Sector3

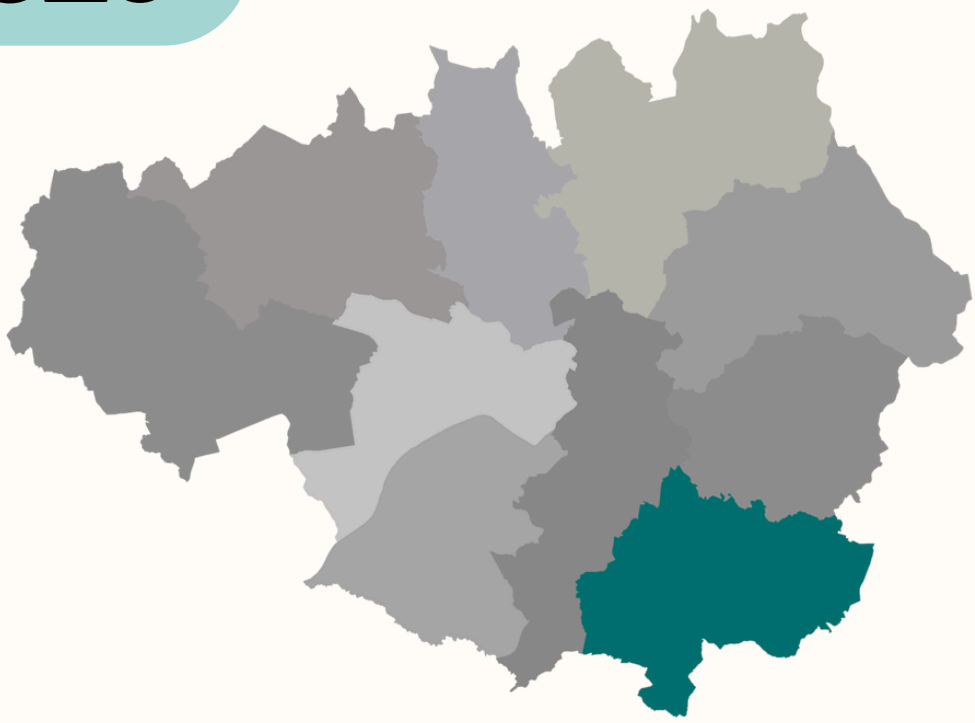
10GM

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

Stockport

State of the VCFSE Sector

2026



Acknowledgements

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We thank the organisations and groups that completed the survey and everyone who participated in the focus groups. 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 Sector 3 Stockport. The executive summary is co-authored by Nottingham Trent University (NTU) and Sector 3 Stockport. All other sections are authored by NTU. Sector 3 Stockport 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

This report offers a timely and detailed picture of Stockport's Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) sector: the contribution it makes to residents and communities, the pressures it is absorbing, and the support it needs to remain sustainable. Drawing on conversations with organisations working across the borough, it shows a sector that is increasingly acting as essential local infrastructure: connecting people, preventing crisis and responding to changing local needs. The evidence demonstrates considerable resilience, but it also highlights growing pressure on organisations, workforces and resources that must be addressed if the sector is to continue delivering its social value.

Community organisations are becoming essential local infrastructure

A consistent message from the Stockport focus groups is that community organisations are trusted neighbourhood assets, not simply providers of individual services. They create safe spaces, build relationships and help people feel able to ask for support before problems escalate.

Participants spoke about the importance of strengthening community connections rather than simply delivering projects.

As one Stockport participant explained:

> "We can't fix the world, but we can fix our part of the world."

Another described community engagement as creating opportunities for local people to enjoy parks, meet neighbours and build relationships rather than simply delivering activities.

This reflects a growing recognition that much of the sector's impact comes through prevention, early intervention and trusted relationships; outcomes that are vital to local wellbeing but often difficult to capture through traditional funding measures.

Demand is increasing in both volume and complexity

Organisations described supporting people facing multiple, interconnected challenges including poor mental health, loneliness, financial hardship, housing insecurity, caring responsibilities and social isolation.

Rather than simply signposting individuals elsewhere, many organisations now provide intensive support: helping people navigate complex systems while offering emotional support, advocacy and practical guidance.

The focus groups suggest that community organisations are increasingly the first point of contact when statutory services are difficult to access, with residents often approaching trusted local organisations before public services.

This represents a significant shift in the sector's role. Community organisations are filling gaps within local systems while operating with comparatively limited resources.

Funding continues to constrain organisational resilience

Funding remains one of the most significant challenges facing organisations in Stockport. Participants described funding processes that are often disproportionate for smaller organisations, requiring significant administrative effort for relatively modest grants. One organisation reflected that the amount of work required to secure small grants often outweighed the value received.

Others highlighted that funding criteria can force organisations to reshape their work to fit funder priorities rather than responding directly to community need. Organisations also reported difficulties accessing funding where governance arrangements or organisational structures did not meet traditional eligibility requirements, despite delivering valuable community activity.

For many organisations, the greatest challenge is not simply securing activity funding but covering the real costs of delivery, including premises, staffing, volunteer management and organisational infrastructure.

Workforce sustainability is becoming a critical issue

Workforce sustainability is now one of the greatest risks to the sector's long-term resilience. Organisations described staff and leaders carrying increasing emotional and practical demands, often working well beyond contracted hours to sustain services. One Stockport participant summed this up candidly:

> "I'm basically doing everything… I'm starting to burn out a little bit."

Others spoke about the risks associated with organisations becoming dependent upon a single individual, creating significant succession challenges if that person steps away.

Alongside paid workforce pressures, organisations continue to rely heavily on volunteers. While volunteering remains one of the sector's greatest strengths, participants were clear that volunteers cannot replace paid staff. Volunteer coordination requires investment in recruitment, safeguarding, training, supervision and ongoing support. Organisations also noted changing volunteering patterns, with more people seeking flexible, shorter-term opportunities and fewer long-term volunteers than in previous years.

These findings mirror the wider survey evidence, which highlights increasing recruitment challenges and growing concern around volunteer retention.

Community assets remain fundamental

Many organisations highlighted the importance of community buildings, parks and shared spaces as the foundations upon which community activity takes place. For Stockport, green spaces were recognised not simply as environmental assets but as places that improve wellbeing, reduce isolation and strengthen neighbourhood connections. However, maintaining these spaces places additional financial and operational pressures on organisations, particularly where maintenance responsibilities are transferred without sufficient long-term investment.

Taken together, these findings show a sector that is increasingly central to local communities. Organisations provide far more than services alone: they create trusted spaces, build social connection, support wellbeing and respond to complex needs that often sit beyond the reach of traditional service models. Yet this expanding role is being delivered against a backdrop of rising demand, workforce pressure and ongoing funding uncertainty.

The evidence highlights both the strengths and vulnerabilities of the sector. As demand grows, Stockport needs investment that recognises the full value of community-based support, including the relationships, local knowledge and preventative work that underpin positive outcomes for residents. By responding to these challenges, partners across Stockport can help ensure the VCFSE sector remains sustainable, resilient and able to continue making a meaningful difference across the borough.

Jo McGrath,
Chief Executive, Sector 3 Stockport



Executive summary

Across the UK, voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) 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.

Stockport sits within this wider context as a borough that has become relatively less deprived over time, but that is also home to both the most and least deprived areas in Greater Manchester, just three miles apart. Poverty, poorer health and financial disadvantage are more concentrated in some places, while needs linked to ageing, disability, caring responsibilities and isolation are also present in communities that appear less deprived overall. This means that the sector must respond both to inequalities between neighbourhoods and to needs that cut across place, age, identity and circumstance.

This report provides an up-to-date picture of Stockport's VCFSE sector in 2026, considering where and how organisations and groups work, the communities they support, their contribution to Stockport, and the pressures affecting their ability to continue delivering. It draws on 81 usable survey responses, focus groups, wider local and national evidence, and informed estimates of the sector's overall scale.

An estimated 1,819 VCFSE organisations and groups exist in Stockport, driven by a diverse collective workforce of around 48,000 staff, volunteers and trustees, and generating approximately £180 million in annual income. The findings from this report show a sector that is an important part of Stockport's social infrastructure, making a significant contribution to health, wellbeing, and community inclusion across the borough. It connects residents to support, strengthens communities, helps prevent crisis and complements statutory services, often while working behind the scenes and with limited resources.

Behind these figures is a sector under increasing strain. Organisations are responding to more complex needs, insecure funding and growing pressure on the staff and volunteers who sustain community activity. They are also frequently the point of contact to which other VCFSE and public sector organisations signpost or refer people. While this reflects confidence in the sector and recognition of what Stockport's organisations offer their communities, it also means that more of the pressure experienced across wider services is reaching community organisations. That pressure is not consistently matched by adequate resources. Many describe funding that does not cover the full cost of delivery, provide longer-term security or increase when costs rise.

Organisations therefore bear the shortfall, whether financially through cross-subsidy or through staff and volunteers contributing more hours and taking on more responsibility. The human cost can be more pronounced in smaller organisations, where individuals wear multiple hats and absorb the strain to keep support available. This commitment is one of the sector's greatest strengths, but it cannot substitute for adequate capacity and sustainable investment.

Stockport's VCFSE sector is doing more because communities need more, but its ability to sustain that role will require continued investment in and fair funding for both infrastructure support and the wider VCFSE sector, alongside partnerships in which community organisations have a meaningful role in shaping decisions, so that Stockport's VCFSE sector can continue to support communities, reduce inequalities and help the borough thrive.



Glossary

This table provides a glossary of terms, abbreviations, and acronyms used in the Stockport 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 VCFSE 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.

1. Methodology

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

Survey

The survey ran from January to April 2026 and received 81 responses from VCFSE organisations based in Stockport. It asked about organisations' activities, who they support, where they work, demand for services, staff and volunteers, and finances and funding. Sector 3 distributed survey links through its networks. An anonymous response option was also available. NTU prepared and analysed the data.

Focus groups

Two focus groups took place with Stockport VCFSE organisations between March and April 2026. They 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 Local Infrastructure Organisations 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 81 responses and an estimated 1,819 VCFSE organisations in Stockport, the indicative margin of error is around ±10.6 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For example, applying this margin to a finding of 60% gives a range of around 49% to 71%. 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 VCFSE organisations in Stockport. Estimated below-the-radar groups, which are not captured on formal registers, were excluded from this comparison because they could not be sampled directly. The Stockport sample was reasonably well aligned with the registered organisation profile by size. 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. Some questions allow more than one answer, so percentages can total more than 100%.

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. Findings on changes in service delivery reflect organisations' own assessments. 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). [1] 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

Stockport is estimated to have 1,819 VCFSE organisations: 707 registered organisations and 1,112 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 Stockport 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. [2] 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 Stockport 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 Stockport 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 Stockport's VCFSE sector as a whole. These are informed sector-wide totals produced using survey data and an estimate of the number and profile of VCFSE organisations in Stockport. The survey findings are extrapolated, meaning they 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 Stockport told us directly through the survey.

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

1,819 organisations

Stockport's VCFSE sector is estimated to include 707 registered organisations and 1,112 below-the-radar organisations not captured on formal registers.

£180 million annual income

Stockport's VCFSE sector generated an estimated £180 million in income during 2024/25.

Mostly micro and small

We estimate that micro organisations and groups account for around three quarters (74%) of the sector. Small organisations make up 16%, medium organisations 8%, and large, major or super-major organisations 2%.

44,300 volunteer and trustee roles

The sector's work is powered by an estimated 34,200 volunteers and 10,100 trustees or Board members.

708,700 instances of support

Stockport's VCFSE sector is estimated to provide 708,700 contacts or episodes of support to people and communities each year.

4.68 million volunteer and trustee hours

Volunteers and trustees contribute around 90,000 hours each week, equivalent to 4.68 million hours a year.

£62.95 million estimated value of volunteering

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

3,012 full-time equivalent paid staff

This represents an estimated 4,000 individual employees working in Stockport's VCFSE organisations.

£151.73 million estimated annual economic contribution from paid staff

The estimated contribution made to the economy each year by full-time equivalent paid staff working in Stockport's VCFSE sector.

2.2. What Stockport organisations told us

Eighty-one Stockport VCFSE organisations made their voices heard, sharing their experiences of working with and supporting communities across the borough.

> “We wanted to do something at the centre that was for the community… we didn't get all the funding, we got 60% of the funding, but it was enough… there was a need to bring a community together and the way that I know how to do that was to bring all ages together… I have recreated that community over and over again in every home I've lived in and every street I've lived on… everybody is equal and everybody has value simply by turning up and breathing in and out. They do not have to bring anything to the table other than themselves. And that's sort of built into everything we do, you know, from our volunteers, everybody's included, everybody has value.”

Demand is rising
Seven in ten organisations (70%) say demand for their services increased over the past year, while almost two thirds (63%) are supporting more people.

Mixed financial positions
A quarter describe their organisation as either vulnerable (14%) or struggling (11%), while one in five say their group or organisation is strong and secure (21%).

Funding not keeping pace
Of those receiving income from grants or contracts, more than four in five (81%) say none have been uplifted in the past year to cover rising costs, and more than three quarters (78%) say that less than half of their current grants and contracts provide multi-year funding.

Reserves filling gaps
Of organisations that hold reserves (65%), almost half (49%) are drawing on them to cover operating costs, plug funding gaps and meet unplanned or emergency costs. However, more than half (54%) of organisations holding reserves say they would last for more than 12 months, suggesting that many still retain some financial protection.

Funding risks
The biggest financial sustainability risks are competition for funding (56%), rising costs (52%) and reduced donations or trading income (42%).

Volunteer capacity
One in three (33%) organisations report difficulty recruiting volunteers, while almost two in five (37%) say they do not have enough volunteers to carry out work and meet objectives.

3. Stockport's VCFSE sector: what it does, where it operates, and who it supports

Sector 3 reflections

The findings show a sector adapting to changing need, but also reveal uneven patterns of activity and investment across Stockport's places and communities. Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis, organisations have placed increasing emphasis on health, wellbeing and community support.

The increase in arts, heritage and culture activity may reflect Stockport's designation as Greater Manchester Town of Culture 2023/24, which is likely to have supported additional visibility, investment and participation in this area. Findings show that investment continues to reach some of Stockport's poorest areas, though gaps in provision in increasingly deprived neighbourhoods, including Offerton and Manor, point to opportunities for more targeted activity and investment.

The growth in organisations operating at a regional level, from 3% in 2021, could indicate that some organisations are adjusting delivery models or partnerships in response to funding opportunities. This should be explored further, particularly where funding priorities may not fully align with established local need and demand.

Compared with 2021, a higher proportion of organisations now work with older adults and children and young people. This is consistent with the wider emphasis on health, wellbeing and preventative support, although further evidence would be needed to confirm the drivers of this shift.

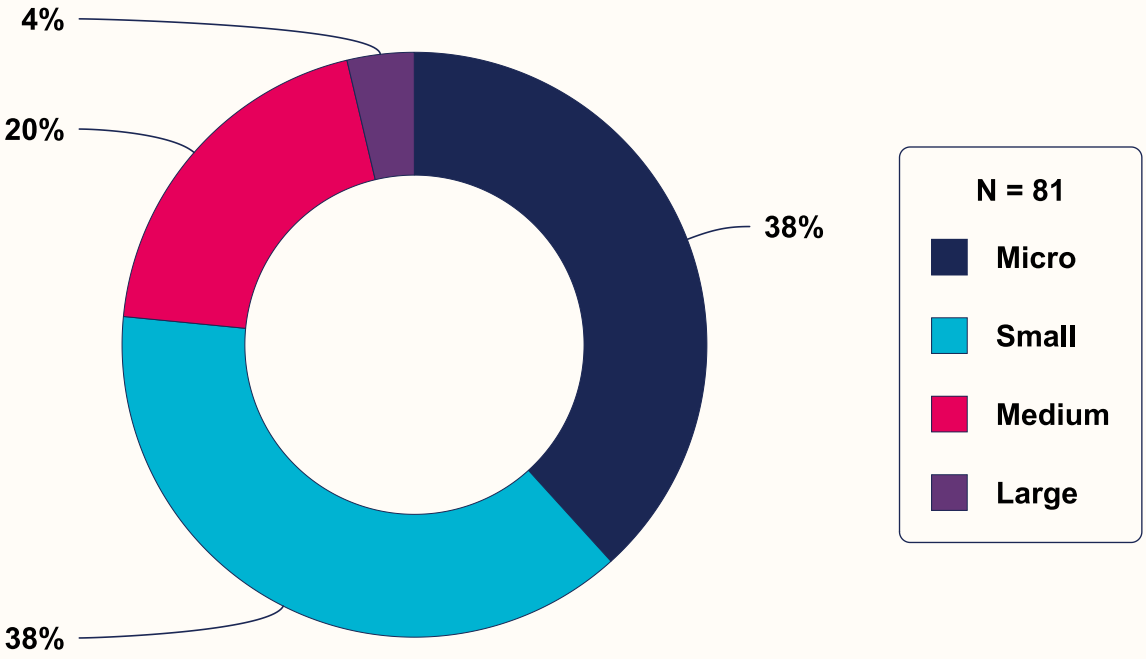
Stockport is home to both the most deprived and the least deprived small neighbourhoods (LSOAs) in Greater Manchester, just three miles apart [3]. These inequalities mean that need emerges in different ways across the borough. Around a quarter of Stockport residents are aged 60 or over [4], but these residents are much more likely to live in less deprived areas, while rates of child poverty are high in Stockport's most deprived communities [5]. The demand for support is likely to exist for both communities, but their needs are likely to differ, making place-based approaches important.

Stockport's local VCFSE sector plays a critical role here, supporting wellbeing, health and community development across communities of experience and place, and often mobilising around those most in need. Together, these organisations help people stay connected, healthy and supported, often reaching communities that other services struggle to engage, including older people, Disabled people and those experiencing financial or economic disadvantage.

3.1. Size, legal form and organisation age

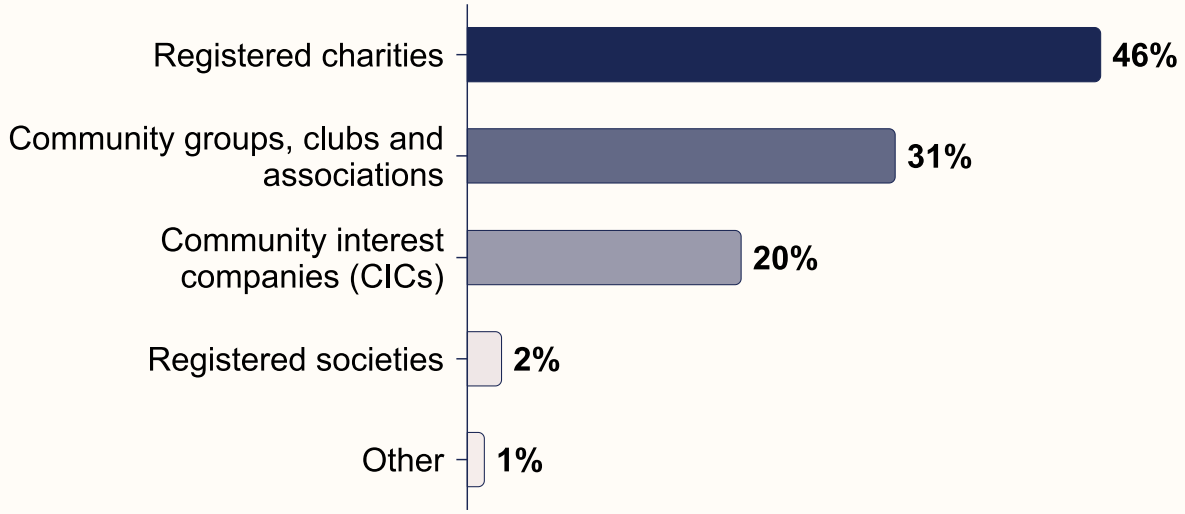
Stockport's VCFSE sector is made up predominantly of smaller organisations. More than three quarters of respondents are micro (38%) or small (38%), while one in five are medium-sized (20%). Large, major and super-major organisations account for the remaining 4%.

Figure 3.1. Proportion of responding organisations by size



Almost half of responding organisations are registered charities (46%), while community groups, clubs and associations account for almost a third (31%). Community interest companies (CICs) make up a further 20%, followed by registered societies (2%) and other legal forms (1%). Two in five respondents (41%) identify as social enterprises, showing that trading and enterprise are part of how many organisations pursue their social purpose and reflecting Stockport's role as a social enterprise hotspot. [6]

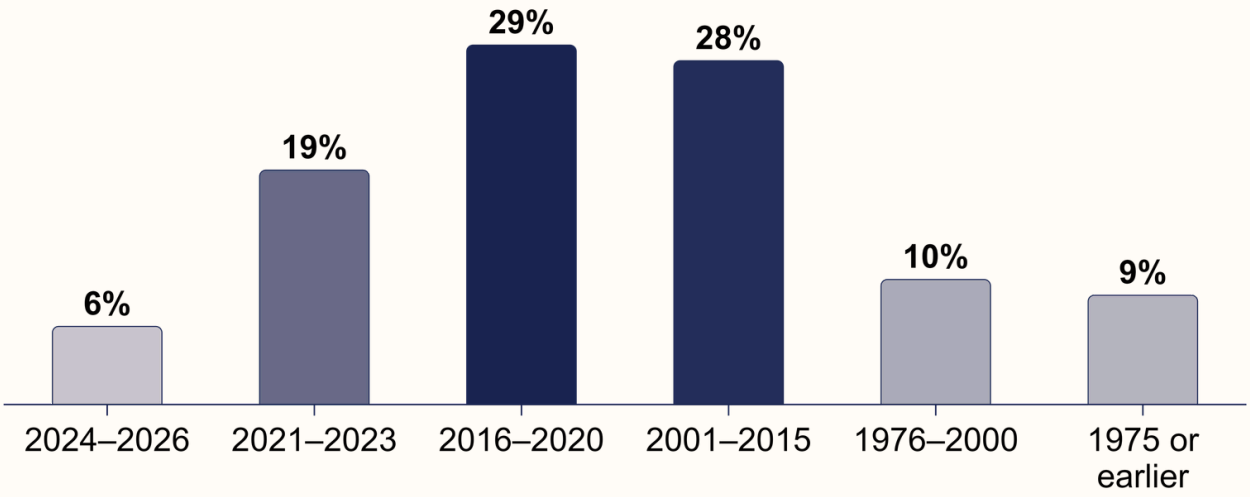
Figure 3.2. Proportion of responding organisations by legal status



Note. Base = 81.

The sector combines long-established organisations with newer groups responding to emerging needs. A quarter were established within the last five years (25%), while more than a quarter were established between 2016 and 2020 (29%). Just over a quarter were established between 2001 and 2015 (28%), and around one in five were established in 2000 or earlier (19%).

Figure 3.3. Year in which organisations were established



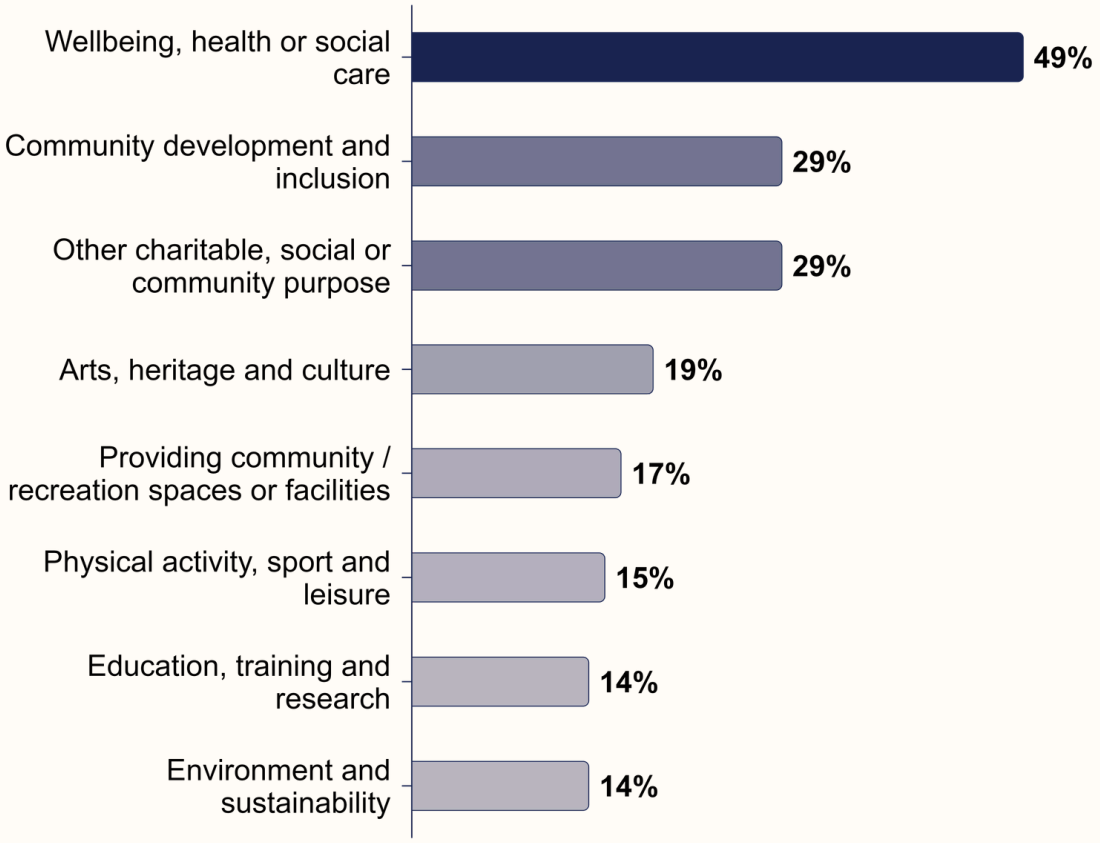
Note. Base = 80.

3.2. What they do

The breadth of need across Stockport is reflected in the range of activities provided by responding organisations. Almost half work in wellbeing, health and social care (49%), helping people remain healthy, connected and supported. Community development and inclusion is also a major area of activity (29%), alongside other charitable, social or community purposes (29%).

Others create the places and experiences through which communities come together. Around one in five provide arts, heritage and cultural activities (19%), while 17% run community or recreation spaces and facilities.

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

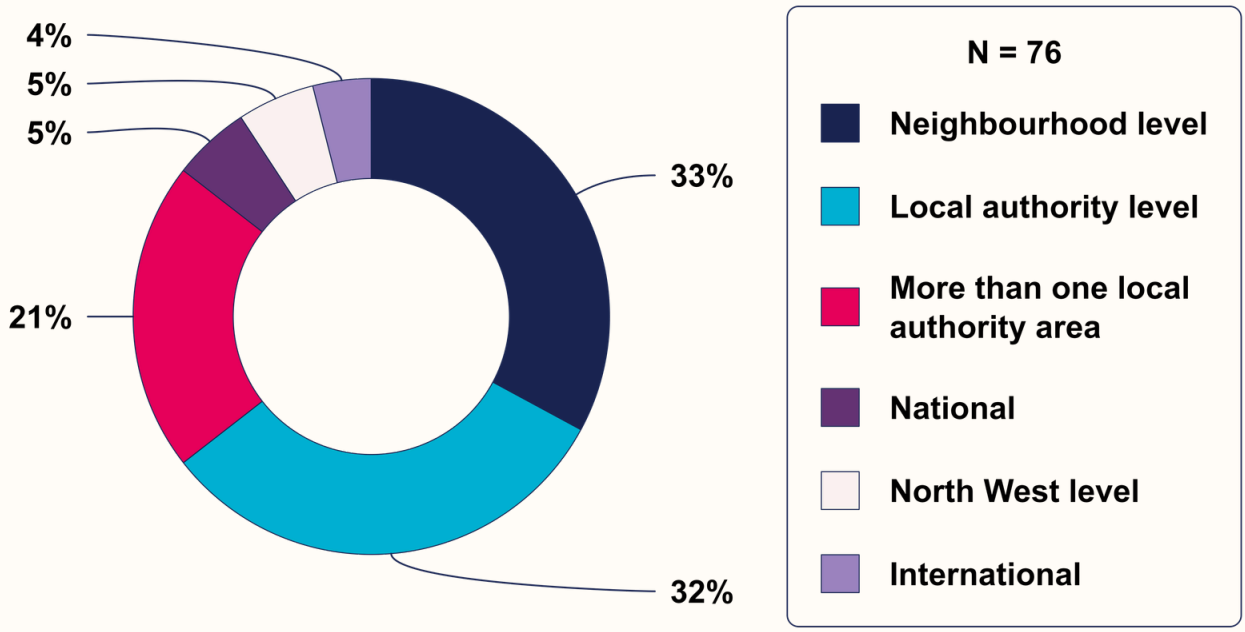


Note. Base = 78. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

3.3. Where they operate

Many responding organisations work close to the communities they support. A third operate primarily at neighbourhood level (33%), while a similar proportion work across Stockport as a whole (32%). A further one in five work across more than one local authority area (21%), showing that activity ranges from highly local provision to services with a wider geographic reach.

Figure 3.5. Geographic scope of organisation's work



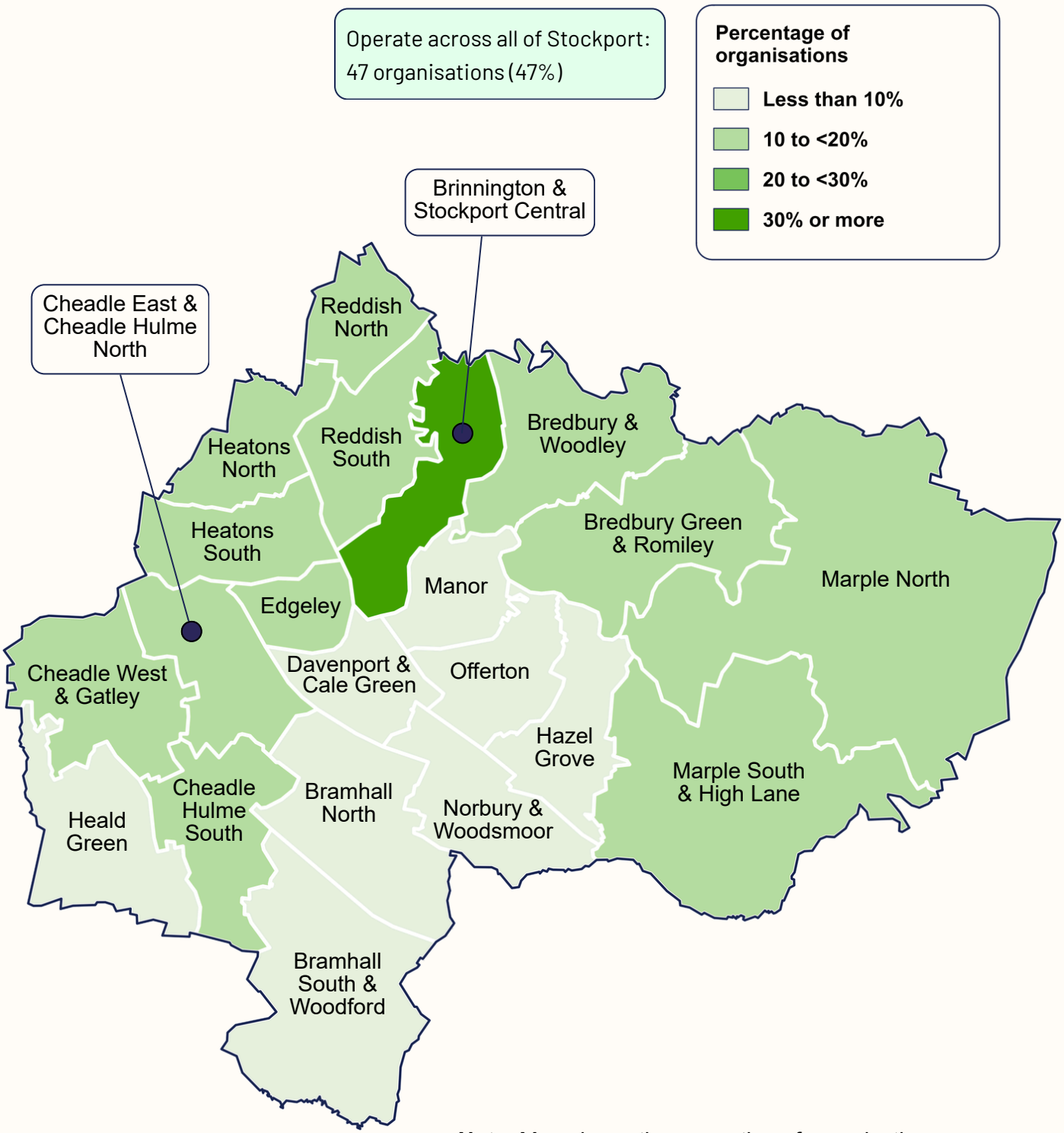
Residents of Stockport are also supported by VCFSE organisations based outside the borough. We therefore asked all organisations that selected Stockport as one of the main areas in which they carry out their activities which parts of the borough they work in. Almost half (47%) say they operate across all of Stockport.

Respondents who did not select 'All of Stockport' could identify one or more individual wards. Among this group, Brinnington and Stockport Central was the most commonly reported area of operation (34%), followed by Reddish South (19%). Manor and Norbury and Woodsmoor were reported least often, both at 2%.

This pattern suggests that responding organisations are reaching some communities experiencing particularly high levels of need, such as Brinnington. However, lower reported activity in other wards may reflect gaps in provision, differences in local demand or the organisations captured by the survey.

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

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



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

'All of Stockport' uses the full valid base (N = 100); individual ward percentages use respondents who did not select 'All of Stockport' (N = 53).

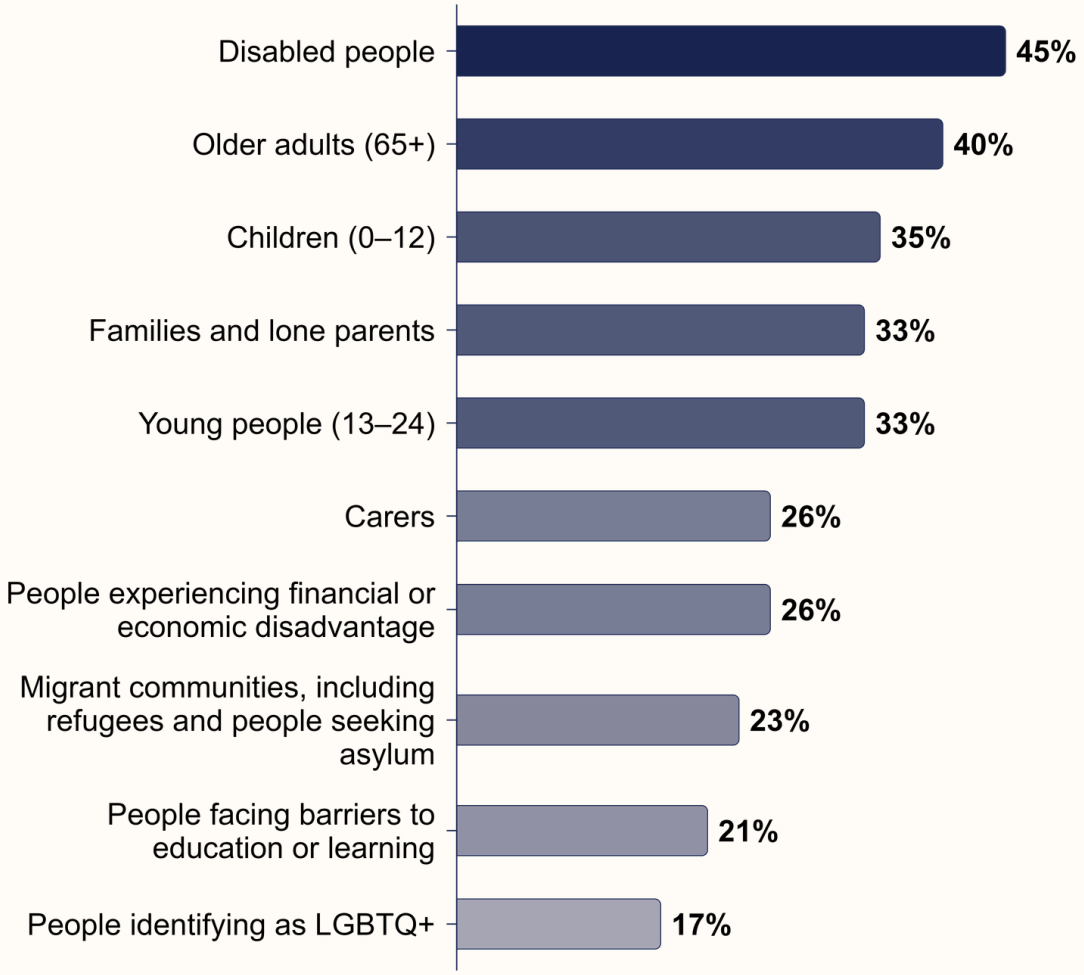
3.4. Who they support

Stockport's sharp contrasts in deprivation mean that need is not confined to particular parts of the borough. Some needs are shaped more by people's circumstances or stage of life, such as the support required by older residents who are more likely to live in less deprived areas, while others are closely linked to place and the inequalities experienced in more deprived communities. VCFSE organisations and groups therefore support people at different stages of life, as well as communities connected by identity, background, place and shared experience.

One in five Stockport residents is aged 65 or over, the highest proportion in Greater Manchester, [7] and two in five (40%) responding organisations say they support older people. Around a third work with children aged 0 to 12 (35%), young people aged 13 to 24 (33%), or families or lone parents (33%). Almost half support Disabled people and those living with long-term health conditions, including mental health conditions (45%).

The sector also works with communities that may face exclusion or additional barriers to support. Around a quarter work with carers and people experiencing financial or economic disadvantage (both 26%), while almost a quarter support migrant communities, including refugees and people seeking asylum (23%).

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



Note. Base = 78. Respondents could select multiple options so percentages do not sum to 100%.

4. Staff, volunteers and trustees

Sector 3 reflections

Findings show a mixed workforce picture: fair pay is improving, but workforce sustainability remains fragile. The substantial proportion of organisations paying the Real Living Wage demonstrates a strong local commitment to fair pay across the sector.

The 2026 estimates point to fewer volunteers and trustees in Stockport's VCFSE sector than in 2021, which may partly reflect the exceptional levels of community volunteering seen during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment remains a pressure point, with a third of organisations reporting difficulties attracting volunteers.

A particular concern is that, among organisations experiencing recruitment or retention difficulties, just over half said these pressures were contributing to staff and volunteer stress and burnout. This appears to reflect more than workforce capacity alone; it may also be linked to increasingly complex community needs, rising demand and the emotional intensity of frontline community work.

The people working in and with Stockport's VCFSE organisations are central to the sector's contribution. They include paid staff, volunteers and trustees, many of whom are motivated by purpose, lived experience, and a commitment to their communities. Their work is practical, but also relational: building trust, holding local knowledge, supporting people sensitively and sustaining relationships.

4.1. Paid staff

There are an estimated 3,012 full-time equivalent paid staff employed by Stockport's VCFSE sector, representing around 4,000 employees. This is equivalent to approximately 2.9% of the 136,000 employee jobs located in Stockport.[8] The work carried out by FTE paid staff in Stockport's VCFSE organisations is estimated to generate £151.73 million in economic value each year through the services and activities they deliver.



Stockport's VCFSE sector is estimated to employ **4,000** people

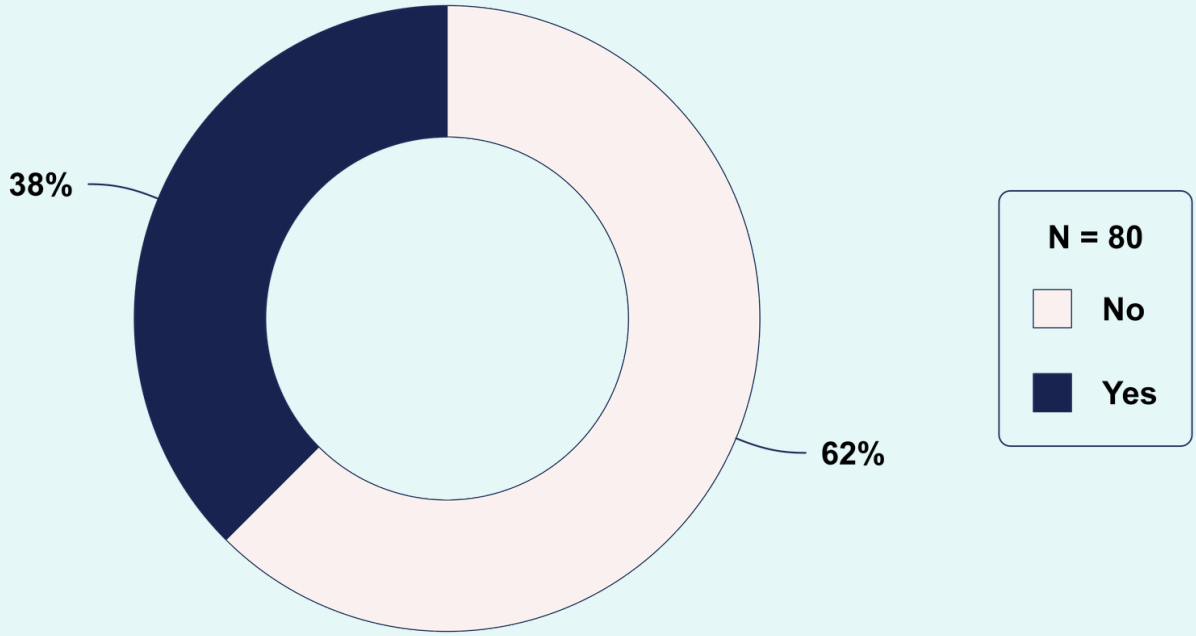
Estimated annual economic contribution from paid staff

£ 151.73 million

Almost two in five respondents (38%) have paid staff, and most of these organisations say they pay the Real Living Wage to all eligible employees (86%). Paid employment is concentrated in larger organisations: 87% of medium and all large organisations report a paid workforce, compared with 42% of small organisations and just 3% of micro organisations and groups.

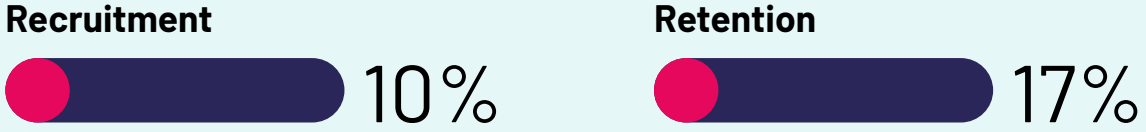
Those with paid staff typically have fewer than five FTE employees. Almost three in five have fewer than five FTE posts (59%), around a quarter have between five and 19 (24%), while 17% have 20 or more.

Figure 4.1. Organisations with a paid workforce



Overall, only a small proportion of organisations with paid staff report difficulties with recruitment (10%) and retention (17%) over the past year.

Figure 4.2. Staff recruitment and retention difficulties



Note. Question shown only to organisations with paid staff. Base: recruitment = 29; retention = 29. Shows the proportion answering 'Yes'. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

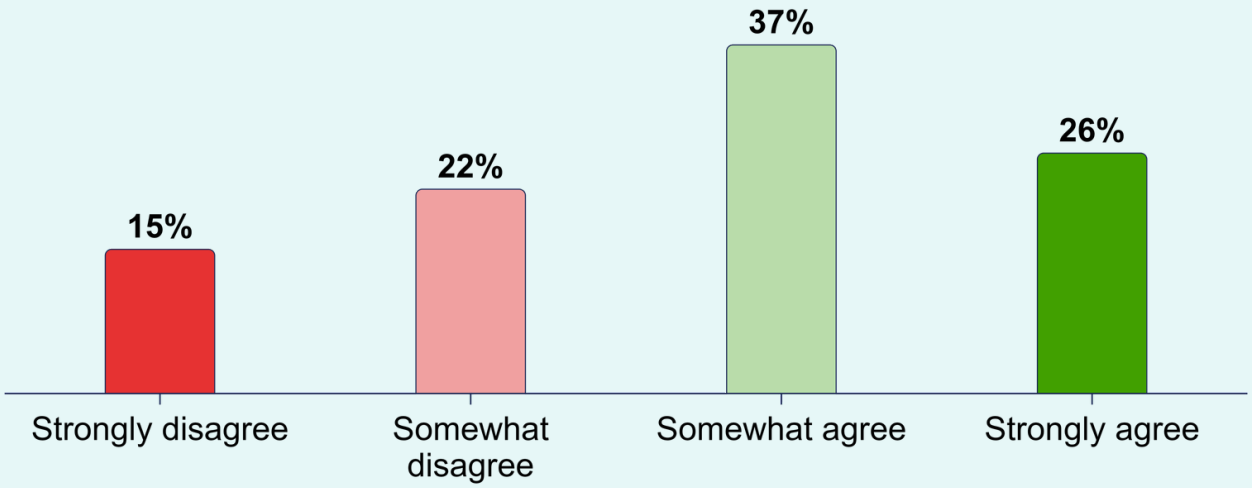
4.2. Volunteers and trustees

Across Stockport, the sector is estimated to involve 34,200 volunteers and 10,100 trustees or Board members, contributing around 90,000 hours each week. Over a year, this is equivalent to 4.68 million hours of unpaid time spent supporting local people, running activities, governing organisations, and playing a key role in their communities. Valued at the Real Living Wage, these hours have an estimated replacement cost of £62.95 million each year.

Volunteers make up a substantial part of the workforce within responding organisations. Two in five have fewer than ten volunteers (40%), while a similar proportion have 25 or more (38%). Around a quarter have between 10 and 24 volunteers (23%). Organisations support volunteers in both practical and social ways. Around three in five reimburse expenses (62%) or provide recognition and social activities (60%), while just over half offer training, development or progression opportunities (53%).

Just under two thirds of responding organisations say they have enough volunteers to carry out their work and meet their objectives (63%), leaving more than a third that do not (37%). 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. [9]

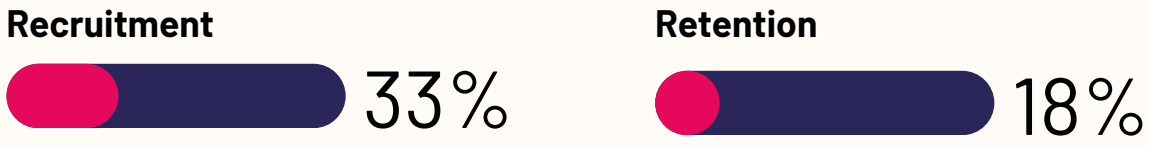
Figure 4.3. Whether organisations have enough volunteers to carry out work and meet their objectives



Note. Base = 78. ‘Don’t know’ responses excluded.

Recruitment appears to be the greater pressure. A third of organisations (33%) have found it difficult to recruit volunteers over the past year, compared to just under one in five that have found it difficult to retain volunteers (18%).

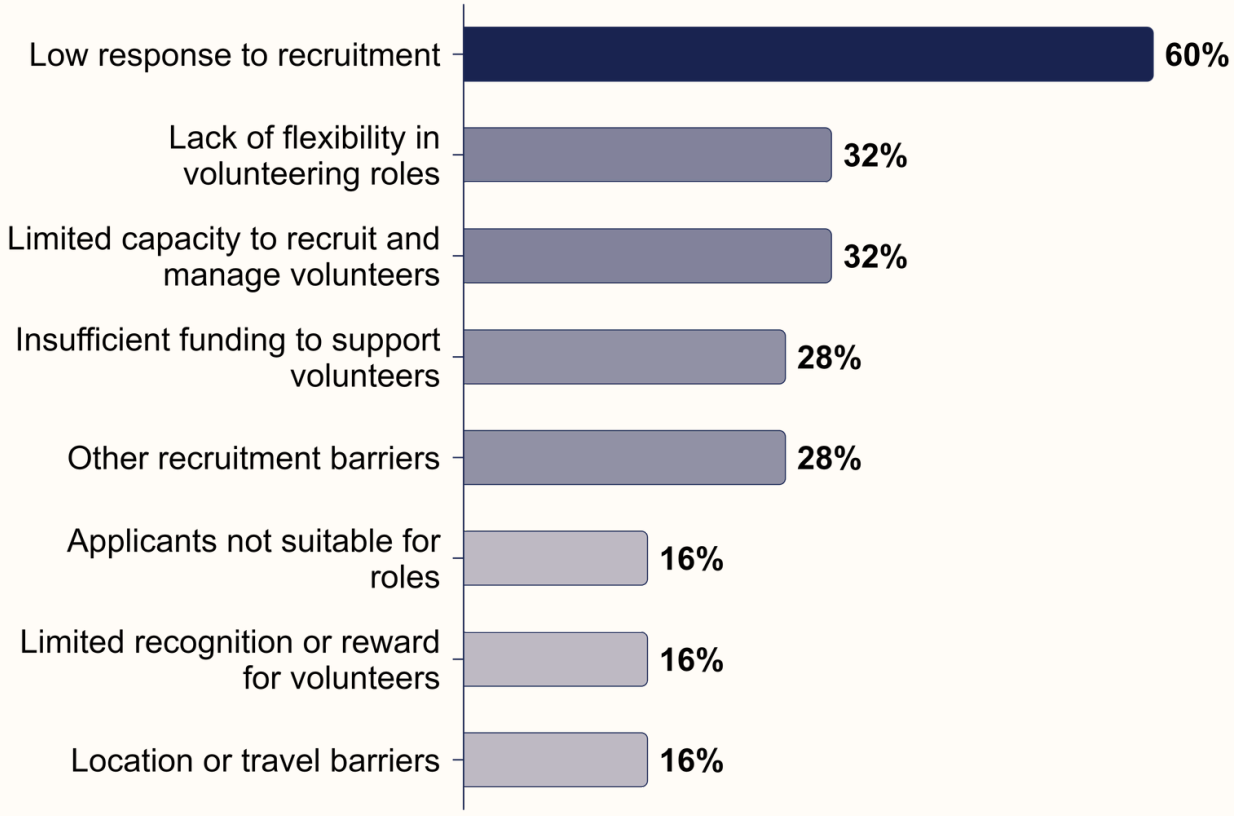
Figure 4.4. Volunteer recruitment and retention difficulties



Note. Base: recruitment = 76; retention = 76. Shows the proportion answering 'Yes'. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

Three in five of those experiencing recruitment difficulties say that a low response to recruitment activities is a barrier (60%). Almost a third point to a lack of flexibility in volunteering roles (32%) or limited capacity to recruit and manage volunteers (32%), while more than a quarter say insufficient funding to support them is a barrier.

Figure 4.5. Volunteer recruitment barriers (top 8)

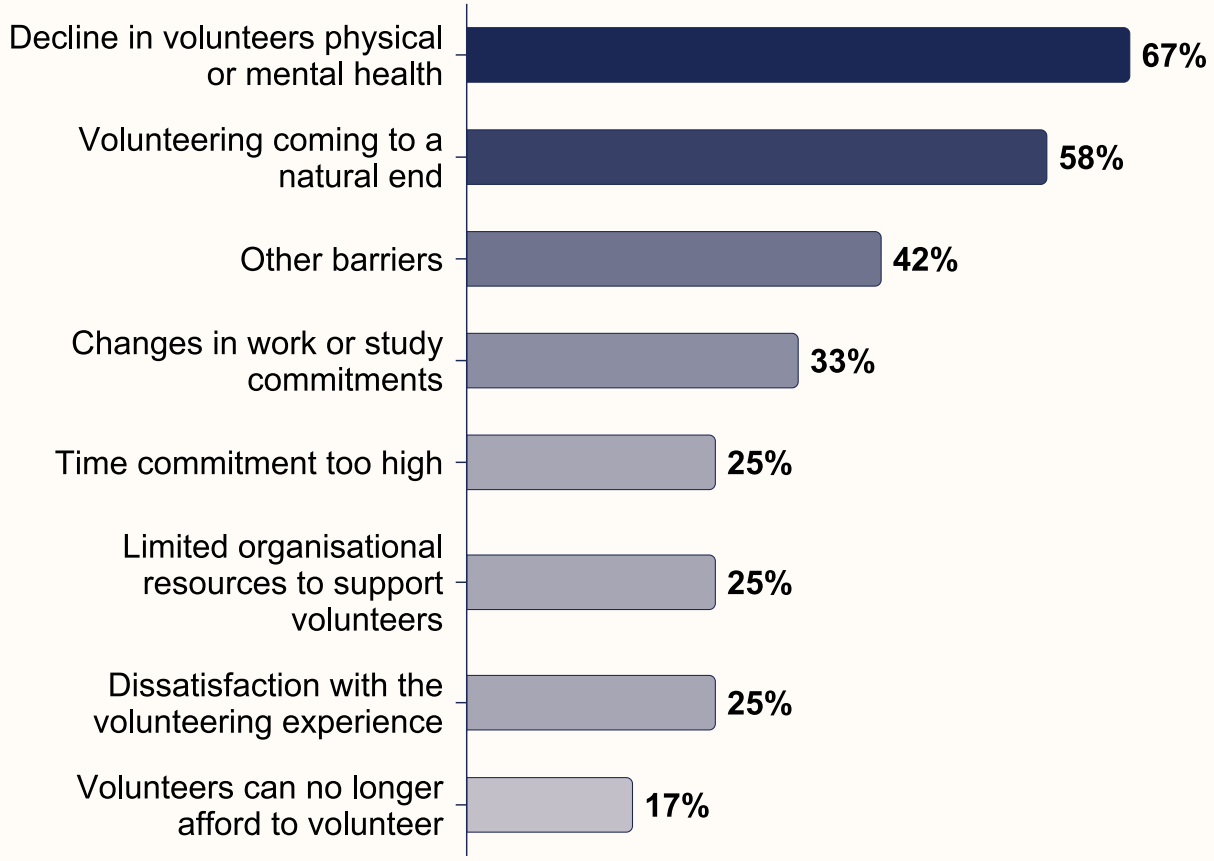


Note. Base = 25. Question shown only to organisations reporting volunteer recruitment difficulties. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Fewer organisations found it difficult to retain volunteers (18%), but those experiencing problems linked them to declining physical or mental health (67%), volunteering coming to a natural end, such as a project ending or long-standing volunteers stepping back (58%), and work or study commitments (33%).

These barriers reflect wider national evidence showing that changing health, home or work circumstances are among the leading reasons why older people stop volunteering, [10] while work commitments are cited as the most common barrier among adults who do not volunteer regularly. [9]

Figure 4.6. Volunteer retention barriers



Note. Base = 12. Percentages derived from a low base are less precise and can change substantially with small changes in responses. 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 or volunteer capacity is stretched, demand does not stop. Services may continue, but the people sustaining them often absorb the pressure through longer hours, increased responsibility and emotional strain. One focus group participant explained that the challenge was not always finding people willing to help, but finding volunteers able to provide the regularity and consistency needed to sustain day-to-day work.

> “I use the Stockport Volunteer Hub – that seems to have brought me some people that are useful. So at the moment, we seem to be pretty active and have a good follow through… [but] my problem is that as chair, I'm basically doing everything… people don't seem to want to take things on an ongoing basis. They're okay to help out, but I'm getting to the point where I'm starting to burn out a little bit and become resentful.”

We describe this as the cost of ‘doing good’ — a trade-off in which the people delivering services often absorb the strain in order to protect those services. Survey respondents described how workforce shortages were exacerbating this strain. Among those experiencing difficulties, more than half say staff and volunteers have experienced increased stress or burnout (55%), almost a third say employees are working increased hours (31%), and one in five say volunteers are contributing more of their time (21%).

National research has identified similar patterns, showing that both staff and volunteers are working or contributing more of their time, and that substantial proportions of the sector experience stress, anxiety and emotional exhaustion because of their work.[11,12,13,14]

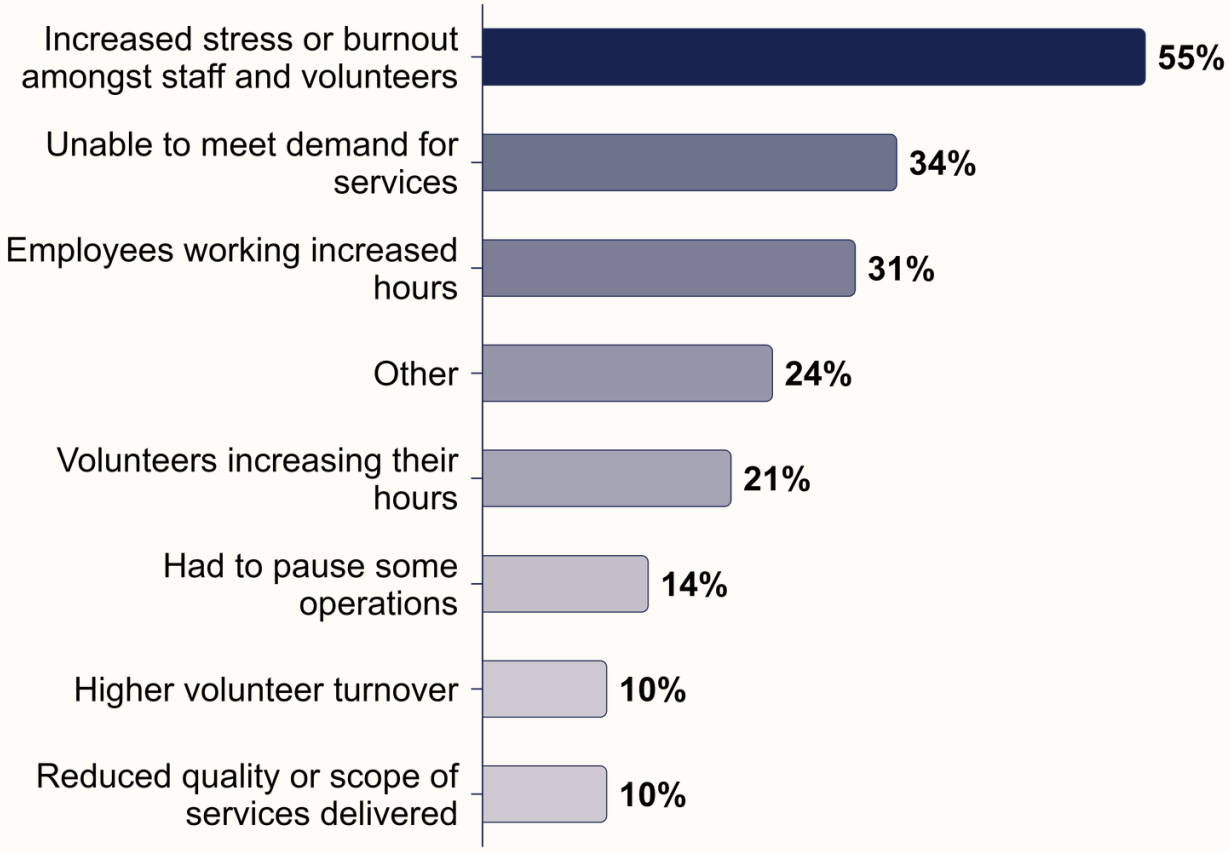
These impacts are often felt most in smaller organisations and groups, where a few people are relied on to carry out both strategic and operational work. Those in leadership roles often undertake a breadth of work across strategy and compliance to sustain provision. One focus group participant described this burden, even for an informal community group:

> “Because if we walked away and it was purely volunteers, it'd be a coffee morning at best. … Because it's not just rocking up on a Friday, we give 16 hours a week easily to this, you know, funding bids. … That's just the surface of what we do. That's the key thing. But there's so much behind it as well.”

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. [12]

Alongside these pressures on staff and volunteers, a third say workforce shortages have left them unable to meet demand (34%), and smaller proportions have paused some operations (14%) or reduced the quality or scope of delivery (10%). The immediate service may be protected for a time, but the cost is carried by organisations and the people within them.

Figure 4.7. How recruitment or retention difficulties are affecting organisations



Note. Base = 29. 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%.

5. Communities supported, demand and access

Sector 3 reflections

Lack of awareness of available services remains a significant challenge. Referrals often come through word of mouth and existing relationships across the VCFSE sector, which can limit access for residents who are not already connected to local community networks or support services. This highlights the importance of increasing borough-wide awareness of VCFSE services and improving routes into support for residents who are less visible to existing networks.

Despite rising demand and operational pressure, nearly half of organisations reported improved service quality, reflecting the resilience and adaptability of the sector. This finding should still be interpreted as self-reported perception rather than an independent measure of service quality, and read alongside evidence of pressure on capacity, costs and availability.

Evidence from both the survey and focus groups paints a picture of Stockport VCFSE organisations acting as everyday social infrastructure. They are places, people, connectors, relationships and trusted routes into support. However, rising demand for Stockport's VCFSE services needs to be matched by the resources, pathways and specialist support required to respond effectively. The high level of referrals from public sector organisations aligns with growing recognition of the sector's role in supporting residents, but it also raises an important system-level question: whether funding and capacity accompany referrals. Partners need to understand the complexity of referrals being made and whether organisations have the capacity and expertise to support people with more complex or clinical needs.

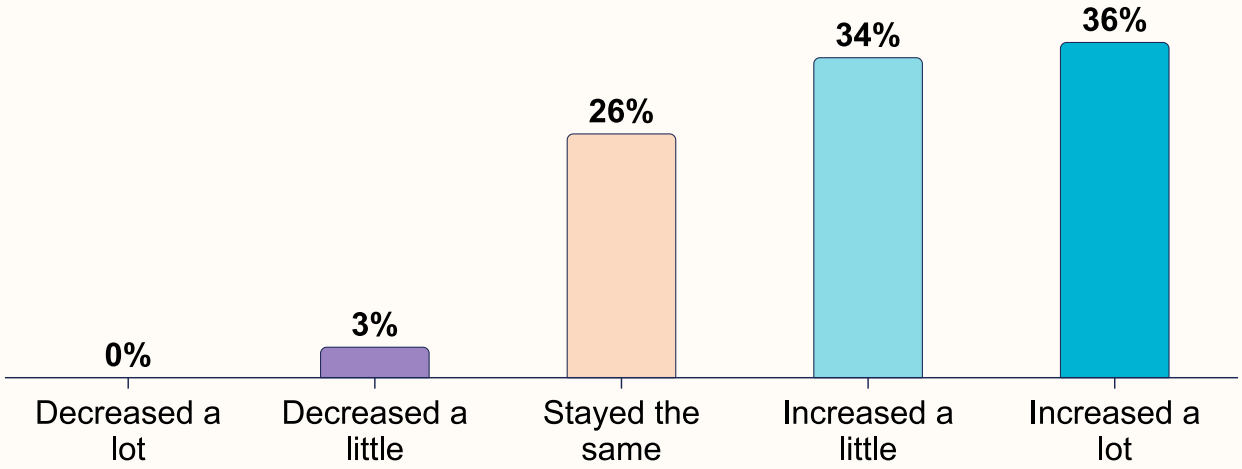
Stockport VCFSE organisations provide an estimated 708,700 instances of support each year.



5.1. Demand for services

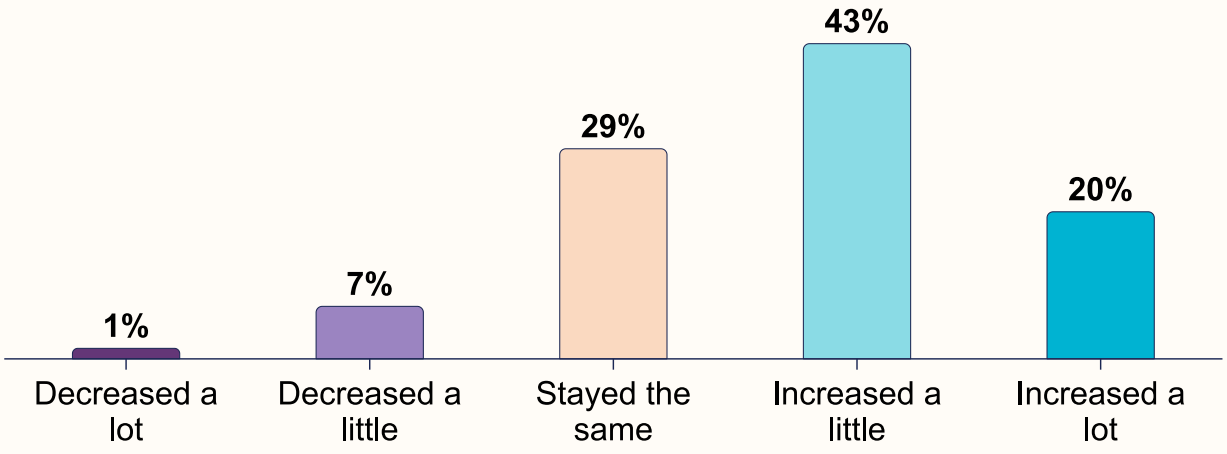
When asked how demand for services had changed over the past 12 months, seven in ten report an increase (70%), including more than a third saying it has increased a lot. Just under two thirds say the number of people they support has also increased over the past year (63%).

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



Note. Base = 61. '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 = 70. 'Don't know' responses excluded. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

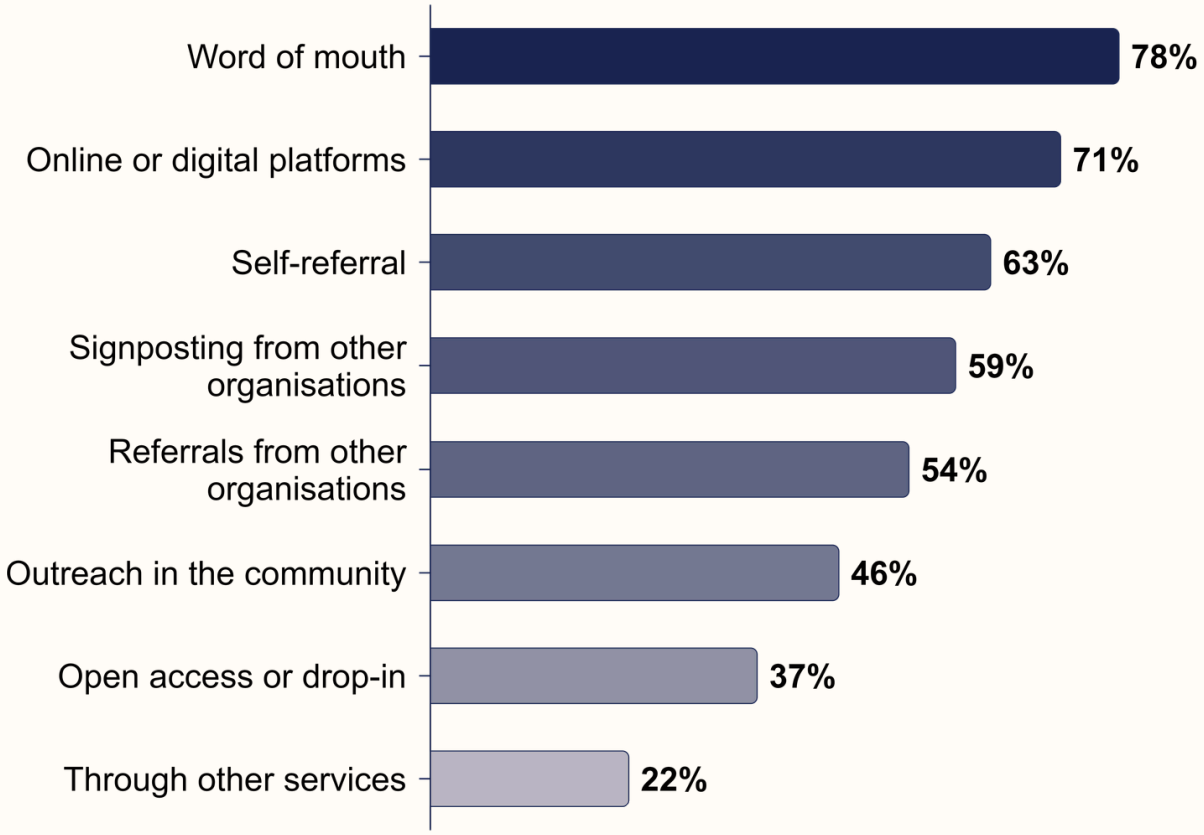
Focus group participants described widening the support they provide, often preventing problems from escalating and reducing pressure on public services, but without funding increasing alongside that role:

> “It's not just [us], there are lots of groups helping with mental health and health in general… preventing appointments with GPs… preventing people ending up in hospital… there's an awful lot that we're doing and there's no money, yet the council says, you are providing such an amazing community service and preventing all of these things, [but] then they’re walking away.”

5.2. How people access services

People reach support through a wide range of routes, many of them direct and relational. Word of mouth is the most common (78%), followed by online or digital platforms (71%) and self-referral (63%). More than half say people are signposted (59%) or referred (54%) by other organisations or services, while almost half report contact through community outreach (46%).

Figure 5.3. How people come into contact with VCSE organisations



Note. N = 76. 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, almost all receive them from other VCSE organisations and groups (95%) and almost nine in ten receive them from public sector organisations or services (88%), while a third receive referrals from the private sector (33%). Many relate to social prescribing, health, adult social care, community support, disability or long-term conditions.

Across Greater Manchester, 265 social prescribing link workers support around 50,000 people each year, connecting them with community-based help in every borough. [15] These pathways show how closely the sector sits within local support systems, and 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.

Providing accessible support that is sustainable depends on adequate resources being provided to the organisations expected to deliver that support. Yet the majority of organisations receiving referrals from public sector organisations and services say that no funding is received to accommodate them.

> “There are some community connectors who are quite well established charitable organisation... they have support workers, they bring people to [us] because they know how much it will help. They get funded to help those people get back out into the community. But basically what they do is bring the person to us and then walk away and go job done. And we don't see any of the funding.”

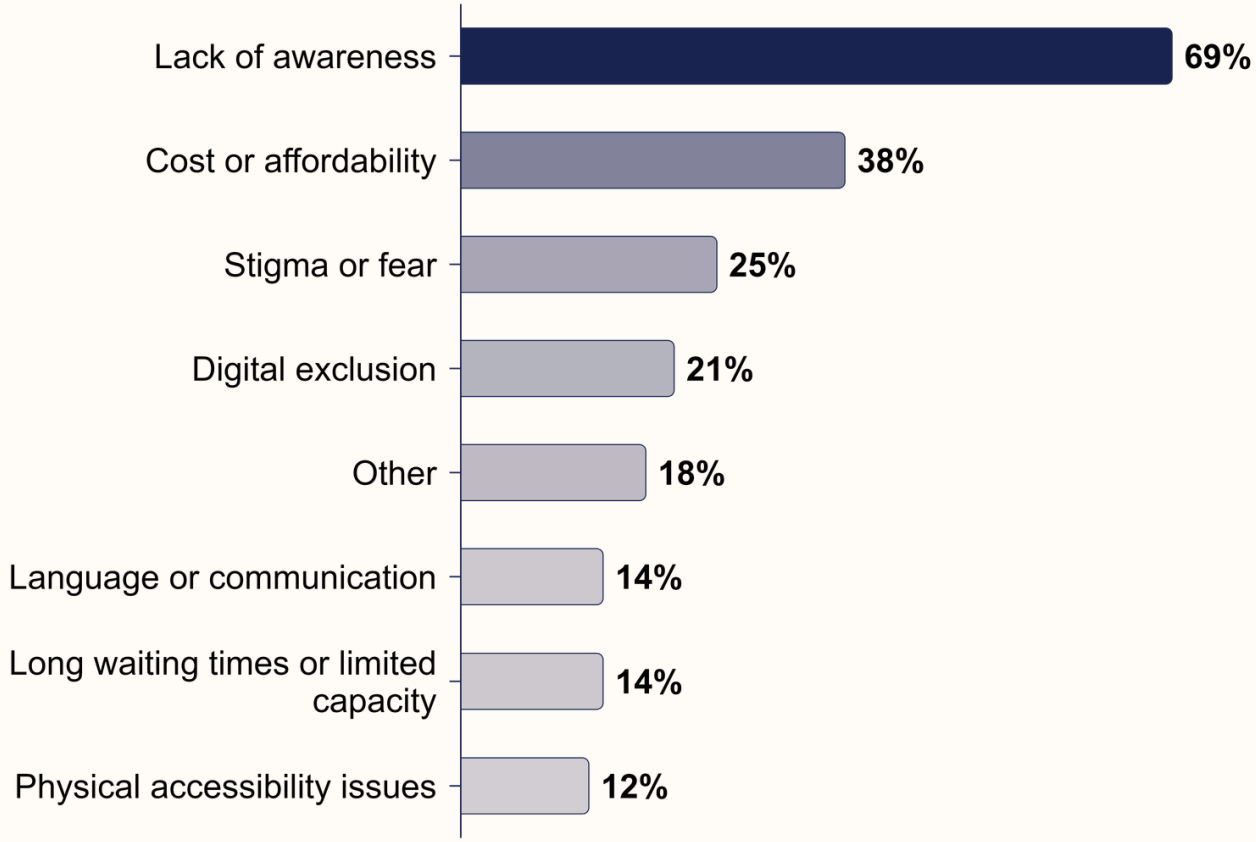


5.3. Barriers to access

Although organisations are coping with increasing demand and supporting more beneficiaries, they also pointed out the barriers to access that some individuals or communities may experience. The One Stockport Live Well directory and developing network of libraries, Family Hubs and other familiar community spaces are intended to make routes into advice and support easier to navigate. [16,17] However, almost seven in ten (69%) say people may not be aware of their services. Slightly fewer than two in five (38%) identify affordability or costs associated with taking part, a quarter (25%) point to stigma or fear, and one in five (21%) identify digital exclusion as a barrier.

While Stockport's work on health inequalities notes that some residents face cultural or language barriers and may not know how or where to find appropriate support, [18] only a small proportion of respondents (14%) identified this as a barrier to accessing their services.

Figure 5.4. Barriers to accessing services

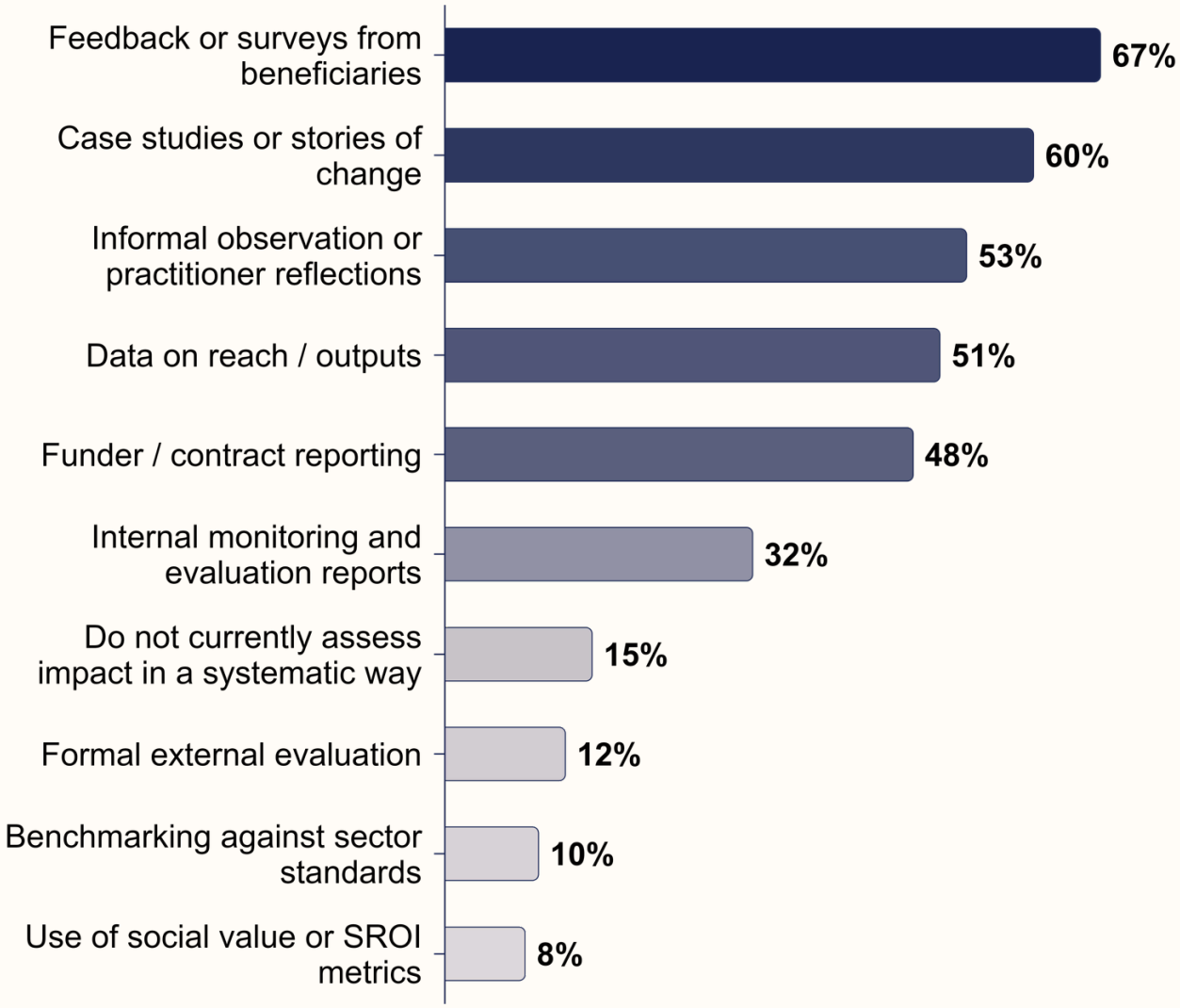


Note. Base = 72. Figure shows the eight most commonly selected responses. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

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 or surveys from beneficiaries and service users (67%), case studies or stories of change (60%), informal observation or practitioner reflection (53%), reach or output data (51%), and funder or contract reporting (48%).

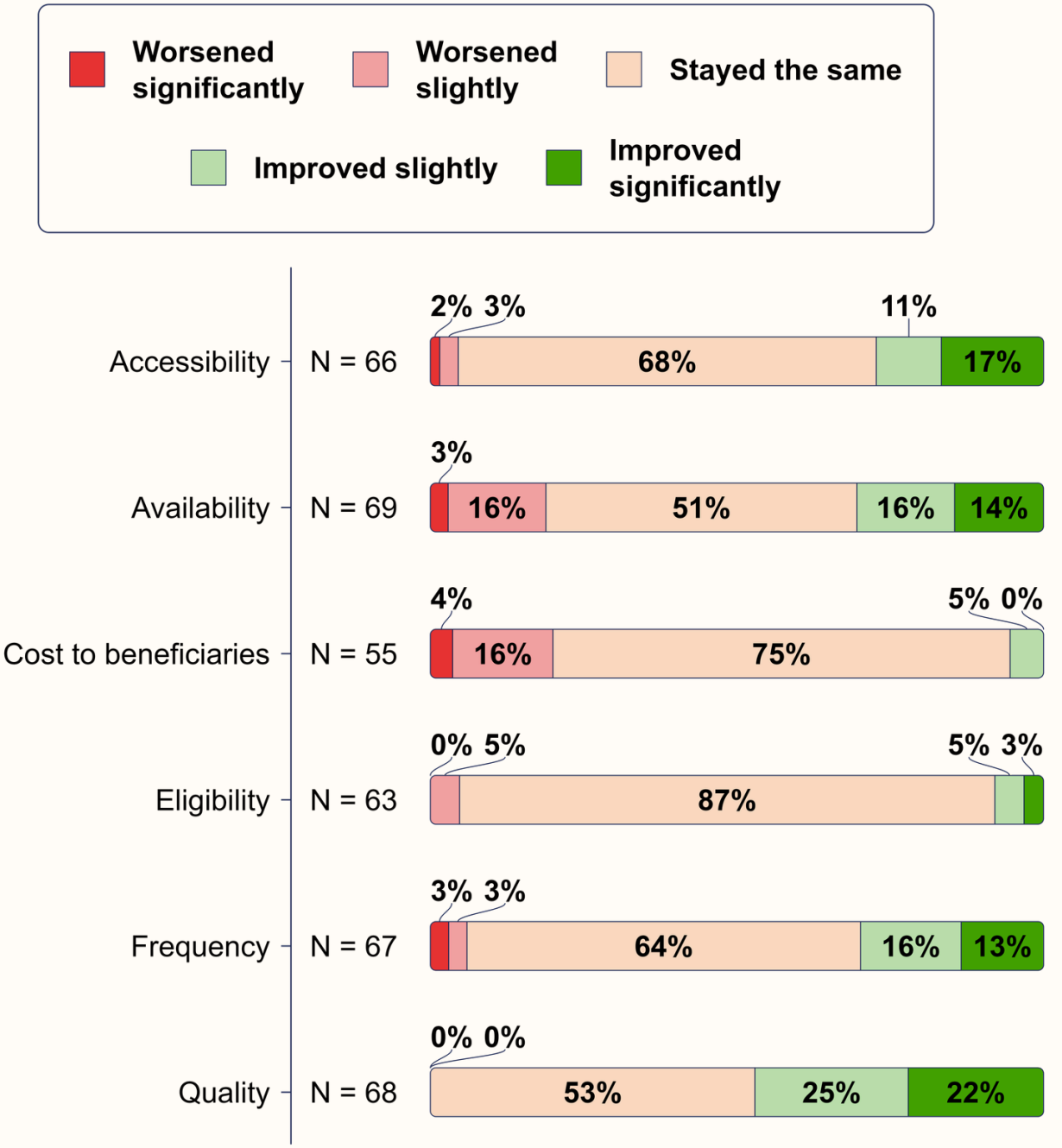
Figure 5.5. How organisations measure impact



Note. Base = 73. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

Despite higher demand, many organisations say they have maintained or improved their level of support. Almost half report improved service quality (47%), while just under a third report improvements in availability and frequency (both 30%). However, one in five say costs to beneficiaries or service users have worsened (20%), and a similar proportion say availability has deteriorated (19%). These mixed findings suggest that organisations are adapting, but not without trade-offs.

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

Sector 3 reflections

The findings in this section indicate that financial sustainability remains a key concern for many organisations. Rising costs and inflation continue to place pressure on delivery, underlining the need for funding arrangements that reflect the true cost of services, infrastructure and volunteer coordination.

It is encouraging that a third of organisations report diversifying their income streams, an approach promoted locally as part of organisational sustainability. Donations and fundraising income have increased significantly since 2021. This is particularly positive given ongoing efforts to strengthen relationships between the VCFSE and private sectors locally through initiatives such as the Proper Good Business Club.

Despite these positive developments, income diversification cannot compensate on its own for underfunded core delivery. Confidence in securing grant funding remains low across local, regional and national programmes, reflecting organisations' realistic assessment of a highly competitive funding environment and the need for more reliable routes to unrestricted income.

VCFSE organisations across the UK have been navigating an increasingly challenging financial and funding landscape in recent years. Pressure on public budgets and household finances has made it harder to secure income, while the cumulative effect of inflation since the pandemic has increased the cost of delivering services. [19,20] At the same time, the communities they support are facing greater pressures, with less money to donate or spend locally, and less time to volunteer, even as more people need support themselves. Together, these factors contribute to a growing gap between what communities need and the resources available to respond, placing increased pressure on organisations to secure additional funding and cut costs to keep support in place.



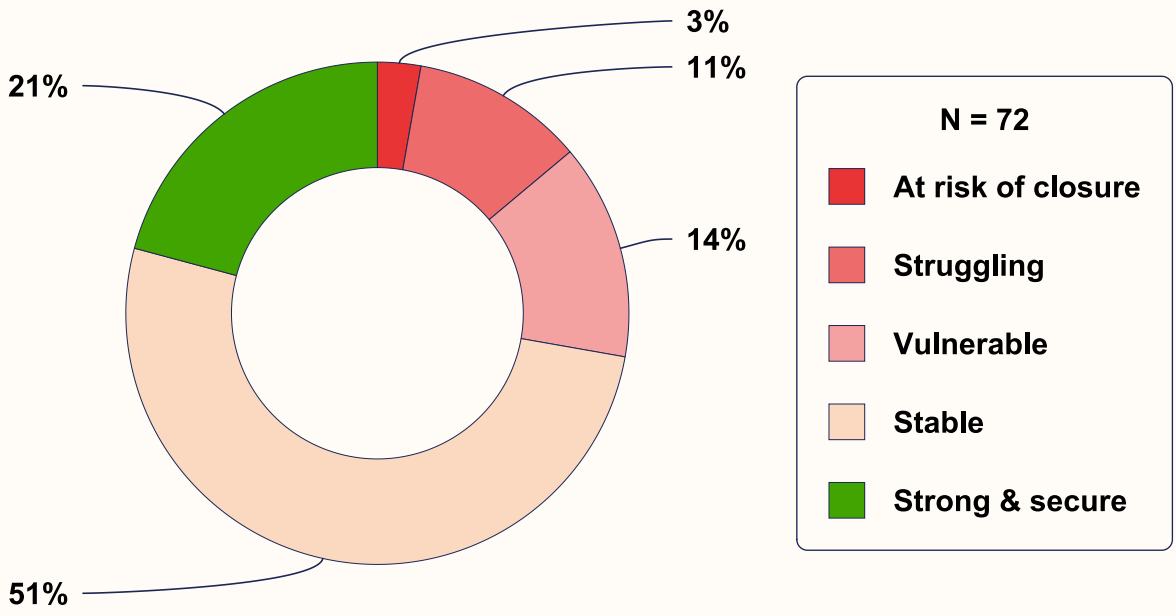
Stockport's VCFSE sector reflects many of these wider pressures. Although half of organisations describe themselves as financially stable and one in five as strong and secure, a quarter say they are vulnerable or struggling. This sits alongside grants and contracts that are often short term and do not increase as delivery costs rise, as well as an increasingly competitive funding environment. Some organisations are therefore drawing on reserves to meet day-to-day operating costs. With two in five expecting to expand their operations over the next year, more stable funding that keeps pace with rising costs would give organisations greater scope to plan ahead, invest in staff and premises, and respond to growing demand.

Stockport's VCFSE sector generated an estimated £180 million in income in 2024/25, with estimated expenditure of £176 million.

6.1. Financial position

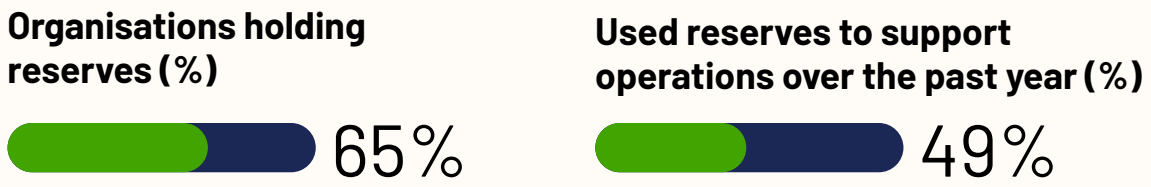
While useful in describing the size of Stockport's VCFSE sector in terms of income, these estimates do not show whether individual organisations feel financially secure. Half of respondents describe their current financial and operational state as stable but with some concerns about the future (51%). Just over one in five say they are strong and secure, well-equipped for future challenges (21%). Around one in seven (14%) say they are vulnerable and facing significant pressure, with sustainability uncertain without changes being made. One in ten say they are facing more serious struggles (11%), and 3% feel at risk of imminent closure.

Figure 6.1. Organisations' current financial and operational state



Two thirds of responding organisations hold reserves (65%), and almost half have used them to support operations over the past year (49%).

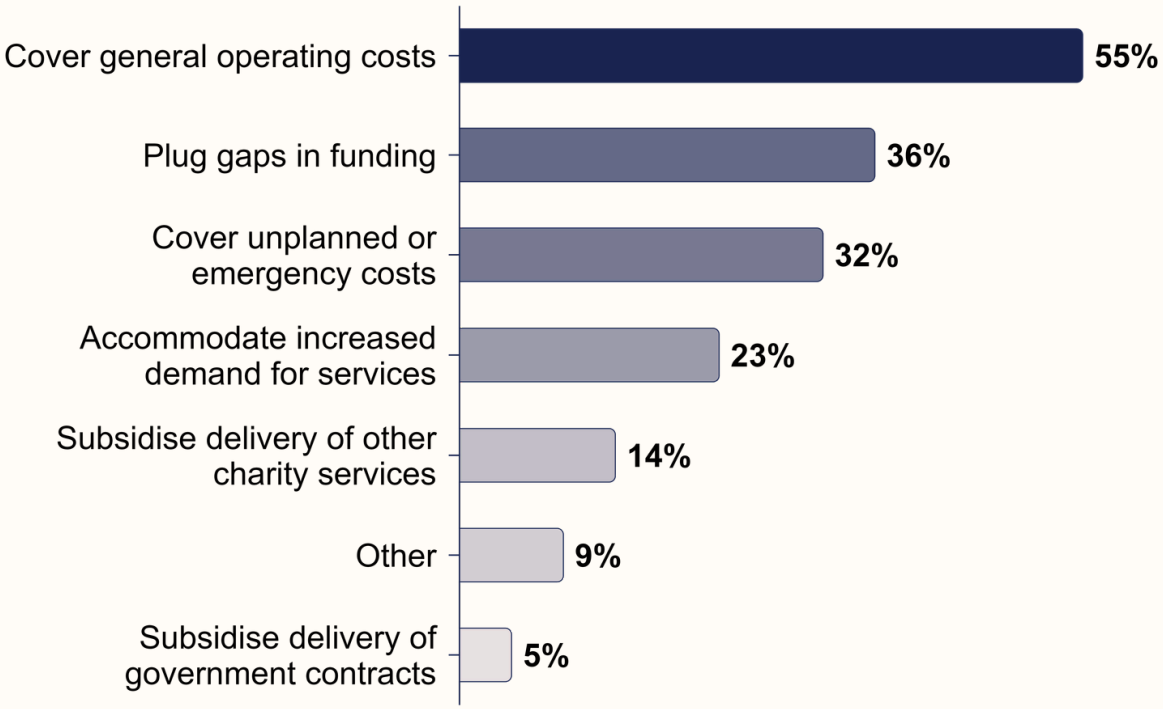
Figure 6.2. Use of financial reserves



Note. Base: holds reserves = 72; used reserves = 45. 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 around a third have used them to plug gaps in funding (36%) or to meet unplanned or emergency costs (32%).

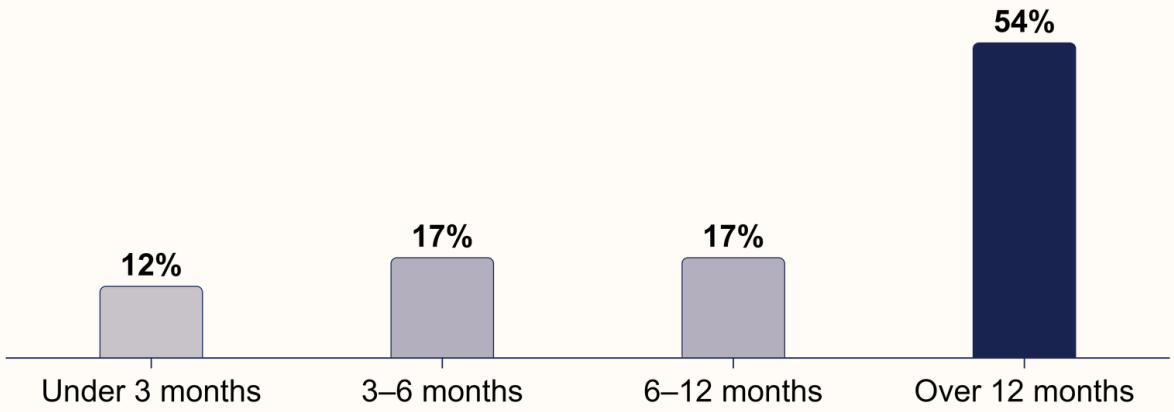
Figure 6.3. Reasons for using reserves over the past 12 months



Note. Base = 22. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

While this suggests that reserves may increasingly be used to keep core activity going, more than half of organisations holding reserves (54%) say their reserves would last for more than 12 months at normal levels of activity and expenditure. Less than one in five say they would last for 6 to 12 months (17%), the same proportion report 3 to 6 months, and 12% report less than 3 months.

Figure 6.4. Number of months reserves are expected to last



Note. Base = 41. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

6.2. Income and expenditure

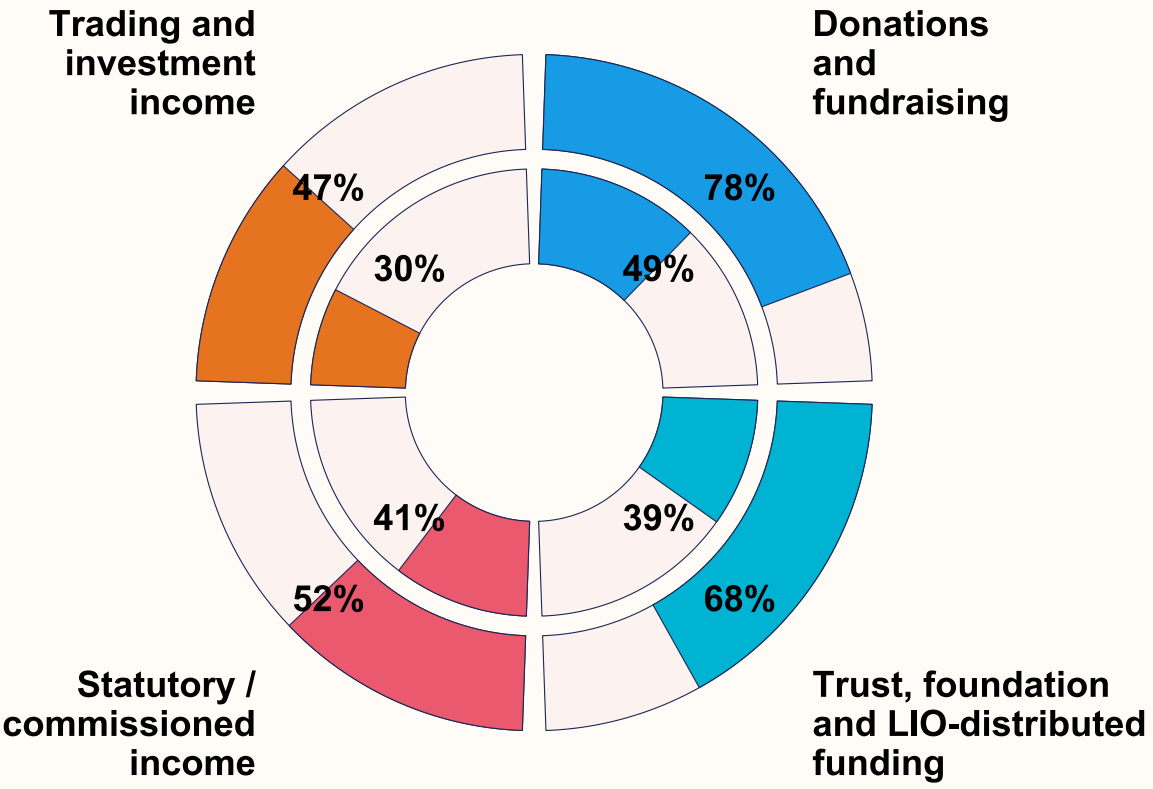
The ways in which VCFSE organisations generate income have changed in recent years. Nationally, the number of people donating has fallen by around six million over the past decade, and the total value of public donations in 2025 was 10% lower than the previous year. [21] Some organisations are looking to legacy fundraising, a source with long-term growth potential but uncertain time horizons. [22] While the number of government contracts delivered by VCFSE organisations has increased, [23] evidence shows that these often do not cover the true cost of delivering services. [24]

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 (78%), more than two thirds from trusts, foundations or Local Infrastructure Organisations (LIOs) (68%), over half from statutory funding and commissioned income (52%), and just under half generate income through trading or investments (47%).

Donations and fundraising account for the largest average share of organisations' total income (49%), followed by statutory and commissioned income (41%) and funding distributed by LIOs, trusts and foundations (39%). Trading and investment income accounts for the smallest share (30%).

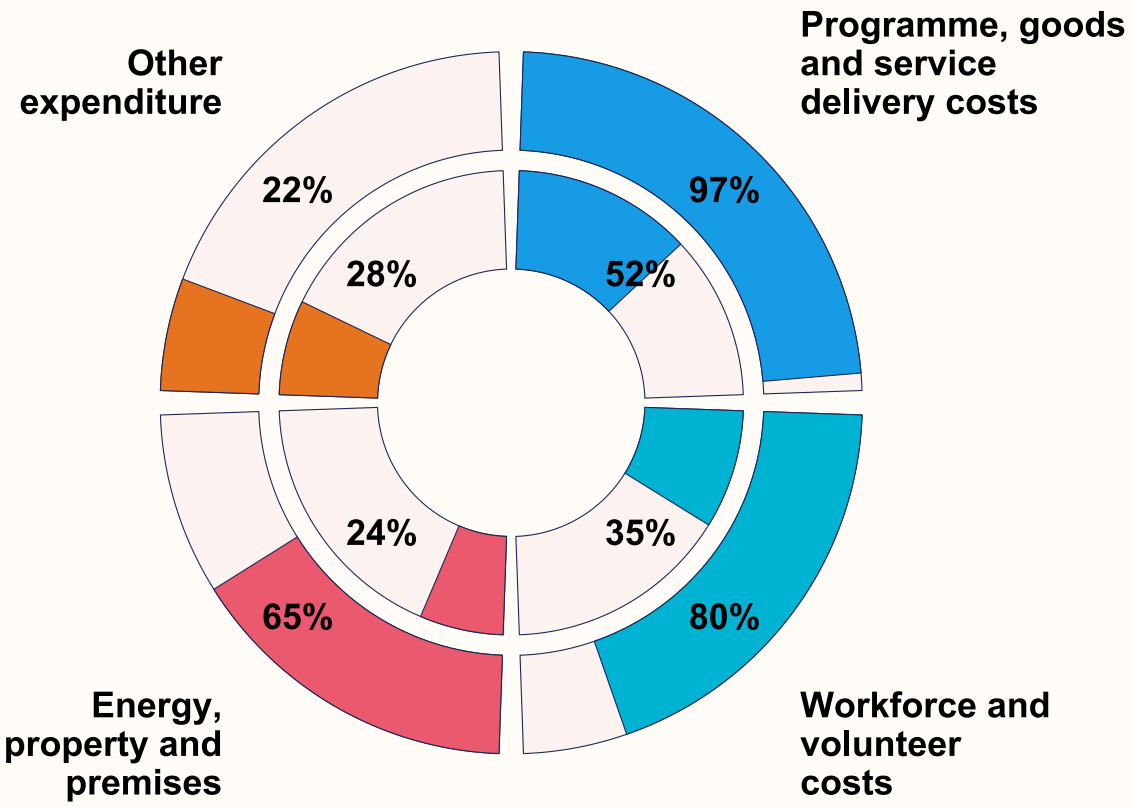
Figure 6.5. Income sources received and their average share of total income



Note. Outer ring shows the percentage receiving any income from each source (base = 60); inner ring shows the average share of total income among organisations receiving that source (base = 28–47, 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 (97%), which also account for the largest share of total expenditure (52%). Four in five report workforce and volunteer costs (80%) and two thirds report energy, property, and premises costs (65%), accounting for 35% and 24% of total expenditure respectively.

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

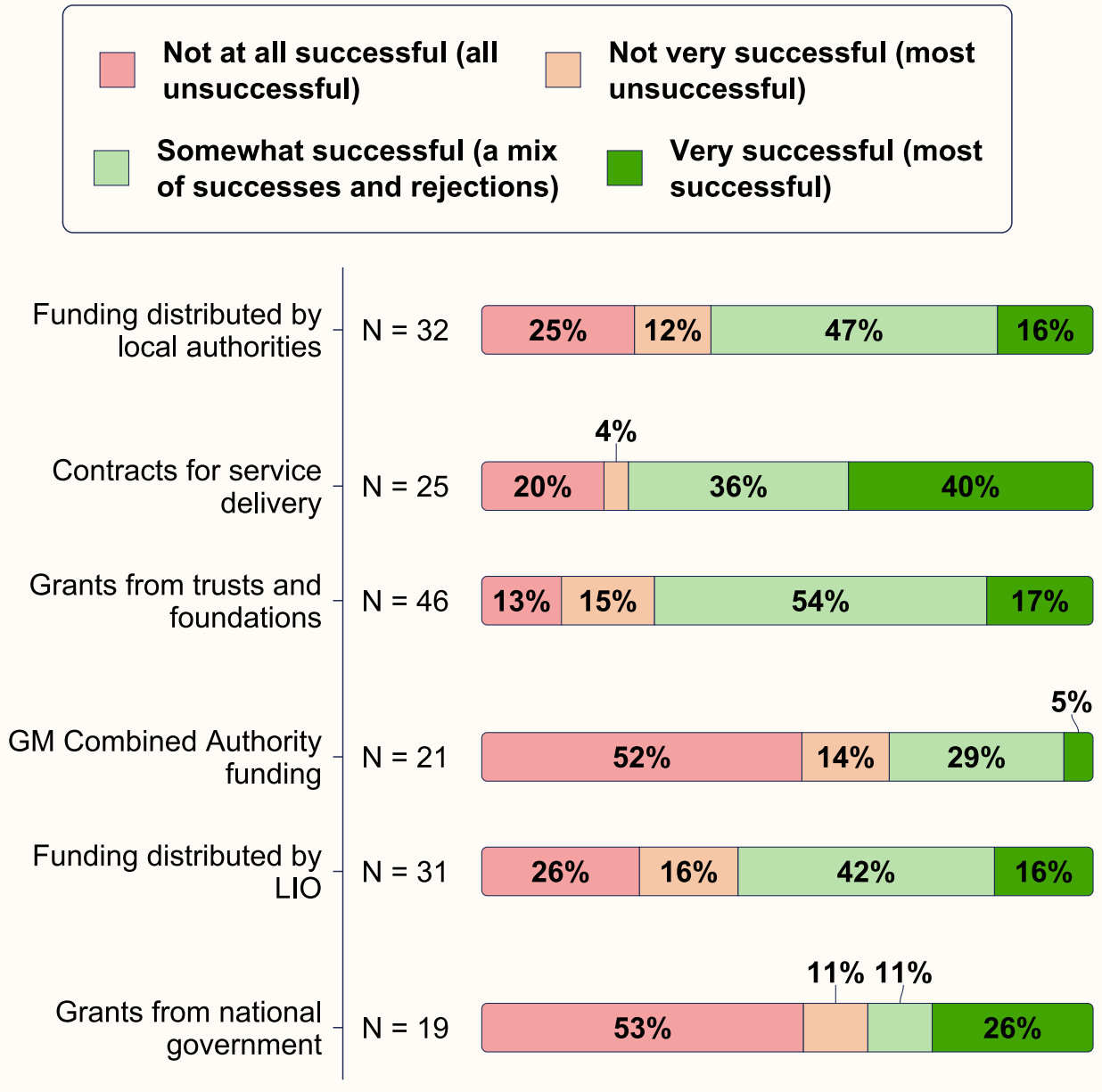


Note. Outer ring shows the percentage reporting any expenditure in each area (base = 60); inner ring shows the average share of total expenditure among organisations reporting expenditure in that area (base = 13–58, depending on area).

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 with service delivery contracts (76%), while just under three quarters reported some success with grants from trusts and foundations (72%). Around three in five also reported some success with local authority funding (63%) and funding distributed by Local Infrastructure Organisations (58%). Fewer reported success with grants from national government (37%) and GMCA funding (33%).

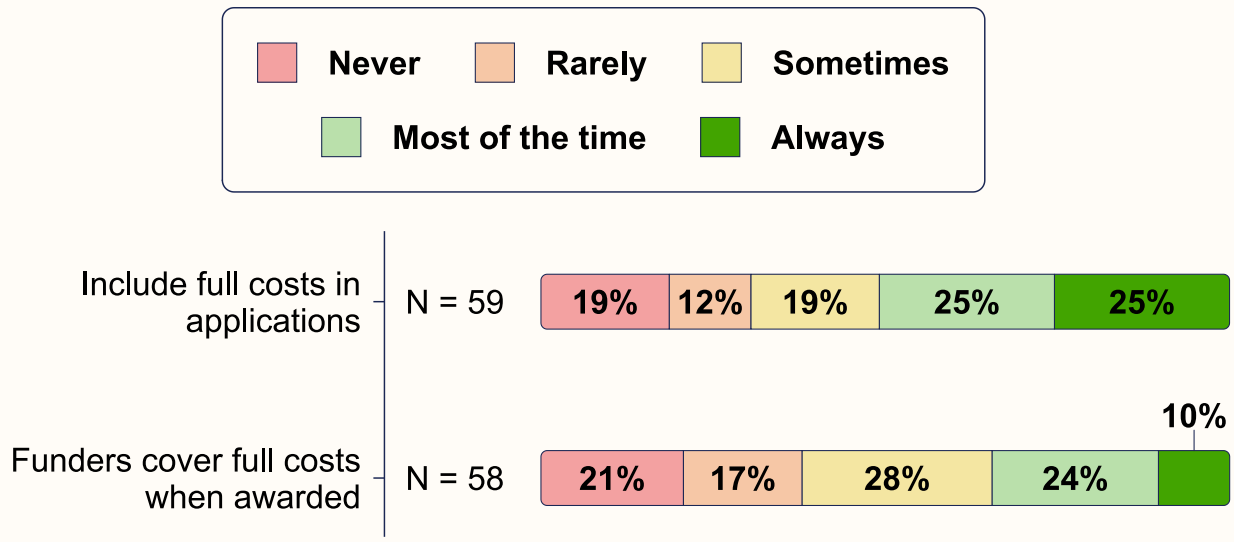
Figure 6.7. Success in funding applications over the past 12 months



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. Half of responding organisations say they always (25%) or mostly (25%) include full costs in funding applications, but around a third say funders always (10%) or mostly (24%) 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 rely on unpaid work to ensure support is delivered. [20,24]

Figure 6.8. Full cost recovery

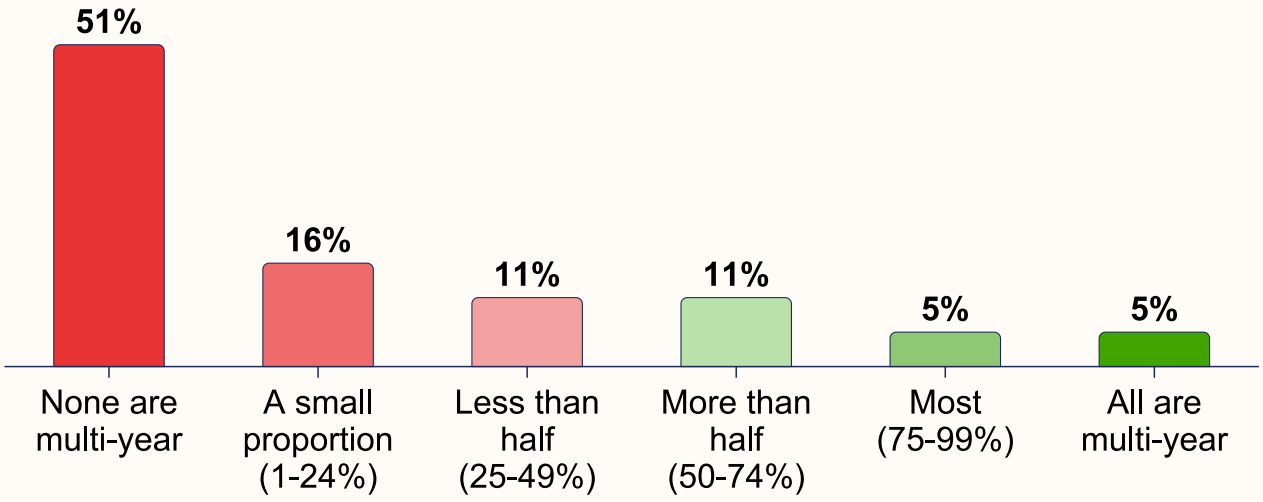


Note. Bases are shown in the chart. 'Don't know' responses excluded. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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. [25] Yet among Stockport organisations receiving grant or contract income, more than three quarters (78%) say less than half of this funding is multi-year, including half that say none is (51%).

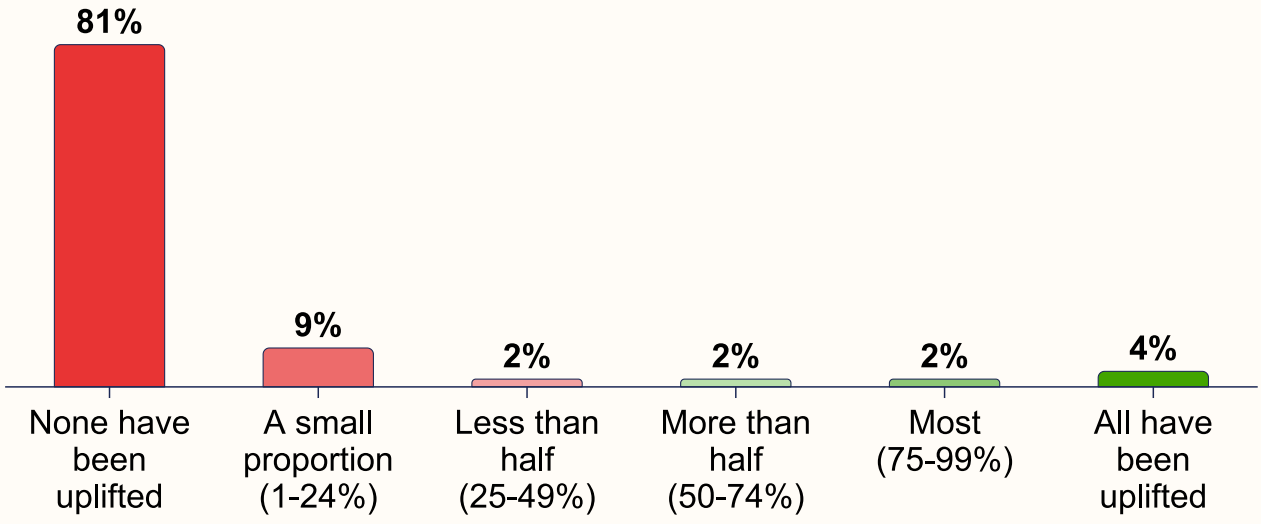
Rising delivery costs also reduce what existing awards can cover, yet national evidence shows that uplifts remain uncommon, particularly for shorter-term funding.[20] More than four in five organisations receiving grant or contract income say none of this funding had been uplifted to reflect rising costs over the last year (81%), 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 VCFSE sector's delivery of public services. [20,24] 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 6.9. The proportion of organisations' grants or contracts that are multi-year (three years or more)



Note. Base = 55. Question shown only to organisations receiving income from grants or contracts from any source.

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



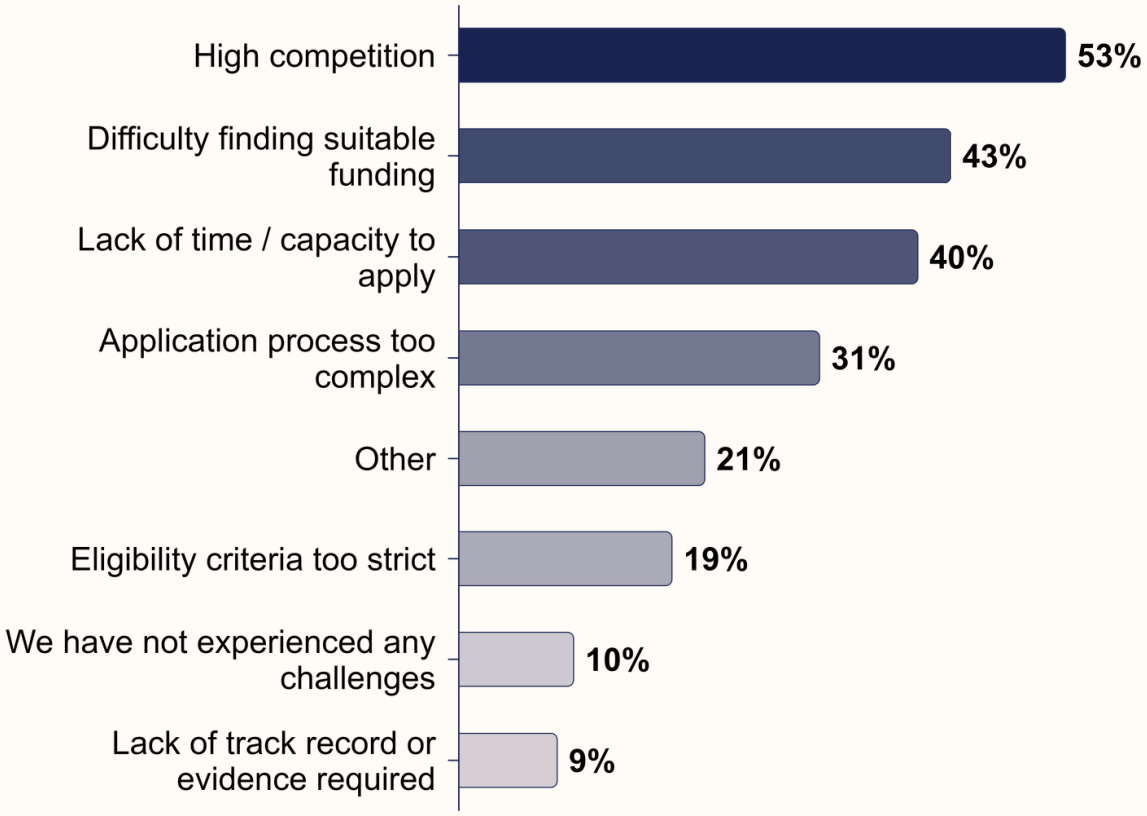
Note. Base = 54. Question shown only to organisations receiving income from grants or contracts from any source. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Focus group participants described how small, short-term funding pots were insufficient to support lasting change, leaving organisations to cover shortfalls through other funding or income and, in some cases, unpaid work to keep services running and communities supported.

> “We work bloody hard to make sure that we are funded elsewhere to give this time.”

As more organisations seek to make up funding shortfalls through additional fundraising, cross-subsidisation and new income sources, competition for the same limited funding opportunities may also increase. When asked about the biggest challenges in finding, applying for and securing funding, organisations most commonly point to high levels of competition (53%), difficulty finding suitable opportunities (43%), a lack of time or capacity to apply (40%), and complex application processes (31%).

Figure 6.11. Funding challenges



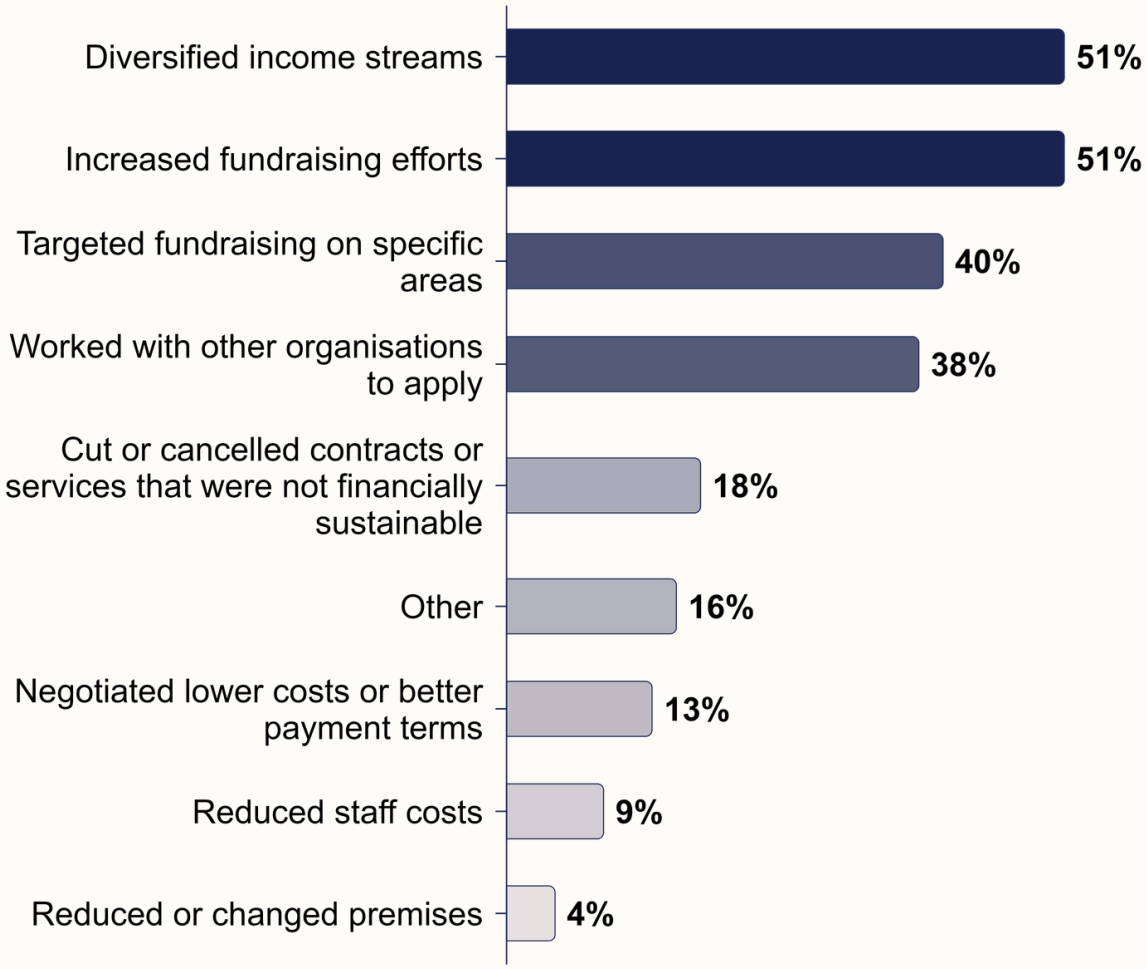
Note. Base = 70. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

To understand how organisations are responding to these funding challenges, we asked what steps they had taken over the previous year. Almost two thirds (64%) had taken at least one action. Among these organisations, half had increased their overall fundraising efforts (51%) or diversified their income streams (51%), while two in five had targeted specific funding areas or opportunities (40%) or worked with other organisations to apply for funding (38%).

The nature of these challenges will vary by organisation type and size, but national evidence shows that income generation is a leading concern across the sector. [20] For smaller organisations in particular, pursuing new income streams and increasing fundraising can require time and capacity that may already be limited.

For the more than a third taking no new action over the previous year (36%), this may mean that no further action was considered necessary. It could also reflect limited scope to respond, or measures that had already been introduced before that period.

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



Note. Base = 45. Excludes respondents selecting 'No actions taken' (N = 25). Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.

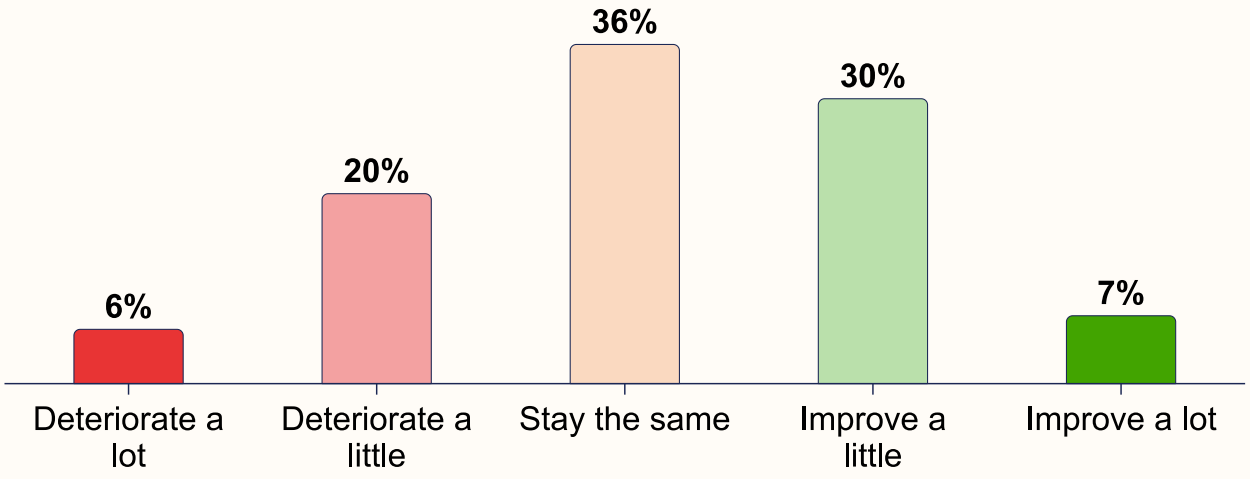
6.4. Premises

Physical premises and spaces are part of the sector's contribution, providing places where people can meet, access support and build relationships. Organisations use a mix of premises arrangements: more than two in five organisations (44%) operate from premises they lease or rent, a third (33%) use premises with shared or free access, and one in ten use premises they own (11%). One in five (21%) do not use physical premises.

6.5. Future outlook

Findings from this report suggest that Stockport's VCFSE sector is supporting more people and operating within an increasingly competitive funding landscape. This uncertainty is reflected in mixed expectations about the next 12 months. Almost two in five (38%) expect their financial position to improve, while a similar proportion expect it to remain the same (36%). A quarter (26%) expect it to deteriorate.

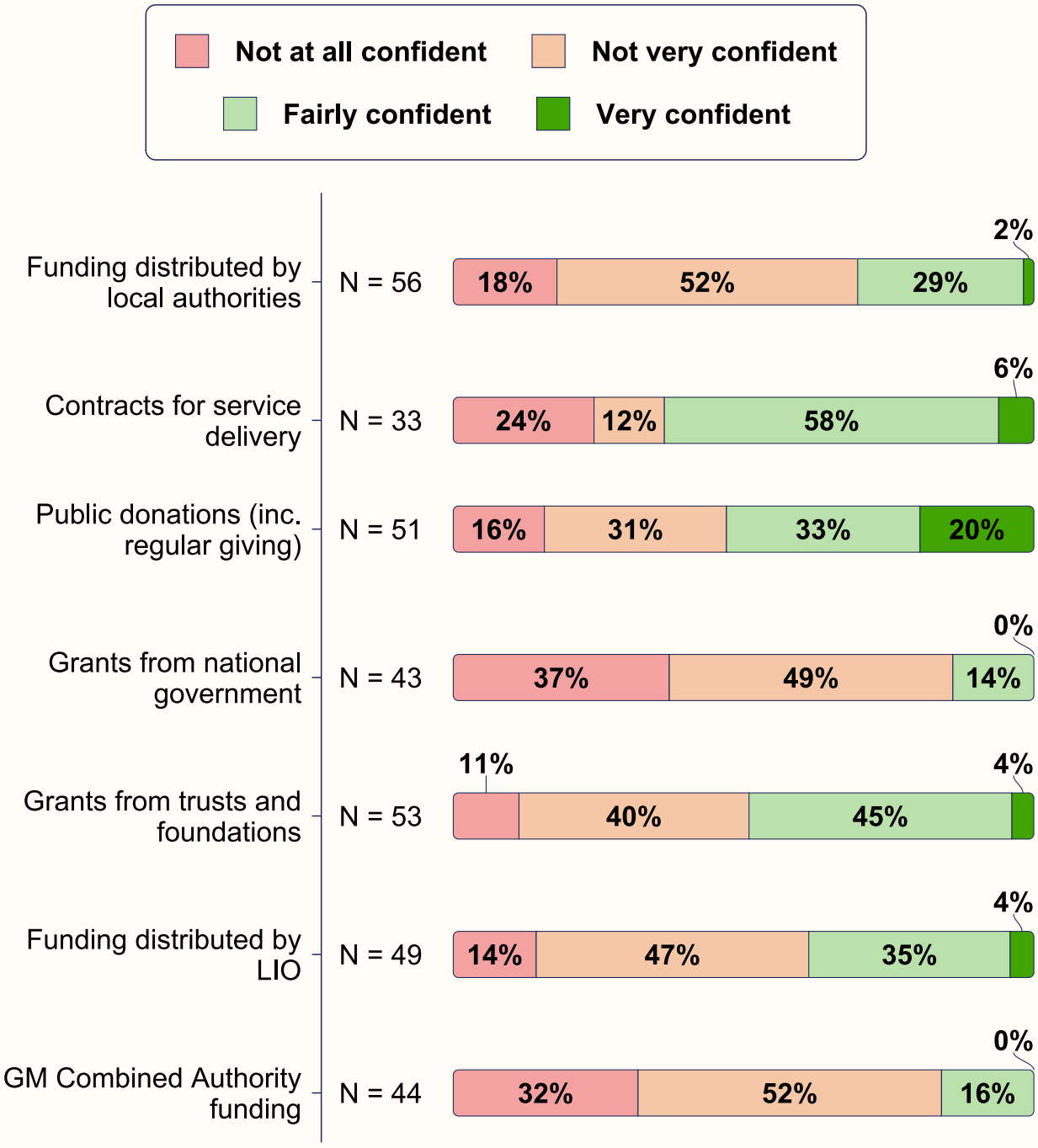
Figure 6.13. Expected financial position over the next 12 months



Note. Base = 69. 'Don't know' responses excluded.

These mixed views are also reflected in organisations' confidence in being able to secure funding from different sources over the next year. Among organisations that considered each source relevant to them, almost two thirds feel fairly or very confident in service delivery contracts (64%), while around half feel confident in public donations (53%) and grants from trusts or foundations (49%). In contrast, more than four in five are not very or not at all confident about grants from national government (86%) or GMCA funding (84%).

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

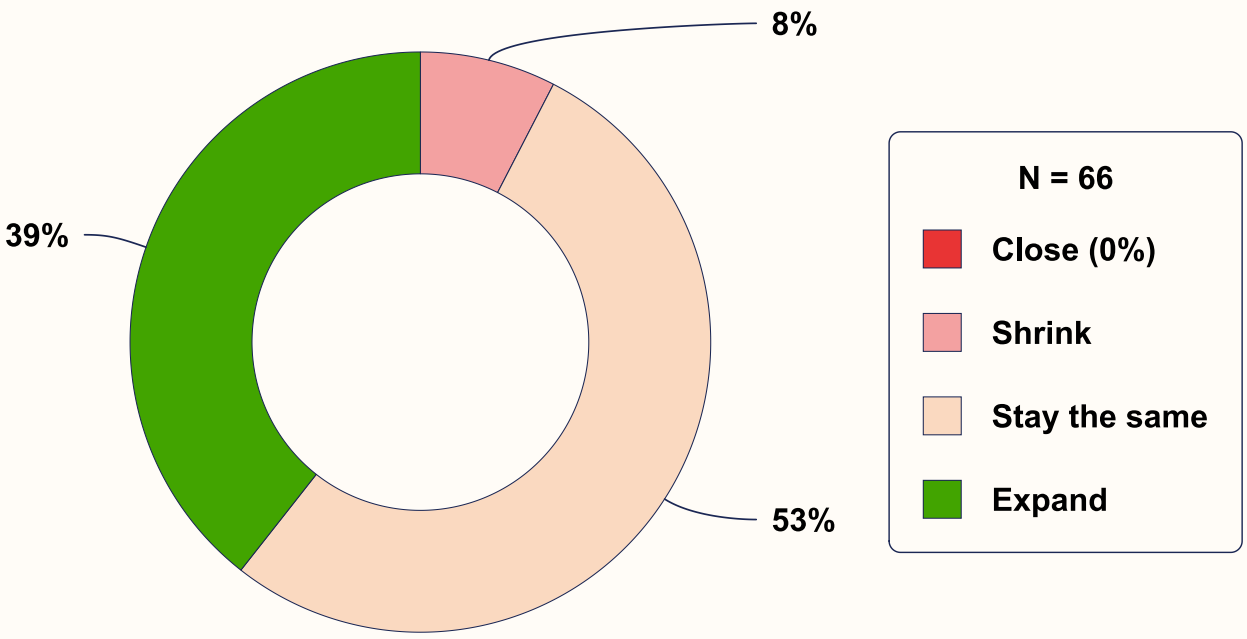


Note. Bases are shown in the chart and vary by source. 'Not applicable' responses excluded for each source. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

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 may also face pressures on their own resources.

Looking ahead, more than half of responding organisations expect their operations to continue at a similar level (53%) over the next year. Almost two in five expect to expand (39%), while 8% expect to shrink. None of those answering the question expect to close.

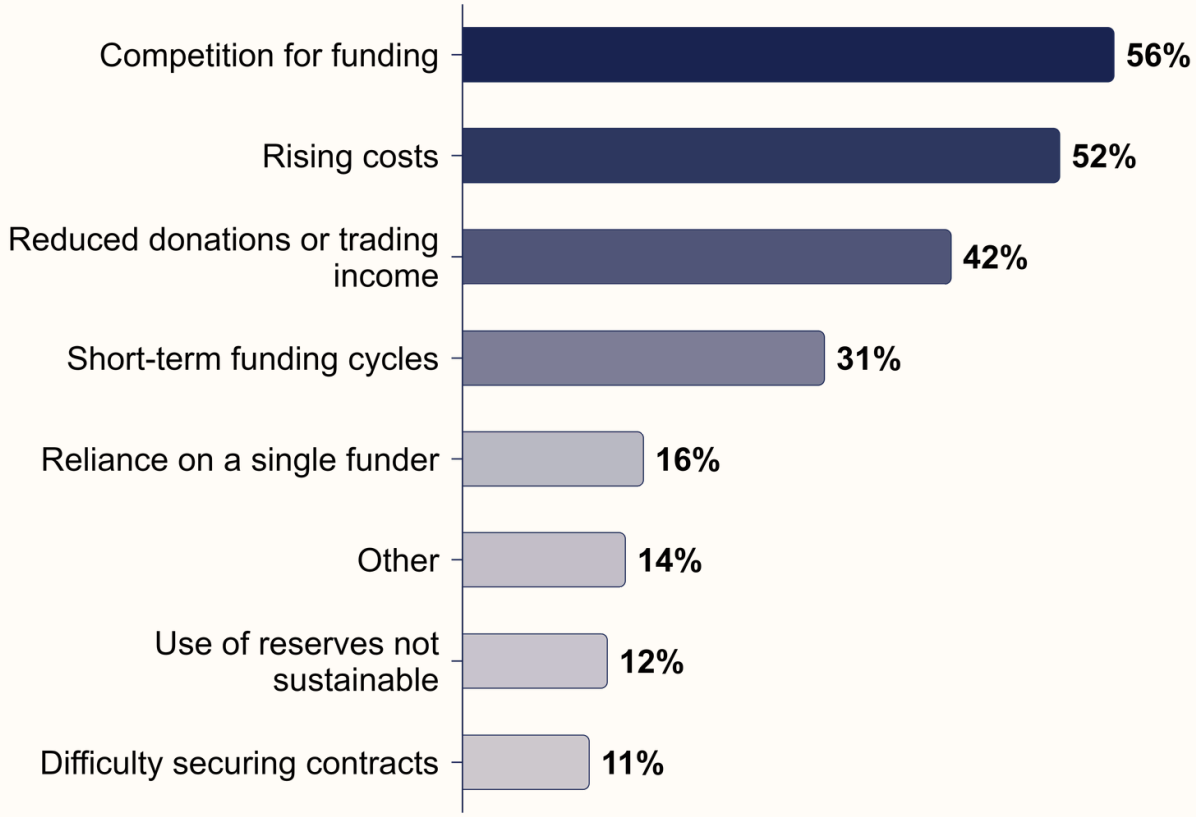
Figure 6.15. Organisational expectations for the year ahead



Ambitions to maintain, sustain, or grow activity sit alongside a number of financial risks, with organisations pointing to competition for funding (56%), rising costs (52%), reduced donations or trading income (42%), and short-term funding cycles (31%) as the main risks to their financial sustainability.

Collectively, these interconnected pressures can have a cumulative impact 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.

Figure 6.16. Risks to financial sustainability



Note. Base = 64. Respondents could select more than one option, so percentages do not sum to 100%.



Conclusion

What this means for Stockport

Findings from Stockport's State of the Sector 2026 show a sector that continues to innovate, collaborate and respond to changing community needs despite significant pressure, growing demand, limited resources and funding that often fails to keep pace with costs.

From Sector 3's perspective, the priorities are clear:

- Invest in organisational capacity alongside frontline delivery.
- Develop more sustainable approaches to volunteer recruitment, management and succession.
- Support leadership wellbeing and workforce resilience.
- Design funding programmes that recognise the true cost of community delivery, including core infrastructure and volunteer coordination.
- Strengthen collaboration between the VCFSE sector, public services and local funders so community organisations are recognised as strategic partners, not simply providers of additional capacity.

Looking ahead

Stockport's VCFSE sector is one of the borough's greatest strengths. It contributes significantly to the local economy, mobilises thousands of volunteers, supports hundreds of thousands of residents through repeated instances of support and provides the trusted relationships that help communities thrive.

The challenge for the coming years is not whether the sector can respond; it has repeatedly shown that it can. The challenge is whether the systems around it will invest sufficiently in the people, organisations and community infrastructure that make this contribution possible. Stockport's VCFSE sector is essential social infrastructure. It now needs the long-term investment and genuine partnership that essential infrastructure requires.



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Stockport's State of the VCFSE Sector dashboard: https://stockport-sector-3.gmstateofthesector.org/

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