

“Living ‘on the Edge’”: a sector in fear of a perfect storm

**Nottingham CVS State of the Voluntary Sector survey
July 2012**

Ferg Slade, Policy & Campaigns Officer

“Living ‘on the Edge’”: a sector in fear of a perfect storm

Nottingham CVS's State of the Sector survey, 2012

Introduction from the Chief Executive

perfect storm

noun

“a combination of events which are not individually dangerous, but occurring together produce a disastrous outcome.”

Collins English Dictionary

Nottingham's voluntary sector have been talking about the impact of cuts since the Coalition government took its place in Parliament back in May 2010. We have seen voluntary groups lose staff, seen their capacity to help people diminish, and their funding stunted. All amidst talk of a stronger voluntary sector: a 'Big Society,' stronger communities, empowerment for local people to do what's best for their community, and measures to make the voluntary sector more sustainable long term. Indeed, among the storm clouds of cuts, talk of a stronger voluntary sector felt like a silver lining.

Two years later, re-reviewing these messages from the government, the voluntary sector is asking: what silver lining? Sadly the walk hasn't matched the talk. The State of the Sector survey from Nottingham CVS, the first in Nottingham since the cuts, has attempted to bring together the experiences, whispers and anger into one comprehensive survey to assess how its voluntary sector is faring.

We have named our report “Living ‘on the Edge’” as it sums up in four words from one respondent what the rest of the sector seems to feel. Similar surveys in other cities have reported a ‘perfect storm’ of increased demand for services, while coping with decreased funding and decreased staff. Nottingham has the same issues, but we don't believe the storm has fully hit. Yet. We are heartened that Nottingham groups have kept support for clients and volunteers as stable as possible. The problem is we don't know how long this can go on for, and answers to this in the current climate are riddled with pessimism.

Our State of the Sector survey was answered by 51 groups in Nottingham (all of whom remain anonymous throughout). They represent a cross-section of the 1,200 groups in this city, the services they provide, and the clients they help. While this is a small

sample of the groups that exist in the city, the results are still a snapshot of what the sector feels. Our survey shows that:

- The voluntary sector in the city is facing increased demand for services, while working with less funding and less staff;
- Funding has reduced from all areas, and proposed future funding streams, such as trading, philanthropy and social finance cannot plug these gaps;
- Only half are confident they will still exist next year;
- Over three-quarters fear they will have to shut a service they provide next year;
- Groups have strived to maintain support to clients and volunteers over the last 12 months, but we don't know how long this can go on for;
- Nottingham's voluntary sector are broadly worried about various elements of government policy, such as welfare reform, housing benefit reform and the Big Society agenda, and how it will affect the city's vulnerable people.

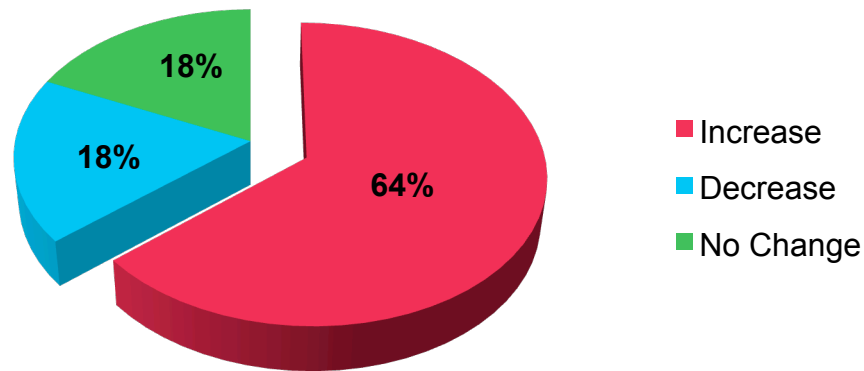
The message is clear: Nottingham's voluntary sector has done its best to work with less, but are living on the edge. The perfect storm is coming, and the voluntary sector won't survive it in its current form, meaning they won't be able to continue to help those who need the voluntary sector's help: our vulnerable citizens, like disabled people, homeless people, addicts, and women in need; our vulnerable communities, such as black and minority ethnic communities, our refugees and asylum seekers, our elderly, our children.

Our city.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Kearsley-Cree', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Helen Kearsley-Cree
Chief Executive
Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service

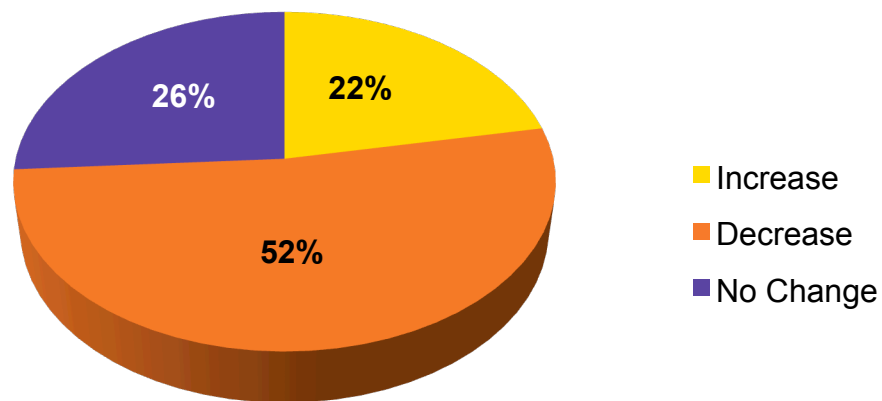
Question 1: Have you seen a change in demand for services in the last 12 months?



In the face of a recession, government cuts and welfare changes, this result was predictable. Closures of groups and services they provide inevitably means more pressure on those who survive to continue to look after the needy in the city.

The increase in demand for services is straining Nottingham's voluntary sector. Other parts of this survey demonstrate reduced staff and income, so we are faced with groups doing more with no increased or extended funding and with no more staff to help them meet targets. A worst case scenario is a group with a decrease in funding, decrease in staff and increase in services. Sadly, the worst case scenario seems all too common.

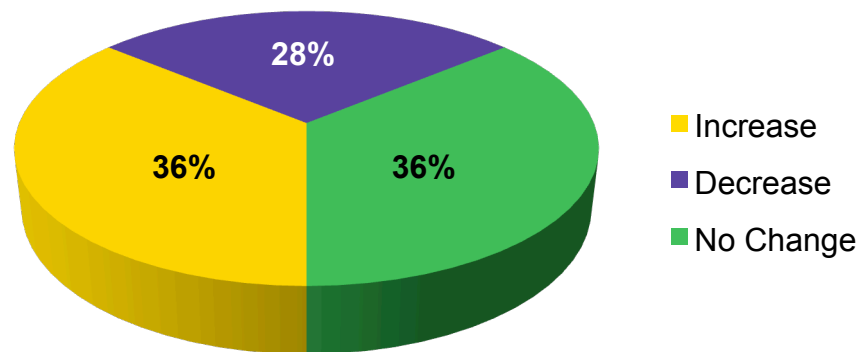
Question 2: Have you seen a change in staff numbers in the last 12 months?



While it is reassuring to see that almost half of respondents have been able to keep their staff numbers stable or even increase them, it is deeply concerning that over half are losing staff. This is despite the increase in demand for services as seen in Question 1. Can support offered to service users remain consistent? Can it be of the same quality as previous times when the organisation had more staff? NCVS are worried about the sustainability of services if staff numbers decrease and demand continues to increase. Less staff could mean less capacity for services, and result in more outsourcing and buying in services. These risk being of less value for money than the services voluntary sector organisations provided before.

If anything, Questions 1 and 2 demonstrate that the sector is doing more with less. Can we go on like this? The remainder of the survey would indicate not.

Question 3: Have you seen a change in volunteer numbers in the last 12 months?



We are encouraged to see that 72% of respondents have maintained their volunteer numbers, or indeed increased them. The voluntary sector is not blind to the work of volunteers and the value they contribute, and to see that so many are sustaining their support for volunteers is pleasing. Nationally, there seems to be a slight decrease in people volunteering as fewer people are giving time once a year.¹ So we are pleased to see Nottingham's citizens doing more for the city.

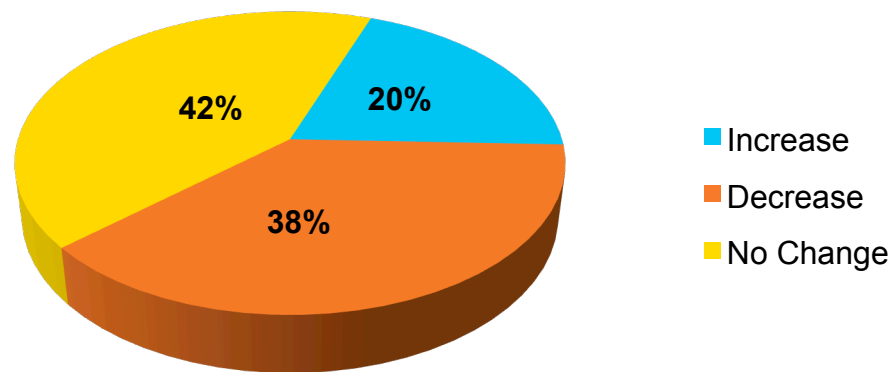
That is not to say we don't see problems. The fact that over a quarter of respondents have had to reduce volunteer numbers is a problem, and Nottingham CVS are keen to stress to these groups that we can offer support to manage and recruit volunteers through our training and referral services – all groups need do is ask!

Furthermore, while the increased volunteer numbers are positive, there are a variety of possible reasons for this. There are almost certainly increasing amounts of people looking to volunteer, and more recently in order to boost their job prospects. While voluntary organisations welcome the support volunteers offer, they are working with an overspill of jobseekers looking to build their skills. The risk of having jobseekers as volunteers is that they could find a job and leave very quickly, creating skills gaps in their host group.

Another more worrying possibility is that volunteers could be being drafted in to meet an increase in demand for services, and are actually plugging the gap of lost staff. This is not ideal, and leaves voluntary groups on the end of a double edged sword of unemployment: groups are losing staff who, rightly, don't feel comfortable doing their job for free, replacing them by bringing in volunteers who could up and leave any minute.

¹ Clark, J. (et al) (2012) The 2012 Civil Society Almanac. London: NCVO.

Question 4: Have you had to change the level of support you can offer volunteers in the last 12 months?



We are encouraged that 62% of those surveyed have increased or maintained their support for their volunteers. It's reassuring that even in tough times, the voluntary sector will still find time to help those who help it exist: its volunteers. However, we have three major concerns.

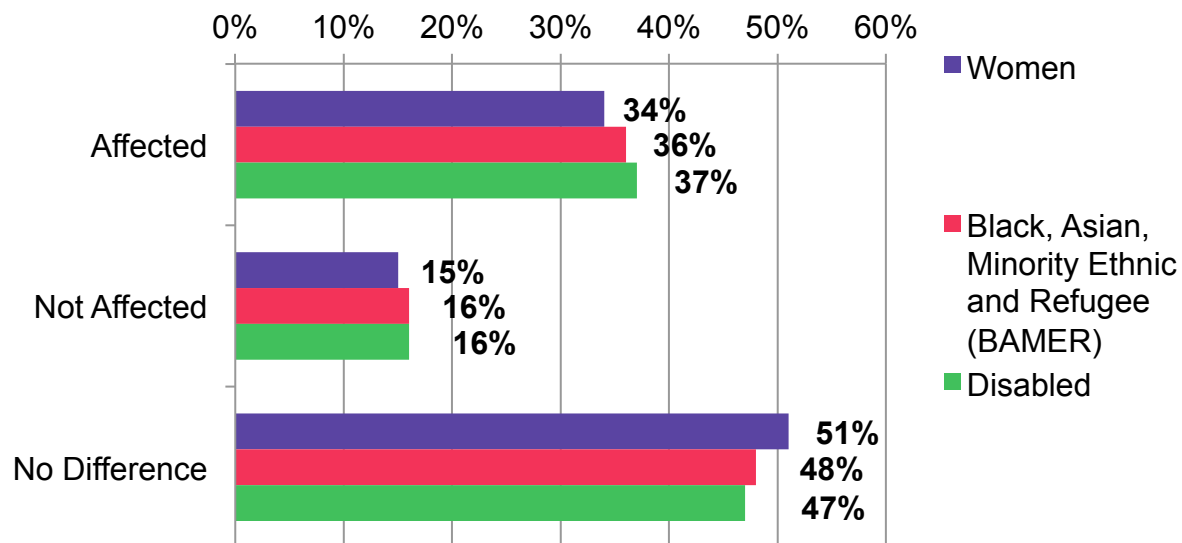
Firstly, as the number of volunteers remains static and / or increases, more groups are offering less support to their volunteers – over a third cannot sustain the support levels they offered a year ago. If applied to the whole sector from the cross-section that responded, this is worrying.

Secondly, if volunteer numbers continue to increase, and staff numbers decrease, then how sustainable is support for volunteers? Will there even be a staff member to support them? Or are volunteers replacing paid staff? Reports are emerging that a third of charities nationally cannot cope with volunteer demand.² In Nottingham, it's 38%, and could increase again next year. Nottingham CVS is aware of local groups who are struggling to respond to prospective volunteers.

Thirdly, talk of 'Big Society' and the public volunteering more might not actually be possible. Increased demand, less money and less staff may mean a shift in priorities where groups have to focus on their charitable objectives and not supporting volunteers. Volunteers need support and supervision, but the way things are going, it may not be possible to give them this, meaning it would be fairer to have no volunteers than poorly supported volunteers.

² Civil Society, 'Third of charities can't cope with volunteer demand, survey finds,' http://www.civilsociety.co.uk/fundraising/news/content/12552/third_of_small_charities_cant_cope_with_volunteer_demand_survey_finds?utm_source=6+June+Finance&utm_campaign=6+June+Finance&utm_medium=email 6 June 2012

Question 5: National reports suggest that the following groups have been particularly affected by cuts in the last 12 months. Thinking of your own staff, service users and volunteers, has this been the case in your organisation?



National reports suggest that disabled people,^{3 4} people classed as BAMER,⁵ and women^{6 7} are particularly affected by the government's austerity measures. While previous statistics raise concerns about the impact of cuts on groups, volunteers and staff, it is once again reassuring to see that broadly groups put clients first. Roughly two-thirds of groups report no differential equalities impacts as a result of the cuts.

However, over a third of those surveyed report some impact, so we cannot be complacent. These efforts by groups can only achieve so much, and can only protect people for so long. As public sector cuts bite, so will pressure on women, who make up two-thirds of the public sector workforce.⁸ The coming Remploy closures⁹ will also damage the employment prospects for disabled people. So while it is wonderful to see Nottingham's voluntary sector protecting its clients, they could yet face increased pressure. We would recommend further local research on equalities impacts.

³ TUC, 'Disabled People Fighting the Cuts', <http://www.unison.org.uk/file/B5514.pdf> May 2011

⁴ Scope, 'Disabled people hit by £9bn of welfare cuts,' <http://www.scope.org.uk/news/disabled-people-hit-by-welfare-cuts>, 1 October 2010

⁵ Guardian, 'Social care cuts are hitting black and minority ethnic communities hardest,' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/social-care-network/2012/mar/05/cuts-black-ethnic-minority-carers-hardest>, 5 March 2012

⁶ Fawcett Society, 'The impact of austerity on women,' <http://fawcettsociety.org.uk/index.asp?PageID=1267> 19 March 2012

⁷ Guardian, 'How will the cuts affect services preventing violence against women?' <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2012/jan/31/cuts-women-services-domestic-violence> 31 January 2012

⁸ NCVO Almanac 2012, p66

⁹ BBC News, Remploy plans factory closures with 1,700 job losses, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-17288762> 7 March 2012

Question 5 (continued): If YES, which ones and how?

Overall, responses focussed on increased pressure on care and support workers, which, given that care and support budgets in Nottingham have faced significant cuts, was always a likely outcome. Respondents also expressed concern that generic services would be the only ones that would survive. As these groups tend to see multiple, complex needs in their everyday work, this alarmed groups: if these needs aren't cared for, they could have long lasting consequences for services beyond the voluntary sector.

"The issue here is that generic, reactive services don't work for people who have multiple needs – a lot of the preventative, early intervention work has gone."

"We've had women...who clearly have mental health needs but do not have a diagnosis yet – which means they do not have support in place, and they fall through the gap in services."

"30 percent cuts over two years to our BME service - staff cuts + reduced service"

"Refugees who have recently received status have been severely affected by cuts to the supporting people contracts. They no longer have as much time with a support worker to settle and integrate into life in the UK."

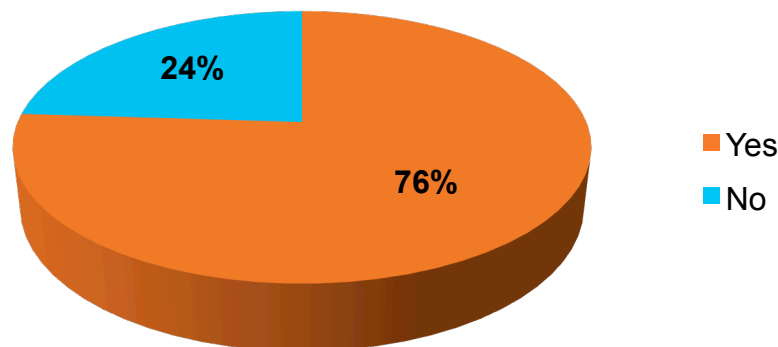
"The level of support for disabled people is diminishing outside our organisation which puts a greater strain on us as we try to support people."

"Services are becoming more generic, less tailored to individuals with needs that cut across multiple strands."

"Decrease in funding for specialist services - council believe that mainstream services can meet the need. They can't."

"Cost cuts to direct services for disabled people...e.g. day services, transport, food, activities, educational activities. Therefore more onus on carers."

Question 6: Is there a possibility of your organisation having to close a service it provides?



Frankly – this is scary. Given that Question 5 suggests that services are already becoming more generic and not addressing cultural or complex needs, we are left wondering what the future holds for people with multiple and / or complex needs who seek help from the voluntary sector.

The closure of services provided by the voluntary sector is a direct consequence of cuts in funding, reduced staff and increased demand. Doing more with less means addressing fewer needs and potentially having to help through triage rather than targeted care.

The message from this is very clear. As bad as the storm is now, it could get worse. Much worse.

Question 6 (continued): If YES, please explain.

This question yielded hugely diverse answers, some of which are highlighted below:

“Feel constantly on the edge of having to close services or change delivery.”

“Services are also at risk as we await news around commissioning as services previously grant-funded move to a commissioning model.”

“We cannot cope with the demand with the reduced resources we have.”

“One service to HIV service users has already been cut.”

“In the past, there was funding available to pay for childcare for women who wanted to access training courses but much of this has gone now. As a result, we’ve seen less women with children attending training, which then – coupled with the fact that women now have less income/child tax credits to spend on childcare - impacts on the viability of our nursery.”

“We have already closed community collection points, we may have to reduce other customer facing services, [particularly] as neither Nottingham City nor County Council are providing any grant funding.”

“Each year we have to fight harder to justify our work. New people, new rules, less understanding and commitment from local authority and health.

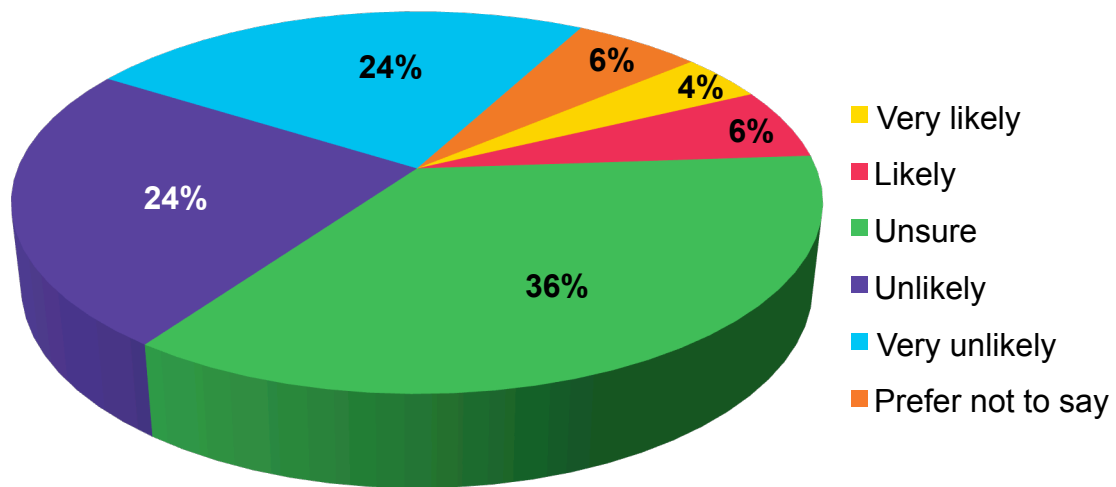
“Luncheon club will only be available to people with personal budgets.”

“Homelessness drop-in centre due to lack of funds for the project manager post.”

“Children's play work.”

These results show the diversity of services offered by groups in the city: employment and training support, social activities for disabled people, help for the homeless, healthcare, support for children – and these are selected examples from a survey of only 51 groups. These are only the at risk services we know about. The statement about living ‘on the edge’ is where this report gets its title: it sums up sentiment across the sector.

Question 7: What is the possibility of your organisation having to close altogether?



Uncertainty about whether a group will still exist should not be taken as a positive: if 36% of the nation's businesses declared they may have to close, it would constitute a crisis. Given the variety of work that the voluntary sector does, and the diversity of people they support, this is deeply worrying.

48% of respondents said it was unlikely they will have to close, but we suspect they may be pushed to continue to do even more with even less. Still, this is less than half of those surveyed, and definitely cause for concern.

Further, it is upsetting that 10% of those surveyed are at risk of closure. If applied to the 1,200 groups NCVS knows about in the city, that's 120 groups at risk of closure in an uncertain timeframe, providing a wide range of services as highlighted in Question 6. We have seen the services provided by those who answered this survey: imagine the damage that could be done if the stats are broadly applied.

8. If you can't provide your services, who will end up picking up your work? What problems will they face?

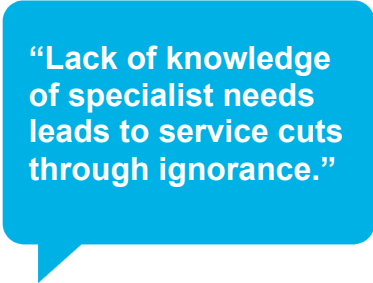
Some examples are highlighted below, but 55% of responses to this question had one response:




"No one."

Again, if over half of businesses could no longer trade, there would be more outcry.

This question received a substantial response with despairing answers.



"Lack of knowledge of specialist needs leads to service cuts through ignorance."



"We already have other agencies trying to signpost residents to our centre because they have no spare capacity."

"There isn't anyone else in Nottingham City or County that has the specialism of engaging with and advocating for homeless people. It may be picked up by a large generic provider who don't have any experience of engaging with hard to reach groups."

"I cannot see who would pick up our services. Women would end up having to go to multiple providers for different services - a model that wouldn't work for our client group. We already take overspill from other services anyway, such as advice agencies."

"Don't know who can pick up the work. We are a specialist provider."

"Mainstream services cannot provide the level of support nor do they understand the specific needs of certain BME communities. They will become further isolated, removed from any support and in the long term we expect to see implosions within the BME community. The wider community will have to face the distress when families cannot cope."

"There would be no other way disabled/elderly people could get impartial advice / assessments on disability equipment...Impartial advice and choice would be removed and wrong equipment could be purchased."

"Presume a competitor might agree to run a lower quality service."

"There isn't really another refugee based charity except for us. Refugee and asylum seekers will struggle to find help elsewhere."

“The national office with a couple of staff will have to serve the entire UK.”

“No provision or fewer but more expensive providers.”

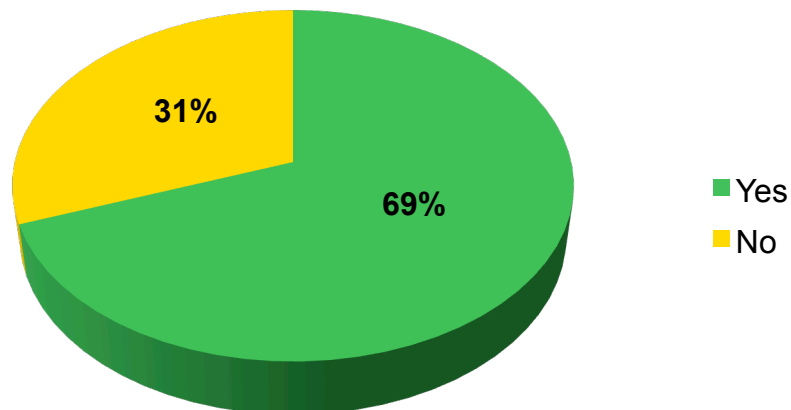
“It would have to be a merger.”

These results clearly show that the voluntary sector aren't duplicating services, they're working in specialist areas and if anything, they're taking on work from other organisations to continue to help service users.

The question was posed hypothetically to see where service users could go if the worst were to happen. The answer is nowhere, which puts the homeless, the disabled, the elderly, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, refugees, asylum seekers, women, people in poverty and addicts at risk. In turn, this final, stark quote indicates that removal of Early Intervention work could end up harming society:

“In some cases no-one will pick things up. With preventative work (e.g. work with young people abusing alcohol or family support) this will come back to bite society later when more people need support for bigger problems because the 'bud-nipping' didn't get funded.”

Question 9: Are you facing reduced income?



Given the rest of the survey, this result was to be expected. The fact that so many are facing reduced income is clearly concerning, but so is the potential effect on service users. They will undoubtedly face uncertainty about whether the service they use will continue to exist, which for some vulnerable groups could actually create more problems.

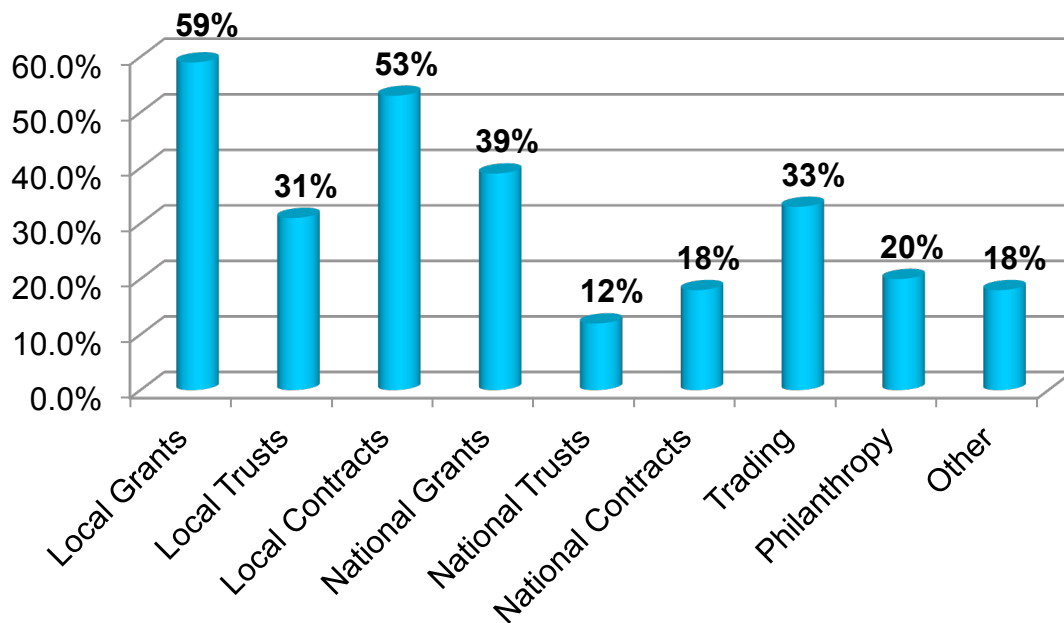
Uncertainty is also likely to affect staff members at risk of redundancy, where morale can understandably be low and lead good people to look elsewhere, with skills leaving the sector and potentially the city.

We additionally asked what the impact would be on service users if the service was to close: responses include:

- Isolation;
- Increased homelessness;
- Less outreach;
- Less connection with decision-makers;
- More crime; and
- More health issues.

While this is a response we expected, it doesn't make reading it any easier.

Question 10: What has been the nature of the funding streams you've received in the last year, and potentially over the next year? (Tick as many as apply)



We are encouraged by the prevalence of local money to address local issues. It's pleasing to see that broadly, the voluntary sector and local decision makers have identified similar priorities for local people in need.

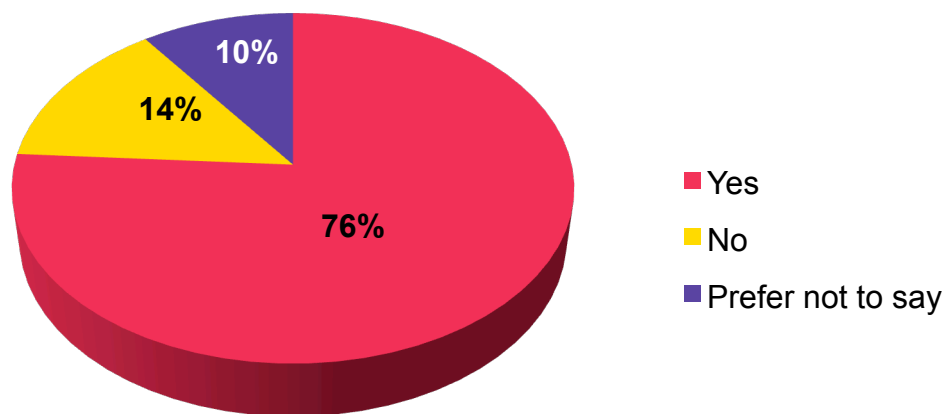
However, the reliance on local grants is a real worry given that Nottingham City Council are moving towards a commissioning-centred model of funding. Grants make up £3 billion nationally¹⁰ and are a crucial resource for the voluntary sector to fund its activities. We are curious as to how this will work for the 59% surveyed, especially considering that there is no belief from the voluntary sector that the services they currently provide would be picked up elsewhere (see Question 8).

While voluntary organisations do rely on grants and contracts to fund services, it is worth noting the results for trading (33%) and philanthropy (20%). These are still only a small part of the £36.7 billion the sector receives annually from all funding sources.¹¹ It reinforces the point that trading and philanthropy must be part of a broader funding strategy for the voluntary sector long term, and not a solution.

¹⁰ The 2012 Civil Society Almanac, p29

¹¹ Ibid

Question 11: Have any of the funding streams mentioned in Question 10 ended or been cut?



A shade over three quarters of those responding losing money is an enormous figure. It speaks volumes about the drastic nature of the current austerity measures, especially when paired with broad uncertainty about future prospects of entire organisations in Question 7. The Voluntary Sector Cuts website reports cuts of an estimated £77 million to charities nationally.¹²

When surveyed about from whom the contract ended or was cut, the answers ranged from national bodies, old schemes like the Future Jobs Fund, local grants and one-off philanthropic donations.

The consequence of these funding streams ending is clear. The funding environment now means these voluntary organisations don't just face the prospect of losing funding, but also the prospect of competing for funding against groups they have previously worked alongside. NCVO are concerned that cash savings now may be 'storing up considerable challenges for the future' by making these cuts to preventative services.¹³

The voluntary sector in Nottingham prefers collaboration over competition. Competition risks competing for clients and / or services, and therefore focusing on staying afloat and not on clients. This would be a significant, dangerous and wholly unwelcome culture shift for the voluntary sector.

¹² The 2012 Civil Society Almanac, p43

¹³ Ibid, p44

Question 12: How much has your funding changed by in the last 12 months? As a percentage or as a monetary figure. (Both would be very helpful!)

Answers in this question varied greatly, but the most common answer was a hugely worrying 50% reduction.

While there were some welcome exceptions where groups had actually increased their funding, the majority of the answers spoke of cuts and loss of funding from various avenues, including trading. There was even some evidence of groups already having to compete against local allies. The evidence is clear: charity is being made to go further than ever.

"In one service alone we received a 70% cut with us then being asked a further two times to lose money again."

"1/3rd lost Greater funding achieved in one area but three times as much work required for the money."

"Approx £68,000 less."

"-25%, £50,000."

"Nearly 80% of funding has been cut."

"Approx reduction of 20% - £100,000's."

"Last Financial Year we had £387,081 in grants including draw down against some capital allocated to us in April 11, the figure for this year will be more in the region of £100,000 + drawdown from our reserves which we can only afford for 2 years - not long enough."

"Income 0, Expenditure £6,400."

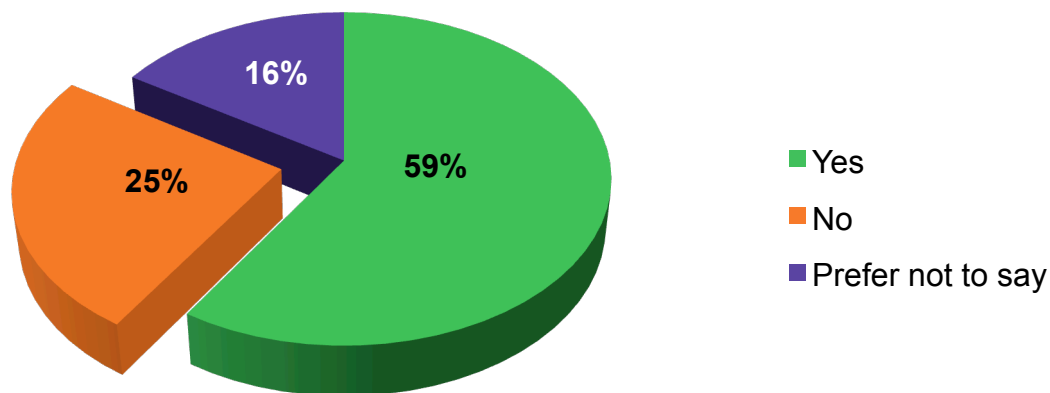
"50% reduction."

"30% less trading = £2,000."

"Grant income for salaries last year paid full costs of 1.5 staff, now we only have grant income for 0.5 staff. Due to loss of the above funding and the coming to an end of another fund, which paid half of the Project Managers salary."

"From £30,000 per month to £3,000 per month."

Question 13: Does your group have reserves?



In times of austerity and a turbulent funding picture, it is worrying that almost a quarter of those surveyed explicitly said they don't have reserves. NCVO report that in 2010, 27% of registered charities they surveyed held 'insufficient' reserves,¹⁴ and it's a concern that this does not seem to be any better in 2012.

Charity Commission guidance recommends holding reserves,¹⁵ and evidence from a supplementary question about whether reserves are being used to fund services indicates a good proportion who have reserves are using them to get through a time of austerity.

The use of reserves in some organisations, and their absence in others, is cause for concern. What if the reserves run out? How long will they be able to continue providing services?

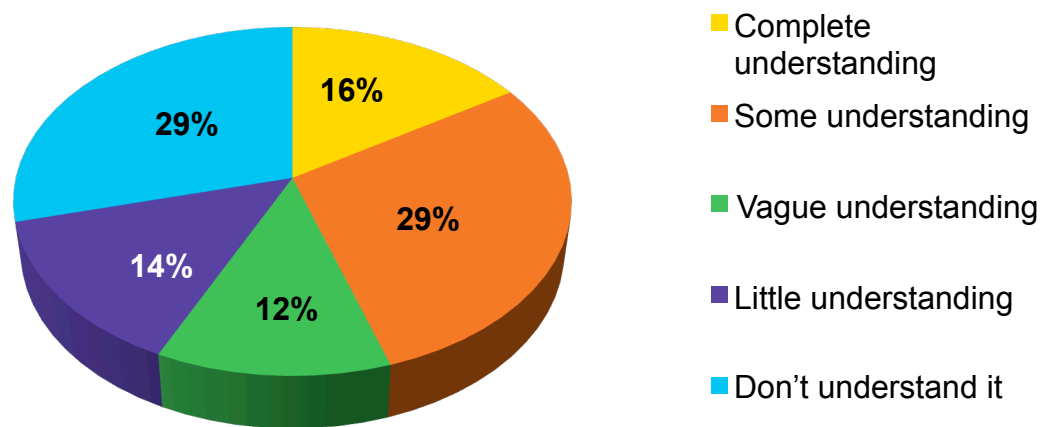
What if those who don't hold reserves can't get funding? What if they fold completely? This could leave bad debt and long term problems for those involved with the group.

More importantly, we should be concerned that we are talking about the use or absence of reserves at all to fund services for vulnerable people.

¹⁴ The 2012 Civil Society Almanac, p59

¹⁵ Charity Commission Guidance, Charities and Reserves (CC19),
<http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/publications/cc19.aspx#e2>

Question 14: Social finance has been suggested as a new way to fund the voluntary sector. How much do you understand ‘social finance’ and how it can support the sector?



Given that social finance, such as Big Society Capital¹⁶ is being suggested to the voluntary sector to support its work in the future, these results are disheartening. 55% don't fully understand social finance, despite its push from government as a key element of future of voluntary sector funding. It is possible that the implication of charging for services to repay the social finance doesn't sit well, and seems to go against the nature of 'charity.'

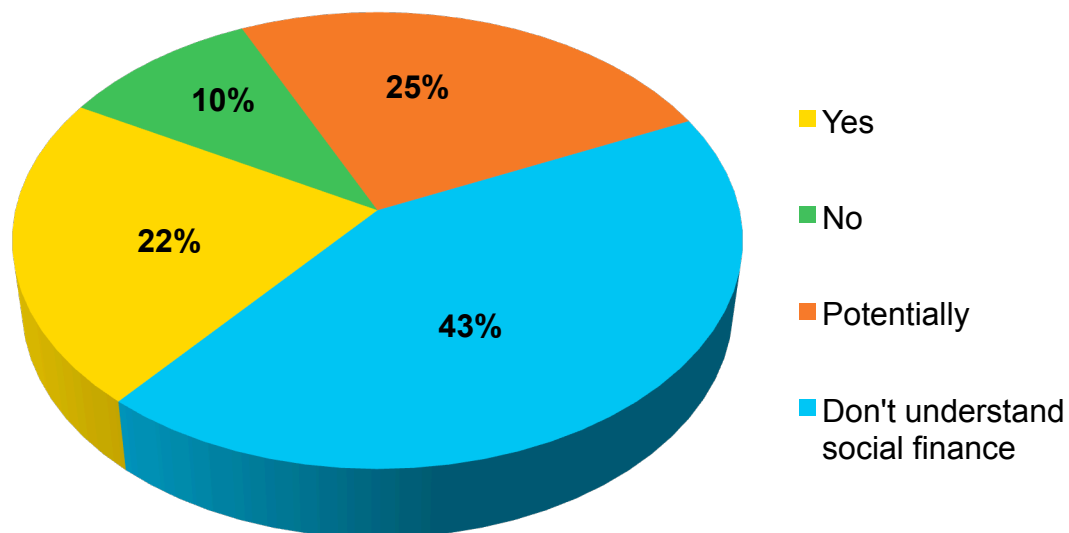
Groundwork South West took part in a Work Programme scheme which they attempted to fund with social finance, with a promise of payment on results. Unfortunately, it led to them being wound up earlier this year.¹⁷

Taking out loans with the expectation of future payments is risky. While public or private sector providers have the money to take a risk on these schemes, this is not possible for small, local groups supposedly being empowered by Localism.

¹⁶ BBC News, 'Big Society Fund launches with £600m to invest,' <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-17602323> 4 April 2012

¹⁷ Guardian, How firms with eye on welfare budget promised to get jobless back to work <http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2012/jun/09/work-programme-welfare-jobs-private-sector?INTCMP=SRCH>, 9 June 2012

Question 15: Would you be willing to use 'social finance' to fund the work your group does?

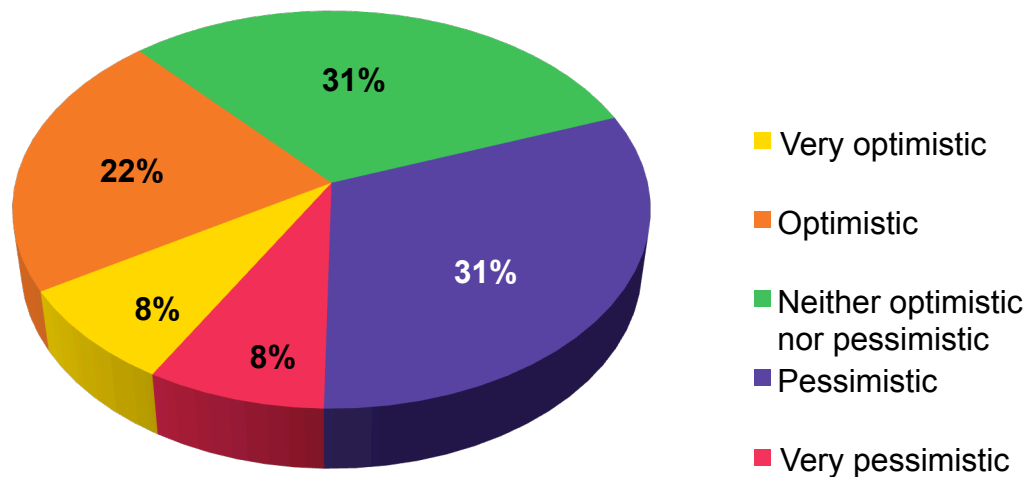


Clearly, from the answers to Questions 14 and 15, there is much work to be done. Social finance in its current form does not seem like a viable model for the voluntary sector.

It seems promising that of those who understand social finance, a total of 47% of respondents would consider using it to fund their work. Realistically though, this is a false positive. 47% of the 45% who claimed to understand it in Question 14 is a very small number. Of those who understood it, over 20% still would not consider using it to fund their work.

This is not to say it cannot work, but government must work with voluntary groups to find a way of making it work, rather than assuming that what has worked for the private and public sectors will also work for the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector are more than happy to work with the government on this, but we need the opportunity.

Question 16: How optimistic are you about your organisation's future prospects given local and national political agendas?



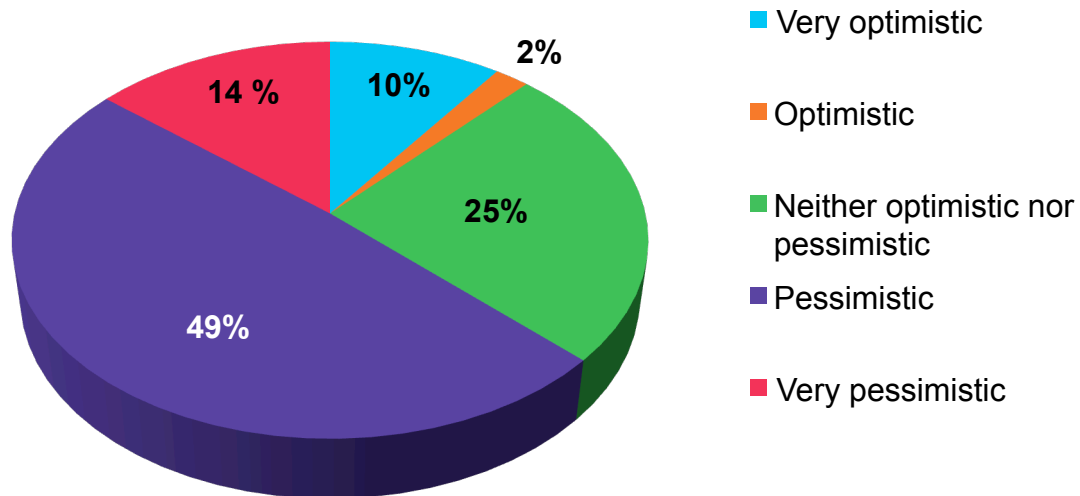
We are pleased to see that groups are reasonably optimistic about their futures, given current turbulence. However, the split in the answers is indicative of a sector feeling insecure. We could, in all likelihood, ask this same question in a year's time and get similar results.

We are concerned that this uncertainty may be due to the vague nature of government policy and attitude towards the voluntary sector. Vague measures and soundbites, such as 'Big Society,' 'Open Public Services' and Localism may make sense to those involved in policy and strategy on a daily basis, but not to its workforce. The government needs to be clearer with its language, policies and opportunities if it wants the voluntary sector's trust.

NCVO are concerned that, "When organisations are forced to close, as many already have, they cannot simply be re-created if a tendering process happens at some point in the future. Their unique skills, connections with people and their relationships with the people they serve will disappear forever."¹⁸ This is a stark warning: this is not just the voluntary sector at risk, but crucial services with a wealth of experience in addressing social ills that cannot be easily recreated.

¹⁸ The 2012 Civil Society Almanac, p44

Question 17: How optimistic are you about your client group's future prospects given local and national political agendas?



Almost two-thirds of those who responded have concerns for their client group, while almost a quarter can't be sure about how their clients will fair in the future.

The introduction of Universal Credit is likely to hit clients hardest, and increase demand for services from the voluntary sector. As shown above, the sector is already stretching to meet demand and being pushed towards generic services. The sector could struggle to meet demand and help all those in need as things stand.

All in all, concerns over government policy make uncomfortable reading for a sector full of people who are concerned for the wellbeing of the vulnerable in society.

Question 18: What additional support has your organisation received in the last year? This can be financial, moral, vocal etc from a source you wouldn't otherwise rely or depend on. Who from?

We were pleased to see a wide variety of support from the wider community for the voluntary sector. While we hear talk of how the sector is supported by its local community, it has been pleasing to actually see it:

“Support from local retailers, NCVS (training needs), CA Plus, other local disability groups and service users.”

“MPs, businesses have been more willing to endorse our work, Councillors are more willing to see value in our work.”

“Have had the opportunity to work with BBC Inside Out to raise awareness about the issues homeless people now face.”

“Lots of support from local people, groups and businesses in terms of fundraising.”

“Voluntary sector support...advice, guidance and general sharing/pooling of resources.”

“Good support from Nottingham City Council Revenue & Benefits team. The Diocese.”

“Good support with regards of the provision of speakers for our Forums from organisations such as One East Midlands, NCVYS, Big Lottery...”

“We have had financial, moral and vocal support from one councillor, moral by another.”

However some respondents used the question to express frustration. It would be easy to dismiss these concerns as dissenting voices among some positive examples, but their concerns are alarming. The two below are the most concerning:

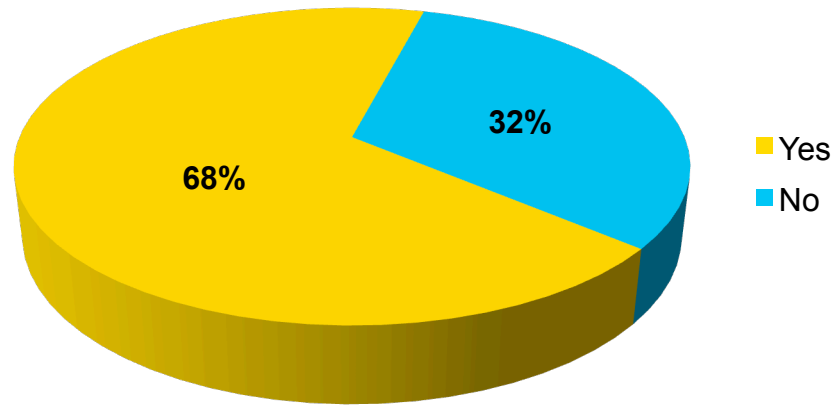
“None especially from national BME organisations who are too interested in looking after their futures rather than doing their job for local groups.”

If BME infrastructure groups decline, where else will specialist support come from?

“None. And I would point out that the increased pressure thanks to funding cuts and the city council's get out clause of commissioning has led to negative competition rather than transparent partnership working.”

While praise was fairly wide for local councillors, this particular criticism has been a theme throughout the survey, and requires urgent attention from the City Council.

Question 19: Is there any legislation or government initiative passed in the last 12 months or currently being debated that concerns you as an organisation? E.g. Housing Benefit reform, NHS reform, Localism.



Answers to this question show deep seated, wide ranging concerns about government policy. From Universal Credit to Housing Reform; from Jobseekers Allowance sanctions to Localism; and from National Citizen Service to Personal Independence Payments:

“The introduction of Universal Credit will cause problems for people who lead chaotic lives and are not used to managing money. All their money will come in one payment monthly – rather than different weekly payments. Where this is already happening we’re seeing women who are not used to managing money who are spending all of their income in the first week or two and then ending up in debt.”

“Homeless people are remaining in services when they no longer need to be there because there are no social housing properties to move into.”

“Housing Benefit Reform - there is a lack of social housing and the reform means that Housing Benefit will not cover private rental therefore more of a strain on social housing of which there isn't enough.”

“Increased sanctions and tighter restrictions on benefits are also having an impact, for example you now lose a fortnight’s money if you miss a Job Centre Plus appointment and have to reapply – we were aware of a woman who led a very chaotic life and kept

missing her 9am Monday morning appointments at the Job Centre. Without her benefits she used sex working to stay afloat.”

“Generally the Government's austerity programme seems to be pushing women back into the kitchen and away from work, and hitting the most vulnerable the hardest.”

“Department of Work and Pensions - changes (cuts) to welfare benefits e.g. Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments. Closure of Remploy factories.”

“Localism should reinforce moral support and we will be encouraged to put voluntary effort into engaging with Police and public sector. But volunteers are limited and are not a substitute for public-sector jobs for a variety of reasons.”

“Localism does not seem to be backed up with the seed money to make it work (if it could work).”

“Welfare Reform Bill will have an impact on our Client base.”

“The National Citizen Service see a lot of Government money (£120 million this year) spent on the provision of a service to 16 years old which would be better spent on youth services as a whole.”

“It is expected that people will use their benefits to buy drugs rather than pay rent rates and pay for household bills.”

“Housing benefit reform which is reducing our income from renting properties to refugees. Awarding of contracts for asylum housing to G4S which will lead to quicker evictions post negative decisions which will increase demand for our housing.”

Had we done a survey exclusively on this topic, our title would have been easy: Unintended Consequences. While we don't believe that government has intentionally gone out to damage the work of the voluntary sector, or to isolate and victimise the vulnerable, the results of such reforms either risk having such unintended consequences, or have already begun to harm those who need help most.

Question 20: Please tell us about the services your organisation provides (please tick a maximum of three)

Advice and information	47%
Advocacy	27%
Health & Wellbeing	24%
Volunteering	20%
Education / training	18%
Housing / Homelessness	18%
Children and youth	16%
Community development / neighbourhood	13%
Infrastructure Support	13%
Befriending / mentoring	11%
Employment / Worklessness	11%
Consultancy	9%
Equalities / Human Rights	9%
Substance Misuse / Drugs / Alcohol	9%
Campaigning	7%
Family / Parent Support	7%
Carer support	4%
Crime and safety	2%
Domestic abuse	2%
Environment / Green	2%
Self Help	2%
Transport	2%

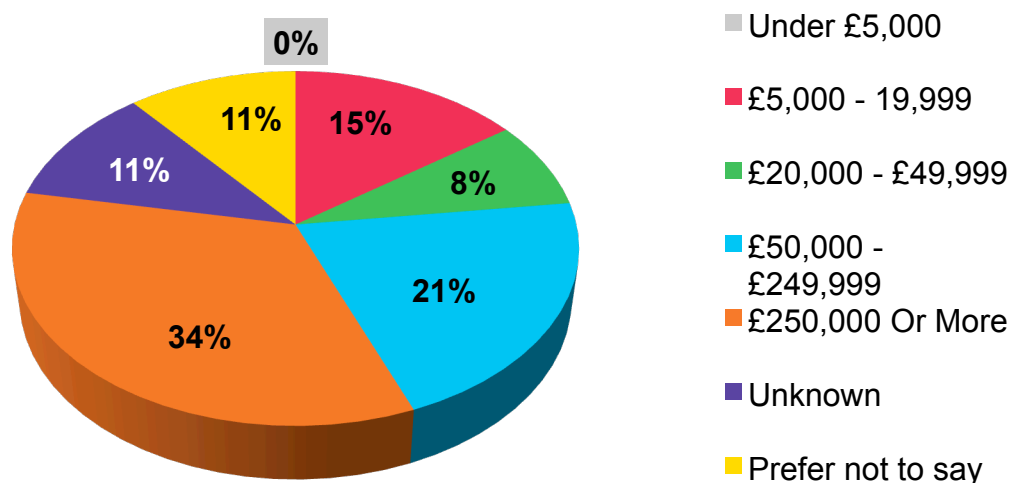
Question 21: Who are your organisation's main client groups? (Please tick a maximum of three)

Women	29%
Parents / families	24%
Young adults (18-24)	24%
Residents / tenants	22%
Black and minority ethnic	20%
Children (under 18)	20%
Disabled people	20%
Mental health	17%
Asylum seekers / refugees	15%
Carers	15%
Older people (over 55)	12%
People with learning difficulties	10%
Faith community	5%
LGBT / sexuality	2%
Men	2%
Offenders / ex offenders	2%

Question 22: Which areas does your organisation work in? (Please tick as many as apply)

Entire City	70.0%
Arboretum	8.0%
Aspley	13.0%
Basford	4.0%
Berridge	11.0%
Bestwood	6.0%
Bilborough	11.0%
Bridge	11.0%
Bulwell	8.0%
Bulwell Forest	4.0%
Clifton North	8.0%
Clifton South	8.0%
Dales	13.0%
Dunkirk & Lenton	13.0%
Leen Valley	4.0%
Mapperley	11.0%
Radford & Park	13.0%
Sherwood	4.0%
St Ann's	15.0%
Wollaton East & Lenton Abbey	11.0%
Wollaton West	11.0%
Nottinghamshire	43.0%
Broxtowe Borough	17.0%
Gedling Borough	15.0%
Rushcliffe Borough	15.0%
National	11.0%

Question 23: What is your organisation's annual income?



The biggest surprise here was the number of responses from voluntary organisations in Nottingham with an income over £250,000 – the majority in the survey.

While we concede that larger groups may have more time to answer surveys, we would also urge those looking at the survey to consider the economic benefit of bringing this amount of money into the city by the voluntary sector.

We are disappointed that we had no responses from any group with an income under £5,000, and will endeavour to correct this the next time we do the survey to make it as inclusive as possible.

Question 24: How many people does your organisation employ?

This question received wide-ranging answers, from no staff at all to answers of 6,000 and 18,000. We have excluded these larger numbers, as we feel these are national numbers which would skew the figures below.

We calculated the mean, median and mode to attempt to reflect employment in the voluntary sector as a whole.

Mean (overall average) = 53 (minus anomalies)

Median (middle number) = 4 (minus anomalies)

Mode (most occurring) = 3

The variety in the averages hopefully displays the differences throughout the sector, and demonstrates that as much as government would like a coherent answer from the voluntary sector on issues that matter to them – despite not asking for similar consensus from the private or public sectors – it is difficult to generalise when such variety exists.

Question 25: How many volunteers does your organisation support?

We also received wide ranging answers to this question, with answers ranging from no volunteers to 4,000 and 11,000 volunteers. We have excluded these anomalies as national statistics to try and present the average number of volunteers in Nottingham as accurately as possible.

Again, we calculated the mean, median and mode below.

Mean (overall average) = 49 (minus anomalies)

Median (middle number) = 18 (minus anomalies)

Mode (most occurring) = 30

Despite low staff numbers, the sector continues to support volunteers to in order to help and support people in Nottingham. If volunteers across the country were to be paid for their work, it would cost the economy £19.4billion,¹⁹ and in 2010 Aspiren reported that Nottingham's volunteers contribute £14.1million worth of time.²⁰ For this, we are eternally grateful: without volunteers, this city could be a completely different place.

¹⁹ The 2012 Civil Society Almanac, p73

²⁰ Gardiner, G., and Esberger, T. (2010) 227 million reasons to celebrate the Third Sector in Nottingham. Nottingham: Aspiren.

Conclusions

As a sector, we are living on the edge. And it's crumbling. Major national infrastructure and support charities such as NCVO and the Charity Finance Group talk about a 'perfect storm,' but Nottingham CVS are concerned that this only considers a few elements: fewer staff, less money and increased demand. Given the results of our survey, these concerns feel like the tropical storm before the hurricane.

The picture in Nottingham matches elements of the national picture. Funding and staff have decreased, demand has increased, and expectations are low. But the rest of the picture reinforces the severity of the situation. Groups expect further cuts and bigger contracts which will damage the ability of smaller, well established groups to apply. Services are becoming more generic as the government's austerity measures create widening, multi-level social problems which the voluntary sector could readily address given the resources. Many services are already at risk of closure, with broad uncertainty about the future of Nottingham's voluntary sector. Concerns from the sector are selfless, epitomising charity by expressing more concern for their service users than their staff.

Government schemes to help and empower the voluntary sector need substance to match the rhetoric. Social finance is touted as a future funding stream but the voluntary sector are unclear as to how it will work, and those who do know show little confidence in it. More must be done to increase knowledge, participation and engagement with social finance. Nottingham's groups fear government reforms will only serve to further harm voluntary groups and service users, with Universal Credit causing most concern. Groups are concerned that it could do more harm than good as their services shrink and cannot handle the administration which comes with Universal Credit.

This is not to mention other government policy reform, such as welfare, housing benefit and benefit sanctions, the unintended consequences of which risk pushing the vulnerable further away from support. Broader policies, such as Open Public Services, Localism and Big Society must shed their ambiguity and become solid, practical, workable methods of empowerment rather than 'opportunities' for the voluntary sector.

The voluntary sector are unable to seize these opportunities for the very reasons outlined above: lack of resources, contracts which are too large to bid for, the struggle to maintain current services without damaging those they already run and no time to analyse what opportunities government policy offers while doing more than ever before with less. Frankly, less time than ever to address huge, diverse issues.

Nottingham's voluntary sector has done what it has been asked. They have strived to do more with less but feel like they are compromising on services as it is. The message could not be clearer. If asked to shrink more, if the edge looms closer, we won't be able to reduce, or downsize, or make services more generic. The sector will just plummet off the edge. The vulnerable people that groups support won't have anywhere to turn.

Then what?



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