

Survey Report

State of the Sector Survey 2026

Wessex Community Action

Produced by Wessex Community Action for the VCFSE sector in Wiltshire.

Table of Contents

Introduction	02
Key findings	03
Methodology	04
Geography	05
Organisation type	07
Staff and volunteers	08
Annual income	10
Demand	11
Current financial position	16
Challenges	22
Support needs	29
Strengths	32
Conclusion	40
Appendix	41

Who is Wessex Community Action?

Wessex Community Action supports Wiltshire's charities and voluntary groups by bringing people together, delivering training, helping organisations grow stronger, and advocating for the sector. Based in Salisbury, we work across Wiltshire to help local organisations thrive. As the county's Council for Voluntary Service, we offer guidance, resources and networks that enable groups to grow, plan effectively and access funding. We ensure the voices of local charities and community groups are heard by decision-makers and funders, so they can focus on making a real difference in their communities.

Introduction



As the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) for Wiltshire, our annual State of the Sector Survey plays an important role in helping us understand the health of the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector. It provides valuable insight into the challenges organisations face, while also highlighting the sector's strengths, achievements, and contribution to communities across Wiltshire.

This year, we received a record 157 responses from organisations of all sizes, working across a wide range of causes and located throughout the county. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who took the time to complete the survey, as well as the partners who supported its promotion and helped us reach as many groups as possible.

The VCFSE sector is diverse, complex, and constantly evolving. While no single survey can capture a fully representative picture of such a broad sector, the breadth of organisations that responded, combined with this year's increased participation, has provided valuable new insights. We hope these findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the sector and help inform those seeking to support its continued development and success.

Whether you are part of the VCFSE sector, a funder, commissioner, partner organisation, policymaker, or simply interested in the role the sector plays in Wiltshire, we hope you find this report both informative and useful. Above all, we hope it demonstrates not only the challenges facing the sector, but also its irreplaceable value and the passion, resilience, and dedication of the people who make it possible.

Natasha Cotton

Co-Director: Partnerships & Development Lead

Key findings

Demand remains high across Wiltshire's VCFSE sector.

A majority of survey respondents, 67.5 per cent, indicated they had seen demand increase, with just under a third indicating demand had increased by 'a lot'. This represents a continuing trend with rising demand reported in both the 2024 and 2025 surveys.

The greatest pressures vary significantly by organisational size and structure.

In the survey the most significant challenge for larger organisations and those with paid staff is securing core funding, increase in running costs and increasing complexity of need. For organisations with fewer than one member of FTE paid staff and those with an annual income of £50k or less the key challenge reported by respondents is the recruitment of volunteers. Notably larger organisations were less likely to report a 'very good' or 'good' financial position than smaller organisations. Additionally, whilst a relatively small number, we found Community Interest Companies (CICs) over-represented amongst organisations reporting a 'poor' or 'very poor' financial position.

People are both the sector's greatest strength and greatest vulnerability.

Organisations highlighted the importance of people as a key strength, 38.2 per cent pointing to people and culture as their greatest strength. This is unsurprising in a sector which is focused on people and which involves people as the key methods to delivering services, whether paid staff or volunteers. In the survey we heard how people bring passion, commitment, expertise and lived-experience as well as providing a connection to the community. We also heard however, how people within the sector are experiencing strain and how organisations are experiencing challenges recruiting new volunteers.

Volunteer recruitment and succession emerge as significant long-term risks.

Almost a third of respondents to the survey identified the recruitment of volunteers as a significant challenge. For smaller organisations and volunteer-led organisations this area was their largest challenge. We also heard in the survey how some organisations expressed concerns for the future due to the challenge replacing older cohorts of volunteers.

Many organisations are sustaining community infrastructure as well as delivering services.

Wiltshire's VCFSE sector is not simply delivering services. It is also maintaining a significant proportion of the county's community infrastructure. This includes community venues, sport and leisure facilities and outdoor areas such as community gardens, parks and nature reserves. Stewardship involves managing facilities on a day-to-day basis, securing investment and involving the wider community.

67.5%

Rising demand

Nearly 7 in 10 organisations are experiencing increased demand, continuing a trend seen in both the 2024 and 2025 surveys.

38.2%

People and culture matter

38.2% identify people and culture as their greatest strength. People are at the heart of local communities.

1 in 3

Report recruitment challenges

Volunteer recruitment is a significant challenge, particularly for smaller and volunteer-led organisations.

Doing more for **communities**, whilst facing more **challenges** than ever

Methodology

The questionnaire ran between Wednesday 10 June and Wednesday 22 July. 164 responses were received. There were six responses from parish councils, and one from an individual which were ruled as ineligible for inclusion as they did not represent a VCFSE organisation, giving a final response number of 157. Of this final number a small amount did not provide a response to all questions. Unless otherwise stated, percentages are based on the overall sample of 157 organisations. Percentages presented within segmented analyses are based on the relevant subgroup.

Where responses were text based these were analysed through coding – the process of assigning a code, or codes to the text. In all cases coding frames were developed by initially viewing responses and refined into a coding structure, rather than using a pre-existing coding frame. Microsoft Copilot AI tool was then used to further refine the final coding structure and to check for consistency in the application of codes.

Where figures are presented in brackets within tables, the bracketed figure represents the percentage of respondents.

Geography

Respondents were asked to select which area, or areas they covered within Wiltshire against a list of current Wiltshire Council Area board geographies and were provided with a map to help them identify which area they fit. An additional option was provided for the whole of Wiltshire if they covered the whole county, or a greater area.

Area board	Number	Per cent
Bradford on Avon	24	15.3
Calne	17	10.8
Chippenham and Villages	20	12.7
Corsham	17	10.8
Devizes	19	12.1
Malmesbury	9	5.7
Marlborough	7	4.5
Melksham	21	13.4
Pewsey	8	5.1
Royal Wootton Bassett & Cricklade	10	6.4
Salisbury	21	13.4
Southern Wiltshire	17	10.8
South West Wiltshire	15	9.6
Stonehenge	9	5.7
Tidworth	5	3.2

Trowbridge	17	10.8
Warminster	18	11.5
Westbury	12	7.6
Whole of Wiltshire	27	17.2



Map to show the number of organisations and where they serve across Wiltshire

Areas for which there was a higher coverage of groups appear to roughly correlate with towns such as Bradford on Avon, Chippenham, Melksham, Devizes and the city of Salisbury. There appears to be much sparser coverage in the more rural north and west of the county in areas such as Marlborough, Pewsey, Tidworth and Stonehenge. These results however may be subject to sampling variability so care must be taken in inferring from this that the results indicate a lower level of community sector activity. It may be that such activity and groups in those areas may be for a range of reasons less likely to have engaged with the survey.

Whilst the highest single proportion of respondents, 17.2 per cent, indicated they covered the whole of Wiltshire or greater it is notable that overall this represents a minority. Indeed 89 respondents, or 56.7 per cent, only selected one area. These findings suggest that Wiltshire's VCFSE sector remains strongly place-based, with most organisations operating primarily within a single locality rather than across the county as a whole.

Organisation type

Organisation type	Number	Per cent
Charitable Incorporated Organisation	43	27.4
Charitable Company (limited by guarantee)	31	19.7
Charity (not specified)	6	3.8
Unincorporated Associtation	35	22.3
Community Interest Comnpany (CIC)	17	10.8
Trust	4	2.5
Other	15	9.6
Don’t know	1	0.6

Amongst respondents the single most common organisation legal type was Charitable Incorporated Association (CIO). This legal form was created by the Charities Act 2011 and available from 2013, proving to be incredibly popular. The older legal form, Charitable Company (limited by guarantee), accounted for just under 20 per cent of respondents.

Unincorporated Associations, a form often used by grass-roots groups accounted for just over 22 per cent of respondents.

Community Interest Companies (CICs), a legal form for limited companies which provide a community benefit and which has existed since 2005, accounted for 10.8 per cent.

The 'other' category, which comprises 9.6 per cent or respondents, includes legal forms such as Community Benefit Society and Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC). Finally, Trusts represented a small minority of respondents, only 2.5 per cent.

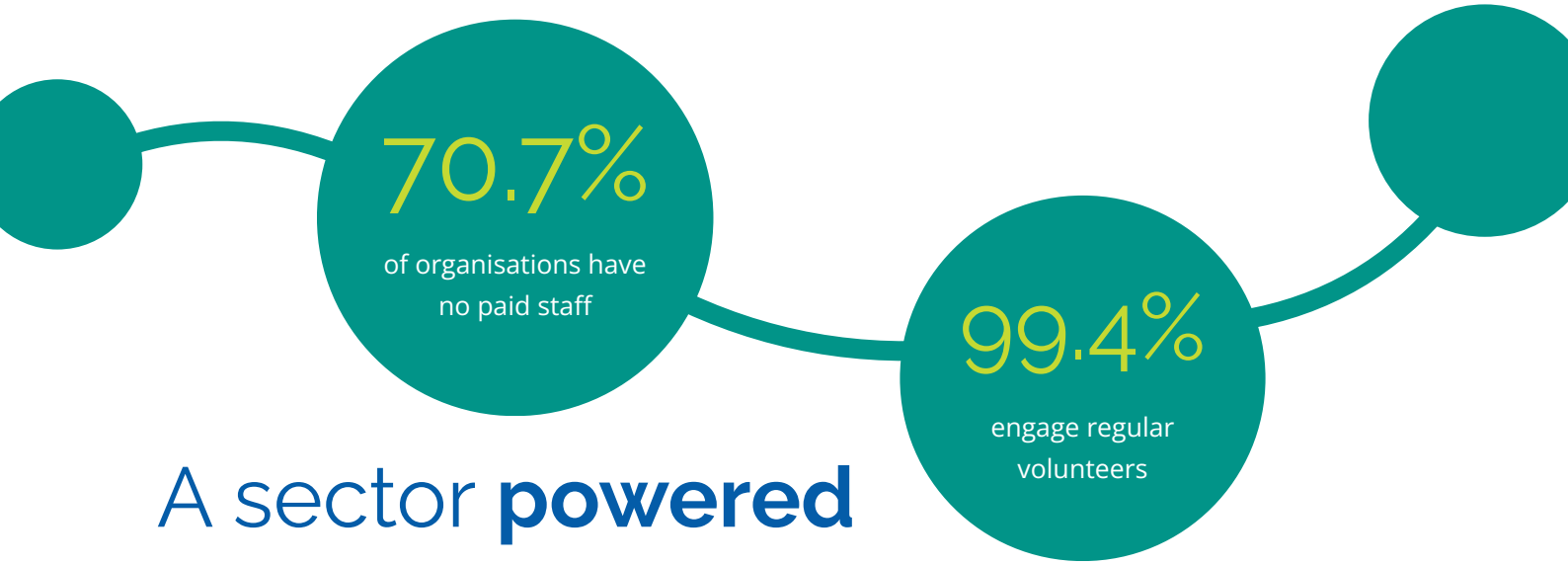
Staff and volunteers

Number of paid staff (FTE)	Responses	Per cent
None	111	70.7
1-5	25	15.9
6-10	8	5.1
11-20	7	4.5
21-30	1	0.6
31-40	0	0.0
41+	5	3.2

Number of regular volunteers	Responses	Per cent
None	1	0.6
1-5	33	21.0
6-10	36	22.9
11-20	39	24.8
21-30	14	8.9
31-40	9	5.7
41+	23	14.6

When asked about the numbers of paid staff (full-time equivalent) and regular volunteers most respondents to the survey, over 70 per cent, advised they have no paid staff. Just under 16 per cent had between 1-5 paid staff. At the other end of the scale just over three per cent of respondents reported employing over 41 paid staff. This overall distribution is consistent with previous surveys and highlights that among respondents to the survey most VCFSE organisations responding to the survey have no, or very few, paid staff.

Almost all respondents advised they engage volunteers, with a significant proportion, just over 14 per cent, having over 41 regular volunteers. Overall, this suggests that across all organisations a significant number of volunteers are engaged by VCFSE organisations in Wiltshire.



A sector **powered** by volunteers

Annual income

	Number	Per cent
Over £1m	5	3.2
£101k - £1m	23	14.6
£51k - £100k	14	8.9
£10k - £50k	49	31.2
Under £10k	58	36.9
Don't know	3	1.9
Prefer not to say	3	1.9

In line with the data on staff numbers the distribution of income across respondents suggests a profile where the majority of organisations can be considered small, or micro charities. In total just over 68 per cent of respondents reported having an annual income no greater than £50,000 per year whilst a very small minority, just over 3 per cent, had an income in excess of £1,000,000 per year.

68.1%

Under £50,000

Of respondents reported an annual income of £50,000 or less.

36.9%

Under £10,000

The largest individual income category, suggesting many organisations operate on very limited resources.

31.2%

£10,000-£50,000

Almost one-third of respondents fell within this income bracket.

3.2%

Over £1 million

Only a very small proportion of respondents reported income above £1 million.

Demand

When asked about demand over the last 12 months for their services/activity a majority, 67.5 per cent, indicated they had seen demand increase with just under a third of survey respondents indicating demand had increased by 'a lot'. At the opposite end of the scale, relatively few respondents, just 5.1 per cent reported a decrease in demand. This picture of demand is broadly consistent with previous surveys in which a majority of respondents have reported experiencing increased demand over the previous year.

	Responses	Per cent	2025 per cent	2024 per cent
Increased a lot	51	32.5	27.5	39.2
Increased a little	55	35.0	40.0	39.2
Stayed the same	38	24.2	22.5	13.7
Decreased a little	8	5.1	7.5	5.9
Decreased a lot	0	0.0	2.5	0.0
Don't know	1	0.6	0.0	0.0
Not applicable	4	2.5	0.0	2.0



Image from our State of the Sector meeting 2026. Photography by Steve Grimmett

Impact of demand

In order to further understand the impact of changing demand respondents were asked **'Can you describe any changes you have made to delivery of services/activities to respond to demand or changing/increasing demands and needs?.'** The responses were then analysed by applying a single code to each response.

	Number	Per cent
Improved / upgraded facilities	23	14.6
Increased provision	22	14.0
Increased staff and/or volunteers	20	12.7
Changed ways of working	16	10.2
Communications	11	7.0
Limitations / unable to meet demand	9	5.7
None	8	5.1
Other	8	5.1
Raising more funds	7	4.5
Capacity pressure / absorbing demand	4	2.5
Waiting lists	3	1.9
Partnership working	3	1.9

This highlights that the most common response to increased demand has been the **improvement to, or upgrading of facilities** – this covers a range of investment in capital assets including: facilities, buildings, equipment, accessibility improvements and venue expansion.

"Invested in the construction of new wheelchair accessible facilities"

"Improved grass playing surfaces for football and cricket. Added cricket facilities (nets etc)."

"...Expanded the community garden growing space and rainwater harvesting capacity, decorated the community fridge room and put in more shelf and freezer storage..."

Together these show the important role the VCFSE plays in securing and managing investment in community assets and infrastructure.

Increasing provision is another common response to increased demand, or changing trends in demand.

"We have opened up new groups to meet demand in previously unrepresented areas"

"We have opened two new Hubs in the community and have included more diverse groups"

"We have trained more benefits advisors, have set up a grief cafe, mindfulness sessions - for mental health, expanded our services, done mor outreach work"

These show the ability of organisations to be able to direct capacity to where it may be needed most. In some cases, increasing capacity may involve an **increase in staff and/or volunteers**, which was another common response to demand.

"Taken on more staff and increased volunteering support"

"...our volunteers have given more hours to meet the increased demand"

"Increased the amount of volunteers, and given more agency to volunteers to run things themselves."

As we see throughout this survey people are at the heart of our sector and volunteers in particular play a key role in delivery.

Another enabler to increasing capacity is **raising more funds**, either from grunt funders or other activities.

"Have applied to more grant making bodies..."

"Increased fund raising to grow delivery in schools..."

The availability of funding can be seen as a key resource in enabling increased capacity through staffing and investment in assets.

In some cases however, there may be less ability to increase capacity and the theme of **capacity pressure / absorbing demand** incudes those who have attempted to meet demand within an existing resource envelope.

"Absorbing extra demand as best we can"

"We seem to be doing more of everything to meet the need"

Whilst this accounted for a small number of respondents it suggests that there is a point of risk of burn-out arising from a mismatch of rising demand and available resources.

For just over five per cent of respondents the situation however, is one where meeting demand is even more of a challenge, represented by the code limitations/ unable to meet demand

*"funding programmes came to an end and outreach workers moved on: incredibly difficult to recruit paid outreach workers or engage volunteers for 10 hours per month. We have **lacked the capacity** to maintain outreach work so engaging with new activity providers has diminished"*

"We have issues with space, we needed a larger space, then the space was closed by the council, space had got really expensive"

"Difficulty finding new volunteers. All are elderly"

This inability to meet demand would appear to be related to a lack of key resources: funding, community space, staffing and volunteers.

Changed ways of working was a relatively common response, citied by just over 10 per cent of survey respondents. This may involve changes to how services are delivered as well as looking for more efficient ways of doing things.

"The complexity of people's needs has increased, so we have adapted our service to allow for more intensive 1:1 support time."

"Training for staff in new areas of activity; rationalisation of workload"

"changed the format of sessions to allow for more effective use of space"

These demonstrate the particular adaptability of organisations to flex in response to changes in demand.

Communications appeared in seven per cent of responses. Communications could both be a way of increasing demand through promotion as well as a way of engaging the wider community, or potential partners.

"Providing a range of our leaflets on demand to local foodbanks. Invites to talk"

"Promotional posters on social media to re-use and donate items for repurposing for re-sale"

"Increased profile across social media"

Finally other ways of managing demand which were mentioned were the use of **waiting lists**, and the use of **partnership working.**

Current financial position

	Number	Per cent	2025 per cent	2024 per cent
Very good	7	4.5	2.5	10.0
Good	50	31.8	42.5	38.0
Fair	79	50.3	35.0	38.0
Poor	13	8.2	15.0	10.0
Very poor	4	2.5	2.5	2.0
Don't know	2	1.3	2.5	2.0

When asked about their current financial position just over half of respondents described it as 'Fair' whilst just under a third described it as 'Good'. Just over ten per cent of respondents described their position as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor.' Notably the proportion describing their financial position as 'Fair' is higher than in both the 2025 and 2024 state of the sector surveys. Whilst this may be due to sampling variation the decline in organisations reporting a 'good' financial position aligns with what we hear anecdotally from sector leaders. Notably in early 2026 there were a several charities operating in Wiltshire which closed, citing financial pressures, including Home-Start South Wiltshire, Relationships Wessex and Carer Support Dorset and Wiltshire.

50.3%

A growing proportion of organisations describe their financial position as 'Fair'

Up from 35% in 2025 and 38% in 2024, suggesting a shift towards a less positive assessment of financial health across the sector.

Organisations' current financial position by number of FTE paid staff (per cent)

	Less than 1 FTE paid-staff (n=111)	One FTE paid staff or more (n=46)
Very good	6.3	0.0
Good	40.5	10.9
Fair	39.6	76.1
Poor	8.1	8.7
Very poor	1.8	4.3
Don't know	1.8	0.0

There is a marked difference in the reported current financial position between organisations with fewer than one FTE paid staff and those with at least one FTE member of paid staff. Almost three quarters of organisations with at least one FTE equivalent staff member report their current financial position as fair, compared to just under 40 per cent of organisations with fewer than one FTE member of paid staff.



Image from our State of the Sector meeting 2026. Photography by Steve Grimmett

Organisations' current financial position by income (per cent)

	Annual income 50k or less (n=107)	Annual income 51k or more (n=42)	Annual income 101k or more (n=28)
Very good	6.5	0.0	0.0
Good	39.3	19.0	10.7
Fair	41.1	71.4	75.0
Poor	8.4	7.1	10.7
Very poor	2.8	2.3	3.6
Don't know	1.9	0.0	0.0

Looking at organisations from by annual income a similar pattern emerges, with organisations with a higher annual income more less likely to report their financial position as very good, or good and more likely to report their financial position as being fair than organisations with an annual income of no more than £50k. This distribution would suggest that overall, among respondents to this survey, organisations with higher incomes were more likely to describe their financial position as "fair" and less likely to describe it as "good" or "very good". It may also suggest a more complex relationship between income and financial position in the VCFSE sector which could on occasions be inverse.

Whilst this pattern would require further investigation possible explanations are that the structure of the VCFSE sector means that greater income does not result in a surplus and therefore a good financial position, but is a reflection of a larger activity and in some cases complexity. Scaling up organisations and activity presents additional costs, such as payroll, national insurance, premises, management costs and other overheads. At the current time such cost pressures are presenting increasing challenges so organisations with a larger income may be more likely to be exposed to these increases.

Reserves

Does your organisation hold unrestricted financial reserves?

	Number	Per cent	2025 per cent	2024 per cent
Yes	75	47.8	65.0	56.9
No	65	41.4	17.5	33.3
Don't know	8	5.1	7.5	9.8
Not applicable	8	5.1	5.0	0.0

Looking at reserves just under half of organisations responding reported holding unrestricted financial reserves. This is slightly lower than the 2024 and 2025 surveys however, this difference may be explained by sampling variability and the lower response rate of the 2025 survey.

When looking at organisations which are volunteer led 41.4 per cent reported having reserves, those with paid staff the proportion was 63.0 per cent.

Is your organisation using unrestricted reserves to meet current operating costs?

	Number	Per cent	2025 per cent	2024 per cent
Yes	32	20.4	27.5	20.0
No	100	63.7	50.0	64.0
Don't know	8	5.1	12.5	12.0
Not applicable	14	8.9	7.5	4.0

When it comes to using reserves to meet current operating costs, just over a fifth reported currently using reserves to meet operating costs, a proportion very similar to the 2024 state of the sector survey. This can represent a gap between income and expenditure and amongst organisations reporting a poor, or very poor current financial position just under half, 47.1% reported currently using unrestricted reserves to meet current operating costs.

When looking at organisations with and without paid staff 18.9 per cent of those without paid staff reported using unrestricted reserves to meet current operating costs, whilst for those with paid staff the proportion is a slightly higher figure of 23.9 per cent.

How likely is it that your organisation will be operating this time next year?

	Number	Per cent	2025 per cent	2024 per cent
Very likely	106	67.5	67.5	72.5
Quite likely	39	24.8	20.0	25.5
Quite unlikely	2	1.3	0.0	0.0
Very unlikely	1	0.6	0.0	0.0
Don't know	8	5.1	12.5	2.0

When asked how likely is it that your organisation will be operating this time next year a majority of respondents, some 67.5 per cent, answered that it was 'Very likely', an identical proportion to the 2025 survey. Only three respondents indicated that it was either 'Quite unlikely' or 'Very unlikely' that their organisation would be operating this time next year. Just over five per cent answered that they 'Don't know', a response which may reflect either a gap in knowledge, or uncertainty about the future. It is however, worth noting that due to the importance of securing grant funding and income through commissioning, both of which can be on short-term cycles VCFSE organisations may experience a degree of financial uncertainty.

Spotlight on organisations reporting a ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ financial position

In total 17 organisations reported their financial position as being poor, or very poor.

35.3%
are CICs

Just over a third, 35.3 per cent, are Community Interest Companies (CIC), this would appear to be an overrepresentation compared to the 10.8 per cent of total survey respondents who are CICs.

23.5%
are CIOs

23.5 per cent are CIOs, this compares to 27.4 per cent in the survey as a whole.

64.7%
have fewer than 1 FTE paid staff

64.7%
Identified increase in running costs

47.1%

use unrestricted reserves to meet current operating costs

47.1%

A growing proportion of organisations describe their financial position as ‘Fair’

Up from 35% in 2025 and 38% in 2024, suggesting a shift towards a less positive assessment of financial health across the sector.

94.1%

reported securing core funding as a significant challenge.

It is perhaps notable that Community Interest Companies (CICs) are significantly over-represented in this group. Whilst requiring further investigation one possible contributing factor may be the more limited range of grant funding opportunities available to some CICs. Another possible explanation is that CICs may be an organisational form adopted when testing newer ideas, services or business models and they may therefore experience greater financial uncertainty during their development.

Challenges

	Significant challenge	Moderate challenge	Minor challenge	No challenge	Not applicable
Securing core funding	52 (33.1)	35 (22.3)	30 (19.1)	13 (8.3)	15 (9.6)
Securing project funding	44 (28.0)	46 (29.3)	28 (17.8)	7 (4.5)	21 (13.4)
Recruitment of volunteers	52 (33.1)	47 (29.9)	38 (24.2)	12 (7.6)	6 (3.8)
Increase in running costs	46 (29.3)	53 (33.8)	32 (20.4)	13 (8.3)	8 (5.1)
Recruitment of paid staff	14 (8.9)	13 (8.2)	16 (10.2)	11 (7.0)	92 (58.6)
Recruitment of trustees	23 (14.6)	24 (15.3)	32 (20.4)	28 (17.8)	41 (26.1)
Utilising AI appropriately	8 (5.1)	17 (10.8)	22 (14.0)	28 (17.8)	58 (36.9)
Increased demand for services	17 (10.8)	42 (26.8)	50 (31.8)	22 (14.0)	17 (10.8)
Increasing complexity of need	21 (13.4)	32 (20.4)	47 (29.9)	26 (16.6)	20 (12.7)
Ability to meet demand	20 (12.7)	44 (28.0)	51 (32.5)	25 (15.9)	10 (6.4)

When asked about their challenges almost a third of respondents to the survey highlighted 'Securing core funding' as a significant challenge as well as 'Recruitment of volunteers'. An 'increase in running costs' was rated as a significant challenge by 29.3 per cent of survey respondents and securing project funding by 28 per cent.

Just over a third rated increase in running costs as a moderate challenge, followed by recruitment of volunteers at 29.9 per cent, securing project funding at 29.3 per cent and ability to meet demand at 28 per cent.

The key areas identified as minor challenges by respondents included ability to meet demand, with just under a third, 32.5 per cent identifying this as a minor challenge, followed by increased demand for services at 31.8 per cent and complexity of need at 29.9 per cent.

Variation between organisations with and without paid staff and by size

Taking the overall figures we looked at challenges by four different segments in order to establish if there were different challenges (see appendix for data tables):

- Organisations with fewer than one FTE paid staff
- Organisations with at least one FTE member of paid staff
- Organisations with an annual income of £51k plus
- Organisations with an annual income of £50k or less



Top five significant challenges by group

Fewer than one FTE paid staff	At least one FTE paid staff	Annual income £50k or less	Annual income of £51k plus
Recruitment of volunteers (37.8)	Securing core funding (56.5)	Recruitment of volunteers (37.4)	Securing core funding (54.8)
Securing core funding (23.4)	Increase in running costs (47.8)	Securing core funding (27.1)	Increase in running costs (47.6)
Securing project funding (23.4)	Securing project funding (39.1)	Securing project funding (25.2)	Securing project funding (38.1)
Increase in running costs (21.6)	Increased complexity of need (32.6)	Increase in running costs (22.4)	Increasing complexity of need (28.6)
Recruitment of trustees (16.2)	Ability to meet demand (26.1)	Recruitment of trustees (17.8)	Recruitment of volunteers/increased demand/Ability to meet demand (23.8)

Looking at the differences between these groups a clear pattern emerges. The most significant challenge for larger organisations and those with paid staff is securing core funding. This may well be a reflection that as organisations scale up, increasing in size and complexity overheads – which require core funding to meet - also increase. These organisations are also potentially more exposed to increases in running costs in their overheads whilst organisations employing paid staff have been impacted by increases in employers national insurance contributions and minimum wage.

For organisations with fewer than one member of paid staff and those with an annual income of £50k or less the key challenge appears to be the recruitment of volunteers. This may reflect the importance of volunteers in the delivery of activities and services as well as the running of organisations. Whilst securing core and project funding as well as increasing costs are are still key challenges for these groups it is at a slightly lower level compared to organisations with at least one FTE paid staff member and organisations with an income of £51k per year and above.

Another area of difference relates to challenges around complexity of need and demand. Organisations with paid-staff and those with an annual income of £51k plus both identified increasing complexity of need as one of their significant challenges as well as ability to meet demand. Whilst this data does not allow us to point to a cause of this difference one possible explanation is that organisations with paid staff may be more likely to support people experiencing complex needs.

Recruitment of trustees was another point of difference, being highlighted by organisations and those with fewer than 1 FTE member of paid staff as a key challenge. The gap between organisations with an income £50k and below and £51k and above was particularly notable with 17.8 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively identifying trustee recruitment as a significant challenge. Those with an annual income of £51k plus and at least one member of paid staff were more likely to identify recruitment of trustees as a moderate challenge. This difference would require further investigation and may be sampling variability, or reflect differences in the prioritisation of challenges however, a possibility may be that smaller organisations, with perhaps a lower profile, find it more challenging to recruit trustees.

Impact of challenges

Asked to describe the impact of challenges respondents provided additional detail which illustrates the effect of the challenges as well as more detail on the challenges themselves. These comments were analysed for themes and codes assigned based on the themes present.

Theme	Number	Per cent
Volunteers	41	26.1
Funding	35	22.3
Costs	24	15.3
Strain	20	12.7
Age	8	5.1
Demand	7	4.5

In many comments more than one theme was present which suggests that many of the themes are interlinked. The relationship between changes in demand, challenges around recruitment and the resulting strain was highlighted by one respondent who said:

*"The intersection of increased demand, increasing complexity of need, and the ongoing challenge of recruiting a stable volunteer base has placed a **significant operational strain** on our organisation."*

Another referred to being caught between the challenge of managing rising demand on one hand and financial pressures on the other, describing it as:

*"A 'pincer movement' of **higher demand** on the one side, coupled with **rising costs/lower finances**."*

Volunteers

Throughout the survey we have seen how central volunteers are to the sector in Wiltshire, particularly in delivery. One of the key challenges we have heard is the recruitment of volunteers, which for some organisations has resulted in strain on existing volunteers.

> "We rely on the help of unpaid volunteers, which results in a core few doing the majority of the work. We have not been able to recruit new people locally, despite many tries through local press and social media. People are not keen to commit due to personal circumstances or busy lives. In turn this causes pressure of the management committee to cover all bases."

"Attracting volunteers to meet the needs of additional teams in a growing club. Same reliance on same few unpaid volunteers who are close to burnout and taking on more as complexity grows in delivering the service."

"Sometimes low volunteer numbers mean more stress - setting up and clearing cafes needs good numbers"

One theme also present was age, particularly relating to the age of volunteers. Some respondents highlighted the ageing of their core volunteer base as an issue for the future.

"Trustees and key volunteers are aging and attracting younger replacements has proved difficult - may in the future be a major issue if not resolved."

"Rising demand is placing pressure on volunteer drivers. Mileage rate for drivers has recently increased from 45p to 55p.Hopefully, this will help recruit more drivers as 30% of our drivers are aged 80+"

Concerns were also raised about the impact of wider changes in people's circumstances and the impact this may have on future cohorts of volunteers:

> "With a doubling of the area we have for our gardens, getting more volunteers is an imperative and that is the major challenge as there are less volunteers available as people are having to work longer to get to their retirement. This will be a major challenge nationwide over the next 20 years because that volunteer set aged over 60 will just not be there to volunteer. They will all be nearer 70 and may not feel that they wish to volunteer as we did when early retirement was an option. It no longer is."

Funding

Funding was a major issue for respondents. One of the impacts of a more challenging funding environment is a need for more resource to be dedicated to securing funding, or investigating new business models, which is something of a double bind in a time of diminishing resources and runs the risk of increasing strain and detracting from service delivery:

"We are facing an uncertain future due to the challenges around future funding, we are looking to see how we may be able to diversify out income but this is difficult with a small team."

"We are frustrated, concerned and overwhelmed at trying to learn how to fundraise- when what we are all wanting and needing to do is support vulnerable adults and children"

"Our financial model constantly requires updating as costs of materials for infrastructure, NICS, reduced grant funding due to refocus on cost of living and depravation"

"Funding is the biggest challenge, we had to let go of our fundraiser, and it has become my job again, but my plate is already full, so speculative funding applications are a luxury."

Costs

Increased costs have had an impact on the sector in several areas. For organisations employing staff, the rise in employers national insurance contributions has had an impact, whilst increased energy costs have also had an impact for organisations such as village halls and fuel costs have also had an impact in a rural county where road travel is often essential.

"Our two biggest challenges are Utility and staff costs"

"Utility costs have soared"

"Increase in running costs, especially electricity, staff costs and vat mean that we may make redundancies, have to increase prices and put more onus on volunteers."

Strain

Some respondents pointed to strain as an impact of current challenges. This theme highlighted the very real costs often falling on individuals in the sector, whether trustees, leaders, staff or volunteers. A term used by some was 'burnout.'

> "We don't have enough support and are in danger of burn out, we cannot continue without support, most groups we attend want us to do more"

"Fewer people carrying higher workloads. Some single points of failure."

"stressed staff and people needing support who have to wait or do not get help"

"Burnout of current volunteers and an inability to deliver and expand into new areas."

"stressful for trustees"

Demand

Finally, demand was another theme which occurred in responses. This included issues of increased demand and complexity.

"Increase in mental health challenges for so many of our clients, more complex situations"

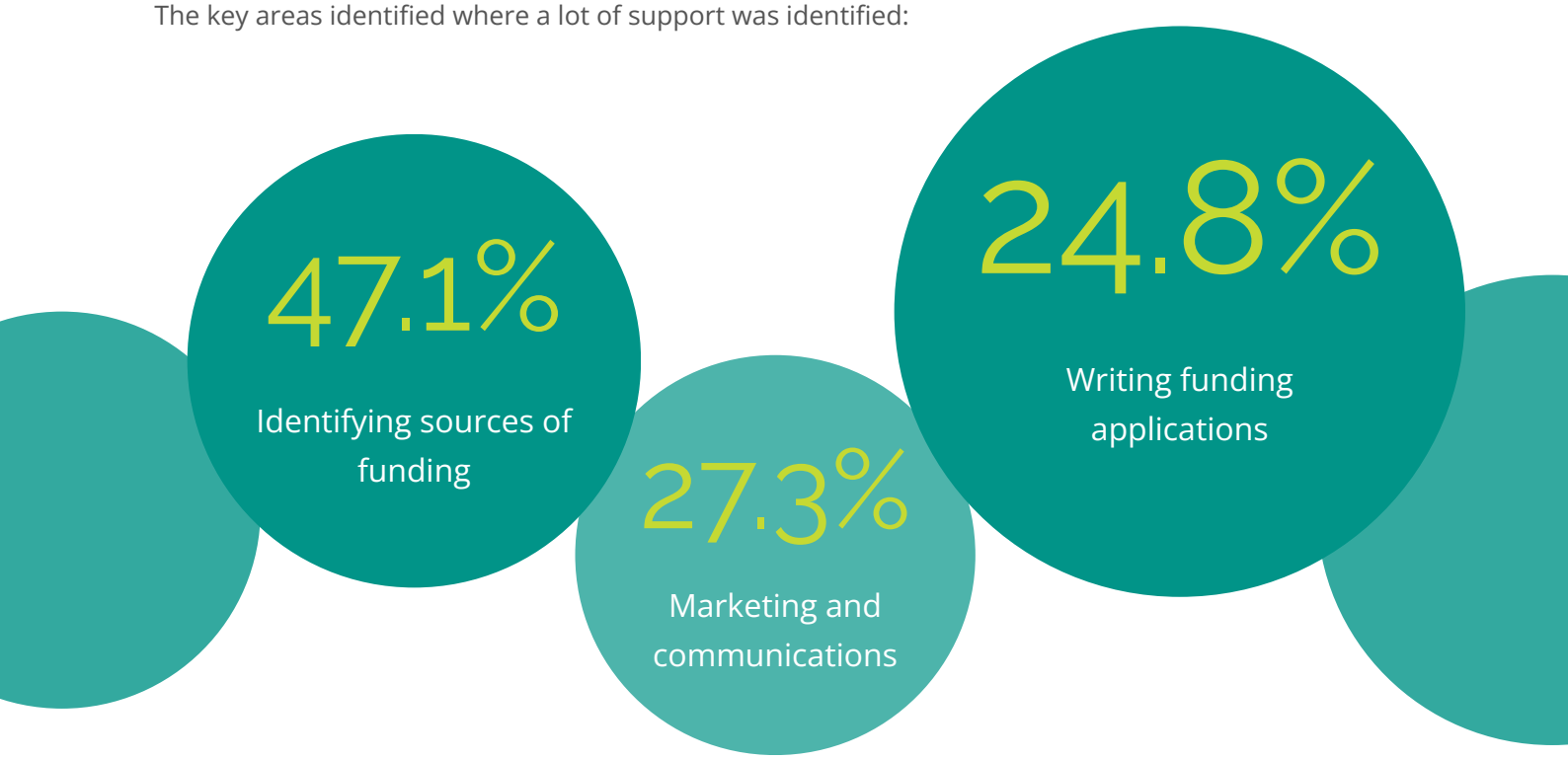
"More clients than before and reduced donations of food"

"Increasing demand for our services which need to be teaching people to fish, not giving them the fish"

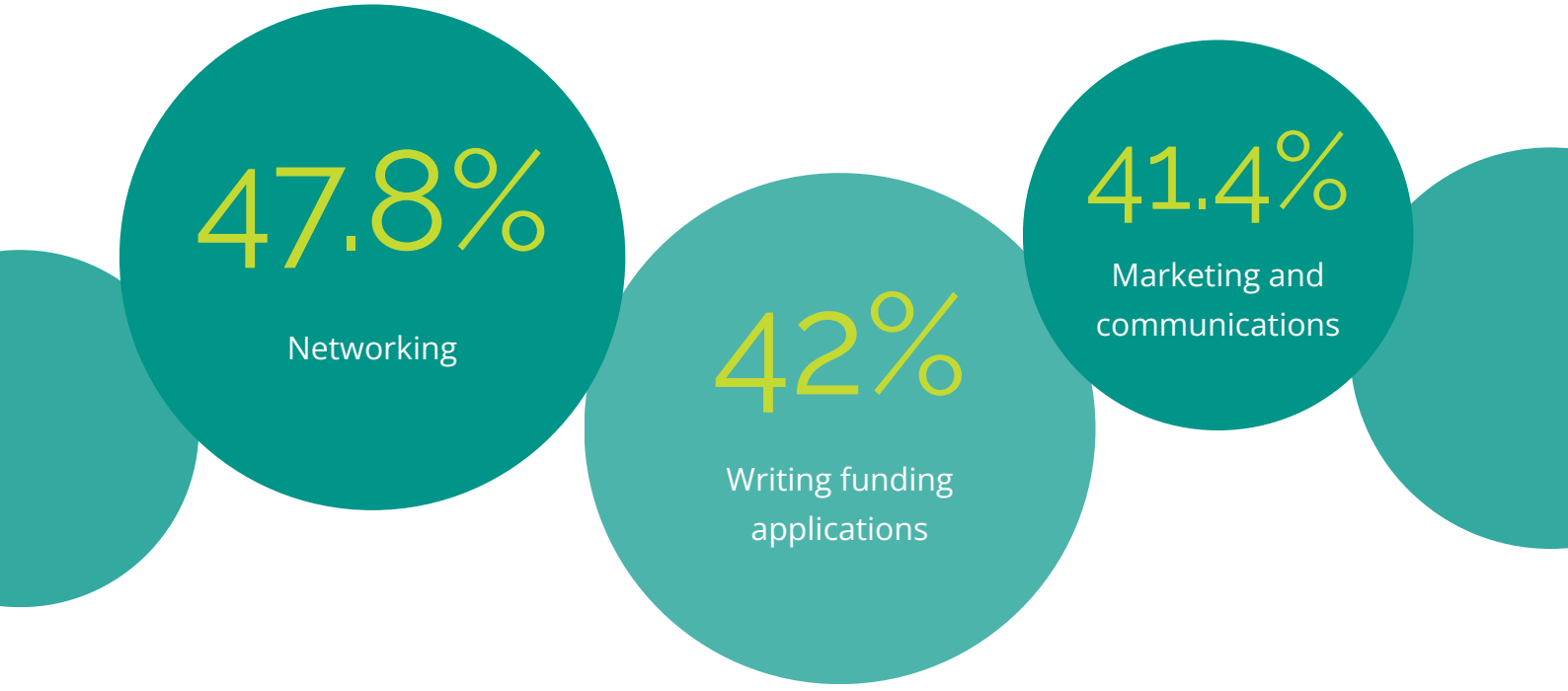
Support needs

Respondents were asked 'Would your organisation benefit from support in any of these areas?' and asked to identify areas they would like 'a lot' of support, 'a little' support, or no support.

The key areas identified where a lot of support was identified:



Main areas where a little support was required were:



Marketing and communications are a category that would perhaps benefit from additional unpacking. Following the early results from the survey we explored this with stakeholders in a workshop and found the following insights:

- Some organisations are utilising social media really well.
- Certain organisations have great accountability of tasks and individuals play to their strengths.
- Newsletters are effective ways of sharing information with stakeholders, however there are a lot of them in circulation and they are time consuming to produce
- Direct customer engagement/ interaction remains effective
- Sometimes marketing and communications becomes bottom of the to-do list due to competing priorities.
- Assessment of impact is difficult and is what we need to be sharing.
- Social media is difficult and not a one-stop shop – it doesn't reach everyone and algorithms are affecting reach.
- Social media requires specialist knowledge and expertise to use effectively. Volume of platforms is confusing.

	Yes, a lot	Yes, a little	No	Not applicable
Identifying sources of funding	74 (47.1)	62 (39.5)	15 (9.6)	3 (1.9)
Writing funding applications	39 (24.8)	66 (42.0)	37 (23.6)	2 (1.3)
Marketing and communications	43 (27.3)	65 (41.4)	41 (26.1)	2 (1.3)
Monitoring and evaluation	17 (10.8)	59 (37.6)	57 (36.3)	6 (3.8)
Networking	21 (13.4)	75 (47.8)	41 (26.1)	6 (3.8)
Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)	5 (3.2)	48 (30.6)	71 (45.2)	14 (8.9)
Environmental sustainability	11 (7.0)	46 (29.3)	70 (44.6)	15 (9.6)
IT / Digital / AI	18 (11.5)	55 (35.0)	62 (39.5)	11 (7.0)
Governance support	15 (9.6)	54 (34.4)	66 (42.0)	9 (5.7)
Volunteer management	16 (10.2)	57 (36.3)	66 (42.0)	9 (5.7)
Financial planning	20 (12.7)	50 (31.8)	66 (42.0)	9 (5.7)

By organisation size

Despite the differences in challenges reported by smaller and larger organisations, when it comes to support they feel they would benefit from, the results appear broadly similar, though there are some areas of difference (see appendix for full data tables).

Larger organisations are more likely to state that they would benefit from 'a lot' of support with networking, 26.1 per cent, compared to smaller organisations where the proportion was 8.4 per cent. Looking at those who reported they would benefit from 'a little' support in this area, the proportion of larger organisations who stated they would is also higher. This may be due to sampling variability, but it may also relate to perceived need to network and this being higher amongst larger organisations with one possible driver being an increased need to work in partnership in delivering commissioned services, or pursuing partnership funding bids. Indeed, greater cooperation amongst organisations may be a logical response to the pressures impacting such organisations.

A higher proportion of smaller organisations also identified they would benefit from 'a lot' of support with governance, 11.2 per cent, compared to 2.4 per cent. Though a relatively small difference this is unsurprising as smaller organisations will include a number of newer organisations, compared to those of larger size which are more likely to be established and to have a more established governance model.

IT/Digital/AI appeared to be an area of slight difference, with 11.9 per cent of larger organisation indicating they could benefit from a lot of support in this area and 42.9 per cent a little. This compares to 12.1 per cent and 33.6 per cent for smaller organisations respectively. Another area of slight difference is environmental sustainability. Amongst larger organisations 2.4 per cent identified it as an area they could benefit from 'a lot' of support with and 42.9 per cent as an area they could benefit from 'a little' support with. Smaller organisations appeared more likely to identify it as an area they required 'a lot' of support with, 8.4 per cent, but fewer as an area they required 'a little' support with, just 26.2 per cent. Overall, smaller organisations were more likely to regard support in this area as 'not applicable' with 13.1 per cent selecting this option, compared to only 2.4 per cent of larger organisations.

Though these differences may also be related to sampling variability, particularly among the smaller cohort of organisations with an income of £51k and above, there appear to be some plausible explanations which could benefit from further investigation. In terms of IT/Digital/AI anecdotal evidence suggests some larger organisations may be embracing the use of AI in particular, partly as a way of managing increasing pressures on administration by improving productivity. When it comes to environmental sustainability this is an area which is becoming seen as increasingly important by funders which may lead to larger organisations looking for support in this area, similarly larger organisations are likely to have a higher environmental impact.

Strengths

Survey respondents were asked 'What would you describe as your organisations biggest strength?'. Responses received were analysed using a coding frame which was developed from the data. The coding frame assigned a primary code to each response and these were then segmented further using a secondary sub-code. The coding frame was refined using Microsoft Co-pilot AI tool.

People and culture accounted for the highest proportion of responses, with 38.2 per cent, a reflection of the person-centredness of voluntary and community sector organisations. Volunteers were often a critical part of this – as we have seen volunteers are integral to the VCFSE in Wiltshire. Commitment was also highlighted as a key strength with people being committed to a cause or serving their community.

"The volunteers we have who are superb"

"Our commitment to Wiltshire and our values"

"The teamwork that goes into organising and running the festival"

"Welcoming and open to everyone, non judgmental , open to all"

Community also featured among a number of responses, in particular a connection to the community which could result in the support of the community. Others referred to a strong reputation in the community.

"The club is well supported by the local community."

"Being at the heart of the Community"

"It's placement in the community, and the respect / reputation that is has for that."

Capabilities was the third most common strength identified. This code referred to the expertise of VCFSE organisations, often stemming from the people in that organisation, as well as the ability of organisations to be agile, flexible and responsive.

"Motivated management committee with range of expertise and knowledge"

"We have a lot of experience to deliver our services and we know there is demand."

"Focused on tasks, and remembering primary aim"

"Lived experience of our staff"

"Flexibility to deliver"

Impact was another area of strength. Organisations may be well positioned to directly see the impact of their work. A small number also spoke about having a unique offer, or ability to tailor their services to meet individuals needs.

"Over 30 years serving the community, getting people where they need to go minimising isolation, loneliness and poverty..."

"big impact on small number of young people"

"Ability to tailor experiences to all types of people"

Another area of strength referred to was **assets and resources**, this included assets, financial strength and organisational strengths. For some organisations, such as community venues, the condition of the venue itself is a key strength.

"Togetherness and good financial position."

"Facility quality with anchor users"

"Its a splendid building in good condition with a large car park"

"Our operating model."

Finally, a small number referred to **service delivery** as a strength.

"listening to our members and delivering"

"Servicing the community and the youth of [our town]"

Overall, many of the sector's greatest strengths stem from its people, relationships and local knowledge. These can be seen to be connected, for example volunteers are often drawn from the community itself and serve to strengthen the connection to the community, bring lived experience, and also, along with paid-staff, bring a commitment to the organisation, led by its mission. These assets however, cannot be taken for granted. Several of the challenges identified elsewhere in this report, including volunteer recruitment, trustee succession and workforce pressures, affect the very foundations on which these strengths depend.

Organisations main strength

Code (primary/secondary)	Number	Per cent
People & Culture	60	38.2
Volunteers	28	17.8
Commitment	19	12.1
Teamwork	5	3.2
Inclusive culture	5	3.2
People	2	1.2
Other	1	0.6
Community	24	15.3
Connection to community	16	10.2
Reputation	5	3.2
Partnerships and relationships	3	1.9
Capabilities	30	19.1
Expertise	14	8.9
Flexibility and responsiveness	12	7.6
Mission & focus	4	2.4

Impact	26	16.6
Service impact	21	13.4
Unique offer	5	3.2
Assets and resources	11	7
Facilities	7	4.5
Financial strength	3	1.9
Organisational strength	1	0.6
Service delivery	3	1.9
Operational delivery	3	1.9

People at the **heart** of **communities**

38.2%

Say their greatest strength is people and culture

People, commitment and community connection are at the heart of organisational strength

What achievements are VCFSE organisations most proud of?

Respondents were asked which achievements they were most proud of. Each response was then assigned a code, using a coding frame developed from the data and refined using Microsoft Copilot.

Respondents described a wide range of achievements, reflecting the diversity of roles played across Wiltshire's VCFSE sector. While the largest number of responses related to the impact organisations have on people's lives and communities, respondents also took pride in delivering valued services, stewarding community assets, meeting local needs and demonstrating resilience in challenging circumstances. The coding suggests that organisations define success not only in terms of what they do, but also in the difference they make, the places they sustain and their ability to remain present for their communities over time.

Theme	Description	Number	Per cent
Impact	Positive changes in people's lives, communities or the environment	40	25.5
Delivery	Delivering services, activities, events and support	33	21.0
Stewardship of community assets	Creating, improving or maintaining community buildings, facilities and spaces	23	14.6
Sustainability	Long-term continuation, longevity and remaining relevant	12	7.6
Growth	Expanding services, reach, facilities or membership	11	7.0
Relationships	Building trust, partnerships, reputation and community connections	11	7.0
Resilience	Overcoming challenges, crises or threats to survival	10	6.4
Quality	Excellence, standards, awards and external recognition	5	3.2
Meeting need	Responding to unmet need or gaps in provision	3	1.9
Other	Responses that could not be readily classified	2	1.3

The most commonly cited source of pride was the **impact** organisations have on people's lives. Responses focused on improving wellbeing, reducing isolation, supporting vulnerable residents, increasing independence, creating opportunities for young people, and helping communities thrive. Many organisations described success in terms of the difference they make, often sharing examples of life-changing support and positive outcomes for individuals and families.

> "We are most proud of the concrete, deeply impactful results we have achieved in our mission to tackle hunger, malnutrition, isolation, and environmental waste across Wiltshire. By coordinating a committed grassroots volunteer network, we have successfully intercepted and rescued 3,995 trays of surplus retail food, equating to nearly 80 tonnes of good food diverted from landfill. This massive environmental save has prevented 160 tonnes of CO2e from entering the atmosphere, the equivalent of taking 94 average UK cars off our local roads for an entire year."

"The reintroduction of the county bird of Wiltshire and the only globally endangered bird in the UK".

"Seeing a noticeable difference in the Young People and families lives that we support."

Alongside impact, many organisations highlighted their **delivery of services, activities and opportunities**. Responses included providing transport services, running community events, supporting participation in sport and culture, delivering education and advice, and maintaining regular activities that bring people together. These responses demonstrate the scale and variety of activity taking place across the sector.

A notable theme was the role of organisations in the **stewardship of community assets**. Many respondents were proud of developing, restoring or maintaining facilities and spaces such as village halls, sports grounds, community buildings, parks, gardens and heritage assets. This highlights the important role the VCFSE sector plays in sustaining the physical infrastructure that underpins community life.

"Our most recent achievement we are proud of is carrying out work to improve the grounds at the hall. Establishing the enthusiastic volunteer group is a good community project. They are actively increasing biodiversity at the site by creating a community wildlife garden."

"We took a derelict building and turned it around within a couple of years, despite the resources."

Several organisations identified **growth and development** as their greatest achievement, citing expanded services, increased membership, wider reach, new facilities or ambitious plans for future development. These responses demonstrate a sector that continues to evolve in response to changing need.

"Expanding services to offer help to more people."

"Widening our reach and working on new initiatives."

Respondents also took pride in their ability to **meet local need,** particularly where there are gaps in statutory provision or barriers to accessing services. Some organisations described being present where no alternative support was available, highlighting the sector's role in responding flexibly to local circumstances and emerging challenges.

"Providing a vital service to the local community in a rural area with limited public transport."

"Turning up when other statutory bodies are nowhere to be seen."

Many organisations reflected on their **resilience and sustainability**. Responses included recovering from flooding, surviving the COVID-19 pandemic, overcoming financial challenges, rebuilding after setbacks and continuing to operate despite a difficult funding environment. Others spoke of the pride they took in their longevity, with some organisations having served their communities for decades. These responses point to a sector that has demonstrated remarkable endurance and adaptability.

"Nearly having to close and rebuilding the group"

"The ability to keep operating despite funding challenges"

"Running a festival for 51 continuous years."

Finally, a number of organisations highlighted the importance of **relationships**, community trust and local reputation. Respondents expressed pride in being embedded within their communities, building strong partnerships and becoming a valued part of local life. Others pointed to **quality and external recognition**, including awards, accreditation and recognition from partners and funders.

"Position of our organisation within the community."

"Serving the community for 11 years, the tremendous support from our local community."

"Winning local and national gardening awards."

Overall, responses suggest that VCFSE organisations define success in a variety of ways. While making a positive difference to people's lives remains central, organisations also take pride in meeting local need, delivering valued services, sustaining community assets and demonstrating resilience in challenging circumstances. Together, these responses paint a picture of a sector that not only supports communities but helps sustain the social and physical fabric of places across Wiltshire.



Image from our State of the Sector meeting 2026. Photography by Steve Grimmett

Conclusion

The findings presented in this report suggest that Wiltshire's voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector plays a significant role supporting our communities. Organisations continue to respond to changing needs, provide valued services and activities, support vulnerable residents, and sustain community spaces and infrastructure. Together, they make a significant contribution to the social wellbeing, cohesion and community resilience across the county.

The report also highlights the diversity of the sector. Experiences differ considerably according to organisation size, income and staffing structure. Volunteer-led organisations are more likely to report experiencing challenges relating to volunteer recruitment, while organisations with paid staff are more likely to face pressures associated with funding, rising costs and increasing complexity of demand. These findings demonstrate that there is no single experience of operating within the VCFSE sector, and that different types of organisations face distinct opportunities and challenges.

Perhaps the most significant finding is that many of the sector's greatest strengths and greatest risks to sustainability stem from the same source: people. Volunteers, staff and trustees provide the skills, knowledge, commitment and local relationships that enable organisations to thrive. These human assets underpin the sector's ability to respond to need, build trust within communities and create lasting impact. However, organisations also report challenges in recruiting volunteers and trustees, maintaining capacity and managing increasing workloads. The very factors that support organisational resilience are also those which may present risks to long-term sustainability.

The findings further suggest that the sector's contribution extends beyond service delivery alone. Many organisations play an important role in maintaining and developing community infrastructure, including community buildings, facilities and shared spaces. These assets provide places for people to connect, participate and access support, helping to strengthen communities, enhance resilience and improve quality of life.

While the sector continues to demonstrate considerable adaptability and resilience, increasing demand, funding uncertainty and workforce challenges create ongoing pressures. The findings suggest that supporting and sustaining the people, relationships and community assets that underpin the sector may be just as important as securing financial resources. Investment in these foundations will be critical to ensuring that Wiltshire's VCFSE sector can continue to meet community needs in the years ahead.

Ultimately, the picture that emerges is of a sector that is committed, resourceful and deeply rooted in its communities. Its future strength will depend not only on funding and resources, but on its ability to attract, retain and support the volunteers, trustees and staff whose knowledge, commitment and relationships remain its greatest asset.

Appendix

Challenges

Organisations with fewer than one FTE paid staff (n=111)

	Significant challenge	Moderate challenge	Minor challenge	No challenge	Not applicable
Securing core funding	26 (23.4)	21 (18.9)	25 (22.5)	12 (10.8)	15 (13.5)
Securing project funding	26 (23.4)	30 (27.0)	21 (18.9)	6 (5.4)	18 (16.2)
Recruitment of volunteers	42 (37.8)	39 (35.1)	21 (18.9)	4 (3.6)	3 (2.7)
Increase in running costs	24 (21.6)	39 (35.1)	23 (20.7)	12 (10.8)	8 (7.2)
Recruitment of paid staff	8 (7.2)	5 (4.5)	4 (3.6)	1 (0.9)	83 (74.7)
Recruitment of trustees	18 (16.2)	13 (11.7)	18 (16.2)	16 (14.4)	37 (33.3)
Utilising AI properly	6 (5.4)	11 (9.9)	12 (10.8)	13 (11.7)	52 (46.8)
Increased demand for services	6 (5.4)	29 (26.1)	34 (30.6)	18 (16.2)	15 (13.5)
Increasing complexity of need	6 (5.4)	20 (18.0)	37 (33.3)	19 (17.1)	18 (16.2)
Ability to meet demand	8 (7.2)	29 (26.1)	39 (35.1)	19 (17.1)	9 (8.1)

Organisations with at least one FTE paid staff (n=46)

	Significant challenge	Moderate challenge	Minor challenge	No challenge	Not applicable
Securing core funding	26 (56.5)	14 (30.4)	5 (10.8)	1 (2.2)	0 (0.0)
Securing project funding	18 (39.1)	16 (34.7)	7 (15.2)	1 (2.2)	3 (6.5)
Recruitment of volunteers	10 (21.7)	8 (17.4)	17 (37.0)	8 (17.4)	3 (6.5)
Increase in running costs	22 (47.8)	14 (30.4)	9 (19.6)	1 (2.2)	0 (0.0)
Recruitment of paid staff	6 (13.0)	8 (17.4)	12 (26.1)	10 (21.7)	9 (19.6)
Recruitment of trustees	5 (10.9)	11 (23.9)	14 (30.4)	12 (26.1)	4 (8.7)
Utilising AI properly	2 (4.3)	6 (13.0)	10 (21.7)	15 (32.6)	6 (13.0)
Increased demand for services	11 (23.9)	13 (28.2)	16 (34.8)	4 (8.7)	2 (4.3)
Increasing complexity of need	15 (32.6)	12 (26.1)	10 (21.7)	7 (15.2)	2 (4.3)
Ability to meet demand	12 (26.1)	15 (32.6)	12 (26.1)	6 (13.0)	1 (2.2)

Organisations with an annual income of £51k plus (n=42)

	Significant challenge	Moderate challenge	Minor challenge	No challenge	Not applicable
Securing core funding	23 (54.8)	14 (33.3)	5 (11.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Securing project funding	16 (38.1)	18 (42.9)	6 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (2.4)
Recruitment of volunteers	10 (23.8)	7 (16.7)	16 (38.1)	6 (14.3)	3 (7.1)
Increase in running costs	20 (47.6)	13 (31.0)	7 (16.7)	2 (4.8)	0 (0.0)
Recruitment of paid staff	5 (11.9)	7 (16.7)	10 (23.8)	8 (19.0)	12 (28.6)
Recruitment of trustees	3 (7.1)	12 (28.6)	13 (31.0)	11 (26.2)	3 (7.1)
Utilising AI properly	3 (7.1)	6 (14.3)	7 (16.7)	15 (35.7)	6 (14.3)
Increased demand for services	10 (23.8)	10 (23.8)	15 (35.7)	4 (9.5)	2 (4.8)
Increasing complexity of need	12 (28.6)	10 (23.8)	11 (26.2)	7 (16.7)	2 (4.8)
Ability to meet demand	10 (23.8)	12 (31.0)	11 (26.2)	6 (14.3)	2 (4.8)

Organisations with an annual income of £50k or less (n=107)

	Significant challenge	Moderate challenge	Minor challenge	No challenge	Not applicable
Securing core funding	29 (27.1)	20 (18.7)	22 (20.6)	12 (11.2)	13 (12.1)
Securing project funding	27 (25.2)	27 (25.2)	20 (18.7)	6 (5.6)	18 (16.8)
Recruitment of volunteers	40 (37.4)	37 (34.6)	21 (19.6)	5 (4.7)	3 (2.8)
Increase in running costs	24 (22.4)	39 (36.4)	22 (20.6)	11 (10.3)	7 (6.5)
Recruitment of paid staff	9 (8.4)	6 (5.6)	6 (5.6)	2 (1.9)	74 (69.2)
Recruitment of trustees	19 (17.8)	11 (10.3)	17 (15.9)	16 (15.0)	37 (34.6)
Utilising AI properly	5 (4.7)	10 (9.3)	15 (14.0)	12 (11.2)	48 (44.9)
Increased demand for services	6 (5.6)	30 (28.0)	34 (31.8)	16 (15.0)	15 (14.0)
Increasing complexity of need	8 (7.5)	20 (18.7)	36 (33.6)	17 (15.9)	17 (15.9)
Ability to meet demand	9 (8.4)	29 (27.1)	38 (35.5)	17 (15.9)	8 (7.5)

Support needs

Annual income of £50k or less (n=107)

	Yes, a lot	Yes, a little	No	Not applicable
Identifying sources of funding	48 (44.9)	44 (41.1)	10 (9.3)	3(2.8)
Writing funding applications	28 (26.2)	40 (37.4)	28 (26.1)	2 (1.9)
Marketing and communications	28 (26.2)	43 (40.2)	30 (28.0)	2 (1.9)
Monitoring and evaluation	13 (12.1)	33 (30.8)	39 (36.4)	6 (5.6)
Networking	9 (8.4)	47 (43.9)	32 (29.9)	6 (5.6)
Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)	4 (3.7)	30 (28.0)	48 (44.9)	11 (10.3)
Environmental sustainability	9 (8.4)	28 (26.2)	44 (41.1)	14 (13.1)
IT/ Digital/ AI	13 (12.1)	36 (33.6)	42 (39.3)	9 (8.4)
Governance support	12 (11.2)	34 (31.8)	42 (39.3)	7 (6.5)
Volunteer management	13 (12.1)	41 (38.3)	39 (36.4)	7 (6.5)
Financial planning	13 (12.1)	37 (34.6)	40 (37.4)	8 (7.5)

Annual income of £50k or less (n=107)

	Yes, a lot	Yes, a little	No	Not applicable
Identifying sources of funding	22 (52.4)	17 (40.5)	3 (7.1)	0 (0.0)
Writing funding applications	10 (23.8)	23 (54.8)	7 (16.7)	0 (0.0)
Marketing and communications	12 (28.6)	21 (50.0)	8 (19.0)	0 (0.0)
Monitoring and evaluation	3 (7.1)	24 (57.1)	14 (33.3)	0 (0.0)
Networking	11 (26.1)	25 (59.5)	6 (14.3)	0 (0.0)
Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)	1 (2.4)	17 (40.5)	17 (40.5)	3 (7.1)
Environmental sustainability	1 (2.4)	18 (42.9)	20 (47.6)	1 (2.4)
IT/ Digital/ AI	5 (11.9)	18 (42.9)	16 (38.1)	1 (2.4)
Governance support	1 (2.4)	20 (47.6)	19 (45.2)	2 (4.8)
Volunteer management	3 (7.1)	15 (35.7)	21 (50.0)	2 (4.8)
Financial planning	6 (14.3)	12 (28.6)	21 (50.0)	1 (2.4)

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Wessex Community Action

State of the Sector Survey 2026

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