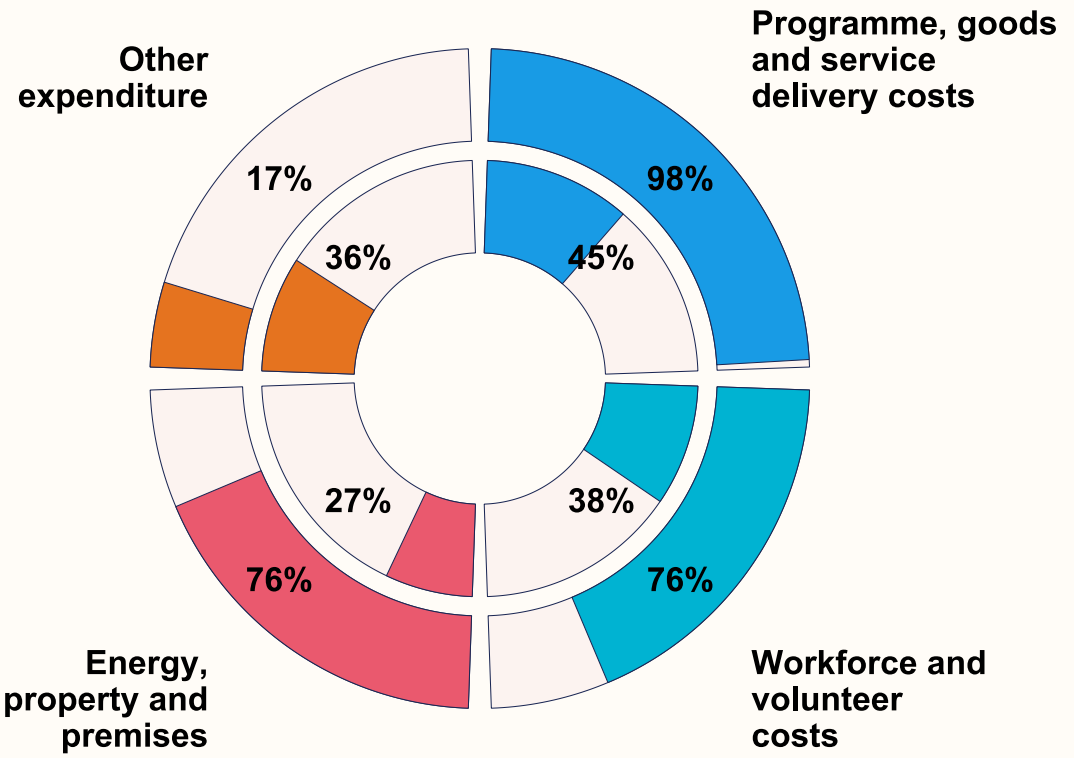
Figure 6.5. Income sources received and their average share of total income



Note. Outer ring shows the percentage receiving any income from each source (base = 128); inner ring shows the average share of total income among organisations receiving that source (base = 47-99, depending on source).

Expenditure was analysed in the same way as income, showing both the proportion of organisations reporting each category and its average share of total expenditure. Almost all organisations report programme, goods and service-delivery costs (98%), which also account for the largest share of total expenditure (45%). Three quarters report workforce and volunteer costs or energy, property and premises costs (both 76%), accounting for 38% and 27% of total expenditure respectively.

Figure 6.6. Expenditure areas and their average share of total expenditure



Note. Outer ring shows the percentage reporting any expenditure in each area (base = 132); inner ring shows the average share of total expenditure among organisations reporting expenditure in that area (base = 23-130, depending on area).

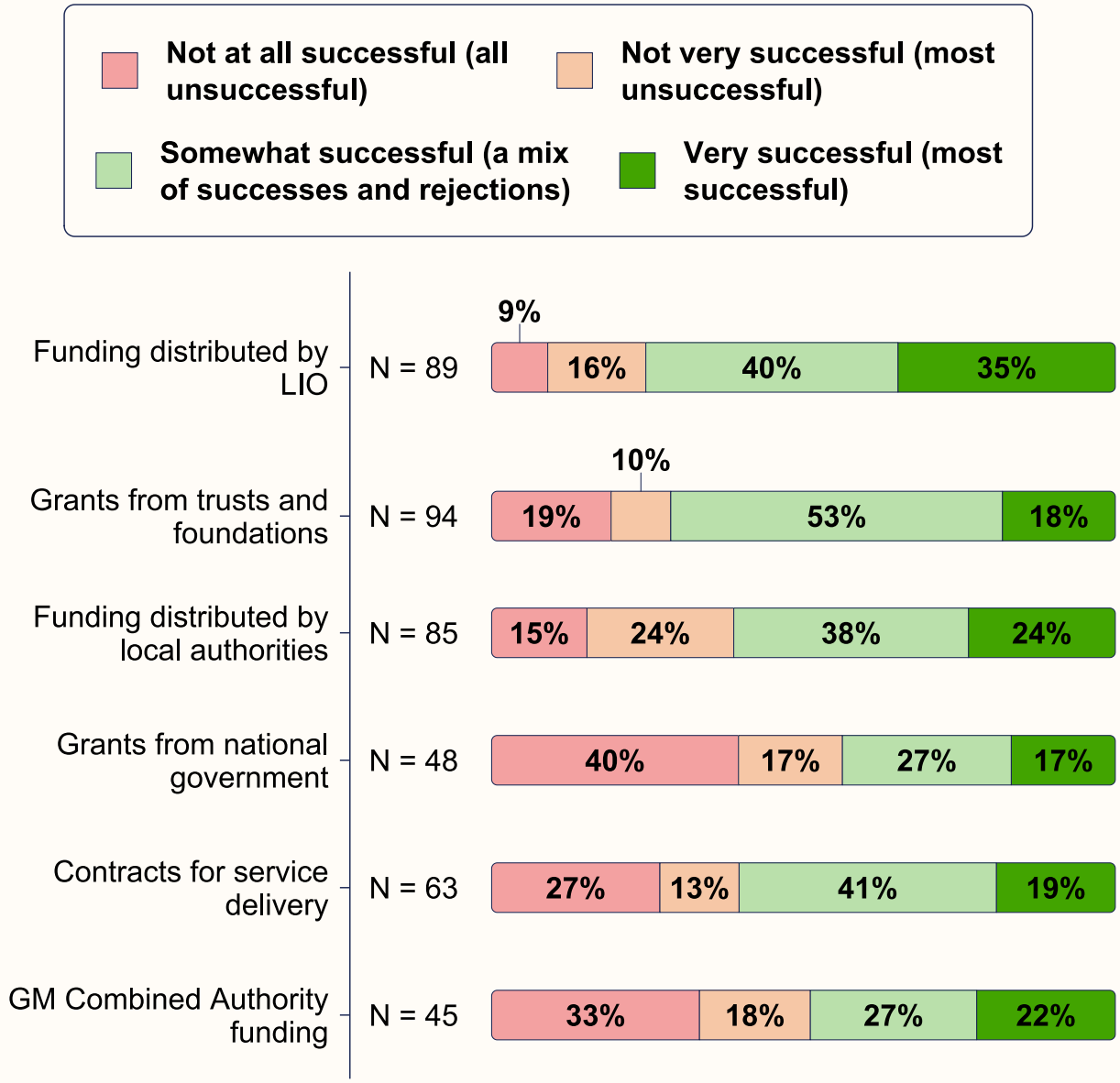
6.3. Funding

When asked how successful they were in applying for funding sources relevant to them, **three-quarters of responding organisations reported being very or somewhat successful when applying for funding distributed by LIOs** (75%).

Salford's LIO, **Salford CVS, provides established routes for community grant-making. Its grants programme distributes around £3 million each year in grants and investments** from Salford City Council, GMCA, the NHS, and trusts and foundations. [18] This sits alongside other funds that focus on community development and wellbeing, such as the Healthy Lifestyles Fund, enabling VCSE organisations to provide more accessible support.

Just under three quarters report at least some success with grants from trusts and foundations (71%), while three in five report success with funding from local authorities (61%) or service delivery contracts (60%). Around half report success with GMCA funding (49%), compared with more than two in five for national government grants (44%).

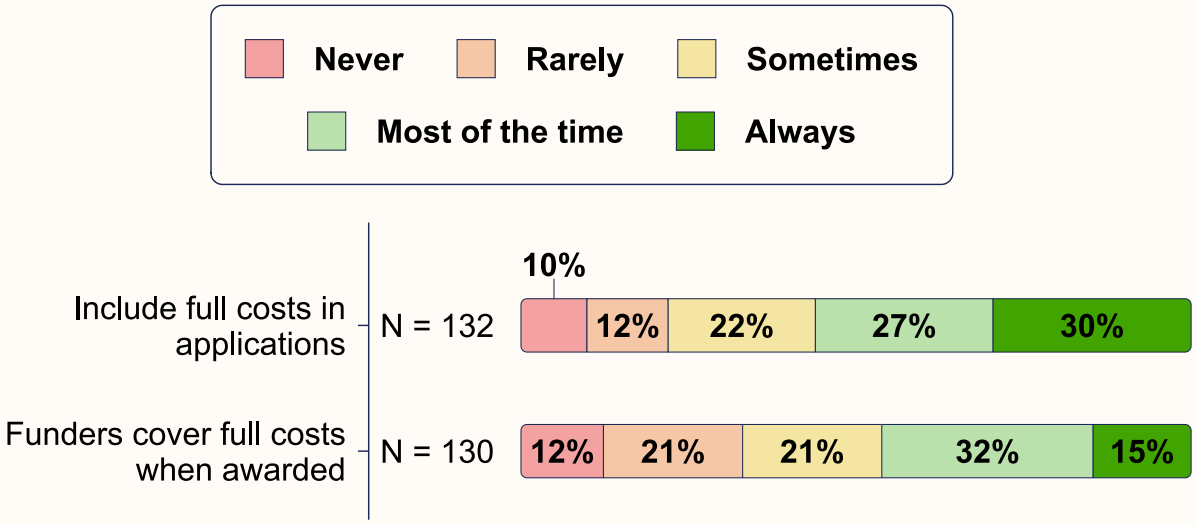
Figure 6.7. Success in funding applications over the past 12 months



Note. Bases are shown in the chart and vary by source. 'Didn't apply' responses excluded for each source. Shows outcomes among organisations that applied to each source. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

A successful funding application does not always translate into financial security if the money is short term, restricted, or does not cover the real cost of delivering services. Almost three in five organisations say they always (30%) or mostly (27%) include full costs in funding applications, but fewer than half say funders always (15%) or mostly (32%) cover these costs when funding is awarded. When there is a mismatch between the funding required and what is awarded, organisations are often left drawing on reserves or income from other sources, or relying on unpaid work to ensure support is delivered, a pattern also identified nationally. [17]

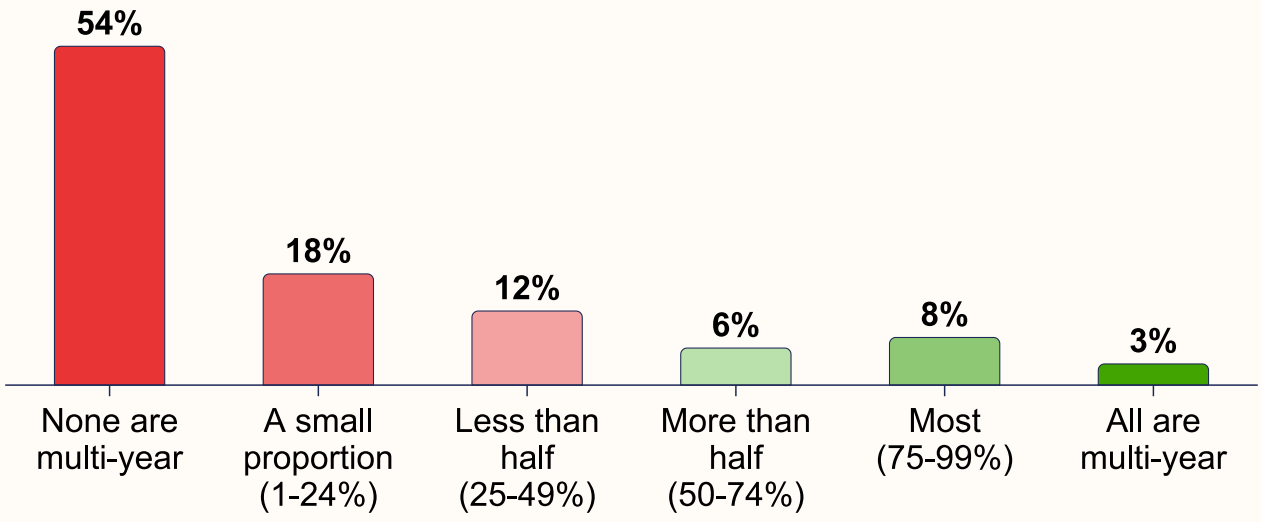
Figure 6.8. Full cost recovery



Note. Bases are shown in the chart. 'Don't know' responses excluded. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Longer-term funding gives organisations more scope to plan staffing and services, and **IVAR**'s most recent funding experience survey found that multi-year grants were a leading priority for charities. [19] Yet among Salford organisations receiving grant or contract income, more than four in five say less than half of this funding is multi-year (83%), including more than half that say none is (54%).

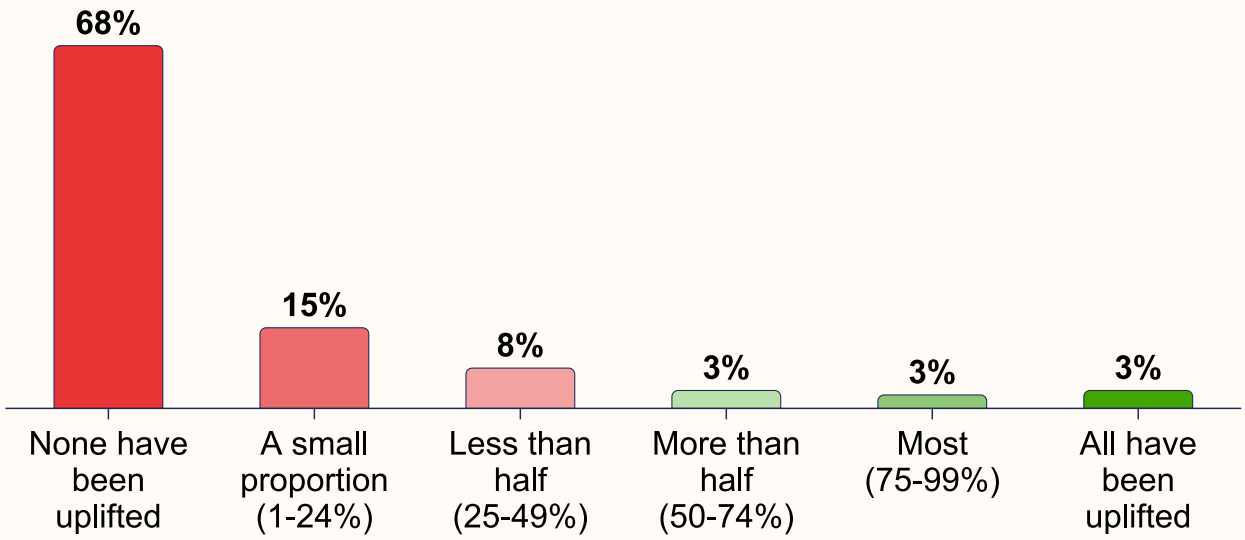
Figure 6.9. The proportion of organisations' grants or contracts that are multi-year (three years or more)



Note. Base = 119. Question shown only to organisations receiving income from grants or contracts from any source.

Rising delivery costs also reduce what existing awards can cover, yet national evidence shows that uplifts remain uncommon, particularly for shorter-term funding. [13] More than two thirds of organisations receiving grant or contract income say none of this funding had been uplifted to reflect rising costs over the last year (68%), while only 6% say most or all had been uplifted. This can leave organisations to meet the difference through other income, reserves or unpaid work, a pattern also found nationally in the VCSE sector's delivery of public services. [17] However, it is important to recognise that this covers grants and contracts from all sources, so it should not be read as an assessment of any single funder.

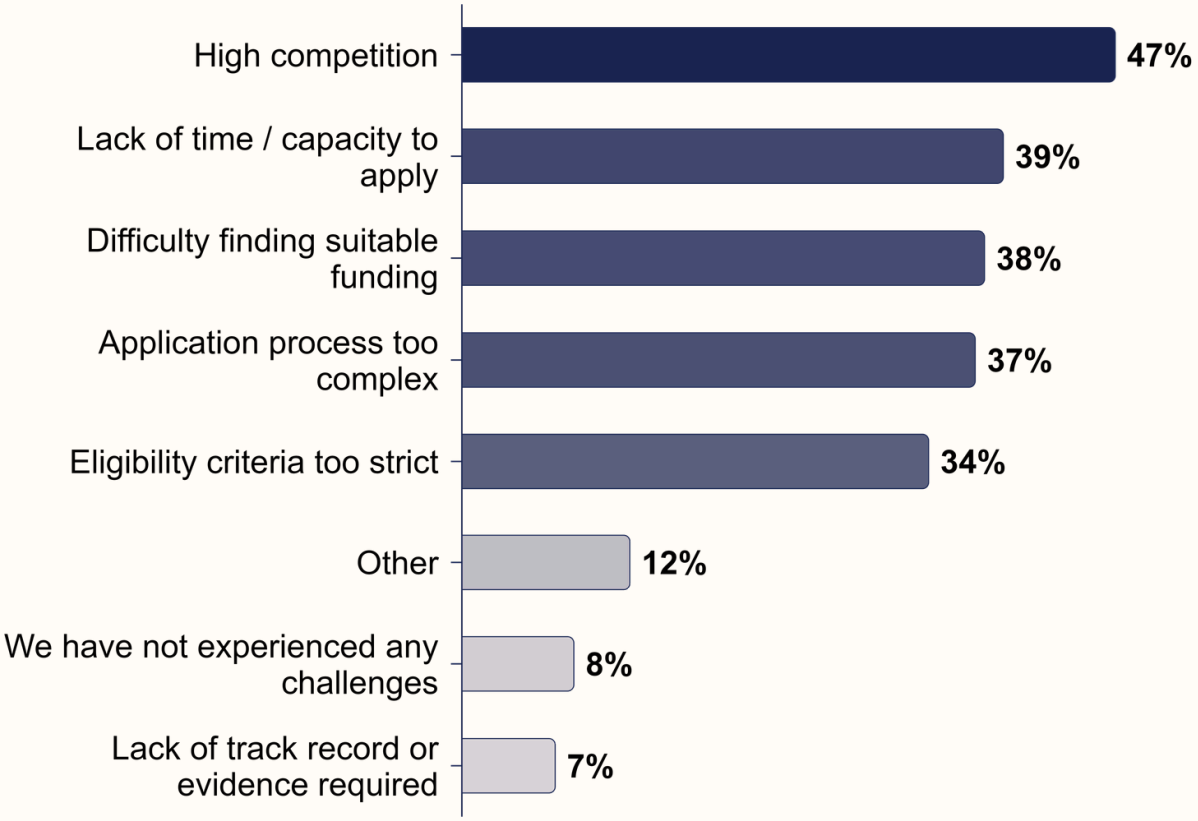
Figure 6.10. The proportion of organisations' grants or contracts that have been uplifted over the past 12 months



Note. Base = 119. Question shown only to organisations receiving income from grants or contracts from any source. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

When asked what the biggest challenges are with finding, applying for, and securing funding, organisations most commonly point to high levels of competition (47%), a lack of time or capacity to apply (39%), and difficulty finding suitable funding (38%). More than a third say that complicated application processes (37%) and strict eligibility criteria (34%) make the process of applying for and securing funding more challenging.

Figure 6.11. Funding challenges



Note. Base = 149. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

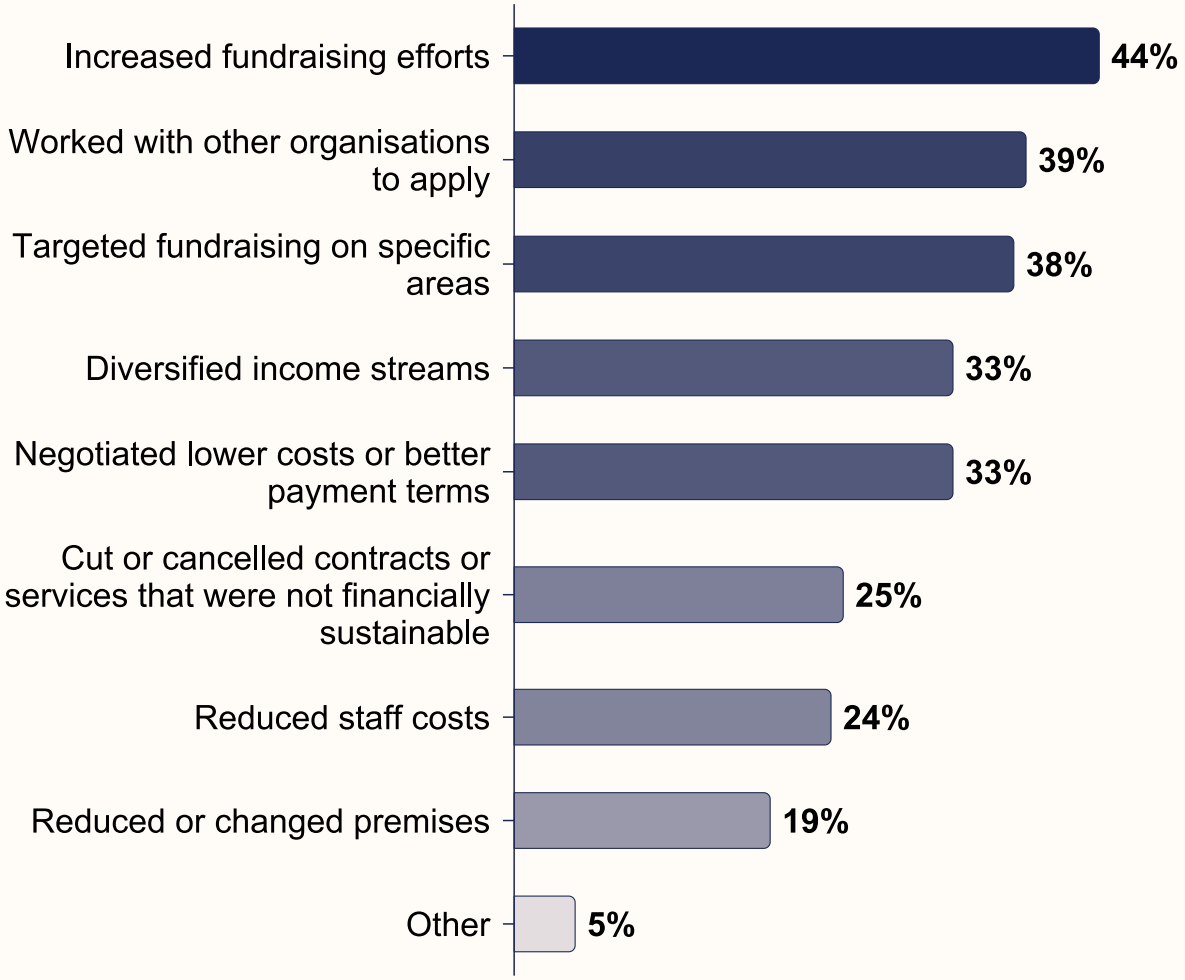
In the focus group, organisations spoke of an increasingly competitive and restrictive funding landscape, and of funding that often fails to account for the time spent on administrative and reporting requirements:

> “The funding environment has got a lot tighter… an expectation of doing more for less… There's less money around and it's more difficult to get hold of. You're often not eligible for certain funds because you're either too big or too small or can't come up with the governance requirements that go alongside it. There's more scrutiny [and] reporting required, yet there isn't any resource to do that because the expectation is that the money will go into the delivery without actually thinking about what else needs to be funded in order to make this successful.”

To understand how organisations are responding to these funding challenges, we asked what steps they had taken over the previous year. **Almost three quarters (73%) had taken at least one action**. Of this group, more than two in five increased their overall fundraising efforts (44%), while just under two in five worked with other organisations to apply for funding (39%) or targeted specific funding areas or opportunities (38%).

A third diversified their income or funding streams or negotiated lower costs or better payment terms (both 33%), while a quarter cut or cancelled contracts or services that were not financially sustainable (25%). For the more than a quarter taking no new action over the previous year (27%), this may reflect limited scope to respond or measures already introduced before that period.

Figure 6.12. Actions taken in response to funding and income challenges



Note. Base = 109. Excludes respondents selecting 'No actions taken' (N = 40). Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

6.4. Premises

Physical premises and spaces are part of the sector's contribution, providing places where people can meet, connect, and access support. One participant described how a familiar venue helped residents feel comfortable and take ownership of community activity while recognising the significant cost of maintaining it:

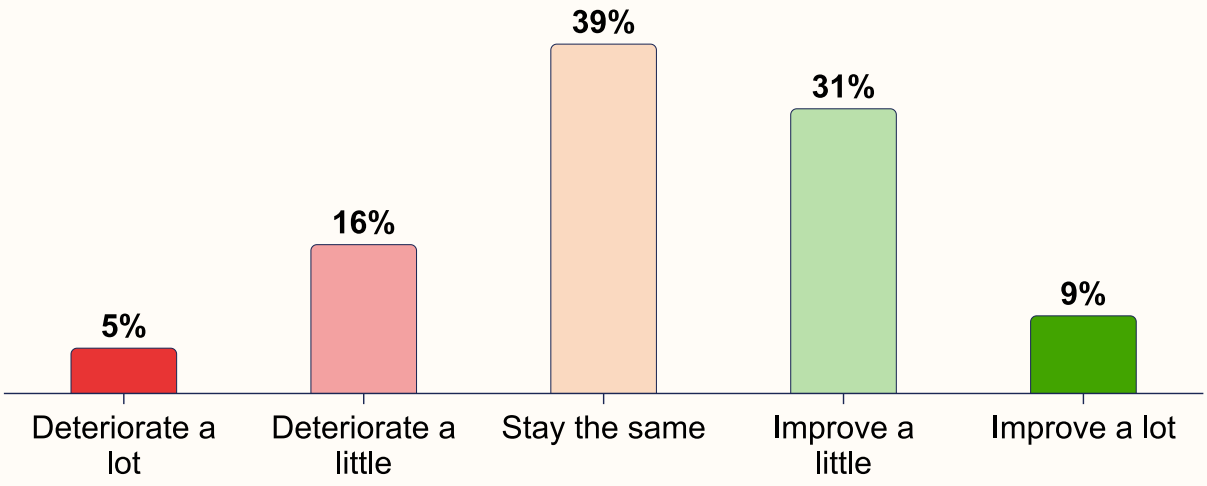
> "It's great having a building that people then take ownership of, and feel like that the space belongs to them. And then when they come in, they feel really comfortable, especially if you're doing projects around wellbeing and isolation with them. The upkeep costs are phenomenal. That is a massive pressure for us and we don't get any support for that."

Organisations use a mix of premises arrangements: three in five responding organisations operate from premises they lease or rent (61%), while more than a quarter use premises with shared or free access (28%). Around one in eight do not use physical premises (12%), and one in ten use premises they own (10%).

6.5. Future outlook

Findings from this report suggest that Salford's VCSE sector is supporting more people, with increasingly complex needs, within an uncertain funding landscape and while experiencing volunteer recruitment difficulties. Despite this, two in five organisations expect their financial position to improve over the next 12 months (40%), while a similar proportion expect it to remain the same (39%). One in five expect it to deteriorate (21%).

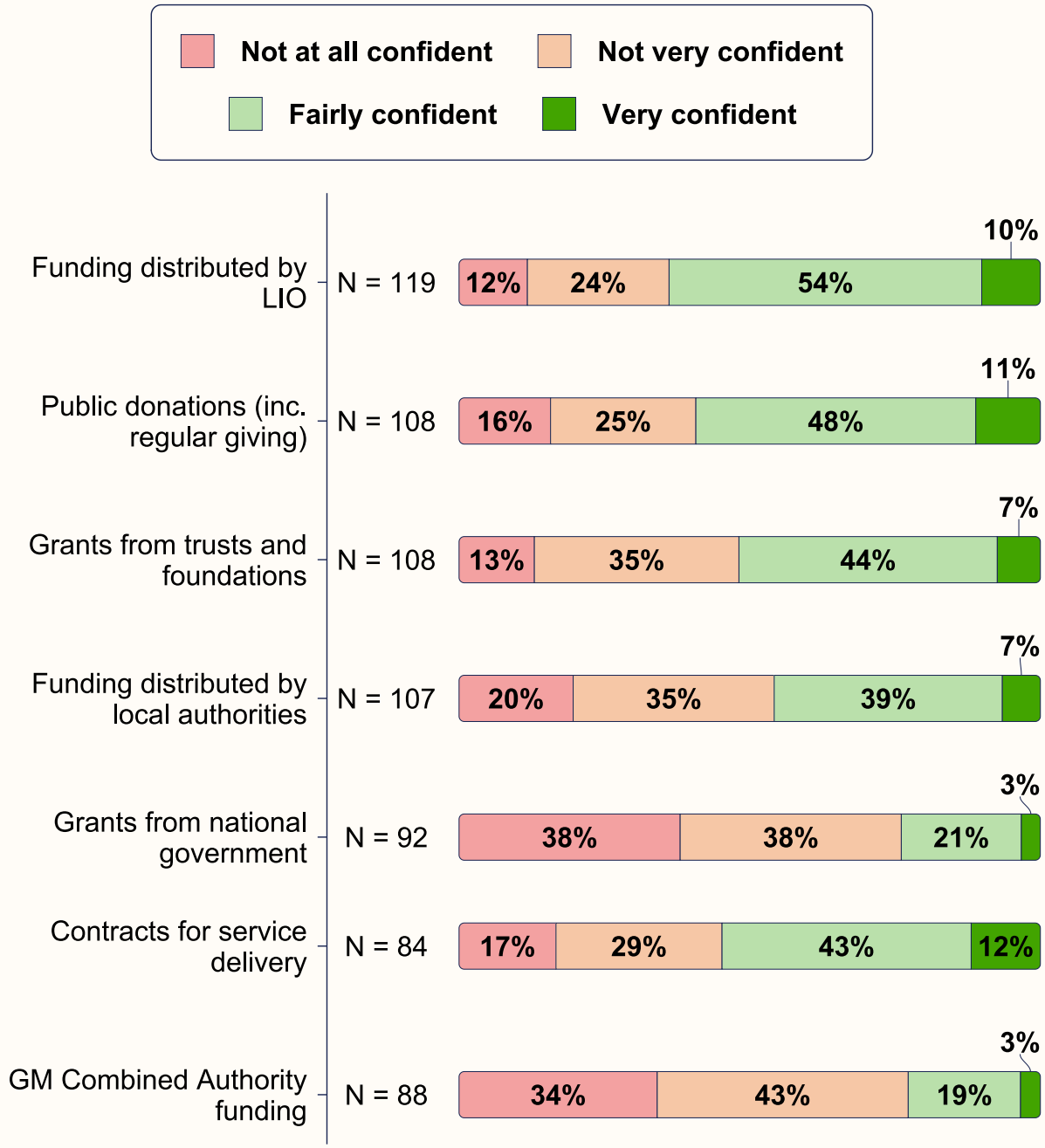
Figure 6.13. Expected financial position over the next 12 months



Note. Base = 140. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

Whilst a minority expect their financial position to deteriorate, organisations have varying degrees of confidence in being able to secure funding from different sources. Among organisations that considered each source relevant to them, organisations feel fairly or very confident in securing funding distributed by LIOs (64%), which sits alongside the relatively high success rate in securing funding from this source over the past year. Three in five feel confident about public donations (59%), and more than half about service delivery contracts (55%) or grants from trusts and foundations (52%). In contrast, more than three quarters are not very or not at all confident about GMCA funding (77%) or national government grants (76%).

Figure 6.14. Confidence levels in funding over the next 12 months

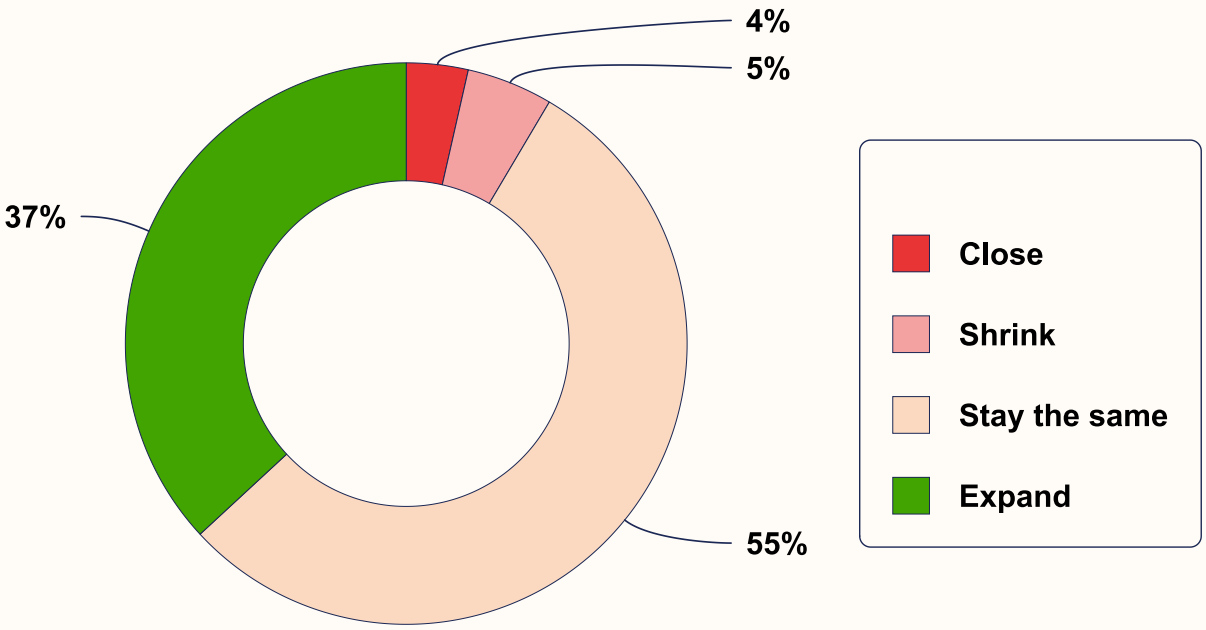


Note. Bases are shown in the chart and vary by source. 'Not applicable' responses excluded for each source. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

These findings suggest greater confidence in funding that is more locally rooted or linked to established relationships than in regional and national public-sector sources, where funders also face pressures on their own resources.

Looking ahead, more than half of responding organisations expect their operations to continue at a similar level (55%) over the next year. Just under two in five expect to expand (37%), while 5% expect to shrink and 4% expect to close.

Figure 6.15. Organisational expectations for the year ahead

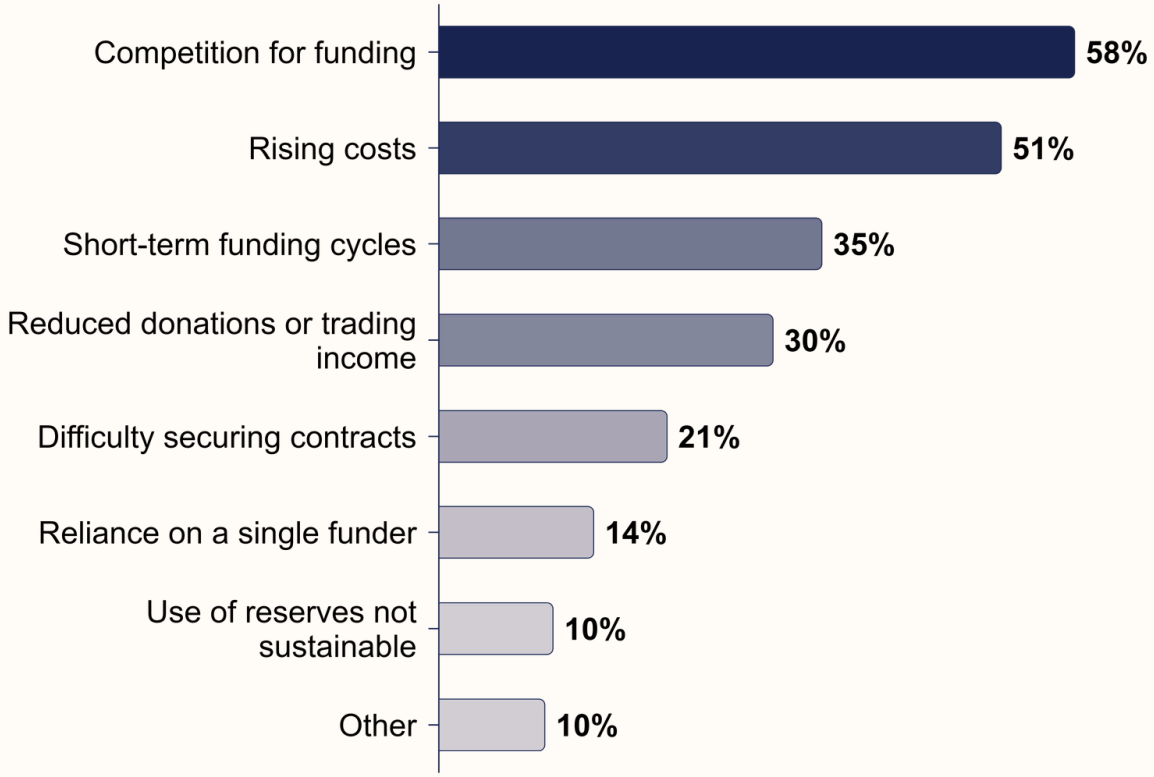


Note. Base = 141

Ambitions to maintain, sustain, or grow activity sit alongside a number of financial risks, with organisations pointing to competition for funding (58%), rising costs (51%), short-term funding cycles (35%) and reduced donations or trading income (30%) as the main risks to their financial sustainability. Competition for limited funding can leave organisations caught between applying for an amount that may be seen as too high and applying for too little to be competitive. One focus group participant described this tension:

> “We find it really, really difficult... if we apply for too much funding, sometimes [we’re told] there are other organisations applying for less and that the fund is oversubscribed. If we apply for too little, we find that we get overlooked... we’re sort of stuck in the middle.”

Figure 6.16. Risks to financial sustainability



Note. Base = 135. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Collectively, these interconnected pressures place a triple squeeze on organisations. Rising costs make services more expensive to run while leaving residents with less money to donate or spend on the activities organisations provide. **As more people also turn to the sector for support, organisations face pressure to secure additional funding both to meet growing demand and to cover shortfalls in existing income**, adding to competition for available funds. Short funding periods make this harder to manage, leaving organisations repeatedly seeking money to sustain work their communities already depend on.



7. Conclusion

This report tells the tale of two cities – actually, two stories of our city at once, and both are true.

Salford's VCSE sector remains central to life in Salford, with almost 2,000 VCSE groups and organisations operating in our city, providing over 1 million instances of support each year across Salford. Rooted in communities, this support happens in all wards and across neighbourhoods, amongst all of the city's diverse communities of identity and experience. With over 53,000 volunteers and trustees and nearly 7,000 paid staff, the VCSE sector in Salford is at the heart of the fabric of our city. But it is also a sector where many groups and organisations describe themselves as vulnerable and where the people doing the work increasingly pay a personal price to keep that work going.

Salford is a city of rapid economic and social growth whilst also being a city with high levels of poverty and deprivation. This reveals an unsustainable position: demand flows from the wider system to VCSE organisations more reliably than funding does and reserves are increasingly being spent on routine costs rather than held for emergencies, limiting long-term investment in capability.

The evidence set out in this report tells a consistent story. Demand for VCSE support across Salford continues to rise, VCSE groups and organisations are meeting it through means that were never designed to last, and the funding system underneath them has not moved to match either.

Across all four State of the Sector in Salford reports Salford CVS have produced since 2010, a trend emerges: that of a VCSE sector relied upon to fill space left by others, finding it increasingly hard to secure the funding, workforce or recognition to be sustainable. The sector is increasingly in survival mode, yet survival is not really the point - these groups and organisations do not aim to endure indefinitely, they work to create change. The real risk is losing them while they are still needed and the impact that would have on our communities. Public services should sit alongside the work of our sector, not seek to replace us, and the risk to stretched public services is a real one, should we not be able to achieve a more stable future, rooted in equitable partnership.

At Salford CVS, we welcome the Greater Manchester VCFSE Accord's commitments to fairer funding and shared power. Ambitions around Live Well in Greater Manchester should mean that going forward we have a shared commitment from our public sector partners to ensure an ecosystem in which voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations can thrive, connect and lead in Salford. That means trusted community spaces in every neighbourhood that people can easily use; a network of organisations sharing, learning, collaborating on funding and acting collectively on tackling poverty and inequality; and investment in the next generation of VCSE leaders. It requires a shift in how public services work with the sector, so real collaboration becomes the standard way of working. If it develops as it should, the sector will emerge better resourced, better connected and more impactful.

Voluntary organisations, community groups, charities, the community work of faith organisations and social enterprises are part of the city's social infrastructure — often the first port of call for people facing hardship, the connective tissue holding communities together. What Live Well can do is make that role visible, valued and properly invested in. That will take sustained commitment from public sector partners, real sharing of power and resource, and a VCSE sector willing to hold the system to account, not just work within it.

This report demonstrates the scale, spread, diversity and reach of our sector. It is a testament to the effort of thousands of local people to improve the quality of life in Salford. It is also a challenge: to safeguard that effort and invest in it for our city's future.

In an operating environment where ‘place’ and ‘prevention’ are at the heart of public sector colleagues’ agendas, and in a city that prides itself on a culture of positive relationships between partners, the need for the VCSE sector has never been greater, and the opportunities to collaborate have never been stronger. Let’s work together to ensure a brighter future for all of the people and communities of Salford.

Once again, our thanks go to every VCSE group and organisation that gave us their time and honesty in responding to this survey. We hope this report does your contributions justice and helps secure a vibrant, effective and impactful VCSE sector in our city, supported by us at Salford CVS, and helps ensure that, going forward, the Spirit of Salford continues to shine brightly.



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Making a difference in Salford

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Salford State of the VCSE Sector 2026 dashboard:
https://salford-cvs.gmstateofthesector.org/

The report can be found at:
www.salfordcvs.co.uk/salford-state-vcse-sector

The Greater Manchester report and all ten locality reports can be found at:
https://10gm.org.uk/10gms-work/stateofthesector/

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