

Community Action Suffolk

# Suffolk Voluntary Sector COVID-19 Impact Survey

April 2020

## Introduction:

In these uncertain times amid the outbreak of the Covid-19 coronavirus, we at Community Action Suffolk recognise that many organisations in the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector are having to make some difficult decisions about the services they offer and how they can continue to operate in the future.

We know that this is having a huge impact in a variety of ways. We therefore put together a short survey so that we could establish the impact Coronavirus is having on the VCSE sector across the County.

In these unprecedented times CAS is doing all we can to support the organisations and volunteers going above and beyond to help others during the Covid-19 pandemic. This survey will help CAS and other VCSE organisations to respond to the needs of our sector during this difficult time, and when we enter the recovery period post Covid-19.

### Response to the survey by organisation:

The response to the survey was very positive and prompt – we carried out the survey between 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and had 176 responses.

The largest response was from registered charities (both registered charities and charitable incorporated organisations – a total of 43.3% of registered charities)– an analysis of responses by organisation type is set out below:

| <b>Organisation type:</b>            | <b>Percentage responding:</b> |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Registered charity                   | 25.7%                         |
| Charitable incorporated organisation | 17.6%                         |
| Parish Council/Town Council          | 13.6%                         |
| Voluntary and community groups       | 12.5%                         |
| Community Interest Company           | 5.6%                          |
| Community Association                | 5.6%                          |
| Charitable Trust                     | 6.8%                          |
| Social Enterprise                    | 1.7%                          |
| Housing Association                  | 0.5%                          |

Social enterprises including community interest companies accounted for 7.3% of responses.

### Response to the survey by Area:

| <b>Local Authority Area:</b> | <b>Percentage response rate:</b> |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| East Suffolk                 | 44.8%                            |
| Babergh/Mid Suffolk          | 33.5%                            |
| West Suffolk                 | 31.8%                            |
| Ipswich                      | 22.7%                            |

We asked organisations a range of questions to establish the impact of Covid 19 and the current lockdown on their organisation. The responses are set out below by questions asked.

Do you own a building or not?:

66.8% don't whilst 33% do own a building. This links later to the question around what they would use emergency funding for - 39.8% said they would use it to pay for 'critical premises bills'.

Do you hold a reserves policy in place? If yes, how long will these reserves allow you to continue running your organisation?

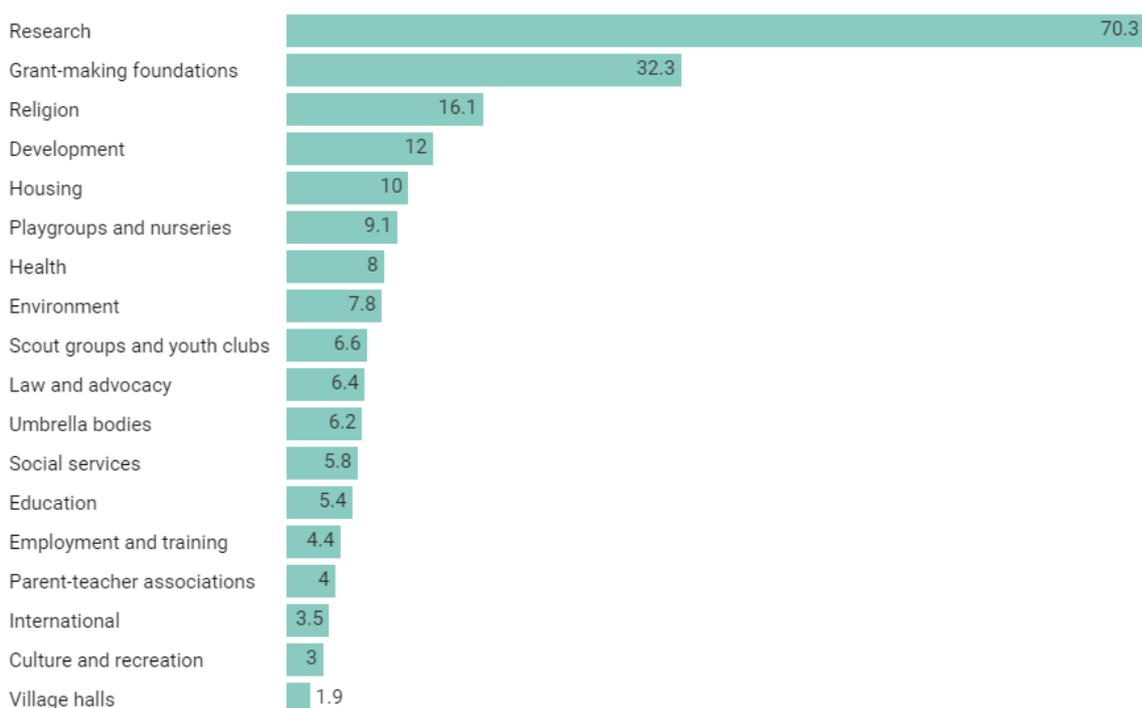
64.5% do have reserves with a policy in place whilst 35.4% do not. This links to a later question where organisations were asked how long they could survive on reserves – the results are set out in the table below and make sobering reading:

| <b>How long can your organisation survive on reserves?</b> | <b>Percentage response rate:</b> |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Indefinitely   | 5.8%                             |
| 12 months  | 33.6%                            |
| 6-12 months  | 31.09%                           |
| 3-6 months   | 21.01%                           |
| Less than 3 months   | 8.4%                             |

We can see that it is likely to be a sizeable part of the sector – just under 30% - that cannot survive past the next 6 months, with a longer 'tail' of impact at 6-12 months of over 30% that will experience trouble. This means that 60% of VCSE organisations in Suffolk who responded to the survey will not survive past 12 months unless there is some additional financial help to address their loss of income and operations.

The national figures reflects the Suffolk picture providing more detail on reserve levels by sub sector – village halls fare particularly badly as the 2016/17 NVCO Almanac data shows in the diagram below:

Level of reserves by subsector, 2016/17 (as months of spending)



Source: NCVO/TSRC, Charity Commission • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Source: <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/sector-finances/assets-and-reserves/#reserves>

We also asked if organisations have a **business resilience or continuity plan** in place - 6.8% of organisations do have a plan in place but **73.1% do not**. This is of particular concern at a time of national emergency, and an area CAS is already focusing on to support the sector going forward to build more planned resilience and sustainability into our sector..

If your organisation is still operational at this time please indicate what, if any changes have been made to your service delivery?

A common response through this survey to a number of the questions has been that organisations are recruiting younger volunteers to cover for the over 70's who are now not able to volunteer due to social distancing. Connected to this are worries about when their over 70's volunteers will return, aligned to concerns that when younger people (who are sometimes furloughed or unemployed) return to work they will stop volunteering.

There is an understandable impact on buildings and from that, on income streams. Several village halls and community buildings are closed, some remain open but not with 'usual users' – these mention operating food distribution for isolated or vulnerable residents. This is unlikely to generate income for the current or future costs of these buildings.

Organisations have identified that staff and volunteers are working from home and many have moved services online. Several identified issues with getting used to IT and videoconferencing, one or two saw this as an opportunity to really get to grips with this technology. Some identified issues with volunteers feeling isolated as they did not have the closer management that working in an office or a communal building affords. The focus of work has shifted to food and prescription deliveries for many – other ‘non essential’ work has been shelved. A lot of groups have moved to telephone, email and other ways of maintaining contact with people who may be isolated. One allotment group are now carrying out Face Book videos to keep people interested and to show what the allotments are looking like.

Community transport has shifted towards click and collect, food and prescription collection, and delivery.

Several organisations referenced that closure of normal activities – be it a building or activities such as classes or lunch clubs - means no income. This will grow as the lockdown continues and may mean that some groups are unable to restart.

#### Are you experiencing an increase or decrease in demand for your normal services as a result of Covid-19?

This question was asked to gauge the impact of Covid19 on the operations of the sector since lockdown.

For 25% of organisations there has been an increase in demand for their services whilst 47% have experienced a reduction in demand for their services. Post Covid-19 - the landscape of service provision and demand for services may be very different, and some of this demand may not return, so organisations need to begin to think what they will do to address this sooner rather than later. 27% have experienced no change as a result of Covid-19. This presents a mixed picture which needs to be read in the context of the reasons given by organisations for this – these are set out below:

14.2% identify lack of volunteers

12.8% reduced income

15% cash flow challenges

12.8% furloughed staff

2.1% of organisations say that they are unable to meet demand

4.2% identify insufficient software and other technology

67.14% identify that the issue is social distancing

39.2% identify other reasons which include:

- Building closures so cannot deliver services
- Uncertainty about future funding

- Many identify Government lockdown advice – building has had to close – including staff unable to come out due to advice
- Animal charities x2 – not getting donations and cannot open to rehome. BBC report on 8/04/20 identified a need for food to feed the animals as charities have no income.
- Many volunteers are over 70 and in ‘at risk’ groups so volunteers are reduced.
- Some services that connect people with medical and other appointments cannot operate due to GP/hospital cancellations. Some have refocused on food parcel/prescription delivery.

Looking at the free text responses there are some interesting examples of impact identified. One (homeless) charity identifies that they cannot carry out their activities due to social distancing requirements, this means they cannot serve meals to homeless people, and not carry out their regular ‘recycling’ activities which raise funds to support the wider aims of the charity.

There are also impacts of charities stopping services due to other (often public sector services) stopping. A charity that helps with hospital discharge has been impacted by the closure/ceasing of services such as rubbish tips, bulk waste removal services and a shortage of carers. They cannot do their work to facilitate hospital discharge which in turn will impact on the availability of beds within the NHS to cope with Covid19 admissions.

As a result of Covid-19, how much additional income do you anticipate needing per month to remain operational?

There was a wide range of responses - figures from £300 to £25k. 75% of responses were for under £5k. Some state that they do not need any extra income – at least 44 said this – but this may be because they are not operating at the moment due to lockdown, or they have reserves for the time being. Others have changed their focus of operation to support isolated and/or vulnerable people in the community. This situation will need to be watched carefully as Covid-19 happened very quickly, and some organisations may find that they are simply unable to restart due to changes that have occurred. The loss of older volunteers who continue to be afraid of ‘going out’ as they did before and loss of regular supporters or funding activities that generate income could also have an impact.

Some identified a short term need for additional income due to circumstances – one was a Good Neighbour Scheme in West Suffolk. “The normal operations costs of the Good Neighbour Scheme will be remaining stable. However, in purchasing shopping for people in need we will need to put money aside to have as a cash float with a view that most, if not all, will be repaid at a later date by the people for whom the shopping was purchased. We are currently looking to apply for an interest-free loan or grant of £200 from the West Suffolk Council to fund this float.”

Another organisation felt that it was difficult to assess accurately at the moment but felt that they might need around £5000 per month additionally. They identified three key factors in this assessment –

- 1) They are unclear how much of their current funding will be unrestricted by funders;
- 2) They have furloughed some of their front line staff to conserve resources while a smaller team develops the online offering. They are expecting the demand for services to increase the longer the crisis goes on;
- 3) They are also facing the loss of a large proportion of their unrestricted income which is generated through their room booking service and Cafe.

Several said that they did not know yet but implied that they would need more – a number identified that it depended on funders attitudes - several said that they would be OK as long as funders continued to be happy with limited delivery;

One identified that they would lose several million over the next few months and would struggle to replace this.

Parish and Town Councils answered in a variety of ways – some will underwrite extra costs, some felt that it did not apply to them.

Have you, or do you plan to access any of the grants and loans that the government is providing to help you through this period?

34.2% said yes and 65.7% said no – this may be because they have limited means of paying back a loan, plus there may be a fear of borrowing among smaller organisations with less secure/certain income.

If emergency funding was available, what would your priorities be?

Many of the responses were predictable given some of the issues already identified:

- 37.3% retain existing staff
- 39.4% to pay critical premises bills
- 33.8% to support interim new ways of working, hardware, software and digital support
- 12.6% support to train new volunteers
- 33.8% for other purposes which included:

A key request from one organisation was for support to address the massive increase in demand for advice on employment rights during Covid-19. This is likely to be reflected across advice organisations as we go forward – both to help those who have lost their jobs and to help those with concerns around their working conditions and the impact of possible exposure to Covid-19 risks.

Several organisations identified a need for funding to pay for on-going bills such as insurance, grass cutting. There were also several requests for business as usual (BAU) costs to be covered due to loss of income. One organisation identified a need for support for the sport and physical activity sector to be in the best position for when restrictions are lifted and things get back to normal – the sector has a number of VCSE organisations who will be affected by the current lockdown and lack of income.

One organisation highlighted the need and scope for new services post Covid-19 – people with the after effects of pneumonia will need support to improve their health. A number of organisations (throughout the survey) identified the need for personal protective equipment (PPE).

A need for video conferencing to support trustee meetings in future was identified. This ties in with another organisation who would like to buy I-Pads to enable rehearsals to be carried out remotely. There may be a longer term impact where groups who find it difficult to meet may be more willing and able to 'meet' remotely using technology – the effect of Covid-19 in 'forcing' people to use technology is acknowledged by some respondents and may have some benefits longer term for those who are isolated or remote and without transport. Another suggestion was to hold internet demonstrations to maintain interest and support for organisations that cannot provide their existing service – e.g. exercise classes, Pilates and so on.

Several organisations identified issues with cash - cash flow for residents – this came up elsewhere as elderly cannot get to the Post Office/bank and so need cash flow to survive. Also identified by food delivery organisations – often charities who have refocused to meet local needs whilst their core activity is in abeyance eg community transport. In this case they are shopping for those who cannot come out but who also do not have access to cash to pay for the shopping.

One organisation felt that it would like to fund social events to 'compensate' the local community for the long period of lockdown isolation.

Some organisations identified a need for support for special educational needs and disability volunteers (of all ages) to enable them to keep volunteering.

#### Do you envisage reducing your staff/ volunteer levels at this time?

When asked if organisations had reduced staff or volunteers as a result of Covid-19, 26.5% said yes and 62.4% said no. In terms of volunteers, and to an extent staff, reductions may be due to services ceasing due to lockdown requirements along with an impact from restrictions for certain vulnerable groups. In terms of not having reduced staff it may be that many small VCSE organisations do not employ staff and it is easier to maintain contact with volunteers (and therefore interest) without delivering activities. Many organisations will hope that these volunteers will return later.

#### If you are considering increasing your capacity by recruiting new staff/ volunteers please explain what roles/ positions you would be looking to fill?

Organisations were asked if they were recruiting at the present time, and for what roles. The response reflected findings elsewhere in this survey – many volunteer roles – due to an expected dip in volunteers when people go back to work – for roles relating to shopping, prescription pick up, dog walking, telephone buddies and befriending, on line coaching, language group leaders and drivers.

One organisation is looking for additional skilled operators for oxygen therapy. They mentioned that many who have had Covid-19 are likely to have longer terms needs for rehabilitation that will involve oxygen therapy.

Other paid roles included the recruitment of a Development Manager to look at increasing income, an Animal Companionship Practitioner - a new role with some funding in place from West Suffolk Council and NHS England. Others are looking for staff and volunteers to increase their online facilities and offers - this links back to the question on emergency funding with many looking to increase their digital and online presence.

At this stage, what, if any resources might you be able to make available to help deal with the Covid-19 support effort

When asked what resources organisations need the response reflected answers to other questions in this survey. Volunteer recruitment came out top with 45.3% saying that they need more volunteer resources. A further 17.5% said that they needed more staff.

Others identified a need for buildings (31.4% of respondents) – this possibly needs to be explored more to see what the driver for this is. It may be more of a short term need to house food and other items or it may be part of an existing desire to expand..

Transport was highlighted as a resource need by 14.8% of organisations – this may be related to a need identified elsewhere for more delivery drivers to help with food parcel and prescription collection and delivery. It will be worth exploring this further to establish what the precise need is.

Organisations were asked what they could offer in return for resources. The responses varied from very specific to more generic:

- Volunteers ready to act now – including telephone support
- Oxygen therapy itself at centre – will be likely to be required post Covid-19 to help with recovery
- Buildings space that could (if necessary) be repurposed
- Help with shopping, collecting prescriptions
- A truck to help with deliveries
- Councillors ready to help
- Tennis courts that could be used for storage

There is scope to match some of the resource needs identified above in the previous section, for example requests for help with deliveries/collections, with the offers identified here.

In an effort to keep this survey as short as possible, please use this space to tell us anything you would like us to know. This could be for example, challenges, opportunities and concerns.

Organisations were asked what else they needed. Many identified common issues relating to loss of income and impacts that may go well into the recovery period – one identified that many of their regular users will have been lost as small businesses will fold. They will lose that business with an associated impact on hall hire fees and income. Others echoed this with fears that when we return to normality they may struggle with demand and less income. Others feel that there needs to be some help to bridge the gap between no income now and need for some income to get started again (arts organisation). There are also concerns around the domino effect of one organisation folding on another - in one case due to another landlord charity folding and making the first charity homeless at a very difficult time.

There were also concerns that the focus on recruiting volunteers for the community crisis may lead to lack of focus on other middle and long term issues such as young people. This feeds into concerns expressed by one organisation as to how people who need their services in the future will know that they exist as the usual referral routes have been disrupted.

Other concerns highlighted relate to carers who are being left to support people without support themselves.

Finally there are concerns about how long this will last - >70's volunteers out for 12 weeks due to Government advice, but may be longer if they are unwell. This feeds back into an earlier issue around the younger volunteer recruits – often furloughed staff or recently unemployed – who are free to volunteer now but may suddenly disappear when lock down finishes and jobs are available. The >70's who are the backbone of many VCSE volunteer organisations may not be back in circulation in time to address the needs of those organisations.

### **Summary:**

- The majority of organisations identify income/funding as a concern – many village halls and community buildings identify that they have **no income at all coming in** at present. Many organisations - 60% - are unlikely to be able to exist after 12 months without additional support. Around 29% cannot exist beyond 6 months.
- It is likely that a sizeable part of the sector will not survive past 12 months from now unless there is some help to address their loss of income and operations – that is 60% of VCSE organisations in Suffolk who responded to the survey. Of these, 30% do not expect to survive more than 6 months.
- Many organisations identify a need to recruit more volunteers – many are doing so already and are pleased to see that younger people have stepped forward to volunteer. However this is tinged with the worry that some of these are furloughed staff or recently unemployed and when they are back at work they may not continue to volunteer.
- The impact of the age profile of volunteers comes up again and again in this survey – many have lost >70's due to Government restrictions or fears about their

vulnerability. Some have recruited younger volunteers (see above) but are aware of the risks of losing them when they go back to work.

- The impact of new ways of working – digital and video conferencing has been referenced a number of times – several organisations are looking for emergency funding to support the development of more online services and for this to feed into different ways of working going forward.
- Emergency funding – many are keen to retain existing staff and pay critical bills – this is not surprising. However, support for the training of new volunteers was only cited by 12.6% of organisations which is surprising given the issue around loss of older volunteers, but this may be seen as a temporary blip due to Covid-19 lockdown. Many cite 12 weeks as an issue in retaining older volunteers (this goes until end of June when some of younger ‘replacements’ may be back at work so there could be a gap before the ‘usual’ volunteers return)