

VS6 – Working together to build
a stronger Liverpool City Region



Collective Impact of COVID-19 on VCFSE in the Liverpool City Region

A report of local survey findings

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Background and Purpose

The coronavirus pandemic has been an unprecedented event across the world, impacting Governments, communities, businesses and people all over in many different ways.

Through conversations with our local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations we are aware that across the region many groups were facing new and unexpected challenges, with some struggling to adapt to the new ways of working with issues such as lack of funding, increasing demand for services and changes to workforce dynamics.

VS6 partners agreed that we needed to review and better understand the collective impact of COVID on our voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sectors across the Liverpool City Region.

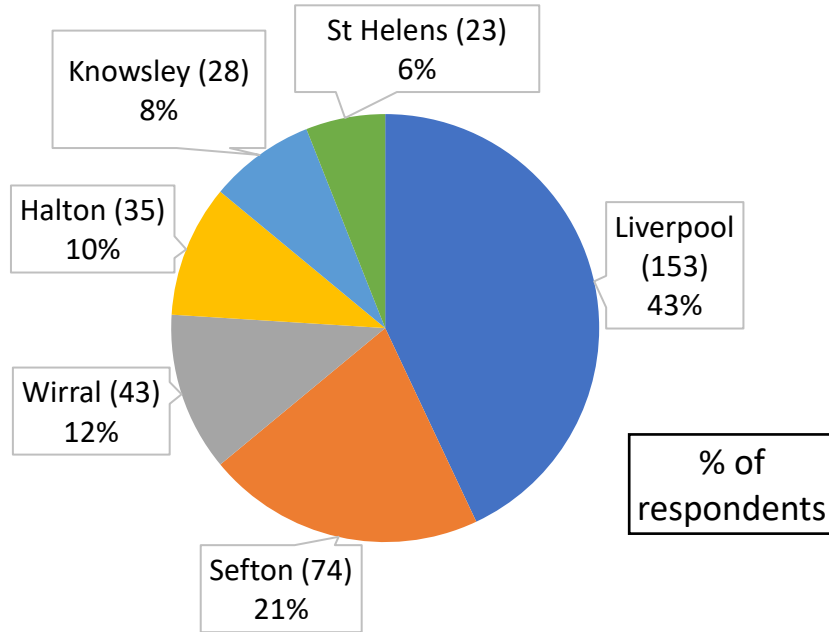
Each borough across the region designed and published their own surveys and invited local VCFSE organisations in their respective areas to complete the surveys, in order to evidence the impact on the sector and to develop recommendations for policy making and the sectors essential role in the COVID recovery response.

This data was collected from approximately March 2020 at the start of the pandemic and Government lockdown and remained open until approximately June 2020.

The findings from each survey were provided to VS6, and this report outlines the collective data and findings from the surveys.

Respondents

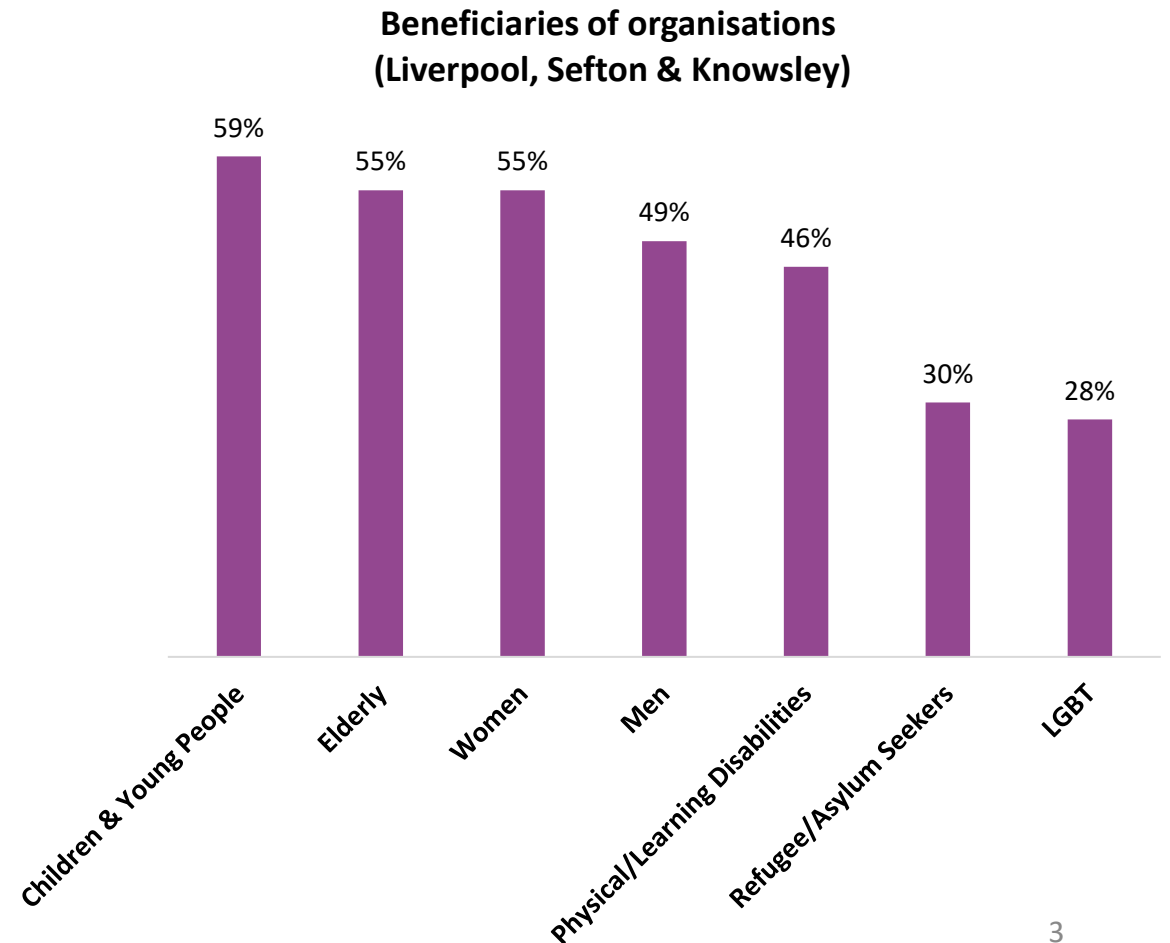
In total there were **356 responses** to COVID Impact Surveys from VCFSE organisations across all 6 boroughs:



Responses were received from a variety of organisations across the region, with varying organisational sizes.

Some organisations work at a hyperlocal level within a borough, whereas others have a larger presence across a wider footprint including the Liverpool City Region and even across the North-West.

Of those CVS's that enquired about the beneficiaries of each organisation, there was an approximate even representation for most beneficiary groups listed, with the top 4 groups chosen by 49% to 59% of respondents.



Findings

Through thematic analysis of each CVS survey responses, the following themes were identified:

THEME	
1. Increased needs and vulnerabilities	The needs of service users and community groups and how these have changed due to COVID.
2. Adapting service delivery	Changing service delivery to suit organisational needs and to react to COVID emergency response.
3. Workforce needs and challenges	The impact of COVID on the VCFSE workforce including leadership, staff and volunteers.
4. Financial challenges	How VCFSE organisations have been financially impacted by COVID including existing funding, income generation and reserves.
5. Organisational support	The support needs of VCFSE organisations during the emergency response stage and post COVID recovery.
6. Looking to the future	A view of what VCFSE recovery may look like in the long term, and how organisations can adapt to the “new normal”.

Increased needs and vulnerabilities

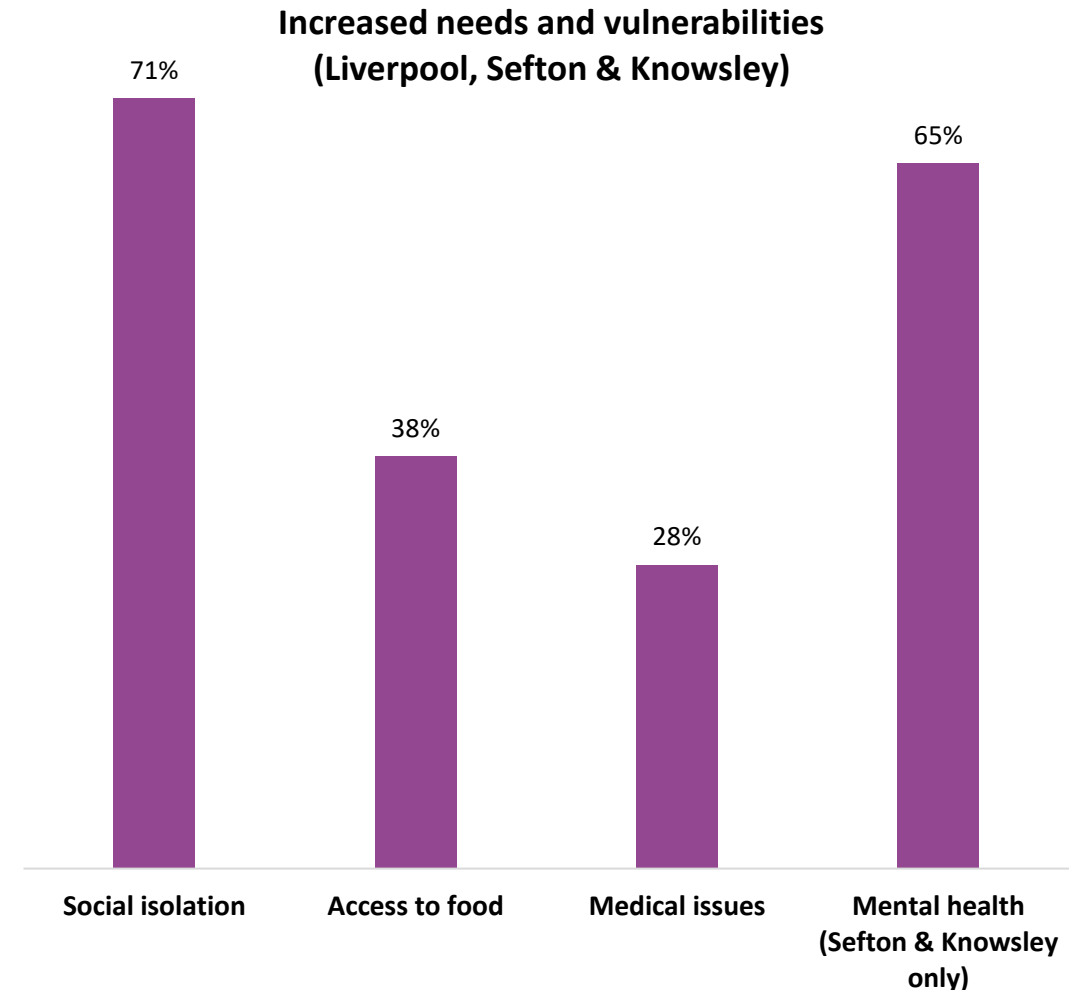
Across **Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley**, 86% of respondents reported that the needs and vulnerabilities of their service users have increased as a result of COVID.

As the chart on the right shows, social isolation was the biggest increased need, with 71% of respondents stating their service users were affected.

This may be due to the Government imposed lockdown, with people being unable to see their close family and friends, as well as the closure of day centres and community activities across the region.

Linked to this, 65% of respondents in **Sefton & Knowsley** identified increased needs in relation to mental health of service users. It is well reported that nationally there has been an increase in self-reported poor mental health, particularly anxiety and depression due to worries about catching the virus, as well as the impact of social isolation and unemployment.

Similarly in **Halton & St Helens**, the loss of face to face contact has impacted negatively on mental health, particularly for older people and those already in contact with mental health services. Whilst some services have moved online, it was reported that for groups whose main role is peer support, such as ADHD support and recovery services, the lack of “in person” connection is a significant limitation to recovery.



Increased needs and vulnerabilities

94% of respondents in **Liverpool** stated that their service users have required additional support due to increased needs and vulnerabilities.

Nearly three quarters of respondents identified that having someone to talk to was a significant area of need for their service users. Almost half of respondents stated that service users required additional financial support and support with food shopping.

In **Wirral** the responses mirror those of Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley, highlighting an increase in need for support while at the same time community groups and activities that would normally be a huge part of an individual's support network have had to close down.

Some respondents discuss how they have tried to move their services online to combat this however also recognise that this is not ideal for those who struggle to access and use technology, as digital exclusion can increase feelings of isolation.

There were similar responses regarding access to food, with one respondent stating that *“A lot of our tenants fall into the shielding category. They do not have the IT kit or knowledge to do online shopping and so are finding it hard to sort out shopping for the basics”*.

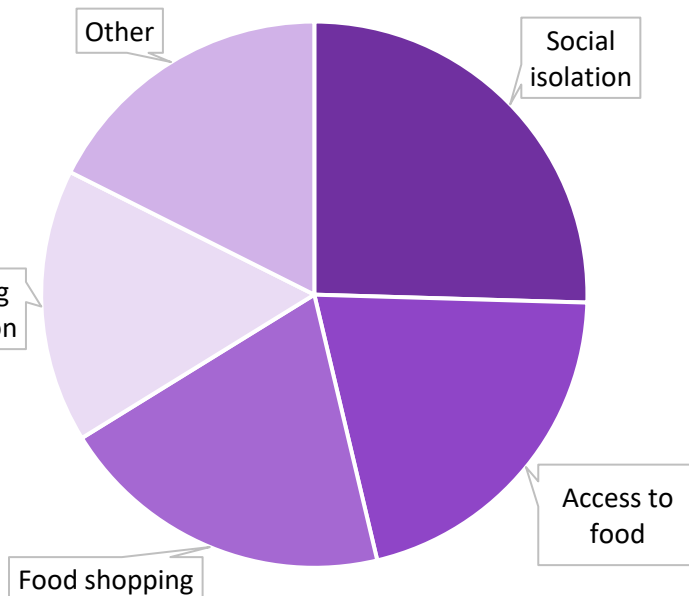
Another respondent stated that *“There has been a 200% increase in the demand for food”*.

Additional support required (Liverpool)



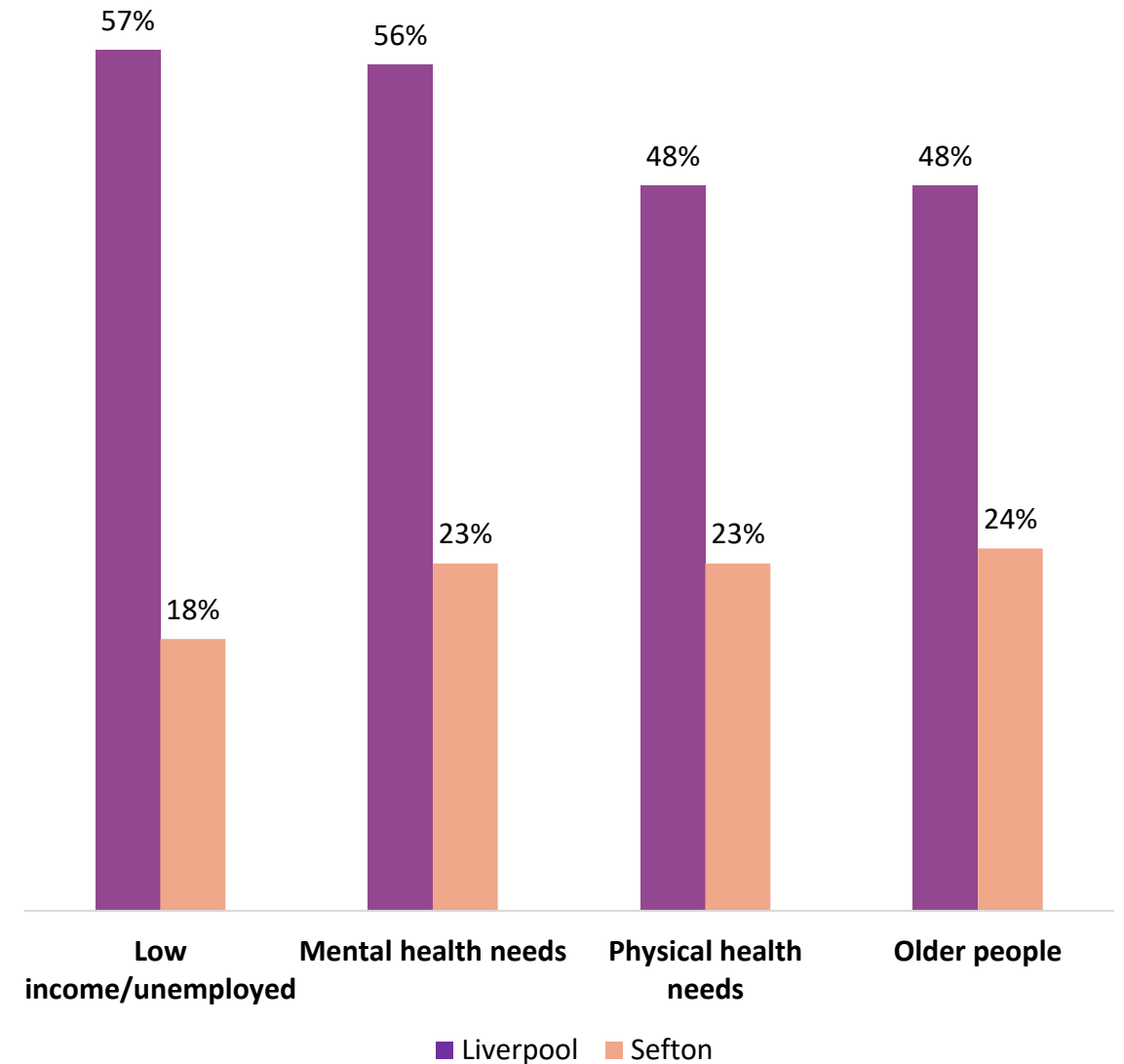
Increased needs and vulnerability

In terms of the wider community, **81% of Liverpool** and **48% of Sefton** respondents identified that there were vulnerable groups needing increased support, with Liverpool reporting higher rates overall as the chart to the right shows.



Liverpool also asked respondents about the specific needs for these groups, which were similar to the needs identified on previous slides, as displayed in the pie chart on the left.

Increased needs and vulnerabilities of the wider community (Liverpool & Sefton)



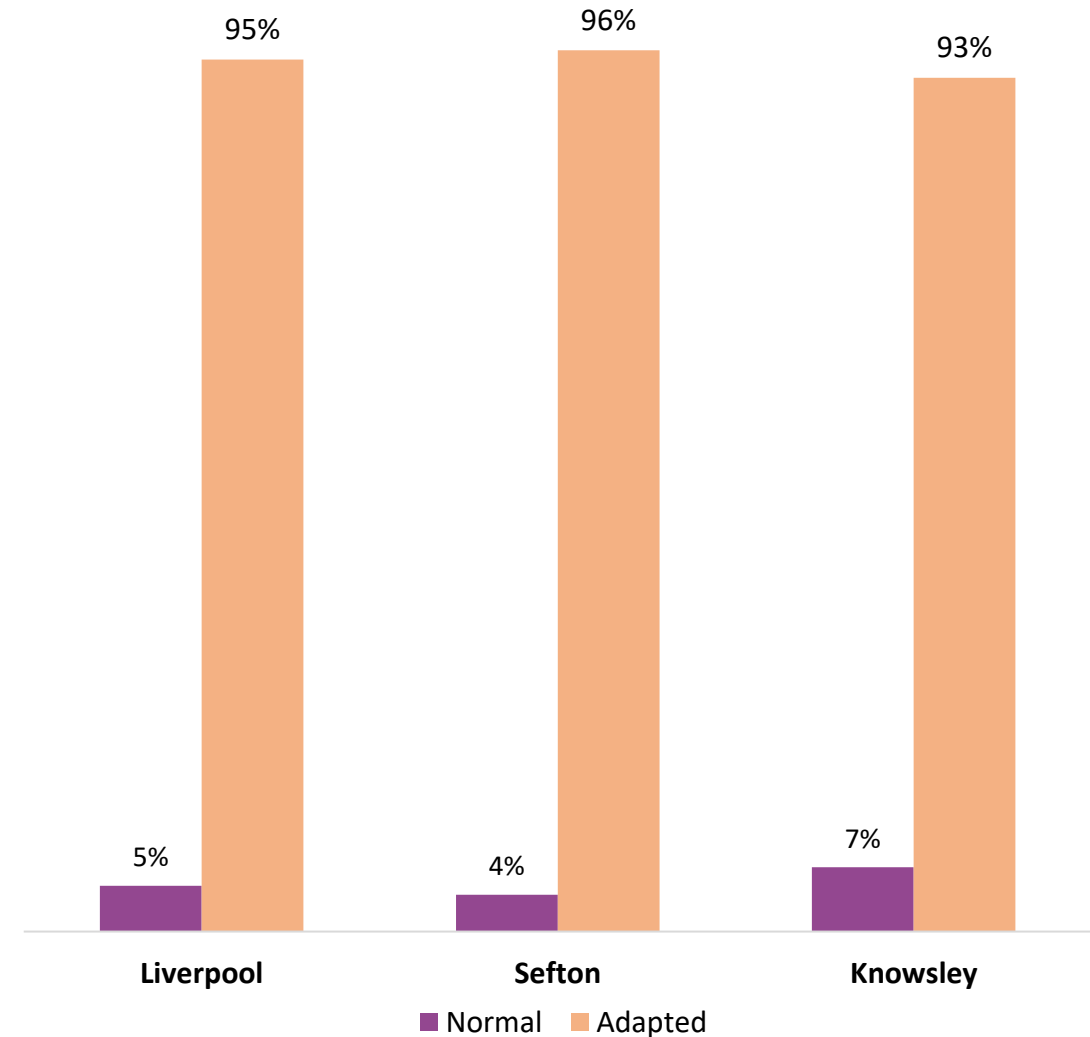
Adapting service delivery

COVID has forced organisations and workplaces across the world to change the way they operate in order to reduce the risk of virus transmission and to comply with Government legislation and guidelines. This has resulted in many organisations delivering services in different ways, such as working remotely or by having to stop operations altogether.

85% of Liverpool and **89% of Knowsley** respondents reported that they were still in operation compared to only **67% of Sefton** respondents.

The chart to the right shows those organisations that are still in operation and whether they have made any adaptations to service delivery. This clearly shows that the majority of organisations in Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley have had to change the way they operate due to COVID.

% of organisations still operating running a normal or adapted service



Adapting service delivery

When questioned about the recovery phase, the majority of respondents in **Halton** (88%) and **St Helens** (95%) stated that they would be able to adapt to the “new normal” which is encouraging and evidences the adaptability and determination of the sector.

Many organisations have been able to offer services online or via telephone support which has allowed beneficiaries to continue receiving support throughout the pandemic, however not all organisations have been able to do this due to not having the technical resources or some services being inappropriate for online delivery. Additionally not everyone has access to digital equipment to access online services, which has been a significant issue across LCR.

Many respondents in **Wirral** discussed the move to working from home and moving some services online such as online classes and the use of video conferencing software for consultations and providing support. However, similar to Halton & St Helens, it was noted that respondents warned that not all services can be delivered remotely, and that online contact can not fully replace face to face support:

“Staff are having to make do with phone consultations. This has proven difficult and more costly with telephone bills, often blurring the lines of normal daily working hours”

“There is a sense of loneliness without face to face interaction”

“Very much reduced access to a service that is delivered face to face normally, we have only been able to offer a phone line”

“With working from home and not engaging directly with our clients, many are more at risk of picking up substances again”

Workforce needs and challenges

Changes to service delivery as a result of the crisis response to COVID has no doubt had an impact on the VCFSE workforce across the region. With many organisations having to step up delivery and therefore in need of more volunteers, whereas others have had to furlough staff due to being unable to operate.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of many VCFSE organisations in the region, offering their time voluntarily in order to support some of the most vulnerable people in the region.

32% of **Liverpool** and 26% of **Sefton** survey respondents reported that they required additional volunteers in order to manage the increase in demand for their services due to COVID. These extra volunteers were needed for a variety of tasks including:

- Food parcel organisation and delivery
- Shopping for vulnerable and shielded people
- Phoning vulnerable and isolated people to maintain social contact
- Providing information and advice

Halton & St Helens asked respondents to consider the role of volunteers during the recovery phase and beyond. Almost a quarter of respondents stated they will need to recruit new volunteers to meet demands, and 40% identified that they may need to consider adapting their current volunteer roles.

Halton & St Helens - Role of volunteers



Workforce needs and challenges

Volunteers cont...

Of **Wirral** respondents who utilise volunteers as part of their workforce, the majority stated that their volunteers were unable to continue volunteering for a variety of reasons. These include issues such as the closure of services, being unable to carry out activities, and volunteers self-isolating/shielding. In some cases, organisations dependent on volunteers faced closure:

“The foodbank had to close because it was manned by people aged over 70”

Many were worried about emotional health and wellbeing of volunteers who were shielding or stood down due to the impacts of social isolation on mental health. Some respondents stated:

“We have deep concerns for our volunteers and are trying to keep in touch remotely as much as possible”

“Our volunteers gain valuable practical work experience with us and support from their peers, some of which has been lost”

Some respondents whose organisations were still operating were concerned about being able to maintain and recruit volunteers. They stated that as volunteers were generally older, many were isolating. Others also mentioned that volunteers with children were unable to volunteer for childcare reasons, those with caring responsibilities were shielding, and student volunteers had returned to their home towns. In contrast, some respondents have found a new demographic of volunteers:

“We are attracting new volunteers with professional level skills whilst they are furloughed”

Workforce needs and challenges

Staff

Wirral surveyed respondents on the impact of COVID on their paid staff workforce. A large number of respondents stated that they have had to furlough staff and/or have had to reduce working hours for some staff. The financial and mental health impact of this on staff was noted:

“Staff have been temporarily furloughed meaning financial uncertainty and stress regarding what the future holds for their role”

Of those staff that remained in active employment, many were working remotely where possible. Whilst positive that some staff were still working, this was not without challenges. Some respondents highlighted issues with access to technology, ability to work at home with caring responsibilities, and the blurring of boundaries between work and home. In some cases, working from home was incompatible with service delivery:

“One of my partners has caring responsibilities for a severely disabled adult. Her self-isolation may lead to an inability to deliver her courses”

“We are working from home where we can, but many of our roles mean we need to be out and about on our estates”

Only one respondent stated they had made staff redundant, and 8 organisations did not employ paid members of staff.

Workforce needs and challenges

Leadership

In terms of leadership, similarly to other paid staff many were working remotely in order to keep their organisations running and faced similar issues in relation to some of the practical difficulties of working from home. However leadership also faced unique difficulties and stresses, including organising the move to working remotely and adapted service delivery:

“Massive challenges to both a move to home based working and also mobilisation of seven day a week response service. Leadership teams members have been working up to double normal contracted hours”

Many respondents discussed how leadership teams were ‘stretched’, worrying about finances and were facing extra pressures:

“The normal leadership pressures are tenfold in trying to maintain the team morale and ethos as well as finding new ways of interacting”

“One person working very hard to keep things together so that there is something to come back to”

Managing the COVID crisis response was a major focus for respondents, however this meant that organisational development was put on hold in some cases, with strategic planning difficult to focus on due to COVID uncertainties.

Additionally the impact of COVID financially meant that leadership teams were struggling to find funding to keep services running, putting on extra pressure to find solutions:

“Looking for grants to cover ongoing expenses. Re-opening will be majorly delayed but utility bills still need paying”

“Worried about finding finance to keep us afloat until we can take bookings”

Financial challenges

As has been highlighted already in this report, COVID and the subsequent national lockdown has financially impacted many VCFSE organisations in the region. With some organisations having to shutdown completely, whilst others are stepping up their services due to increased demand.

Out of all **Sefton** respondents, 77% reported a loss of income due to COVID. Similarly, 71% of **Knowsley** respondents also reported income loss. For both boroughs, there were similar reasons identified including:

- Closure of services and paying for community spaces that are not being used
- Increased running costs due to COVID emergency activities
- Inability to stage fundraising events and trade
- Unable to access grants as funders changing their priorities to COVID only

Similar issues were highlighted in **Wirral** with only 19% of respondents stating that they had either not experience income loss or this was not applicable for their organisation.

Many organisations stated that their income mainly relied on room hire, charity shop sales and fundraising events all of which have had to cease due to COVID. A lot of respondents also stated that private donations had significantly decreased. At the same time, Wirral respondents identified that in some cases outgoing costs have increased:

“...outgoings have increased somewhat with having to purchase extra IT and mobile phones to facilitate working from home. There is also substantial fuel and transport costs with having to carry out welfare house calls and shopping for our more vulnerable clients”

Financial challenges

Respondents in **Wirral** also cited similar issues in relation to grants and funding, with changing priorities of funders and some funding being dependent on delivery which can not be carried out:

“We were through to second stage with 2 major funders and both changed their funding period and criteria in response to the pandemic. One has been paused for 6 months. The other meant we were unsuccessful”

“We have attracted grants for COVID work but have had to cease other projects that we had already secured restricted funds for. We are struggling to secure core costs”

Wirral survey respondents were asked to identify their least resilient and most resilient income streams, of which have been summarised in the below table. Income resilience is likely to be influenced by type and size of organisation, including the expertise of leadership and capacity to apply for funding, fundraise etc.

LEAST RESILIENT	MOST RESILIENT
Donations	Grants and funding
Service income	Contract delivery
Charity shops	Fundraising
Events	Housing benefit
Rental income	None

In order to mitigate the loss of income, **Wirral** respondents stated they have taken action in a variety of ways including:

- Applying for grants and funding
- Diversifying funding bids and collaborating funding streams
- Working remotely
- Reducing outgoings where possible e.g. furlough staff
- Using reserves
- Moving services online

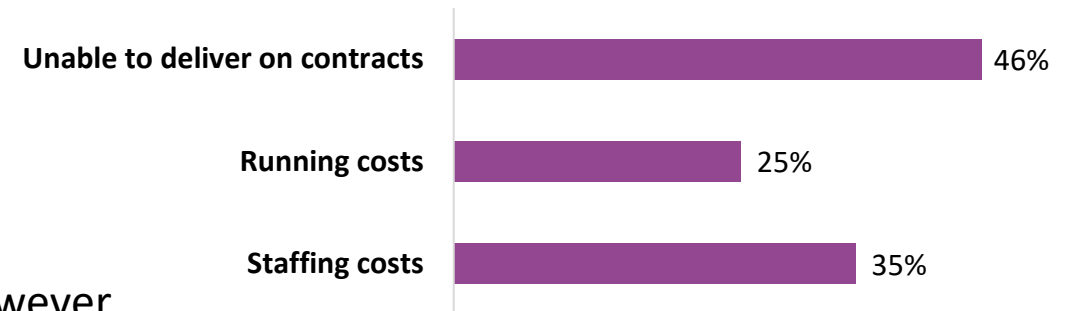
Only 13% of respondents stated they were not able to mitigate income loss, evidencing that the adaptability and flexibility of the majority of the sector.

Financial challenges

In **Halton & St Helens**, just over 65% of groups experienced financial loss as a result of having to close, the cost of adapting service delivery and loss of direct funding.

Nearly half of respondents stated they had already used their reserves in order to survive, with a further 40% stating that they will or may need to use their reserves at some point in the near future to remain operational.

The chart to the right shows the some of the main reasons respondents identified for their loss of income. This is similar to responses already received From Sefton, Knowsley and Wirral.



50% of Halton & St Helens respondents have successfully applied for and secured COVID related funding, which is very positive. However

of those respondents who did not apply for funding, many identified issues such as not fitting funding criteria, lacking confidence to apply, unsure which funder to choose and not having the capacity to apply for funding. These are important issues that the VCFSE sector will need support with, to ensure that all organisations have the opportunity to apply for essential funding in the future.

In terms of organisations at risk:

- 40% stated that they were at risk in the short term as they hold no reserves or only enough to cover 3 months core costings.
- Small to medium organisations are most at risk as they hold fewer reserves
- Despite this, only 4% of organisations surveyed consider it likely that they will have to close.

Organisational Support

Liverpool, Sefton & Knowsley

Across these three boroughs, 79% VCFSE organisations stated that they needed support to get through the COVID response phase.

The most important need identified was for funding, both to cover operating costs and for COVID emergency response activities. As we have seen on previous slides, some organisations have been able to secure COVID emergency funding, however simultaneously have lost income that would cover running costs.

Organisations would also like support with developing an organisational recovery plan, delivering organisational change and increased partnership support. It is positive that these organisations recognise a need to adapt to new circumstances, and are eager to begin this work.

VCFSE organisations also appear confident in their ability to retain volunteers, with only 8% requiring support in this area.

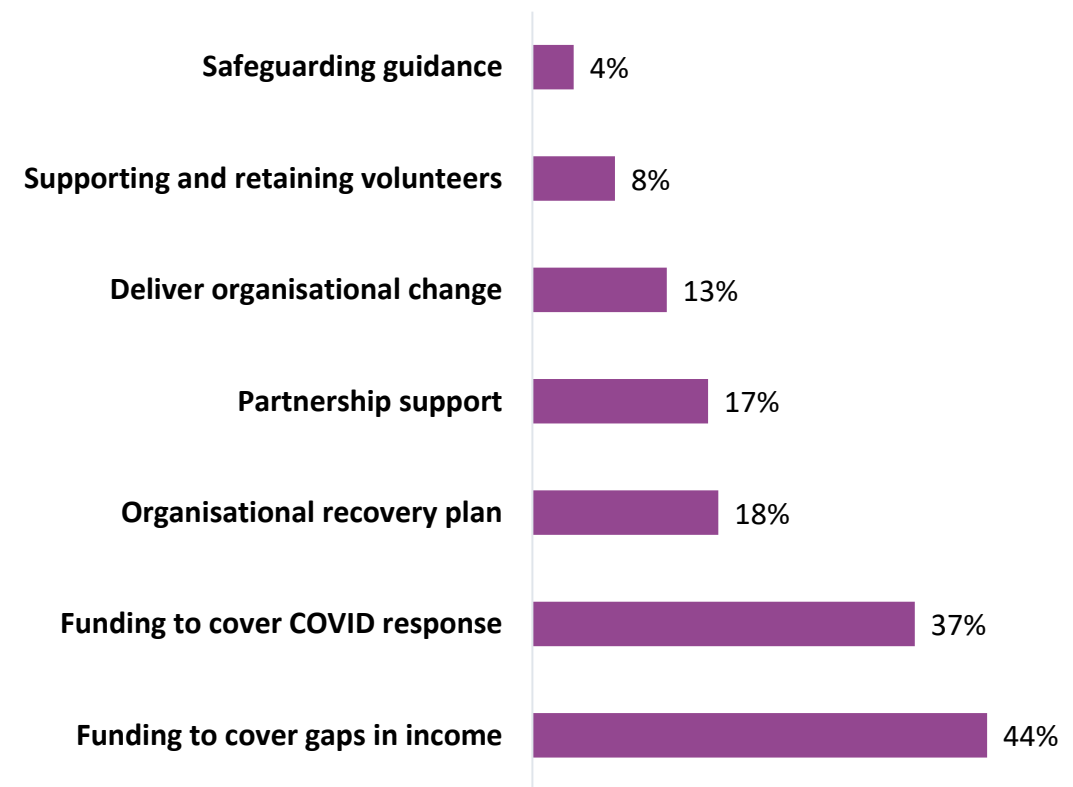
Wirral

Similarly, the majority of respondents in Wirral identified needing support and expertise for applying for funding and financial planning. Many smaller organisations stated they would benefit from small grants in order to cover running costs and utility bills. Interestingly, many respondents also requested support with providing digital services and social media training:

“Help with online content for young people” “What are the best platforms to use and how...”

This again shows that the VCFSE sector are willing to diversify and want to explore new ways of working and engaging with their community and volunteers.

Support needed now



Organisational Support (Post-COVID)

86% of respondents in **Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley** stated they would need support in the recovery phase in order to get through this challenging time.

Again, funding was the most significant need, with 44% of respondents highlighting they will need support with income generation and advice on applying for funding.

Many of the respondents were future focused, identifying that they will require support with adapting, reshaping plans and delivering effective organisational change to ensure resilience moving forward.

Halton & St Helens reported similar support needs, and identified that increased partnership working has been positive and provides better outcomes for service users. Services need to come together to survive and support each other.

Wirral respondents again identified support with funding as an area of need post-COVID. Continuous CVS support and communication was an area that the majority of respondents felt they would benefit from going forward, highlighting a need for a single point of contact for information and perhaps a need for continued community spirit and ‘togetherness’:

“Share success and encourage community groups to support each other” “Continue to do what you are doing and keep an open dialogue”

Support needed post-COVID



Looking to the future

As well as focusing on the needs of organisations in the immediate term and over the next 6-12 months post-COVID, some respondents were asked to consider how their organisation may look in the longer term, and what plans they were putting in place to ensure they could be sustainable and resilient.

This is especially important to consider in the current climate, in which the country is facing a potential second wave of COVID with the LCR reporting significantly high infection rates.

In **Halton & St Helens** the majority of respondents believed that they would still exist in 12 months time, with only 2 respondents stating they didn't think their organisation would survive the impact of COVID. Again this shows the overall resilience of the sector.

In terms of funding, which has been a theme throughout these survey responses, the majority of **Halton & St Helens** respondents identified that they would prefer long term funding (over 12 months) and funds to help organisations deliver the "new normal", evidencing that they are thinking about how they will operate in the future.

Respondents in **Wirral** valued the importance of collaborative and partnership working, pooling resources together to support each other and *"working alongside groups to maximise funding benefits received in the community"*. One respondent suggested the idea of a voluntary sector community hub with shared facilities for staff and volunteers that VCFSE organisations could use to reduce outgoings. Sharing best practice and learnings from the COVID response was also identified, supported by regular 'Zoom' calls that Community Action Wirral already host.

Of **Liverpool** respondents, 78% stated that they were aware of other local partnerships supporting vulnerable people through COVID, evidencing that the majority were linked in to the work of other organisations. It would be great for additional support for any organisations feeling isolated to build their support networks and resilience.

Summary of key survey findings

Funding	Digital Inclusion	Adapting to Increased Demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular income streams, such as donations and fundraising, have reduced significantly. Funding advice and guidance for VCFSE is needed, particularly for smaller groups who do not have the resource to apply for funding. Increased access to funding streams and grants to cover emergency response is important, however funding to meet general running costs is critical. A shift to medium and long-term funding is needed to support VCFSE organisations to plan ahead, rather than just emergency funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some VCFSE organisations have been able to move services online with positive outcomes, however other services have been unable to adapt. There are concerns that isolated and digitally excluded individuals are unable to access services online. Online delivery is not a replacement for face to face services Social media has been a great tool to raise awareness and to keep connected with the public. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VCFSE sector has reported increased demand on services due to a rise in the needs and vulnerabilities of service users and the wider community. Social isolation, poor mental health, access to food and medication were highlighted as significant issues. The majority of VCFSE organisations have managed to adapt service delivery to provide support safely, however they may struggle to continue to provide a crisis response in the event of a second wave and will need financial assistance.
Organisational Resilience Planning	Workforce	Partnership Working
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall, the sector has innovated and adapted successfully and despite the scale of the challenge has evidenced how resilient it can be. However, in some cases resilience has been pushed to the limit. VCFSE organisations now require support to plan ahead for the long-term including adapting service delivery, safely re-opening face-to-face services, long-term resilience planning and financial recovery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector has successfully utilised the volunteer resource throughout COVID however there are some concerns about retaining new volunteers when they go back to work or university. Many older volunteers have been unable to help out due to shielding. VCFSE organisations have had to furlough some staff and will require financial support to retain staff when the furlough scheme ends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VCFSE organisations have been working in partnership throughout the pandemic and is recognised as a key strength of the sector. Referral pathways between organisations need to be strengthened. Support from infrastructure organisations is highly valued, with regular communications, meetings and sharing of best practice identified as something that should be continued and expanded.

Survey Considerations

There are differences in the survey methods, type of information and insights captured by each borough, with some overlap across all 6:

- **Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley** surveys generally focused on understanding changes in service user needs and VCFSE organisations ability to adapt service delivery, including the impact on the volunteer workforce.
- **Halton & St Helens** surveys focused on the financial impact of COVID-19 on VCFSE organisations, including changes to funding and financial recovery planning.
- **Wirral** data is qualitative with an even focus on the impact on service delivery and the financial implications of COVID-19.

As each borough asked varying questions in their surveys, not all areas are equally represented under each theme as part of the findings. However that is not to say that a borough with missing data under one of the themes is not facing similar issues and challenges. In future, it would be useful to take a LCR wide approach to these surveys to ensure that organisations in each area can be represented equally to help bolster findings and recommendations.

In terms of timescales, these surveys were distributed and completed at the onset of the COVID pandemic and lockdown in March 2020, and may not be representative of all the challenges facing the sector at the current time.

An additional survey of LCR VCFSE organisations would be helpful to assess the current situation during the recovery response and also at the precipice of a potential second wave of COVID.

Nonetheless, this survey shines a very important light on the impact of COVID restrictions and changes to service delivery have had on VCFSE organisations in the region, and the results are important to consider in conversations around response and recovery for the sector.