

North Yorkshire Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Resilience Survey – Supporting people and making connections

KEY FINDINGS - BRIEFING PAPER

INTRODUCTION

Voluntary groups and charity organisations are playing a critical role in the Covid-19 pandemic response, working in different ways, more flexibly and, in many instances, under real financial pressure.

Partners providing infrastructure support to VCSE organisations across Yorkshire and Humberside, have worked together to gather information using a common survey, co-ordinated by Voluntary Action Leeds. Community First Yorkshire is a member of the partnership which also includes the Universities of Hull, Leeds and Sheffield. The Universities, as part of the Mobilising Volunteers Effectively ([MoVE](#)) Project.

This briefing paper provides highlight information for North Yorkshire from the VCSE sector resilience survey, to quantify the impact of the current crisis on their activities and their organisations. The full report, the Briefing paper and previous reports are published on the [Community First Yorkshire website](#).

Anyone using the report information is asked to acknowledge Community First Yorkshire as the source.

For any further information, provide comments or to raise any queries please contact Community First Yorkshire info@communityfirstyorkshire.org.uk

The Briefing includes:

- Summary messages
- Respondent characteristics
- Workforce dynamics
- Service reopening, demand and managing change
- Viability and use of reserves
- Support and advice
- Positives emerging from Covid-19

Sample survey

The fieldwork took place between 1 May and 14 June 2021. The scope of the May/June survey included questions from the September/October and April 2020 surveys to provide tracking information, as well as new questions to gauge sector resilience as post Covid-19 restrictions are eased up.

Responses were received from 104 organisations 'active' in North Yorkshire, delivering at least one service in at least one of the seven Districts of the county - Craven, Harrogate, Richmondshire, Hambleton, Ryedale, Scarborough and Selby, and 91 organisations with the main location in North Yorkshire. This is a smaller response than previous surveys and reflects an element of survey 'overkill' across the sector over the year. The responses are statistically representative but where response numbers and percentages are low, the findings should be noted as an indication of the picture.

To assess the volume impact estimated baseline figures of voluntary organisations and charities in North Yorkshire range from 5,000 predominantly charity registrations and to 10,000 including other formerly constituted and informal groups. Percentages should be applied to these numbers to gauge the size of the impact.

Community First Yorkshire commissioned independent consultants Skyblue Research Ltd to extract further meaning from quantitative data for North Yorkshire and its individual Districts described in this report. The information in this document is presented in good faith and is thought to be accurate at time of drafting in July/August 2021. The author cannot accept responsibility for any errors or omissions. Prepared for Community First Yorkshire by Skyblue Research Ltd (alan@skyblue.org.uk).

KEY FINDINGS

Summary messages

- Whilst the sector is still reporting challenges the overall picture in North Yorkshire is more positive than the previous two surveys, in April and October 2020.
- Most organisations have demonstrated the resilience to survive, maintain services through agility and adaptability, and/or accessing government and other grants. What the survey does not tell us is what proportion of organisations has ceased to operate.
- Some organisations have thrived, in so far as Covid-19 has given them time to rethink and refocus their service, better understand their users and community and adapt to new or different demands. For some, this has also meant an increase or change in volunteer profile.
- Confidence is greater than it was previously, to restart and reopen services in 2021, but sustained guidance to help all VCSEs reopen safely, in tune with service users' anxieties to return, is needed along with continued flexibility that funders have exhibited throughout.
- The proportion of organisations at medium to high risk, of struggling to financially sustain beyond 6 months, is 9%, lower than in October 2020 at 28% and 40% in May 2020.
- 25% have introduced additional support arrangements for their staff during the pandemic, a slightly lower proportion than was reported in October 2020 (31%).
- Digital exclusion faced by VCSE service users remains a stubborn challenge for 42% requiring sustained, co-ordinated countywide, sector support and investment for venues for activities and service providers.
- 85% of organisations are using at least one form of support or advice in May 2021, up slightly from 76% in April 2020 and 82% in October 2020.
- Collaboration and closer working across VCSEs has been evident, and further collaboration between VCSEs, and between planners/funders and support organisations is required to maintain stability and responsiveness of the sector.

Respondent characteristics: structure, location, delivery areas

- 62% (53% October) of respondents are from registered charities, 14% (13% October) are companies limited by guarantee and 20% (21% October) are charitable incorporated organisations. 13% (11% October) are groups, unincorporated associations or forums.
- 48% (38% October) of respondents are from organisations with an annual turnover of less than £10k. 74% (79% October) have an annual turnover of less than £100k.
- 37% (42% October) respondents say their organisation earned more than 50% of their income from trading in pre-Covid-times, of these 92% have experienced a reduction since March 2020 and 65% say their trading income levels have decreased by 76%-100%.

Workforce dynamics

Paid staff

- 41% of organisations employ staff, this is down from around 50% in the previous surveys
- 1 in 5 (21%) of organisations employing people say they employ more paid staff than they did pre-Covid (compared to 8% in October 2020).
- 1 in 4 (23%) have made redundancies between March 2020 to May 2021, whilst only 2% expect to make redundancies by end 2021 and 7% are unsure.

■ 21% of employing organisations with paid staff have some people on furlough but none expect to make redundancies.

Volunteers

■ Volunteer capacity is back to somewhere between at around 90% of what it was just prior to Covid-19

■ Just over 4 in 5 (82%) organisations say that the volunteers they have in May 2021 are the same people they had volunteering back in January 2020/pre-Covid meaning, however that nearly 1 in 5 (18%) are now managing a different profile of people than before.

■ Nearly 6 in 10 (58%) of those reporting a decrease in volunteers were slightly/confident that previous volunteers will return.

Service reopening, demand and managing change

Reopening services

■ In May 2021, 44 (45%) of 98 VCSEs said they were closed during lockdown but were now reopening their services - a higher proportion than the 35% who said they were reopening services back in October 2020.

■ 67% of VCSEs saying they had stopped or put on hold some service delivery reported that they have plans to restart within 1-2 months, with a further 30% saying they would restart before the end of 2021. Only 1% said it would be sometime in 2022 and 1% was unsure. Comparative figures in October 2020 were 40% re-opening in 1-2 months, 25% re-opening before the end of 2020 and 35% were uncertain.

Demand for services

■ 1 in 3 (33%) organisations have seen an increase in demand for their services between October 2020 and May 2021, higher than previously tracked increases in 2020 which were experienced by 1 in 5 organisations (22%).

■ Organisations that have seen the most increase in demand since October 2020 belong to the 'Social & Community Care, Mental Health and Volunteering' grouping (78%), followed by 'Children & Young People, Education & Training and Health' grouping (45%) and 'Older People, Disability, Social Activities and Befriending' grouping (43%).

■ Conversely 1 in 5 (22%) have seen a decrease in demand for their services in the most recent 6 months, but this compares favourably with the 57%/56% reporting decreases between January and April 2020 and May and September 2020.

■ Conversely, organisations that have seen the biggest decrease in demand for their services are those in the 'Arts, Culture & Heritage and Community Development' grouping (50%, caution though low sample) and the 'Community & Village Hall and Sports & Leisure' grouping (36%).

Service changes

■ One in two (49%) organisations have maintained their service through modification, an almost identical finding to the result one year ago. Some of these models will have taken time and resources to embed and for those commissioning services in future, it may be useful to reflect this learning into contract specifications.

■ Levels of concern about digital access for clients is very similar to the results 6 and 12 months ago affecting 2 in 5 organisations (42%) potentially rising to 3 in 5 if including those who were unsure about the extent of the challenge. 1 in 5 organisations say this is also an

issue for staff although the lack of training appears to have diminished as a key challenge reported previously.

■ What has been experienced is the change in the profile of needs, with an increase in family support, assistance with food and responding to the economic impact during this period.

Viability and use of reserves

Financial sustainability

■ The proportion of organisations classified as being medium to high risk, meaning they would struggle to financially sustain beyond 6 months, is 9%, much lower than in October 2020 when it was 28% and much lower than the 40% reporting this concern a year ago.

■ The organisations at risk are equally spread across the Districts, and vary in their size and annual turnover from <£10k to as much as £500k.

■ 1 in 4 (23%) of organisations have used financial reserves in the past 12 months, whilst 54% have not and 19% haven't used them yet but may need to before the end of December 2021. 5% have used all their reserves, slightly up on 2% in October.

■ 90 (87%) of organisations identified at least one risk (on average 2-3 risks) to their income until December 2021. The most prevalent risks in May 2021 were a loss of income from trading/reduced service delivery due to restrictions (20% of all risks mentioned compared to 15% in October 2020), a loss of income from future lockdowns (18% compared to 16%), a loss of income from less donations (16% compared to 11%), a loss of income from trading (14% compared to 26%), no new funding for projects (12% compared to 8%) and loss of key personnel including trustees.

■ The risk from a loss of funding as a result of public sector cuts remained the same as in October 2020, at 10% of all income risks identified, as did the risk to income from increased operational costs (7% of all risks identified in both periods).

Funder flexibility

■ All VCSEs that receive grant or contract income said funders had offered flexibility (60% saying all had been flexible and 40% saying some flexibility was offered)

■ Funders had been especially flexible in varying service delivery and activities from the original plan (50%), or varied the service towards Covid-19 response (38%) or extended the timeline for delivery/activities (42%).

Support and advice

Sources of support

■ 85% of organisations are using at least one form of support or advice in May 2021, up slightly from 76% in April 2020 and 82% in October 2020. They typically access 2-3 sources of different support and advice, with 'other infrastructure' (e.g. Community First Yorkshire) being the most prevalent source (46%) in May 2021 and local authorities continuing to be seen as a trusted source for 40% of organisations. Behaviours vary between the organisations active in the different Districts quite considerably.

■ 1 in 2 (50%) organisations identify at least one form of support they feel they need, interestingly, higher than was the case a year ago during the first lockdown (37%), but not quite as high as recorded in October 2020 (63%).

■ These organisations collectively made 76 different mentions of support needed. Most prevalent needs relate to funding and the continued flexibility of funders (20/76 mentions or 26% of all needs mentioned), followed by support for recruiting or employing staff and volunteers (11 mentions/15% of needs), Covid-19-19 guidance especially regards re-opening safely/support for restarting (9 mentions/12% of needs), business planning/organisational development (7 mentions/9% of needs) and IT/digital/connectivity related support (7 mentions/9% of needs).

Health and wellbeing support for paid staff and volunteers

■ 77 (74%) of organisations have at least one form of support in place. The most prevalent being peer support (79%) followed by line management (55%). then access to specialist services (23%). Online resources were made available by just under one in five (18%) of respondents. These are consistent with findings reported in October 2020.

■ 22 (25%) have introduced additional support arrangements for their staff during the pandemic, a slightly lower proportion than was reported in October 2020 (31%).

■ The support has been varied from counselling to training, coaching to increased guidance and policies around making people feel safe, emotional resilience interventions, the use of mindfulness, emotional and physical wellbeing Apps and regular check-ins to ensure staff and volunteers feel connected and cared for. Some have also paid additional volunteer expenses.

Positives emerging from Covid-19

■ 57 (55%) of respondents were able to think of at least one positive, slightly lower than October 2020 (60%) but in line with just over a year ago (55%).

■ Respondents identified 77 positives the largest proportion concerning:

- developing, refocusing or reimagining their services
- new ways of working using IT and digital technology to their advantage.

■ A new kind of positive reported in May 2021 that did not feature explicitly in October 2020, was the 8% of organisations who said a positive had been the way in which new and more diverse volunteers were now supporting their work.

Maintaining a vibrant and growing VCSE sector – our recommendations

Next steps for funders and planners

1. Flexibility has been acknowledged and is necessary to continue.
2. Investing in core costs has emerged as increasingly important for core costs, IT investment, management and embedding new ways of working. With a particular emphasis on leadership and succession planning.
3. Funding should give time for organisation learning and development
4. Plan and fund digital transformation, within organisations, enhance community access of ICT facilities and increase people's access to and confidence to use technology
5. Co-design services, recognising that service delivery has been modified and some of the changes need to be reflected in new service specifications.
6. Jointly plan investment for short, medium and longer terms – with an immediate 6-month horizon, to maintain groups and activities, until other sources of income are on a more sustainable platform.

Next steps for Community First Yorkshire and support organisations

1. Develop packages of support, joining up services from support organisations
2. Extend reach to groups farthest from accessing help through a place-based and priority groups approach.
3. Develop collaborative approaches to join up support digital transformation, addressing organisation changes which are needed and capitalising on remote working and the emergence of blended working patterns.
4. Focus on support to manage change within organisations, in relation to how they manage their work, build on the new ways of working.
5. Develop resources for engagement and re-engagement of volunteers and coordinate Volunteering in North Yorkshire campaign with partners and VCSs.
6. Facilitate and supporting groups to connect with one another to share learning and join-up activities locally.

Next steps for voluntary groups and charities

1. Keep in touch with support services and the public sector, as part of a network of public services.
2. Use the help that is available and web-based resources for information and learning (Community First Yorkshire, NYCC, NCVO etc.).
3. Be part of local networks for sharing learning, collaborating and generating ideas.
4. Encourage others in an area to access support and engage in local networks.
5. Forward plan to continue to recruit diverse mix of volunteers.
6. Retain, adopt and celebrate the positives – the spirit of unity and kindness, commitment of staff and volunteers, new ways of working, creativity, adaptability and agility.

Community First Yorkshire support

Community First Yorkshire can help you with many aspects to running your community group or voluntary organisation, from governance to funding, trustees to volunteering. We can support you on a one to one or group training basis. Simply fill in an [enquiry form](#) and we'll get back to you.

You can sign up for our news bulletins [here](#):

- Our monthly Funding Bulletin lists updated funding opportunities.
- Our weekly newsletter has information about the charity sector, including training.
- Our monthly update on rural matters, Rural News.



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