

Informing the Development of a new
Voluntary Sector and Volunteering
Strategy for The Merton Partnership

State of the Sector 2016

Merton's Voluntary Sector



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Executive Summary

The Merton Partnership commissioned the 2016 State of the Sector Research, led by Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC); to gain greater insight into how the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) in the borough is coping in the current economic and social environment.

The Merton Partnership is reviewing the local voluntary, community and faith sector and volunteering strategies, and will merge them into one, coherent strategy. In total 80 organisations participated in the research with 120 interactions across the various methods used.

The Sector Locally

The voluntary, community and faith sector in Merton comprises of charitable and organisations that are not required to register because of their size and turnover. Most boroughs have double the amount of community groups that are not registered as charities, since the threshold requiring registration increase to £10,000.

- 394 registered charities in Merton with an income of £113.1m
- 2,183 trustees of registered charities
- 3% growth in clients supported between 2013 and 2016
- 813,680 people supported in 2015 across 80 organisations
- Large increase in Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) as a new legal entity
- Almost a quarter of organisations are unincorporated exposing trustees to more risk
- 16% of organisations engaged were established in the last 3 years
- Merton has a long established resilient sector with 46% having been established over 21 years
- Compared to the 2013 research, the percentage of social enterprises and Community Interest Companies has risen by almost 5 percent in this 2016 sample. This could be an indicator of people trying new models of sustainability and job creation, advocated by successive governments since 1998.

Funding

2016 has seen the greatest reduction in funding from Merton Council but was timed to take money out of the system at the end of a commissioning cycle, rather than making cuts. Despite having to make such drastic savings, Merton Council has maintained its funding for small grants managed by MVSC in 2016. Recognising the importance of community activity delivered by small groups and a need to invest in fabric of the sector.

The 25% of organisations that do not receive funding, support their activities through membership fees, subscriptions, sponsored events, donations and fundraising. The 'goodwill of volunteers' was also important for many organisations to keep going.

The research highlighted that as reductions in public sector funding continue, across all sectors; more vulnerable members of the community, will increasingly rely on smaller groups and less formal volunteering structures. New approaches to supporting smaller groups and less formal volunteering will need to be explored to help organisations successfully navigate the future.

40% of organisations expect income from unrestricted sources to grow despite it having been reasonably static for the last three years. There is a need to provide support for this desired change. Organisations need access to several areas of support including:

- Skill development in fundraising methods needs to be addressed
- Support in formulating fundraising strategies
- Support in identifying funding sources

More effort should be put into maximising the Merton Community Fund which could be a significant resource, particularly for smaller groups.

Clearer messaging from public sector agencies about the opportunities for funding the VCS over the next three years, so organisations can plan and respond in good time.

Premises

67% of organisations identified finding suitable and affordable premises as a challenge. As organisations experience reduced funding, they are charging for, or increasing prices for space hire. These charges often put room hire out of the reach of small groups. At a time when communities are being asked to do more following reductions in the state this is seen as a self-defeating policy.

These are also issues around inconsistent policy and practice in meeting the premises requirements of the VCFS. A more coherent, cross sector approach is required.

Meeting Community Needs

70% of organisations identified increasing demand compared to 62% in 2013 with Pollards Hill, Lavender Fields, Figge's Marsh, Cricket Green and Colliers Wood Wards presenting increased demand for support.

Mental health, dementia, older people with complex need and young adults (16-24) were identified as those presenting greater need for the VCFS.

Groups with income below £10,000 are reporting the greatest pressures, marginally greater for those with income below £1k. Groups with incomes between £10,000 and £100,000 are the next group reporting increasing demand.

The People – Volunteers and Employees

Just under half the organisations participating in the research have no paid employees; relying on volunteers to govern the organisation and deliver activities.

Expectations of trustees can be high, with more in depth knowledge and expertise required today than had been the case in the past, and organisations are demanding more of trustees than previously.

Getting trustees with of the right calibre is a challenge for local organisations. Smaller groups struggle to recruit and retain trustees more than their larger counterparts, who often have a paid Volunteer Manager.

Senior employees feel that inadequate levels of supervision and support is provided by trustee boards, because of skill and capacity constraints.

49% of organisations reported an increase in the number of volunteers they engage in the last three years. At the same time, many organisations stated they do not have the capacity to recruit, support and training more volunteers.

Smaller groups find too many people want to volunteer but not enough capacity to manage them and identified more hands on support in volunteer recruitment and management was needed.

Collaboration

There are mixed views about the value of networks, small groups placing greater importance on them than their larger partners; although 71% attend networks and forums in Merton.

Small groups often feel undervalued, and evidence suggests larger groups need to be mindful of their interaction and engagement of smaller groups.

There has been a 14% increase in partnership work since 2013 but lack of trust, transparency and risk were identified as reasons for not working more together. Organisations feel less inclined to share information in a time of reduced funding and increased competition for resources.

Key Findings

1. Improved collaboration between all sectors

All public-sector agencies need to take a more collaborative approach to service definition and delivery (co-production) with the VCFS to maximise the impact of resources for local people.

Clearer, more honest communication and messaging is required between agencies to enable meaningful discussion and creative solutions. The current policy, legislative and funding environment is impacting all sectors; there is a desire to work together to find meaningful solutions.

2. Review the terms of reference of the Interfaith Forum

The Interfaith Forum plays a crucial role in supporting sector activity, and all the evidence points to this role becoming more important in the immediate future. Reviewing the terms of reference of the Interfaith Forum can kick-start the process of greater involvement of faith organisations in strategic decision-making.

3. Understand, involve and resource small groups

Throughout the research, the role and importance of small groups was highlighted. The challenge of supporting joint work between large and small groups is not exclusive to Merton but needs to be addressed to increase trust and mutual understanding.

4. Recognise the value of unfunded groups and prioritise supporting them

A quarter of organisations who took part in our online survey are unfunded, while our faith groups' focus group and numerous of our one to one interviews highlighted that many groups sustain

themselves without ever securing funding through grants and contracts. They are often small but their work and social value is equal to the larger organisations.

5. Revitalise the approach to training

A better approach to maximizing investment in developing people (staff and volunteers) needs to be created through joint working in Merton. Training volunteers and community members to support more resilient communities is an investment that will have a long-term benefit.

6. Fundraising and strategic planning

The whole sector needs to be supported and developed in its approach to fundraising. The Merton Community Fund could play a vital role but there is no capacity at present to maximise its potential. Areas of intervention required around fundraising are: -

- Support to develop skills in fundraising (not just grants, trusts and foundations)
- Focused support in strategic planning (not just writing a business plan)
- Improved partnerships for tendering

7. A more strategic approach to premises

67% of organisations engaged in the research are experiencing challenges associated with premises. For many small organisations, venue hire is their biggest expenditure. A more strategic and coordinated approach between agencies to maximising the use and reach of buildings and facilities in Merton is required.

8. Trustee recruitment

Support systems need to be developed to help organisations identify, recruit and train trustees with the business skills required to lead modern, sustainable organisations.

There may also be ways in which governance systems could be reformed to enable volunteers with professional skills to support good governance without becoming a trustee.

9. Volunteering support

Larger organisations with dedicated volunteer management capacity, seem more able to recruit, support and train the volunteers they require. Smaller organisations are struggling with defining the tasks volunteers could do, recruiting, supporting and retaining volunteers. Targeted support to increase the capacity and ability of smaller groups to maximise volunteering is required.

10. Capacity to deliver

All partner agencies are experiencing capacity pressures and the cuts are starting to have a real impact. If more resource is to be dedicated to addressing issues identified in the research, other functions may have to be reduced to release capacity.

The Voluntary Sector in Merton 2016

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Introduction

The Merton Partnership commissioned the 2016 State of the Sector Research, led by Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC); to gain greater insight into how the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) in the borough is coping in the current economic and social environment.

The voluntary, community and faith sector in Merton has historically had a very positive outlook. Dealing with changes in funding systems and the demographic profile of the borough well. In fact, Merton is often recognised for its welcome to new communities and community led cohesive responses to social problems. A geographically small borough will big ambitions and a social conscience.

The impact of austerity measures on Merton's voluntary sector is a key area of concern for all partners. Thus, the Merton Partnership is exploring how it relates, engages and supports the sector in the future. In our changing times the VCFS is faced with the ever-present challenge of securing funds to meet presenting need and achieve their ambitions, as well as demonstrate good governance and quality delivery in the face of ever increasing monitoring, scrutiny and media exposure.

The objectives of the research were to: -

- Learn how organisations are faring financially
- Identify challenges to sustainability
- Look at trends in demand and presenting need
- Explore what strategies are being utilised to respond to funding and demand pressures
- Identify support requirements for the future

The Merton Partnership is reviewing the local voluntary, community and faith sector and volunteering strategies, and will merge them into one, coherent strategy. It is essential that this new strategy is informed by up to date data and intelligence; the research aims to inform that process.

To help give an understanding of changes over time, the research was also designed to build on the findings of the 2013 State of the Sector report¹ and where possible put it in context of other regional and national comparable data.

About the Merton Partnership

The Merton Partnership² is the multi-agency body which brings together organisations that provide services or are involved in public life in the borough. Its annual conference includes the wider community, Members of Parliament and other community organisation representatives and stakeholders.

The Merton Partnership does this to work towards its vision of making Merton “a great place to live and call home, where citizens are also neighbours and take responsibility for improving their own lives and neighbourhoods”.

At the time of writing, the Merton Partnership membership comprises:

¹ <http://www.mvsc.co.uk/mertons-voluntary-sector/state-of-the-sector>

² <http://www.mertonpartnership.org.uk/>

- Merton Police
- Merton CCG
- Merton Fire Brigade
- Merton Council
- Jobcentre Plus
- Merton Voluntary Service Council
- South Thames College
- Circle Merton Priory Homes
- Merton Chamber of Commerce
- Members of Parliament
- The Interfaith Forum

Methodology

The Merton Partnership commissioned a team of consultants to lead on the research following a competitive procurement process. Some of the successful team (Ian Beever and Sandra Vogel) also worked on the 2013 State of the Sector survey, and so were able to understand the best ways to build on its findings for best quality learning in this research.

Engaging a broad spectrum of organisations in the research was important. A mix of organisations differing in size, funding profile and communities was one of the primary factors directing the participation targets. It was also crucial that the research met the requirements of the Equalities Act 2010, engaging organisations run for, or by those communities with protected characteristics. We are happy to report that the following communities were engaged in the research: -

- ✓ Age - those working with a range of ages participated
- ✓ Disability - including those with long term physical and mental health conditions
- ✓ Gender reassignment
- ✓ Race – a range of race specific organisations were engaged
- ✓ Religion or belief – leaders from a cross section of faiths engaged
- ✓ Sex (gender)
- ✓ Sexual orientation

Research Methods Used

The research took place between June and August 2016. The initial timeframe was a six-week period across late June and all of July. This was extended into August to help maximise the returns across what is a major holiday period.

We wanted to reach as wide an audience as possible. We particularly wanted to achieve balance in terms of sectors served, a mix of funded and unfunded organisations, a mix of organisations with and without paid staff, and to ensure we reached across the spread of ethic and equality strands.

We arranged our research methods to get a mix of qualitative and quantitative data.

The 2013 State of the Sector research was used as a starting point for some of our work, with a view to obtaining comparative information where possible. We also wanted to place emphasis on the

effect of the changed economic climate in the intervening period since 2013, to learn about the impact of funding changes across the sector.

To meet these goals, we used a range of methodologies.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was devised. This was designed for completing online and on paper, and was publicised widely using a range of methods including:

- Mailing list circulation via MVSC, Merton Council Officers, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group and others.
- Merton Connected weekly e-bulletin for at least five weeks
- Regular email reminders were sent by MVSC, who also ensured the survey was prominent on the front page of its web site
- Online channels such as Twitter and Facebook were used regularly by both MVSC and the researchers
- Merton Council publicised the research through communications channels including social media
- Paper copies of the questionnaire were distributed at numerous meetings attended and convened by MVSC
- MVSC staff completed the survey with organisations when they were in contact for one to one support or advice sessions
- Direct emails were sent to key personal contacts in the VCFS by MVSC staff, the research team and Merton Council to encourage participation
- After six weeks a member of the research team phoned every organisation on the MVSC database who had not responded, encouraging them to complete the online survey

This methodology resulted in a wide reach and every organisation on the MVSC database was contacted multiple times, including being contacted in person, by phone.

The cascading of invitations to complete the survey through numerous organisations and social channels means we do not have a base number of organisations contacted. We are not, therefore, able to calculate a percentage response rate, just a numerical total of responses. Because we targeted ALL groups on the MVSC database, and reached out widely, our response group was not stratified in any sense – apart from organisations' willingness to complete the questionnaire.

Focus Groups

A series of focus groups was organised. These were targeted at: Small Groups, Arts & Community Centres, Corporate, Children and Youth People, Faith Groups, Housing, Adult Social Care. A further focus group discussion took place at MVSC's July INVOLVE meeting.

It proved impossible to secure participation across all of these themes in the focus groups, although they all engaged in the online survey. There may have been a range of reasons for this including:

- Holiday time meant lots of people were away or covering for colleagues and so had limited time
- Organisational capacity being stretched and so participation in research being de-prioritised
- A lack of willingness to participate because of trust issues (trust issues were raised by a number of organisations we did speak to)
- ‘Meeting overload’ – many organisations are already involved in a heavy schedule of participation in networking events
- The competitive nature of work in the sector as organisations can feel set against each other for limited funds which may have made organisations unwilling to share what they know
- In general, groups that had their funding cut or lost out in recent commissioning exercises appeared unwilling to engage, despite several attempts

One to One Interviews and Meetings

A series of fifteen one to one semi structured interviews were carried out.

In addition, we held meetings and interactions with key statutory sector partners in order to identify relationships and support with the VCFS. The goal was to try and capture information that may not have been widely quantified or recognised historically.

Desk Based Research

We identified and analysed a range of open source data, research reports and policy papers at a local, regional and national level that offered insights and comparative data to the findings in Merton. Where this added value it has been included in the report.

Engagement

There were multiple interactions with some organisations across the different research methods, with some completing the questionnaire survey who were also involved in either focus groups or one to one interviews. The advantage of this is that we were able to collect both qualitative and quantitative information from those participants.

There was no crossover between focus group participants and one to one interviewees.

Method used	Interactions
Questionnaires	80
Focus groups	25
One to one interviews	15
TOTAL	120

For a list of all participating organisations, see Appendix.

Merton Borough Profile

Merton’s 2014 population projection is 203,200 people living in nearly 80,400 occupied households. Population density is higher in the east wards of the borough compared to the west wards. Just over half the borough is female (50.6%) and the borough has a similar age profile to London as a whole. Greater London Authority (GLA) population data (2014) shows Merton’s current BAME population

Is 76,188. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups make up 35.1% of the population, lower than London (40.2%). Based on GLA trend based projections, Merton’s population will increase by 13,245 people between 2014 and 2020. The age profile is projected to change, with the most notable growth in those under 16 and over 50, and a decline in the proportion of people aged 25-35 years old. Merton’s ethnic composition is also forecast to change, with the BAME proportion increasing from 37% to 40%³.

Indices of multiple deprivation

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)⁴ set out the relative position of local areas in terms of deprivation using a range of 37 indicators across seven ‘domains’ (income, employment, education skills and training, health, and disability, crime, barriers to housing and services, living environment).

These domains have a range of indicators within them, whose data is drawn from the most recent information available, which is mostly from 2012/13. The overall score allows a comparison across geographical areas.

Domain	Weight (%)	Indicators per domain
Income Deprivation	22.5	6
Employment Deprivation	22.5	5
Education, Skills and Training Deprivation	13.5	7
Health Deprivation and Disability	13.5	4
Crime	9.3	4
Barriers to Housing and Services	9.3	7
Living Environment Deprivation	9.3	4

Figure 01 Indices of deprivation and weighting

Detailed analysis of the data shows that overall both East Merton and West Merton are less deprived than the average for both London and England.

³ Merton JSNA 2015

⁴ [English indices of Deprivation 2015, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015](#)

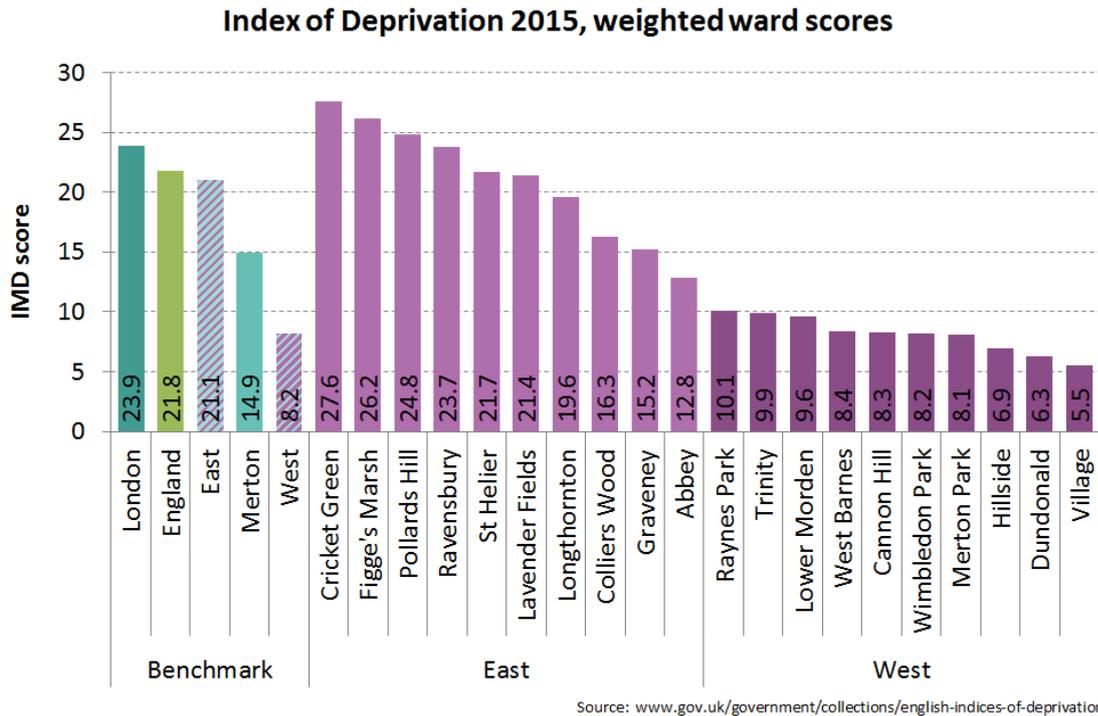


Figure 02 Indices of deprivation and weighting.

However, three wards are more deprived than the average for London Cricket Green, Figge’s Marsh and Pollards Hill, while one ward, Ravensbury, is less deprived than the average for London, but more deprived than the average for England. The weighted average for Merton is 14.93.

On average Merton is less deprived than most of the boroughs with which it is often compared (geographically neighbouring boroughs and boroughs that are deemed similar by National Statistics). The exceptions are the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames.

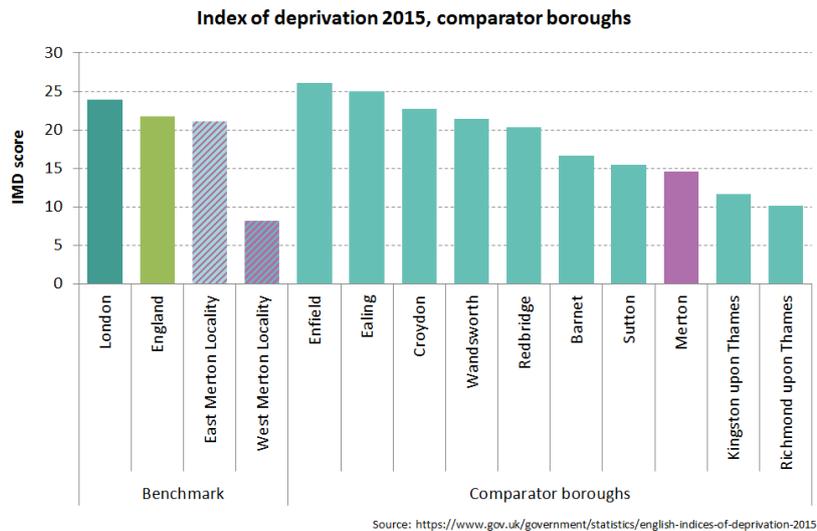


Figure 03 Index of deprivation, comparator boroughs

Housing

The number of households in Merton is projected to increase to 99,000 (15%) by 2021, an average annual household growth of 2.2%. This is ranked the fourth highest household growth in England with much of the increase expected to be in single person households. Lone parent households are also set to increase by 9%.

Although the number of homeless households in Merton is amongst the lowest in London, homelessness is on the increase, with homelessness applications rising from 188 in 2010-11 to 279 in 2011-12 and the number of households accepted as statutory homeless increasing from 89 in 2010-11 to 101 in 2011-12.

Environment

Merton has more than 100 parks and green spaces, and 99.6% of Merton's area less than 400m from a publicly accessible open space.

Valuing Merton's Voluntary Sector

KEY FINDINGS

- **394 registered charities in Merton with an income of £113.1m⁵**
- **Charities have assets worth £72.8m⁶**
- **2,183 trustees of registered charities⁷ contributing £1,309,800 to Merton in terms of time**
- **3% growth in clients supported between 2013 and 2016**
- **813,680 people supported in 2015 across 80 organisations⁸**
- **Faith sector has a large role in social action often not recognised**

It is notoriously difficult to understand how much value the diversity of the voluntary brings to local communities. Methodologies for understanding the financial value brought are complex and variable, and it is beyond the remit of this research to produce a figure for Merton.

The National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) calculations of the economic value of the voluntary sector, using a measure called Gross Added Value (GAV), estimates that in the sector's

⁵ Charity Commission LVSC Report 2013 excludes those not traditionally seen as voluntary sector

⁶ Charity Commission LVSC Report 2013 only includes organisations with incomes greater than £500k p.a.

⁷ Charity Commission LVSC Report 2013

⁸ Recognising that some clients will be beneficiaries of more than one organisation

gross contribution to the UK economy in 2013/14 was £12.2bn. This is comparable to the GAV contributed by the agriculture sector in the same period, and valued at 0.7% of the UK economy.⁹

Charity Sector Profile

The London for All sector profiling conducted by London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC) using Charity Commission Open Source Data in 2013, provides the best and most recent overview of the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector in Merton.

Key Statistics¹⁰:

- 666 registered charitable organisations in Merton in 2013 including independent schools, housing associations, government bodies, trade associations and faith groups whose main objective is the promotion of faith
- 224 charities operate only in Merton
- 63 national charities registered in Merton
- 17 national and overseas charities registered in Merton
- 46 overseas charities registered in Merton
- 32 charities based outside the borough but operating in it with an income for Merton only work of £63.4m

The role of faith organisations in meeting social need within their communities and to those outside their faith must be recognised. It was hard to source current data to support this as many of the umbrella bodies that used to collate research and map activities have closed down due to funding cuts. We did manage to identify recent research from Peterborough that highlights the reach and role of faith organisations¹¹: -

- 87% of faith organisations provide social action
- Largest categories of beneficiaries are young, older and disabled people
- 58% visited sick people at home – 52% visiting people at home
- 35% provided youth services

Reach

Economics are not the only way to value the voluntary sector. Another measure is the social value brought to peoples' lives. Merton had a population of 205,100 in 2014¹². We asked respondents to our online survey how many clients they had supported in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The average

⁹ The UK Civic Society Almanac 2016, NCVO

¹⁰ Charity Commission LVSC Report 2013

¹¹ Audit of Presence and Faith Activity in Peterborough, Peterborough City Council May 2015

¹² JSNA summary document, 2015

number of respondents across all three years was remarkably consistent, and close to 11,000, with a small year on year rise across the three years.

Number of clients supported	Average number of clients supported	Total number of clients supported
2013	10,037	792,910
2014	10,144	801,348
2015	10,300	813,680

Figure 04 Approximately how many Merton residents did you support or provide services to in the last three years.

This consistency may be an indication that many organisations are reaching capacity with what they can achieve within their resources, while demand is rising. We address the issue of demand later in this report.

Legal Structures

The legal structures of VCFS organisations is important as it impacts on the ability to fundraise, reduces trustee liabilities, has tax benefits and can assist in accessing business rate relief etc.

KEY FINDINGS
➤ Small increase (3.6%) in number of registered charities since 2013
➤ Large increase in Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs)
➤ 5% increase in social enterprises since 2013
➤ 2% increase in groups just starting compared to 2013 sample
➤ Almost a quarter of organisations are unincorporated
➤ 16.3% of organisations engaged were established in the last 3 years
➤ Merton has a long established resilient sector with 46% having been established over 21 years
➤ Large proportion of organisations not reached or engaged in Merton

Voluntary sector organisations in Merton are characterised by a wide array of legal structures. We asked organisations if they were registered charities and 64 percent told us they were, a small increase of 3.6% on the 2013 sample.

Is your organisation a registered charity?	Percent
Yes	62.5%
No	36.3%
Don't Know	1.3%

Figure 05 Is your organisation a registered charity?

We also asked about the legal status of organisations. By far the most popular legal structures were Company Limited by Guarantee and Charitable Incorporated Organisation, but a significant number of organisations were unincorporated.

What is the legal status of your organisation?	Percent
Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)	25.0%
Company Ltd by Guarantee	30.0%
Industrial & Provident Society	2.5%
None - just starting	6.3%
Social Enterprise or Community Interest Company	12.5%
Unincorporated Association	23.8%
Friendly Society	0%

Figure 06 What is the legal status of your organisation?

Nationally the most recent data from NVCO¹³ points to 77 percent of organisations being unincorporated. It breaks these down by income bands:

NCVO income band (size designation)	Percentage of organisations that are unincorporated
Less than £10,000 (micro)	87.2%
£10,000 to £100,000 (small)	81.8%
£100,000 to £1 million (medium)	41.9%
£1 million to £10 million (large)	17.3%
More than £10 million (major and super-major)	14.0%
Total percentage across all bands	77.0%

Figure 07 percentage of unincorporated organisations across UK. Source The UK Civic Society Almanac 2016, NCVO and data.ncvo.org.uk

The disparity between the Merton sample of unincorporated organisations and the figures from NCVO point to a large section of the local sector that is unknown or engaged by MVSC and the wider partnership. Based on Charity Commission charity numbers of 666 in the borough, there are 512 unincorporated organisations in Merton.

¹³ The UK Civic Society Almanac 2016, NCVO

Compared to the 2013 research, the percentage of social enterprises and Community Interest Companies has risen by almost 5 percent in this 2016 sample. This could be an indicator of people trying new models of sustainability and job creation, advocated by successive governments since 1998.

There was a small increase in the number of new groups engaged in the mapping compared to 2013 but more notable was the number of unincorporated organisations. Compared to the 2013 sample, there were almost 10% more unincorporated organisations.

We found that 16.3 percent of organisations responding to our survey had been set up within the last three years. There are several factors that could have contributed to this finding: -

- MVSC funding has been focused support on new and emerging groups which could have led to the sample engaging the organisations with which they supported recently
- More social enterprise support in the borough has stimulated growth in this sector
- Reductions in public sector services has stimulated a community response

We also found that the sector is characterised by organisations with great staying power. 46.3% have been in existence for more than 21 years.

How long have you been operating?	Percent
Three years or less	16.3%
Four to ten years	20.0%
Eleven to twenty years	17.5%
More than twenty-one years	46.3%

Figure 08 How long have you been operating?

As would be expected, longer standing organisations were much more likely to be registered charities. With the threshold for registration with the Charity Commission now £10,000,



Figure 09 charity status by length of operation

Funding Profile and Issues

KEY FINDINGS

- **75% of organisations surveyed receive funding of some kind**
- **42% of organisations expect funding from Merton Council to stay the same over the next 3 years**
- **£740,000 savings achieved in VCS funding by Merton Council in 2016**
- **£1m of investment in the VCS through the Community Fund by Circle Housing ended in March 2015**
- **Small grants distributed by Circle Housing generated £1.12 additional match funding into Merton for every £1 invested**
- **Ways to engage and support unfunded groups and faith organisations needs to be refined in Merton**
- **Organisations need more support in making funding applications and preparing business plans and other strategic documents**
- **New ways need to be found to support small groups**
- **Capacity pressures are limiting organisational ability to develop and submit funding applications**
-

Like all boroughs in the country, austerity measures are impacting on all public-sector bodies including Merton Council, Merton CCG, Merton Police and Merton Fire Service. Thus, the voluntary and community sector cannot be protected from some resulting impact, as they are funded by the public-sector agencies to deliver services and support to Merton residents.

Since 2010, Merton Council has gradually reduced funding to the sector marginally and mostly only at recommissioning points, so as not to cut funding but change the profile of commissioning when the opportunity presents. Children, Schools and Families have worked with VCS organisations to achieve savings at certain points (2014) but this was negotiated with funded groups to ensure services could be sustained. The research demonstrated that overall, VCS organisations feel that Merton Council have managed the incremental reductions in funding well, in line with Merton Compact principles.

2016 has seen the greatest reduction in funding from Merton Council but was timed to take money out of the system at the end of a commissioning cycle. The scale of funding reductions is however notable: -

- Children, Schools and Families £340,000 reduction in VCS funding
- Housing and Adult Social Care £500,000 reduction in funding

Despite having to make such drastic savings, Merton Council has maintained its funding for small grants managed by MVSC in 2016. Recognising the importance of community activity delivered by small groups and a need to invest in fabric of the sector.

In 2015 the Merton Priory Homes (MPH) Community Fund came to an end. As part of their transfer agreement, MPH invested £1m into the voluntary sector through this programme. Its evaluation in October 2015 highlighted that for every £1 invested through the Community Fund, groups generated an additional £1.12 in match funding; bringing a further £1,124,231 into the borough¹⁴.

Analysis of Merton Priory Community Fund beneficiary groups highlights that small groups working with children and families and BAME communities have lost out most when the fund ended¹⁵.

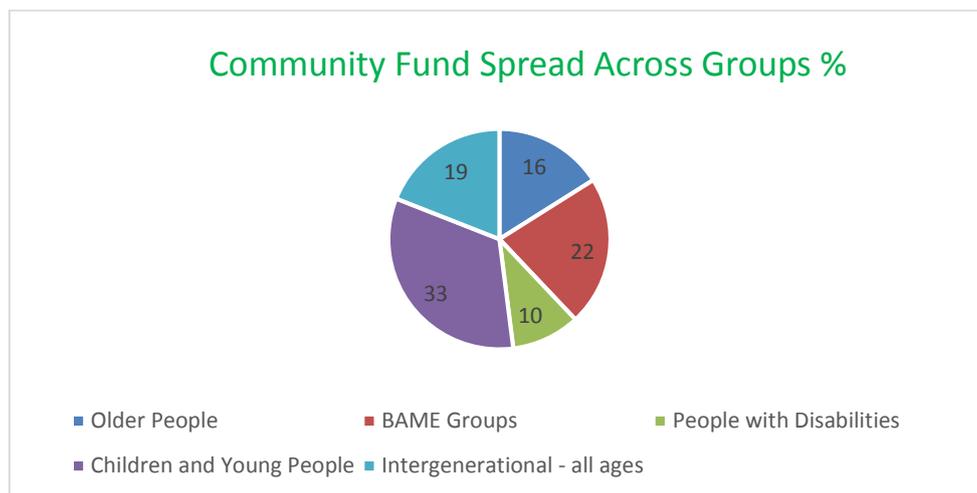


Figure 10 Circle Merton Priory Community Fund Reach Across Groups

We were interested to learn more about the situation across the last three years, as successive rounds of reductions in funding resources have begun to bite. We asked organisations what their total income was over the last three years.

What was your total income over the last three years?	2013	2014	2015
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Less than £1,000	21.62	20.78	17.50
£1,001 - £5,000	9.46	12.99	12.50
£5,001 - £10,000	9.46	9.09	13.75
£10,001 to £100,000	28.38	25.97	21.25
£100,001 to £1m	24.32	24.68	28.75
£1m to £10m	6.76	6.49	6.25

Figure 11 What was your total income over the last three years?

Income Trends

Analysis shows that organisations with less than £10,000 are a steadily growing group comprising 40.54 percent of the total in 2013 and 43.75 percent of the total in 2015. The largest group also demonstrates a trend of reducing income.

¹⁴ Celebrating our Community Fund - Circle Housing (Merton Priory) October 2015

¹⁵ Celebrating our Community Fund - Circle Housing (Merton Priory) October 2015

To some extent the sector is a mirror or reflection of national policy and funding profiles in which most small grants have a turnover limit which means they are not available to larger groups. Meanwhile larger groups are usually contracted and have seen cuts in contract value and/or have been decommissioned.

What was your total income over the last three years?	2013	2014	2015
	Percent	Percent	Percent
£0 to £10,000	40.54	42.86	43.75
£10,001 to £100,000	28.38	25.97	21.25
£100,001 to £1m	24.32	24.68	28.75
£1m to £10m	6.76	6.49	6.25

Figure 12 What was your total income over the last three years?

There is an increasingly widely held view that as cuts to funding begin to bite even harder, local services, including those for more vulnerable members of the community, will increasingly rely on smaller groups and less formal volunteering structures. Our findings suggest this may already be apparent in Merton, and it is a view that was expressed in our faith groups' focus group, which has contact with multiple smaller groups and informal volunteering structures.

New approaches to supporting smaller groups and less formal volunteering / social action will need to be developed to help organisations successfully navigate the new pathways that lie ahead.

It must be recognised that a quarter of organisations who took part in our online survey do not receive any funding at all. Our faith groups' focus group and numerous of our one to one interviews highlighted that many groups sustain themselves without ever securing funding through grants and contracts. They are often small but their work and social value of equal value to the larger organisations.

Faith groups and some small groups said they themselves as a different beast to the 'larger' organisations. They are focused on doing things and not on what some see as 'chasing' money. They don't want to participate in networks (such as INVOLVE), but do want to be engaged and supported.

Funding Profile

75% of organisations surveyed receive funding, we asked those which do not receive any funding how they operate without this resource. Membership fees, subscriptions, sponsored events, donations and fundraising were often mentioned in responses, and the 'goodwill of volunteers' was also important for some organisations.

Organisations receive funding from a wide range of sources. The table below shows the percentage of organisations using specific sources over the current and previous two financial years.

Did your organisation receive funding from any of these sources in the last three years?			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17 (at this point in time)
	Percent	Percent	Percent
London Borough of Merton	61.11	65.28	47.22
Merton NHS (CCG)	9.72	12.50	12.50
Central Government	2.78	4.17	5.56
Any other statutory body (Police, Fire Service etc.)	5.56	4.17	4.17
Housing Association (i.e. Circle Merton Priory)	41.67	29.17	9.72
City Bridge Trust	1.39	5.56	6.94
Trust for London	5.56	4.17	2.78
Lloyds Foundation	6.94	4.17	1.39
London Councils (London Borough Grants)	2.78	2.78	1.39
European Funding (ESF etc.)	1.39	0.00	2.78
Other charitable trusts/companies	31.94	31.94	30.56
Big Lottery Fund	11.11	12.50	15.28
Awards for All	12.50	9.72	2.78
Other Lottery distributors	2.78	1.39	1.39
Fees paid by service users	26.39	29.17	29.17
Contracts for Services	22.22	25.00	23.61
Unrestricted fundraising	33.33	36.11	34.72

Figure 13 Did your organisation receive funding from any of these sources in the last three years?

Several interesting and informative trends emerge when comparing funding across the three years.

- There has been a significant fall in funding from LBM across the period
- There has been a very significant fall in funding from housing associations
- There is a less significant but still concerning fall in funding from Trust for London and Lloyds Foundation
- City Bridge Trust is being used to an increasing extent
- Big Lottery Fund is being used more and more while the other key Lottery based funding source, Awards for All is declining
- Organisations do not seem to be increasing fees to service users to compensate for possible losses of funding from elsewhere. We heard from focus groups and one to one sessions that there is a reluctance to ask service users to pay more as this may exclude people based on affordability
- Unrestricted fundraising is barely changed across the three-year period

The Challenge of Fundraising

Analysis of the data and contributions from one to one interviews and focus groups leads to several conclusions:

- 40% of organisations expect income from unrestricted sources to grow despite it having been reasonably static for the last three years. There is a need to provide support for this desired change. Organisations need access to several areas of support including:
 - Skill development in the fundraising methods needs to be addressed
 - Support in formulating fundraising strategies
 - Support in identifying funding sources

- More effort should be put into maximising the Merton Community Fund which could be a significant resource, particularly for smaller groups.

Sutton Council have been harnessing community skills and time and have residents volunteering to support bid writing for groups and projects (mainly environmental and heritage) and has seen a good success rate. As it is time limited, project based volunteering it may appeal to a section of the community reluctant to make long term volunteering commitments.

Looking just at the funding sources we specifically asked about, many organisations used a range of sources to help diversify their fundraising base. Still, a significant number concentrated on just two or three sources, suggesting there is scope for organisations to further diversify their income base.

Number of funding sources used in each year			
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17 (at this point in time)
	Number	Number	Number
None	11	7	12
One funding sources	17	20	15
Two funding sources	8	11	18
Three funding sources	8	7	10
Four funding sources	12	11	8
Five funding sources	6	7	4
Six funding sources	5	5	2
Seven funding sources	4	4	2
Eight funding sources	1	0	1

Figure 14 Number of funding sources used

By analysing these results further, we can see several trends:

- The number of organisations with no funding reduced significantly in the 2015/16 financial year, but looks to be on the rise again
- Fewer organisations in the current financial year are relying on a single funding source
- There is a clear spike in organisations using two funding sources in the current financial year, following a less pronounced rise in the 2015/16 financial year
- Growth in using three funding sources across the three time periods is also apparent
- The number of organisations using more than four funding sources is falling

Focus groups and one to one interviews shed some light on the reasons for these trends. We were told, for example, that:

- Applying for funds has become more like a job in recent times
- Responses to funding challenges have included; employing a fundraiser, setting up a fundraising committee and considering pursuing legacies.
- Reduced staffing at the same time as an increased need to seek funds is difficult to manage, not just because of the process of fundraising but also because of the need to report on grants
- The burden of activity required for the monitoring of grants often felt disproportionate to the size of grants awarded
- Using more funding sources meant a greater amount of time spent on monitoring and evaluation. Sometimes the cost benefit of this for organisations made applying for funding unattractive
- Organisations are having to put time into learning more about how to complete funding applications – and this can mean there is less time to spend on delivering services.
- Organisations have looked to neighbouring boroughs for funding support as they are perceived to be more supportive of the VCS
- Small groups described having their confidence knocked when funding bids were rejected. When a group is new and embarking on a new community venture they know is needed, the group wants to feel supported and recognised. Having a first small grant application rejected often puts the brakes on small groups.

In addition, several organisations indicated as change in mindset because of new ways of seeking funding, and for some the loss of core funding from Merton was of considerable concern. For example:

- A move towards having to apply for contracts or project funding made it difficult to find ways to cover core costs
- A need to think laterally about how to provide consistent services when relatively small grants for relatively short periods did not necessarily support that approach
- Key non-project staff roles including but not only Chief Officer roles, were under threat because of the lack of core funding
- A move from applying for a small number of larger grants to a larger number of smaller grants could be difficult because of factors like
 - Increased time spent on fundraising
 - Increased time spent on reporting
 - What one respondent called a ‘scramble for small amounts of money’

There were also some concerns expressed about funding being available for more ‘popular’ areas of work and that experience suggests this may be cyclical or influenced by wider public events, rather than necessarily based on need. One example given during our research was the migrant crisis in Europe which generated much support and interest earlier this year, but which is already tailing off as the topic drops out of the wider media, while need continues. The faith groups also highlighted this fact stating that donations had reduced as a result of less media coverage.

Our small groups focus group shed some additional light on funding as it specifically applies to small groups:

- Small grants are often not of a suitable size to deliver meaningful work
- Most small groups find it difficult to get grants
- Rejected funding applications can undermine the confidence of small groups. It is arguable whether the effect of rejections is greater for small groups over larger groups, but that they chose to mention it suggest they feel the problem keenly
- Being provided with support to make funding applications (for example by MVSC), is useful, but if an organisation is not supported in a broader and more joined up sense, then this feels piecemeal – and more so if bids are not successful
- The bureaucracy associated with small grants is often disproportionate to the level of grant given and is off-putting to groups

Charging for services has been an option adopted by some groups, but issues with this approach were pointed out, including:

- Some have found that service users are unable to pay and so unable to use services
- Moving from a free to charged model was difficult to achieve as services users can feel the organisation is turning against them

Future Funding

We asked organisations if they anticipated any changes in their use of the funding sources we previously listed in the coming three years. We were interested in organisations' expectations of where they might get funding from regardless of whether they were currently funded through a source or not.

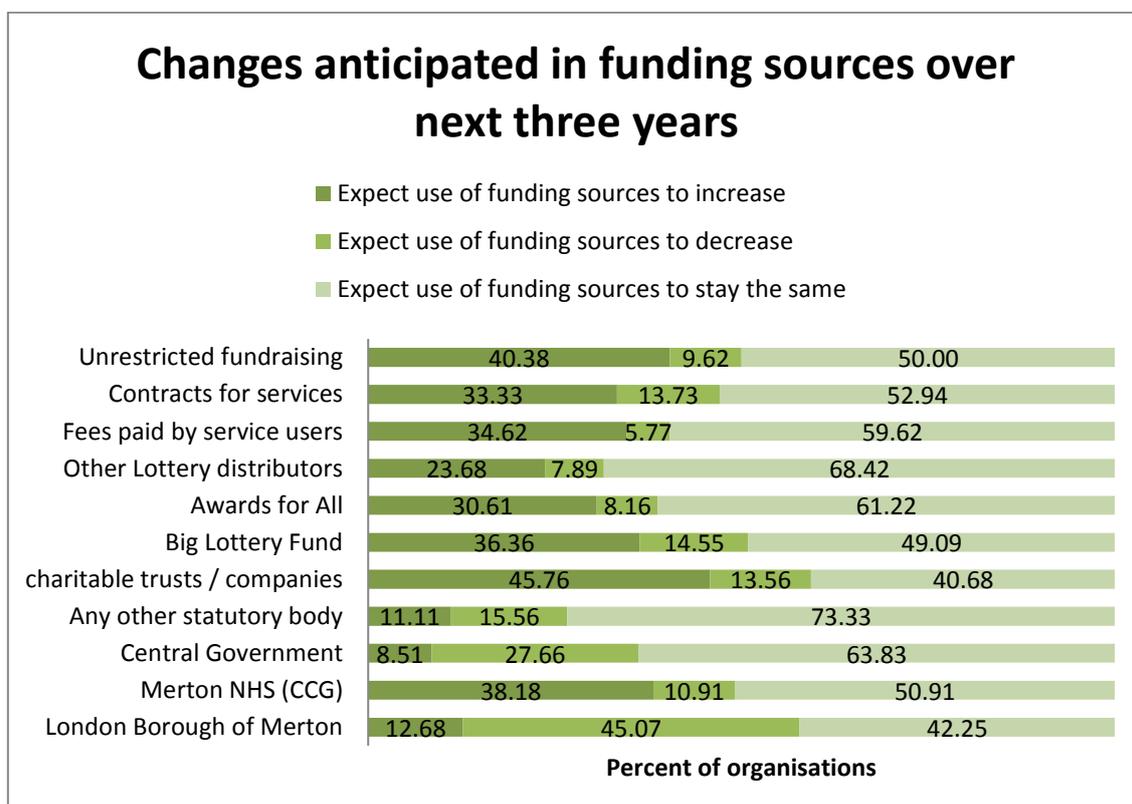


Figure 15 What changes do you anticipate in funding sources over the next three years?

We can see some interesting emergent trends around which sources of funding organisations are expecting to use to a greater or lesser extent in the coming three years.

- 45% of organisations expect funding from Merton Council to decrease
- 42% expect funding from Merton Council will remain the same
- 51% of organisations expect funding from the NHS to stay the same
- 38% of organisations expect NHS funding to increase in the next 3 years
- 35% expect to increase income from charging for services
- 46% of organisations expect to make greater use of charitable trusts and companies
- 40% expect to see a greater use of unrestricted fundraising

These figures point to the need for clearer messaging from public sector agencies about the opportunities for funding the VCS over the next three years. Groups cannot plan effectively without a better understanding of their future operating environment.

Greater pressure will be placed on service users to contribute towards the cost of services they receive.

Premises

KEY FINDINGS

- **Diversity of requirements for space including open space**
- **67% of organisations are experiencing challenges in relating to premises**
- **Need to increase rental costs by many agencies for their own sustainability is undermining the ability of small groups to find venues to deliver their work**
- **Consistent policy, practice and communication by Merton Council regarding premises is required**

The research identified that the VCS use premises, public realm and green space for a range of purposes including:

- Offices
- Service/activity delivery points
- Events
- Meeting places
- Training and conferences

Those organisations which have to manage premises can find it a complex and expensive matter. In the current economic climate, when subsidised or supported rents are under threat, organisations can be doubly concerned about the financial commitments they face regarding premises.

67% of organisations identified finding suitable and affordable premises as a challenge. The complexity of the challenges around premises really came to light however through the focus groups, one to one interviews and meetings with officers from the Council.

Major issues identified were: -

1. Groups taking proactive action around premises in response to funding reductions, only to find them undermined by lack of clarity on the future of sites by partners.
2. Lack of clarity and consistent policy on the relationship between premises, reduced rents and sustained funding from the council.
3. Lack of specialist support and investment in groups who need to contribute more towards their rent/premises, so they can change their business model and generate more income to cover increases.

Our small groups focus group discussed a range of problems they have finding premises. These included:

- Venue hire being their biggest cost. As organisations are experiencing reduced funding, they are charging for space hire. This includes libraries. These charges often put room hire out of the reach of small groups. At a time when communities are being asked to do more following reductions in state this is a self-defeating policy.
- Improving partnerships with groups that have premises could be worth exploring, though the forum realised that this would need coordination. It suggested a borough wide strategy to identify affordable space for groups to deliver services would be useful.
- Lack of awareness about the training room community use available in the new Mitcham Fire Station.

If the government's plans to change the model of local government funding go ahead in 2020 as planned, there will be a real need to plan for the impact offering rate relief to charities. If Merton Council's funding from central government is to be replaced with business rates, offering charities rate relief will seriously impact on the council's ability to generate income. Some to consider as part of the strategy development. Groups engaged in the research valued the current rate relief greatly.

Serving Merton's Communities

KEY FINDINGS

- 64% of organisations support BAME communities
- Largest areas of activity are children, young people, families and older people
- New groups are developing to fill gaps in provision and respond to the reductions in public sector activity

Merton’s voluntary sector provides services to a wide range of communities. We asked organisations to indicate which client groups they particularly worked with.

Which client groups does your organisation work with?	Percent
Children and families	60.0%
Women	66.3%
Black and minority ethnic groups	63.8%
Refugee and asylum seekers	42.5%
Faith communities	40.0%
Young people	65.0%
Older people	67.5%
Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender	38.8%
Travellers	21.3%
People with physical or sensory disability	42.5%
People with learning disability	42.5%
People with mental health problems	55.0%
Victims of crime	30.0%
Victims of domestic violence	33.8%
Carers	40.0%
Offenders	31.3%
People with substance misuse issues	31.3%

Figure 16 Which client groups does your organisation work with?

In addition to these client groups respondents were left free to add information relating to groups served. Many suggested that the segmentation of people into groups was not an appropriate way to try to understand how organisations in the sector function to serve communities. This is a response which highlights the sheer diversity of the sector in which some organisations are specialists by issue/need or community while others are activity/service focused. Geographic area boundaries cut across this to make for a complex, diverse and wide-reaching sector.

For example, several organisations, including those whose primary interest is in open spaces, sport, faith and health indicated in one way or another that such segmentation was not meaningful to them as they served any client group that wants to use their facilities. As one respondent to the online survey put it “anyone who dries their hands on the Dyson hand dryers in the toilet block” is served by the organisation.

Other respondents pointed out the difficulty of segmentation by noting the point that somebody from one of the segments above could belong to other segments too.

This is a perennial dilemma for work which tries to map and measure the voluntary sector. It also has a relevance much more pertinent to the current financial situation. At times when funding is challenged organisations with a ‘broad brush’ clientele can find themselves outside of the system for prioritising funding or sitting outside of identified funding streams.

Yet organisations which provide services which cut across a wide range of client groups can be just as valuable to those groups. Organisations that focus, for example, on open spaces, sport, faith and health can have a key role to play in social prescribing, in mental health and wellbeing, and in the provision of social contact.

The challenge for funders is to understand the value such groups can provide to the wellbeing of communities, even in situations where the results may not be easily measurable. Small groups described to us the scale of their reach and impact on individuals, but as groups they often don't have the capacity, skills or money to quantify and demonstrate their quality and impact. This means their effect can get lost, and they fail to be given the importance they deserve in the policy debate.

We were interested to see if there has been any change in groups setting up to serve sections of the community in recent years given changes in the wider funding regime.

Client groups served	Length of time operating			
	3 years or less	4 to 10 years	11 to 20 years	more than 21 years
Children and families	7	13	8	20
Women	10	14	10	19
Black and minority ethnic groups	9	10	12	20
Refugee and asylum seekers	7	7	9	11
Faith communities	7	8	6	11
Young people	9	13	9	21
Older people	9	9	12	24
Gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender	7	4	9	11
Travellers	2	2	6	7
People with physical or sensory disability	4	6	7	17
People with learning disability	3	8	6	17
People with mental health problems	7	8	8	21
Victims of crime	6	5	6	7
Victims of domestic violence	6	6	6	9
Carers	6	5	5	16
Offenders	4	8	5	8
People with substance misuse issues	4	6	6	9

Figure 17 Client groups served by length of time operating?

The analysis highlights a marginal larger increase in new organisations supporting older people, young people, carers, victims of domestic violence, victims of crime, people with mental ill-health, children and families in the last 3 years. Some of which can be due to filling gaps in local provision and some responding to reductions in public sector provision.

Service Provision and Changing Demand

KEY FINDINGS

- **70% of organisations identified increasing demand compared to 62% in 2013**
- **Pollards Hill, Lavender Fields, Figge's Marsh, Cricket Green and Colliers Wood Wards presenting increased demand for support**
- **Mental health, dementia, older people, young adults (16-24) identified as those presenting greater need**

All participants in the research were asked to profile their services, demonstrating a very wide range of activity.

- 70% provide advice and information
- 45% provide befriending or social activities
- 40% provide emotional and psychological support

What services do you provide?

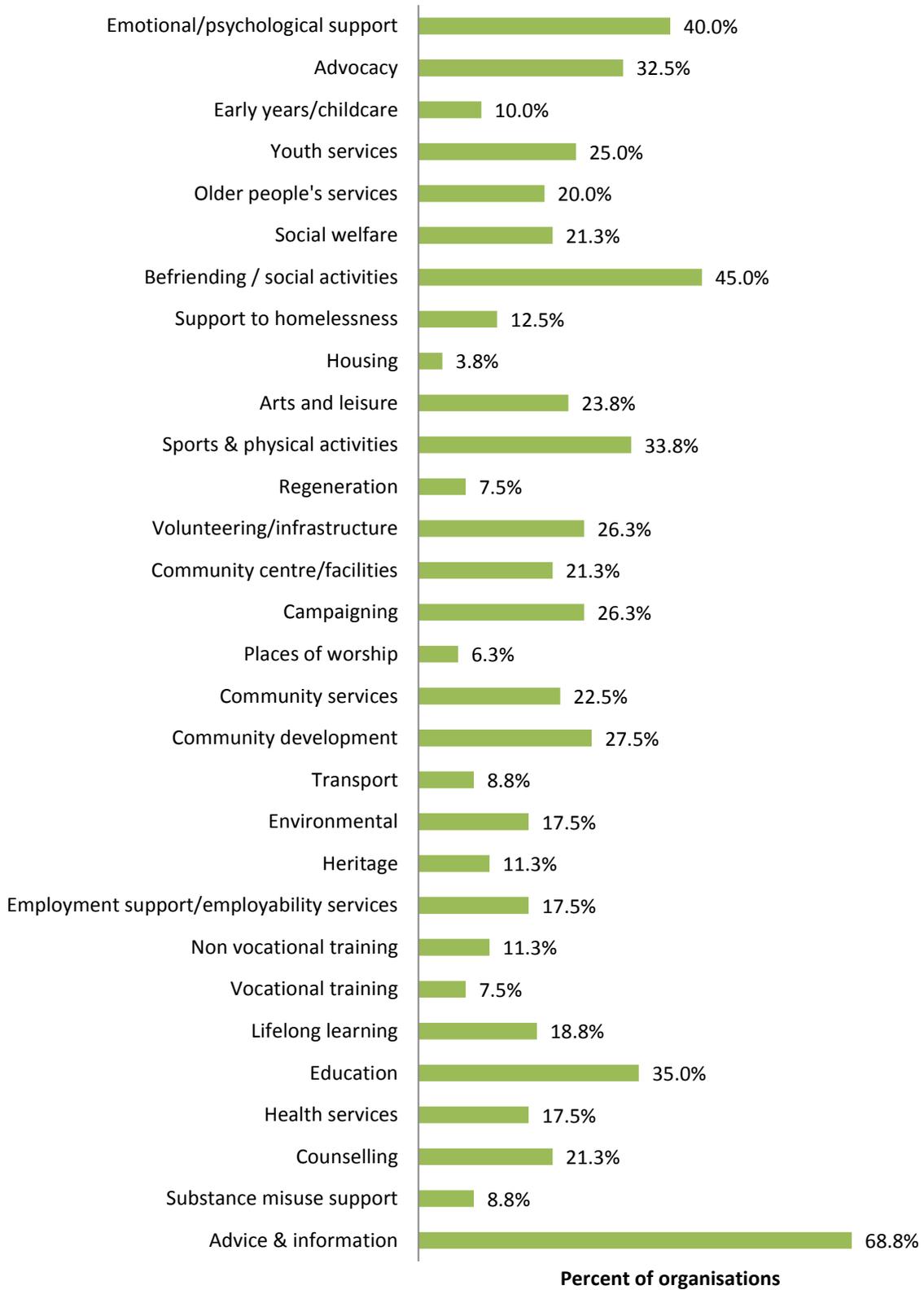


Figure 18 What services do you provide?

69 percent of organisations work across the whole borough but through the research we wanted to establish if certain wards presented higher demand.

The pattern presented by responses should be interpreted with some very strong caveats.

- We can't be certain that all organisations are aware of ward boundaries
- Organisations may set geographical boundaries using factors other than wards, and so selection of wards in this response may be more by accident than by design

Nor can we necessarily equate high levels of demand from wards with high levels of social need. We did not ask organisations to define 'demand' and so need to approach this finding with some care.

The responses did however identify five wards where organisations know there to be or perceive there to be higher demand:

- Pollards Hill
- Lavender Fields
- Figge's Marsh
- Cricket Green
- Colliers Wood

70 percent of organisations reported experiencing increased demand for support, this has gone up by 8 percent since the State of the Sector research in 2013.

21 percent state that demand has stayed the same over the last 3 years and only 6 percent report demand decreasing.

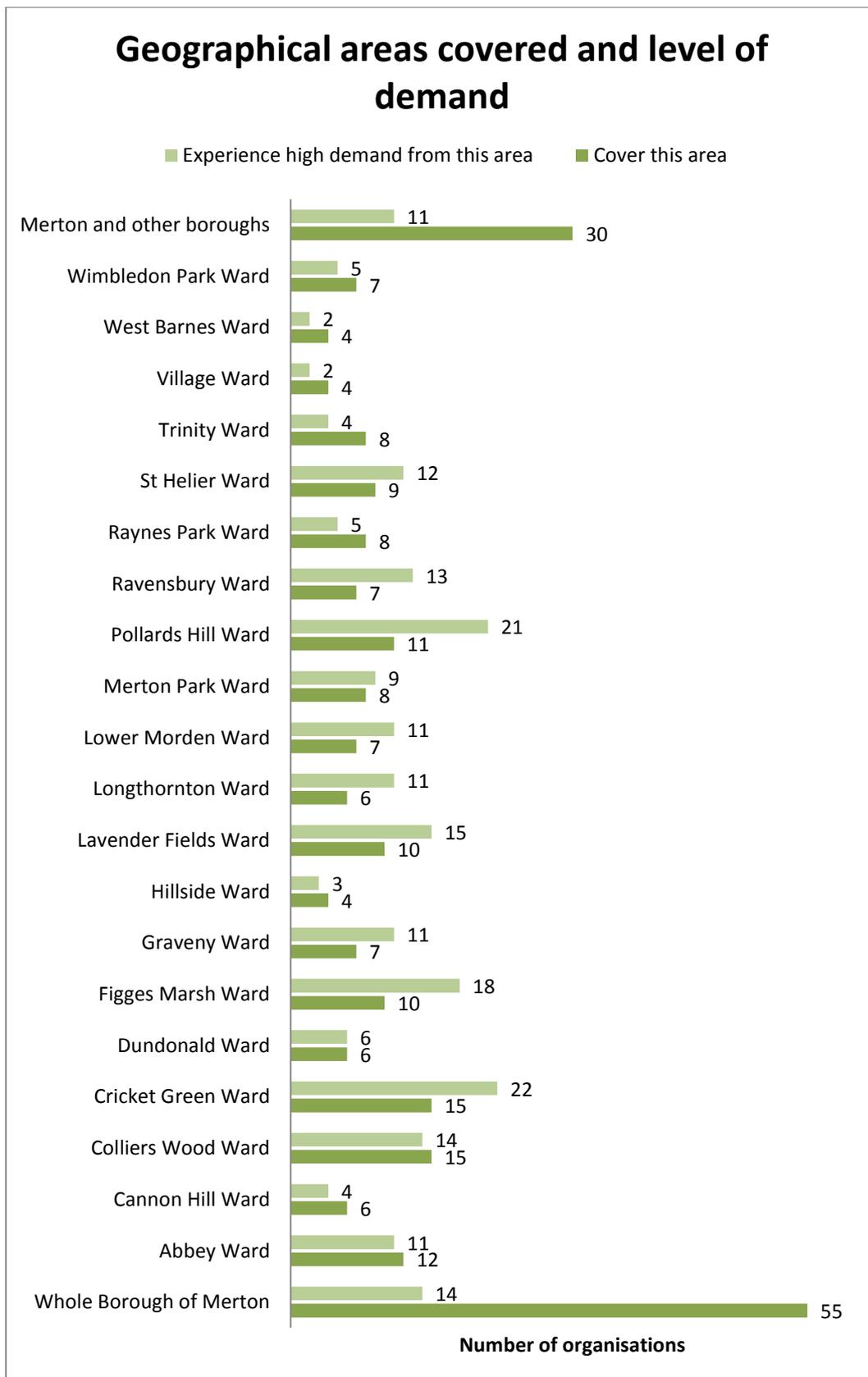


Figure 19 Which geographical areas do you cover and in which do you see the highest demand for your services?

Trying to profile the organisations who are reporting increasing demand for their support by size highlights some interesting factors.

- Groups with income below £10,000 are reporting the greatest pressures, marginally greater for those with income below £1k
- Groups with incomes between £10,000 and £100,000 are the next group reporting increasing demand

We asked survey respondents what they thought was causing this change, and discussed changing demand within our focus groups and one to one interviews.

Many respondents cited both the reduction in statutory services and reductions in benefits and other support which affect individual incomes as a key driver for increasing demand on their own services. Rising levels of poverty were also cited as a reason for growing demand, as was closure of organisations offering similar services.

Organisations are seeing a rise both in terms of the sheer numbers of people turning to services and the increasing complexity of individual cases.

One of our focus groups pointed out that demand for services, particularly across mental health and dementia, was spread across the whole borough, but those in the West are more affluent and able to respond more quickly and pay for services.

The point was made that asking about levels of demand by counting service users is the wrong way to approach this issue. We should be asking how many people are being turned away rather than how many are being helped.

This was the presenting face in our research of an issue that organisations already face and will face in the immediate future: how to deal with increased demand at a time of reduced funding.

A key challenge for the sector will be to formalise and firm up its ability and/or willingness to assess need and change or challenge eligibility. This may result in excluding some people from services. Methodologies for assessing need and means for responding to challenges will need to be clearly articulated and able to be followed through without causing further drain on organisational resources. This is already a presenting challenge, and it will only become more visible as funding cuts bite harder while demand rises.

The governance issues this presents for organisations are enormous, not least because it often goes against their values, ethos and ethics. LBM will need to consider carefully how it will handle the rising need for support in this area.

Reductions in VSC funding by Merton Council were, as one would expect, heavily criticised. Groups described the cuts as having a negative impact on their ability to deliver services just at the time when need is increasing and knowledge about their own offer is also rising. Some were facing having to cope with considerable increase in demand alongside decreases in funding, and their frustrations were palpable.

The increasing complexity of individual cases was cited by many organisations which take on an advocacy or individual support role as an issue of major concern. Lack of specialisms to deal with individuals who may already have been referred by other agencies, referrals to voluntary sector organisations without necessary assessments being carried out first by statutory agencies, and a feeling that voluntary sector agencies are being used to pick up the slack of a reduced statutory sector without the benefit of resources or expertise were all cited as frustrations.

Some organisations providing direct services or advocacy felt that the perception of their role was changing without a parallel change in the level of support they received. Some organisations said they felt they were now being treated more like statutory than voluntary sector organisations, in some cases contracted to the local authority and with referrals coming direct to them without much understanding of what the organisation can and cannot deliver.

For example, one interviewee told us many referrals now coming to them “have a social need which we cannot help with, or have mental health issues that we can’t deal with.” Another told us that they are increasingly getting referrals with major support needs such as mental health needs. And another said they were taking on a lot of the work that social workers used to do, but without the resource to do it.

Faith groups were consistent in their view that their social and community action work is poorly understood. As many resource their own services from within their community, they don’t need to be part of formal networks, and thus are often under-represented, and their views not heard, or the value of their contribution not noted.

They said they pick up when public service cuts bite and when local community resources funding is cut, and see this as something that will only get more pressing as time goes on. The focus group was strong in its view that because the faith sector is picking up a lot of pieces now, the true impact of reduced funding across the VCS is hidden.

Many organisations said they were becoming increasingly well known, variously citing this because of better skills at publicising themselves and their services, improved networking, or because of changing business models, and that this was part of the reason they were experiencing increasing demand. However even this was not viewed entirely positively. One questionnaire respondent summed the situation up as “Organisations are under more pressure to meet increasing demands with reduced funds.” This was a sentiment widely echoed across the organisations we spoke to, and again emphasis the need for organisations to be equipped to handle issues of eligibility mentioned earlier.

Merton Council has had an ongoing policy to support people in the east of the borough, and this has resulted in a lot more community engagement. Respondents pointed out that this is resulting in a growing demand for services. There is a clear need for the demand that’s created to be followed through by funding and other forms of project support so that newly apparent demand is met – and seen to be met – though the VCF.

The Sector's people

Merton's VCS relies on a mix of trustees, volunteers and paid staff, and that mix varies across different organisations, with a significant number having no paid staff at all.

KEY FINDINGS

- Just under half of organisations have no paid staff
- Staffing patterns are remarkably stable suggesting organisations are trying to meet increasing demand without increased staff resources
- 569 trustees across 80 organisations
- Lack of diverse skills for trustees presents a challenge
- Inadequate supervision of employees by staff identified as a problem
- 49% of organisations have increased volunteers in last 3 years

Employees

We asked questionnaire respondents if their organisation has paid staff. Two fifths (41 percent) said they had no paid staff. This sits against 56 percent having paid staff in 2013.

We were interested to know how many paid staff organisations had, and whether these were full time or part time.

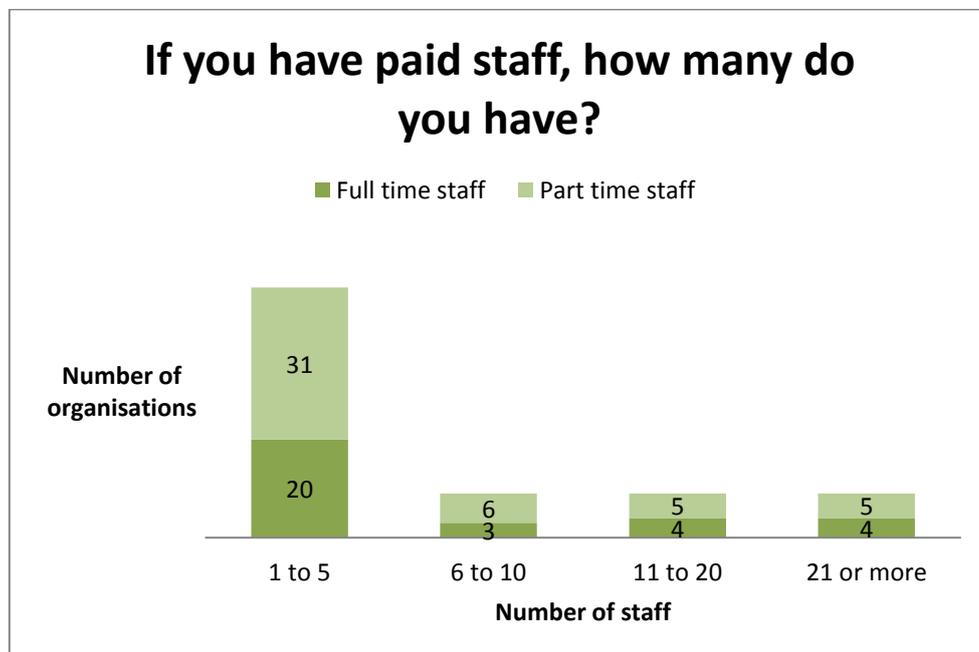


Figure 20 Do you have paid staff?

We also wanted to know if staffing patterns had changed over the last three years. For the clear majority of organisations staffing patterns had stayed the same, reinforcing points made elsewhere in this report that organisations are trying to serve increasing numbers of people without increased resources.

Trustees

We asked questionnaire respondents how many trustees their organisation has and explored governance across all our research methods.

The 78 organisations which provided a numerical answer to this question had between them a total of 569 trustees worth £341,400 of volunteer time to Merton’s civil society. This equates to a mean number of trustees per organisation of 7.2.

The distribution of trustees’ bulks at between six and 12, with one organisation having 20 trustees and seven having no trustees at all.

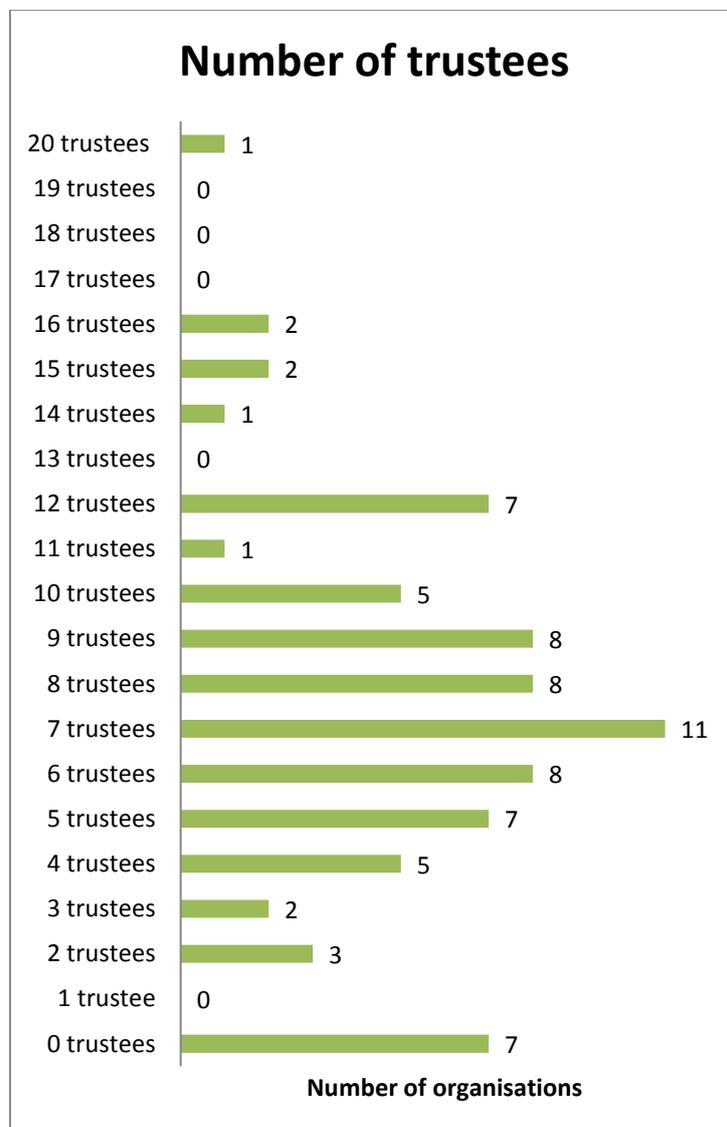


Figure 21 How many trustees/committee members does your organisation have?

Organisations which have a board of trustees (or management committee), find them crucial to strategic decision making. We asked our focus groups and interviewees about their experiences in recruiting and retaining trustees, how that has changed in recent years, and about the quality of trustees.

Several organisations said they have used skills audits to better understand the abilities and skills of their trustees and to identify gaps. Other recruit trustees based on their areas of knowledge or expertise, and some admitted they recruited trustees if they liked them, rather than going through skills based recruitment processes.

Organisations use various methods to recruit trustees ranging from using specialist companies to local contacts, church, recruiting through MVSC's web site.

Expectations of trustees can be high, and some organisations told us that more in depth knowledge and expertise was required today than had been the case in the past, and that they demanded more of trustees than previously.

However, others admitted to issues with trustees such as a lack of diverse skills, lack of new trustees and absence of supervision for senior staff.

Volunteers

We asked questionnaire respondents about their engagement of volunteers. The number of volunteers active in organisations varied from none to 350.

We asked questionnaire respondents whether their level of engagement with volunteers had changed over the last three years.

- For half of respondents (49 percent) engagement with volunteers had increased
- For a fifth (20 percent) engagement with volunteers had decreased
- For a little less than a third (31 percent) engagement with volunteers had stayed the same

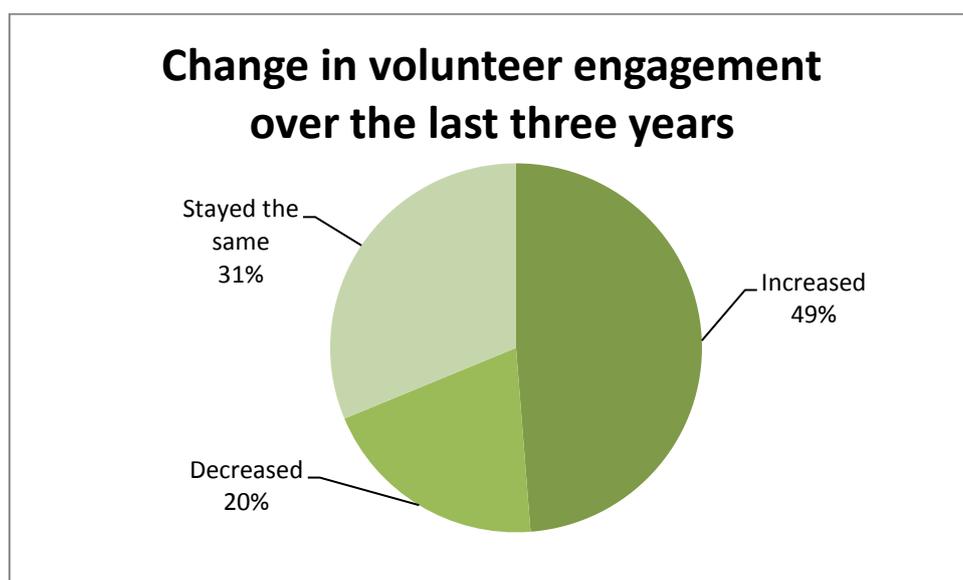


Figure 22 Regardless of whether or not you engage with volunteers now, has the number of volunteers you engage changed in the last three years?

Respondents told us that a variety of methods was used to identify and recruit volunteers:

- MVSC
- local businesses
- advertising in the local paper
- colleges
- putting ads at community venues
- word of mouth

Our qualitative research identified the contribution volunteers make as well as a number of challenges organisations face in recruiting and supporting volunteers. Those organisations with a paid volunteer coordinator identified fewer challenges to those who do not have someone in this role.

The issues identified were:

- Too many people wanting to volunteer and not enough capacity to manage and support them
- Not having the people, time and resources to make volunteers feel valued for their time
- Struggling to recruit volunteers and borough based support being inadequate to address this
- Volunteers needing more support than organisations are able to provide
- A belief that the volunteer opportunities on offer may not be the type people are looking for
- Small groups said they find it harder to get and support volunteers than larger organisations
- Volunteers may be involved as a step to employment rather than wanting to put something back into the community. This can mean they do not stay very long, yet they require as much training, support and mentoring as those who stay with an organisation for years
- A feeling that the attitude to volunteering for some had changed and they expected something in return now. This can be difficult for organisations to manage
- The cost of training volunteers in essential courses is a significant drain on resources but organisations know they won't be able to function without volunteers.
- Smaller groups find it harder to find the capacity to develop the systems, role descriptions, supervision, support and other things that volunteers need, or even to find the thinking time to plan for volunteer recruitment and support.
- For some organisations beneficiaries and trustees are also volunteers. This is especially the case in user led organisations, peer support activities, befriending and other organisations which directly engage with service users.

There was a very real sense that small groups in particular would benefit from free, readily available help in all matters relating to volunteers. The sense we got was that this is about much more than offering short training or information sessions, or help with recruitment. More hands on, ongoing mentoring support, could go a long way to helping meet small groups' needs.

Organisational Development

KEY FINDINGS

- **There are mixed views about the value of networks, small groups placing greater importance on them than their larger partners**
- **Clear areas of priority for organisational development include fundraising, tendering, communication, monitoring, evaluation, strategic leadership and planning**
- **71% attend networks and forums in Merton**

For the voluntary sector to thrive it needs to engage in organisational development and training, and take advantage of external support offered by infrastructure organisations, training providers and other third parties. It can also benefit from networking on both a formal and informal basis. While it should be recognised that some organisations manage to thrive without such support, small groups told us they especially valued networking.

We wanted to learn how what kinds of organisations development and training might be of most benefit, what is being taken advantage of at present, and to learn more about how organisations approach networking.

Support and Training

We asked questionnaire respondents whether they received any external support or training to ensure good governance, management and sustainability. More than a third (36 percent) said they did not.

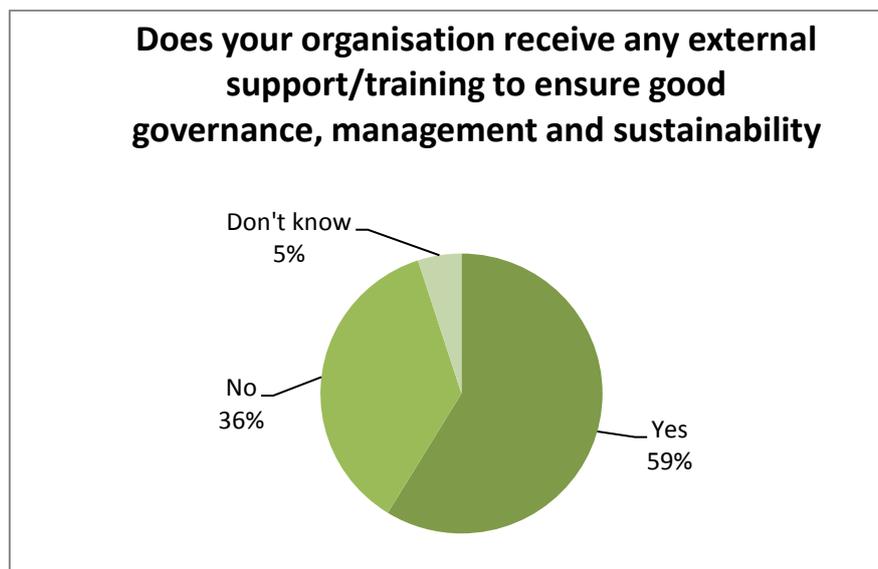


Figure 23 Does your organisation receive any external support/training to ensure good governance, management and sustainability?

We then asked organisations to tell us the kinds of support that they receive from external agencies. The most frequently cited area in which external support was sought was governance, with 52.7 percent of organisations having had support in this area. Financial planning and management was the next most popular area for support with 47.3 percent of organisations taking this up. Quality standards support had been sought by 45.5 percent and 41.8 percent had received support with fundraising.

Strategic planning was relatively unpopular as an area for seeking support with a quarter (25.5 percent) of organisations taking advantage of external support in this area. However, this might not be an argument for offering less support in this area. Strategic planning in its wider sense – identifying markets, understanding trends, think about client needs in a broad way, can be something organisations lack the time or capacity to undertake. Yet it is something that’s increasingly important as they face the challenges of increasing demand and diminishing resources.

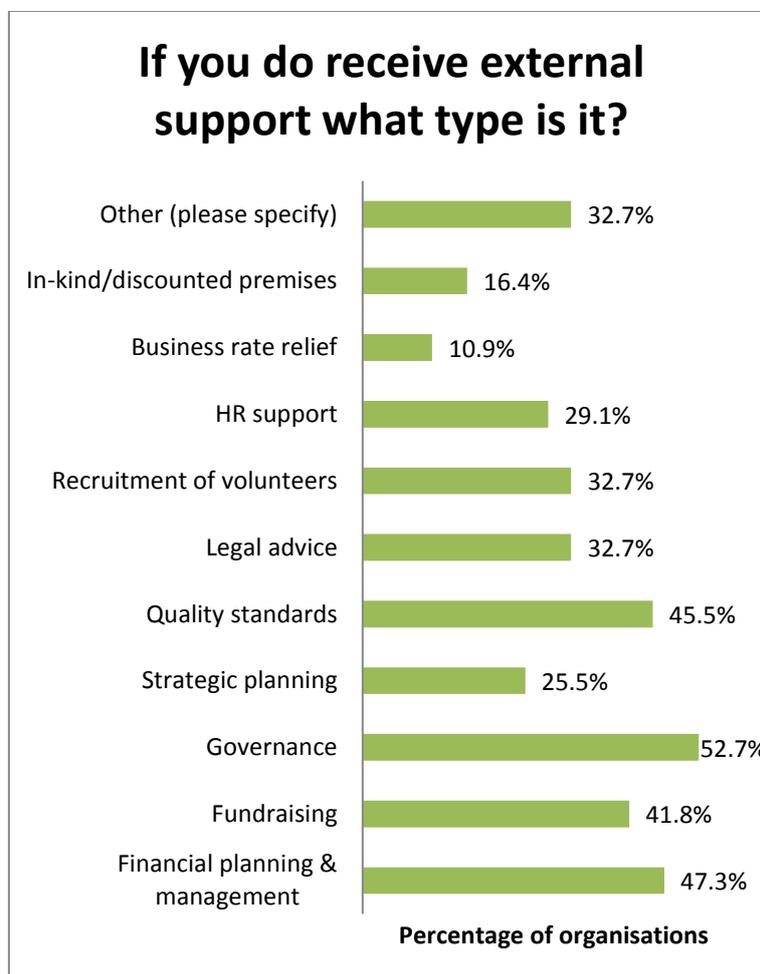


Figure 24 If you do receive external support/training what type is it? (Respondents = 55).

We were interested in following up on specific support that might benefit staff, trustees and the Chief Officers of organisations. We asked about a range of different topics on which support might be useful to these groups. There were some consistent areas of support identified across trustees, CEOs and managers: -

- Fundraising
- Tendering
- Strategic Planning/leadership
- Monitoring and evaluation

Other areas identified as greatest priorities for CEOs were:

- Change management
- Handling the media and PR
- Enterprise/business development
- Communications

For managers a broader range of priorities emerge:

- Relationship management
- Performance management
- Managing people (including volunteers)
- Marketing
- Computing and technology
- Communications

For trustees' similar priority areas were identified but with some clear differences: -

- Change management
- Working as a cohesive team
- Media and PR
- Financial management
- Governance
- Strategic leadership and planning

Despite the number of groups who stated they access external support, when this was explored in the focus groups and one to one interviews, remarkably few said they had received any external support. It is not clear from the research whether this means organisations buy in external support as professional services such as accountancy and legal but don't invest in developing in people to make them more self-reliant and resilient.

A small number told us about external support they had received. HR advice was mentioned, and our small groups' focus group was particularly strong in its recognition of the need for support in understanding how to use the internet. It rightly pointed out that as more and more information and resources go online, groups need to be able to support others in using digital resources, for example when helping clients access online benefits resources or Council services. We can infer from this that there may be cases where the groups themselves may need support in understanding these resources in order to pass their knowledge on.

This forum also said it felt the need for an advocate for smaller groups, not least to encourage investment in those groups, and that small groups could be more coordinated in their approach to supporting each other.

The tendency for larger groups to secure contracts and then refer clients to smaller groups, and even their tendency to pass on more complex cases despite getting the funding to deal with them was a concern for small groups.

We were told that some groups in the BAME sector had relocated to Croydon as they felt they got better support from that borough.

Faith groups stressed the importance of organisations working together, and this carried through into its comments on support and training, which it suggested could be delivered jointly across a range of organisations. This could be the case both for organisational training focused on specific skills or certification such as first aid, and more 'generic' training such as dementia awareness.

Funding, and access to sources of funding came up frequently as an area where organisations felt they could benefit from more support. They told us that information received was patchy and that while some was received through MVSC they found the need to search other sources, such as web sites, themselves. There is a question mark as to how much an infrastructure organisation can do to meet the specific needs of organisations, but the number of comments we received around funding across all this survey suggests there is a need for more support in this area.

Networking and Information Sharing

Networking is always seen as important for voluntary sector organisations. Formal networking events such as those organised by infrastructure bodies such as MVSC are a good opportunity to learn about important topics, and present the added advantage of including freeform networking time during which organisations can exchange information.

Small groups appeared to value networking more than larger groups, but with increasing demands on their time it can be easy for organisations to de-prioritise attending networking events.

We asked survey participants if they had attended any networking events in the previous six months and for details about which events were attended and how valuable they had been. We deliberately chose not to define networking events, to allow organisations to self-define and give us an idea of the spread of activities they consider to be networking events.

There was a feeling among our faith groups' focus group that networks were dominated by paid staff, and that that there is a political element to the way the voluntary and community sector works that is a barrier to engagement. They expressed no interest in being part of networks in their current form because of these issues.

Faith groups also pointed out that networks often focus on funding, which is not something they focus on. Instead Faith groups' focus is action and delivery. Approaching their involvement from such different starting points causes a clash of cultures in networking structures which doesn't work well for them.

Faith groups prefer informal collaboration which is less bureaucratic. They are very keen on making connections around sharing information on opportunities, current issues and ideas sharing.

The timing of networking events affects the ability of individuals to attend. We were told that volunteer committee members who work during the day feel unable to engage in networking

because events are primarily held in the day time. They would like to engage, but are unable to. The same comment was made about opportunities to explore collaborative working.

Our experience through the focus groups and one to one interviews suggests that attending events is often made the responsibility of a single individual. There are consequences to this approach which might be detrimental. For example, only one person from a group is the external face, and if they are not available, nobody else is sent in their place.

The respondents who said they did attend networking events between them attended a wide variety of different events. By far the most attended was MVSC's INVOLVE forum which was mentioned by 20 of the respondents.

Collaboration and Partnership

KEY FINDINGS

- All agencies need to recognise the value of all groups regardless of their size. Small groups often feel undervalued, and evidence suggests larger groups need to be mindful of their interaction and engagement of smaller groups.
- Organisations may feel less inclined to share information in a time of reduced funding and increased competition for resources.
- 14% increase in partnership work since 2013
- Lack of transparency from Merton Council cited as an issue
- Lack of trust and greater competition are major factors undermining collaboration

Partnership working is increasingly important in the current climate, where funders are looking for organisations to show they can maximise the value from resources by working with others to ensure service delivery is not duplicated and resources are used economically. Collaboration between voluntary sector organisations and across sectors including local authority and health are all growing in importance.

We were interested to explore how Merton's voluntary sector is managing collaborative working, and how they feel about the quality of partnerships with statutory and public bodies.

We asked organisations to identify the statutory and public bodies with which they have positive working relationships.

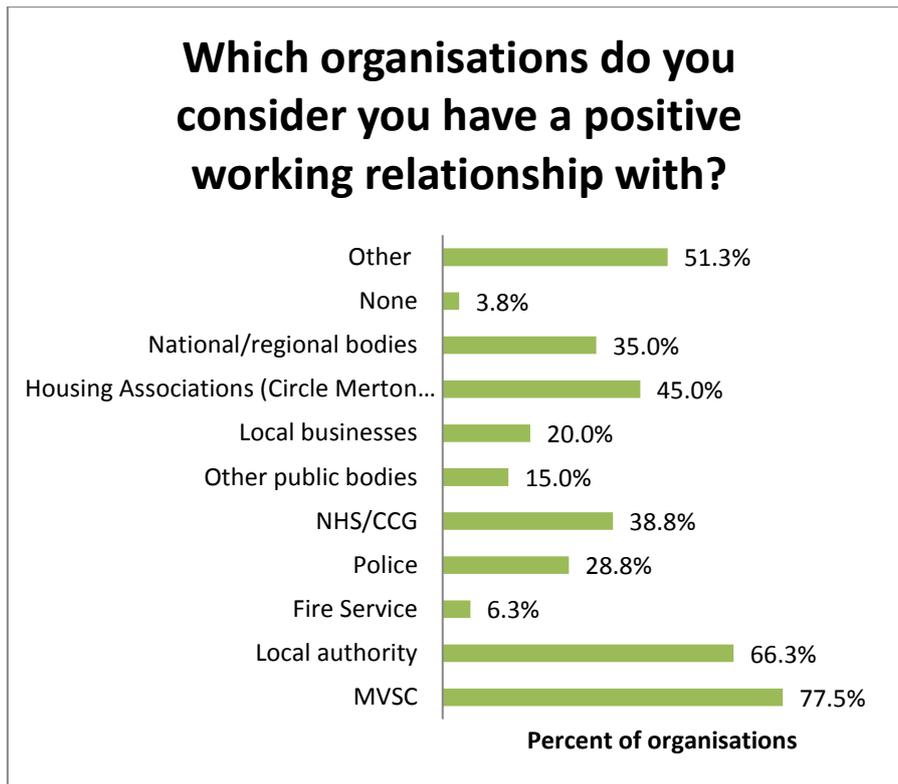


Figure 25 Which organisations do you consider you have a positive working relationship with? (Respondents = 80).

- Merton CCG have seen a marked increase in positive partnership relationships with the VCS.
- Merton Fire Service have seen a reduction in their engagement with the VCS.
- Relationships with business have also marginally improved.

We asked respondents to our questionnaire to tell us if they deliver services in partnership with other organisations. Two thirds (67 percent) said they did, an increase of 14% since 2013.

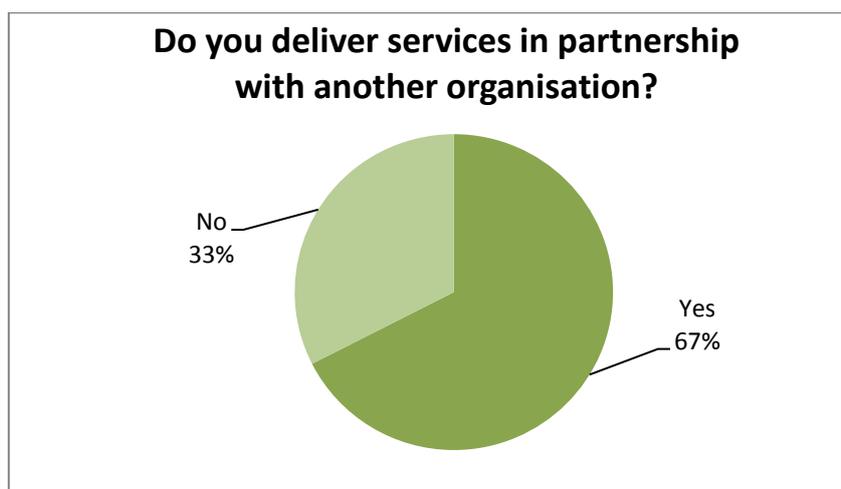


Figure 26 Do you deliver services in partnership with another organisation?

We also wanted to know what organisations thought of the quality of partnership working. We did not restrict this to just those organisations who said they delivered services because we wanted to understand the general trend of opinion. Just over half (53.3 percent) thought the quality of partnership working was good.

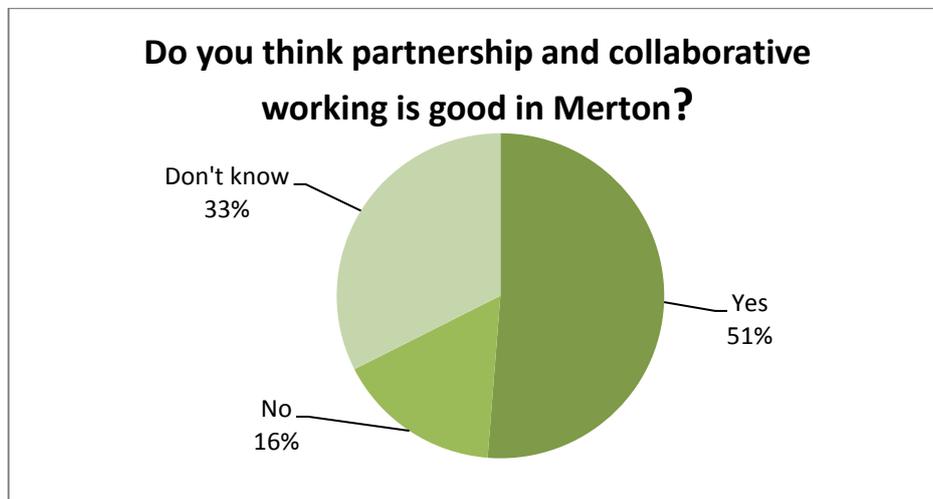


Figure 27 Do you think partnership and collaborative working is good in Merton? (Respondents = 80).

We offered respondents the opportunity to add a comment on this question. Two thirds (64 percent) of respondents chose to leave a comment, indicating the degree of importance that voluntary organisations attach to partnership working. We have incorporated these comments with those received from our focus groups and one to one interviewees.

The overall picture is very mixed; the table below brings together comments from respondents across all the research.

Partnership and collaboration likes and dislikes	
Organisations like.....	Organisations dislike.....
Feeling of common purpose	Threat of losing funding to other organisations
Showcasing work	Feeling that there is not a joined-up strategy to deliver to all services which avoids waste and duplication
Enabling other organisations to link with projects	The principles of the Compact need to be upheld [inference that they are not being at present]
Broader partnerships result in better quality delivery	Need better planning to meet partnership requirements. Present approach seems too reactive
Seeing a shared vision develop among partners	Transparency is key [inference that it is not present always]
Sharing of common interests	Routes to collaborative working and networking tend to be during working hours, so they are out of reach for those who work. There was

	particular mention of MVSC offering its events during working hours.
Provision of mutual support	The timing of networking events affects the ability of individuals to attend. We were told that volunteer committee members who work during the day feel unable to engage in networking because events are primarily held in the day time. They would like to engage, but are unable to. The same comment was made about networking.
	Limited understanding of small community organisations
	Limited understanding of those organisations that don't provide 'services' but champion issues or local geographical areas
	Perceived control by Merton Council
	Feeling excluded – a view particularly expressed by a BAME organisation which felt its expertise was called upon but then not recognised

Small groups face challenges in terms of partnership working and collaboration.

- A feeling expressed more than once in different ways across interviews and focus groups was that large groups are too ready to take the credit for work done by small groups. Yet small groups often provide the route to population groups and individuals who are hard to reach, and, as has been pointed out elsewhere in this report, small groups that work with clients can feel that more challenging clients are referred to them while larger groups take the contract money and credit for the work.

Faith groups are very clear that they spend a lot of time picking up the pieces funding cuts bite. They expressed their desire for this role to be understood, and a wish to be equal partners in the Merton Partnership. They want to work on developing a more sustainable approach to supporting communities, through co-production, rather than consistently acting as a backstop.

Long established relationships between VCF organisations and the statutory sector are being broken as statutory sector jobs are cut back. The effect of these losses is difficult to quantify, but it has been identified as detrimental to the sector. Organisations felt frustrated at the need to start again with relationship building, often at very short intervals. They feel they are constantly revisiting old ground or even going backwards.

There was a general feeling that Merton Council and other bodies don't think expansively or creatively enough. Numerous organisations spoke of having better experiences out of borough – Sutton was praised by many for its levels of support.

On numerous occasions, we were told that groups' experiences around collaborative working were changing, with organisations retracting from collaboration, being less open, and less willing to share

ideas. There was a perceived fear of having ideas taken and used by other groups, because of having to apply to reduced funding sources.

Representation and Voice

KEY FINDINGS

- **Organisations feel they are not engaged enough by statutory sector**
- **There is a need for improved communications**
- **Voluntary sector partnership and service boards are poorly understood and could be better managed**
- **Small groups feel they do not currently have enough of a voice**

We asked focus groups and one to one interviewees about whether they felt listened to and able to influence local agencies as much as in the past, about how well they feel represented and about how well they felt the voluntary sector was valued in the borough. The responses suggest there is more work to be done across these areas.

The ability to engage by and listened to by local agencies seems to be patchy, with some organisations reporting good relationships, others weak ones. There is a general feeling that the engagement is not at a high enough level to influence policy and because of this, agencies are missing out on valuable information organisations have, such as learning from direct contact with service users.

A number told us they felt they were not a priority for Merton, even where they delivered services direct to significant numbers of users. Others told us they did not feel valued by other agencies.

Our small groups' focus group was clear that there was a need for a better voice for small groups. This is something that was picked up numerous times during the focus group.

Where organisations were approached by statutory agencies and others for consultation, they could be left with no follow up or feedback on their input. The CCG and mental health trusts were give as examples.

Some organisations felt they should be more widely involved in policy making on areas that are directly related to their work, and that there may be some simple things which could make their work much more effective, but they were simply not asked or their voice was often ignored.

We asked whether respondents are aware of voluntary sector representatives on local partnerships and service boards. Awareness levels seemed low, and there was criticism of these strictures from some who were representatives including:

- A lack of training and support – one member said they waited nine months between election and training (though we don't know the reason for this), another implied the structure was complex and it was difficult to understand who all the representatives are, nor how the structure worked.
- When partnership meetings are attended, it can be difficult to see how being there has made any difference

Response to Changing Environment

KEY FINDINGS

- **The changing environment is putting increasing pressure on VCF organisations at all levels**
- **Mental health is an area which is particularly stretched**
- **An increasingly project focus on funding makes it difficult for some organisations to fund core costs**
- **Support given by infrastructure organisations can be at the wrong level – often short term or not focussed enough**

Organisations have had to respond to changes in the funding environment in several ways. We have seen how those who provide services to clients can experience increased demand, and some have said they must learn, or may have to learn, about turning people away. This goes counter to the reason for existence of many organisations, and it is likely many will find it difficult.

Organisations have also had to consider their approach to funding, looking for funds from different sources. This has created its own issues, including increased time spent on looking for sources and writing applications, more bureaucracy in reporting back to funders – especially when multiple small grants are being used, and coping with being unsuccessful in the face of increasing demand on funding sources.

With more and more funding being outcome focussed, organisations find it increasingly difficult to cover core costs.

Increasing changes in personnel in statutory agencies has for some organisations influenced their ability to maintain strong relationships, with a number reporting that they have felt they are remaking relationships with increasing frequency.

Organisations providing services to individuals reported growing demand, with some saying there was already a huge growth in demand and expecting that to grow as funding to statutory services falls.

Providing services in the mental health area seem particularly stretched as the result of cuts to statutory services. Not only do groups report a growing number of referrals, they also report that cases are more complex, and some organisations report inappropriate referrals. Some organisations

in this position found it difficult to know where to refer people on to. Some organisations seem to fear a future in which they are overwhelmed.

Concerns were expressed about the closure of youth clubs and withdrawal of funding to community organisations. Within our small groups' focus group people said this was starting to present real challenges as young people are not occupied.

Considerable numbers in our one to one interviews reported dissatisfaction with how connected statutory services are. They see inappropriate referrals because, for example, the NHS and social services are perceived to be in conflict, not patient centred, and, as one respondent told us, 'everyone has a different idea of who is in charge'. This makes it difficult for the organisations to function effectively.

Underlying a range of comments is the feeling that support to organisations needs to be more sophisticated than it is and to take a longer-term view. For example, if an organisation needs to do some business planning then mentoring and nurturing through the process is likely to get much more positive results than simply providing base information or wayfinding to online or training resources. The investment in handholding organisations may result in long term benefits not only for those organisations but more broadly across the sector.

We asked our questionnaire respondents to think about the future. Despite the many comments about growing demand on services and difficulties in the current climate, there was a remarkably positive attitude.

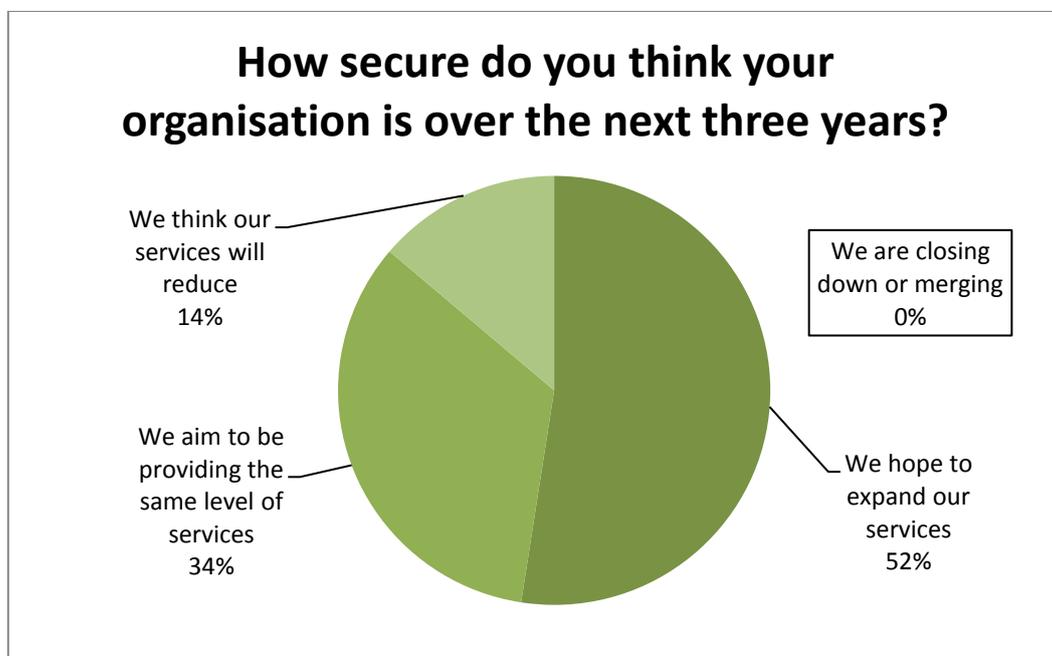


Figure 28 How secure do you think your organisation is over the next three years?

To help us identify possible areas where training and support might be focussed in the future we asked organisations about their key strengths and challenges. The table below identifies the strengths and challenges. The main challenges for the sector identified as: -

- Dealing with increased demand
- Securing funding from a range of sources but also identifying this as the weakest area for organisations
- Recruiting volunteers
- Recruiting skilled volunteers and not have the skills to do this
- Developing partnerships for bidding
- Finding suitable affordable premises

Looking to the future, what are your organisation's key strengths and the challenges? Tick all that apply				
Answer Options	Strengths	Challenges	Rating Average	Response Count
Dealing with increased demand	25	48	1.66	73
Responding to the changing needs of the client group	40	25	1.38	65
Securing funding from the public sector	3	64	1.96	67
Securing funding from trusts	10	57	1.85	67
Generating funds from other sources	15	55	1.79	70
Ability to influence planning and policy	32	33	1.51	65
Keeping up-to-date with change	41	24	1.37	65
Collaborative working with the public sector	40	30	1.43	70
Collaborative working with the private sector	18	42	1.70	60
Collaborative working with the voluntary sector	53	19	1.26	72
Potential to make use of modern technology	39	30	1.43	69
Training and developing staff and volunteers	38	27	1.42	65
Identifying new opportunities	38	29	1.43	67
Managing, acquiring or other factors relating to premises	16	41	1.72	57
Demonstrating the impact of our work	36	32	1.47	68
Recruiting enough volunteers	24	44	1.65	68
Recruiting skilled volunteers	15	49	1.77	64
Developing partnerships for bidding	16	46	1.74	62
Suitable affordable premises	20	41	1.67	61
Other				10
answered question				80

Key Conclusions and Challenges for New Strategy

The research has enabled the team who conducted the work to identify some key themes that need to be considered by Merton Partnership in the development of the new strategy. The funding pressures experienced by all agencies may present significant challenges in being able to resolve all the issues identified but hopefully some actions can be agreed.

Improved collaboration between all sectors

VCF organisations in Merton have a clear understanding of their user groups and the needs of these groups and this is defined and regulated. Their position on the front line makes them a crucial source of information about how demand for services is changing, and what can be done to best meet this demand. All public-sector agencies need to take a more collaborative approach to service definition and delivery (co-production) which will make the most of this knowledge and ensure that provider organisations feel fully engaged with strategic decision-making.

Review the terms of reference of the Interfaith Forum

The Interfaith Forum plays a crucial role in supporting sector activity, and all the evidence points to this role becoming more important in the immediate future. Faith organisations have expressed their willingness to take this on, and shown their frustration at not being more deeply embedded in the development of policies and strategies. Reviewing the terms of reference of the Interfaith Forum can kick-start the process of greater involvement of faith organisations in strategic decision-making.

Understand, involve and resource small groups

Throughout the research, the role and importance of small groups was highlighted. They often felt undervalued, left out of decision-making, and unable to participate in wider forums because of lack of time and resources. There was a perception that larger organisations refer clients to smaller groups, without any funding associated with the transaction. Equally, larger organisations expressed the challenge of fully including small groups in tenders, as Due Diligence often highlights the risk associated with such collaboration. The challenge of supporting joint work between large and small groups is not exclusive to Merton, some ways in which it could be improved in the future include: -

- Better understand the relationships between small and larger groups in specific areas, particularly health and social welfare – to ensure small groups are recognised for their role in supporting clients
- Reach out to smaller groups to provide specific, targeted support, such as organisational mentoring delivered in a way which the groups can use to best advantages e.g. on their own premises if they have these, at times which are convenient to the groups, and on topics which are most useful to the groups. Such one to one support is expensive, but can reap great rewards for the groups and their clients
- Ensure that small groups' views and experience are considered when developing policies

Recognise the value of unfunded groups and prioritise supporting them

A quarter of organisations who took part in our online survey are unfunded, while our faith groups' focus group and numerous of our one to one interviews highlighted that many groups sustain

themselves without ever securing funding through grants and contracts. They are often small but their work and social value of equal value to the larger organisations.

Revitalise the approach to training

Training is vital. Our faith groups' focus group noted several areas where it could benefit from training, for example around mental health, dementia, poverty, welfare reform and benefits, social isolation, send defence, crime and fire safety. There are other areas where training and support would be of value to organisations. The challenge that must be addressed offering this in a way, at a time and location, and at a cost to the organisations themselves which is appropriate in a climate where it is difficult for people to find time to attend courses. There is a strong argument for an increase in mentoring and one to one support, which might seem costlier at the point of delivery than group training, but which could be much more effective and empowering for the recipient organisations in the longer term.

There is a very real possibility that the groups which have £10,000 to £100,000 income are the ones struggling the most. They may not have reserves to buy in support or manage change and many may be quite new, and so may have not built up a skills base for strategic planning. Yet they may provide services to a large demographic. They must not be lost in a 'large groups or small groups' set of strategic policies and priorities in any voluntary sector strategy planning.

Fundraising and Strategic Planning

The whole sector needs to be supported and developed in its approach to fundraising. The Merton Community Fund could play a vital role but there is no capacity at present to maximise its potential. Areas of intervention required around fundraising are: -

- Support to develop skills in fundraising (not just grants, trusts and foundations)
- Focused support in strategic planning (not just writing a business plan)
- Improved partnerships for tendering

A More Strategic Approach to Premises

67% of organisations engaged in the research are experiencing challenges associated with premises. For many small organisations, venue hire is their biggest expenditure.

It was widely recognised that as budgets are tightened, increasing charges for renting offices and hiring space is a sensible way of generating more funding; however, it impacts on the voluntary sector and its ability to address growing demand.

A more strategic and coordinated approach between agencies to maximising the use and reach of buildings and facilities in Merton is required.

Volunteering

Support systems need to be developed to help organisations identify, recruit and train trustees with the business skills required to lead modern, sustainable organisations.

There may also be ways in which governance systems could be reformed to enable volunteers with professional skills to support good governance without becoming a trustee.

Larger organisations with dedicated volunteer management capacity, seem more able to recruit, support and train the volunteers they require. Smaller organisations are struggling with defining the tasks volunteers could do, recruiting, supporting and retaining volunteers. Targeted support to increase the capacity and ability of smaller groups to maximise volunteering is required.

Capacity to deliver

All partner agencies are experiencing capacity pressures and the cuts are starting to have a real impact. If more resource is to be dedicated to addressing issues identified in the research, other functions may have to be reduced to release capacity.

Appendix 1: List of organisations participating

Abundance Wimbledon
African Educational Cultural Health Organisation (AECHO)
Age UK Merton
AICSZM Associates
Arthritis Care UK - Merton, Morden and Sutton Branch
Ashdon Jazz Academy
Association of pastoral care in Mental Health
Association of Polish Family
BAME VOICE
Beyond Barriers @ Help for Carers
Carers Support Merton
Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS)
Citizens Advice Merton & Lambeth
Commonside Trust
Community Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services
Corrine Food Bank
East Merton Learning Together Trust
Equinoxcare
Faith in Action Merton Homelessness Project
Focus 4 1
FOMWAG UK
Friends in St Helier (F.I.S.H.)
Grenfell Housing & Training
Healthwatch Merton
Help for Carers
Hercules Wimbledon AC
High Path Community Association
Homestart
Home-Start Merton
Independent Merton Green Spaces Forum
Inner Strength Network
Jigsaw4u
May Project Garden
Mental Health Forum
Merton and Morden Guild
Merton and Morden Guild of Social Service
Merton CIL
Merton Community Transport
Merton LGBT+ Forum
Merton Mencap
Merton seniors Forum
Merton Voluntary Service Council

Merton YP Risk & Resilience Service
MertonPHAB
MertonVision
Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage
Mitcham Pearl
Mitcham Town Community Trust
Muslim Women of Merton
MWAH CIC
Parish Nursing Ministries UK
Personal Independence Support CIC
Polka Theatre
Pollards Hill Baptist Church
Pollards Hill Community Group
Raynes Park Bereavement Service
Rethink Mental Illness - Carers and Users Support Group Merton
Rethink Mental Illness Merton & Sutton Group
Shree Ghanapathy Temple
Social Anxiety Community Involvement
Social Enterprise Merton C.I.C
South London Music And Cultural Group
South London Refugee Association
South Mitcham Community Association
South Wimbledon Community Association
Spectra CIC
Springfield Advice and Law Centre
St Andrews Church South Wimbledon
St Tersea's Church
Sustainable Merton
Tamworth Farm Allotment Society
The Ethnic Minority Centre (EMC)
The Goan Elderly Group
The Rethink Mental Illness Merton and Sutton Carers and Users Support Group
The South London Humanist Group
The WISH Centre Merton
United Nations Association (Merton Branch)
Wandle Valley Forum
Wandle Valley Regional Park Trust
Wimbledon District Woodcraft Folk
Wimbledon Foodbank
Wimbledon Guild
Wimbledon Park Bowls Club
Wimbledon Park Heritage Group
Wimbledon Synagogue
Wood World Missions
Young at Heart (base at South Mitcham Community Centre)