

Sandwell Voluntary and Community Sector Leaders Survey Report - Autumn 2011

Introduction

Sandwell Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) is a key local infrastructure organisation, providing representation, development support and capacity-building for Sandwell's Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). In September 2011 it invited all voluntary organisations and community groups in Sandwell to share information and views on the current and future state of Sandwell's VCS.

The survey received a total of 78 responses: providing just over a 9% return rate.

This report draws out key information and is split into the following sections:

Section 1 – Headline Findings

Section 2 – Sandwell VCS Service Delivery

Section 3 - Views on the Future

Section 4 - Engaging Local Public Sector Partners

Section 5 – Next Steps

Section 6 - Appendix

This report also draws on data about Sandwell's VCS held by SCVO on its web-based database www.sandwellvcs.info, together with a Leader's Forum Survey that was conducted in the [Autumn of 2009](#). The report has been compiled by Leona Bird, Network Development Officer at SCVO.

For the purposes of this report, definitions of 'small', 'medium' and 'large' are based on annual income; this is provided as a guide, whilst recognising the arbitrary nature and natural exceptions and limitations of this.

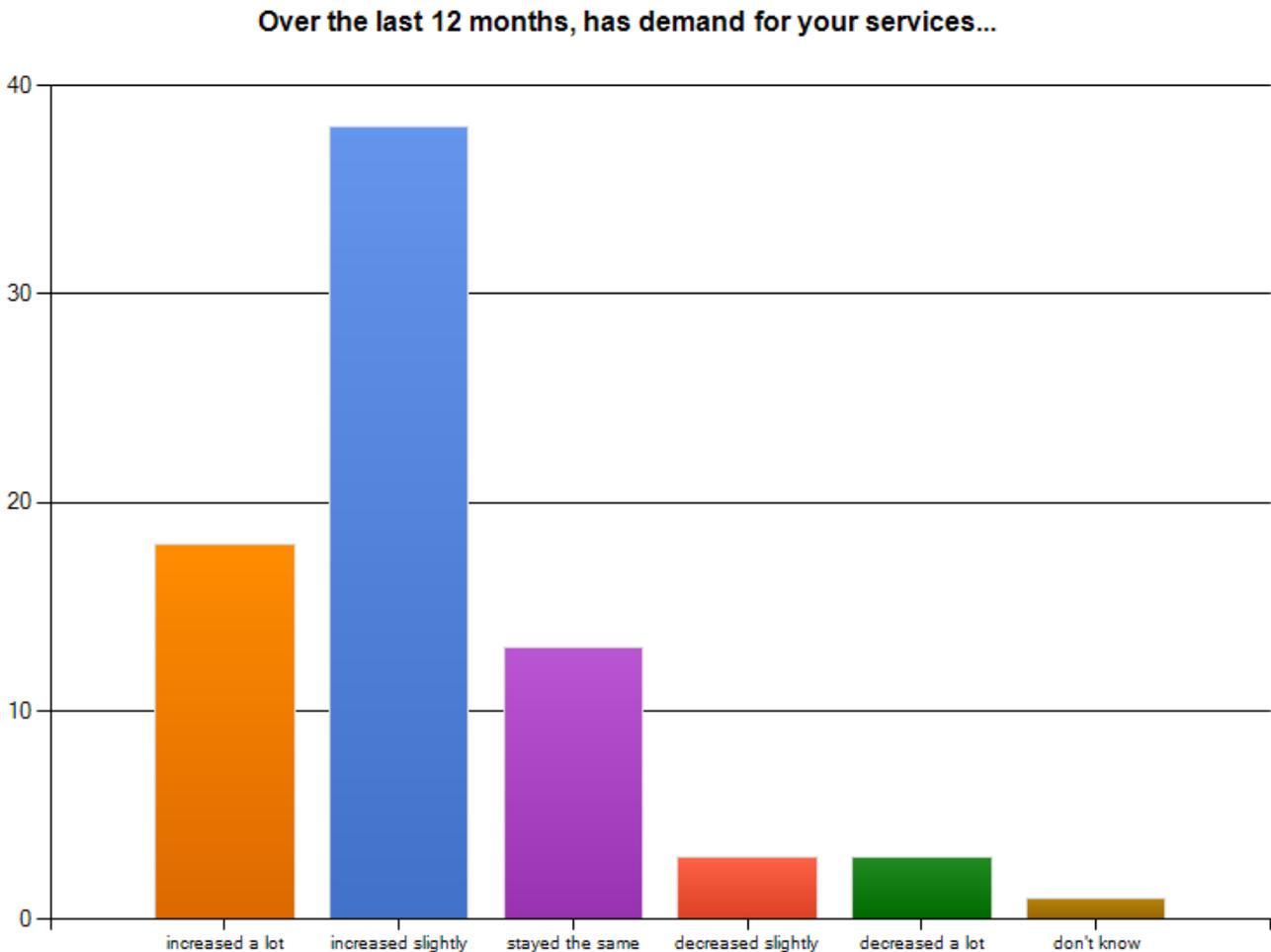
- 'Small' organisations have an income not exceeding £15k;
- medium organisations have an income not exceeding £250k;
- large organisations have an income in excess of £250k per annum.

1. Headline Findings

- The Voluntary and Community Sector has faced a widespread increase in demand for its services.
- Smaller organisations had the greatest ability to increase their capacity to deliver services to meet the demand.
- Medium to large sized stated that although demand for their service was increasing their capacity to deliver services had stayed the same, or decreased.
- The majority of organisations are not reliant on the public sector for their funding or it only made up a small amount of the total of their income.
- 50% of respondents felt that reductions in public sector budgets and changes to priorities was a great concern.
- Over one third of respondents felt that unclear funding and commissioning processes and competition over funding were the greatest threats to their organisation.
- A greater proportion of medium organisations feel pessimistic rather than optimistic that Sandwell’s Voluntary and Community Sector will “survive and thrive” in the next 12 months.
- Despite relations with the Public Sector staying much the same or improving the sector still feels an inability to influence local decisions.
- Much work is needed to help to raise the profile of Sandwell Compact and its benefits.

2. Sandwell VCS Service Delivery

(i) Changing Demand for Services



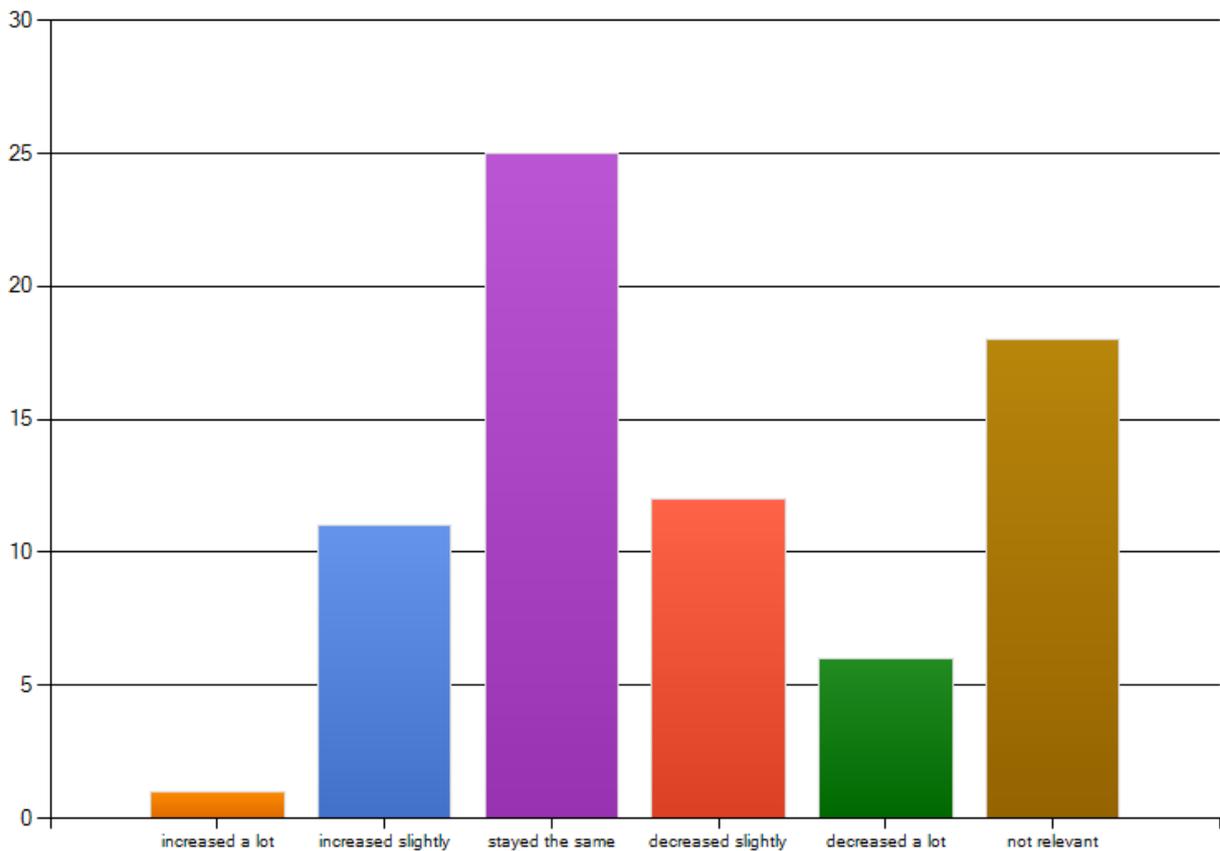
Times have been tough for Sandwell during the current economic downturn: challenging for many residents and also for the voluntary and community organisations which support them. Increasing pressures on individuals, families and communities has increased demand on service-delivery agencies and necessitated swift, flexible responses by those who offer help.

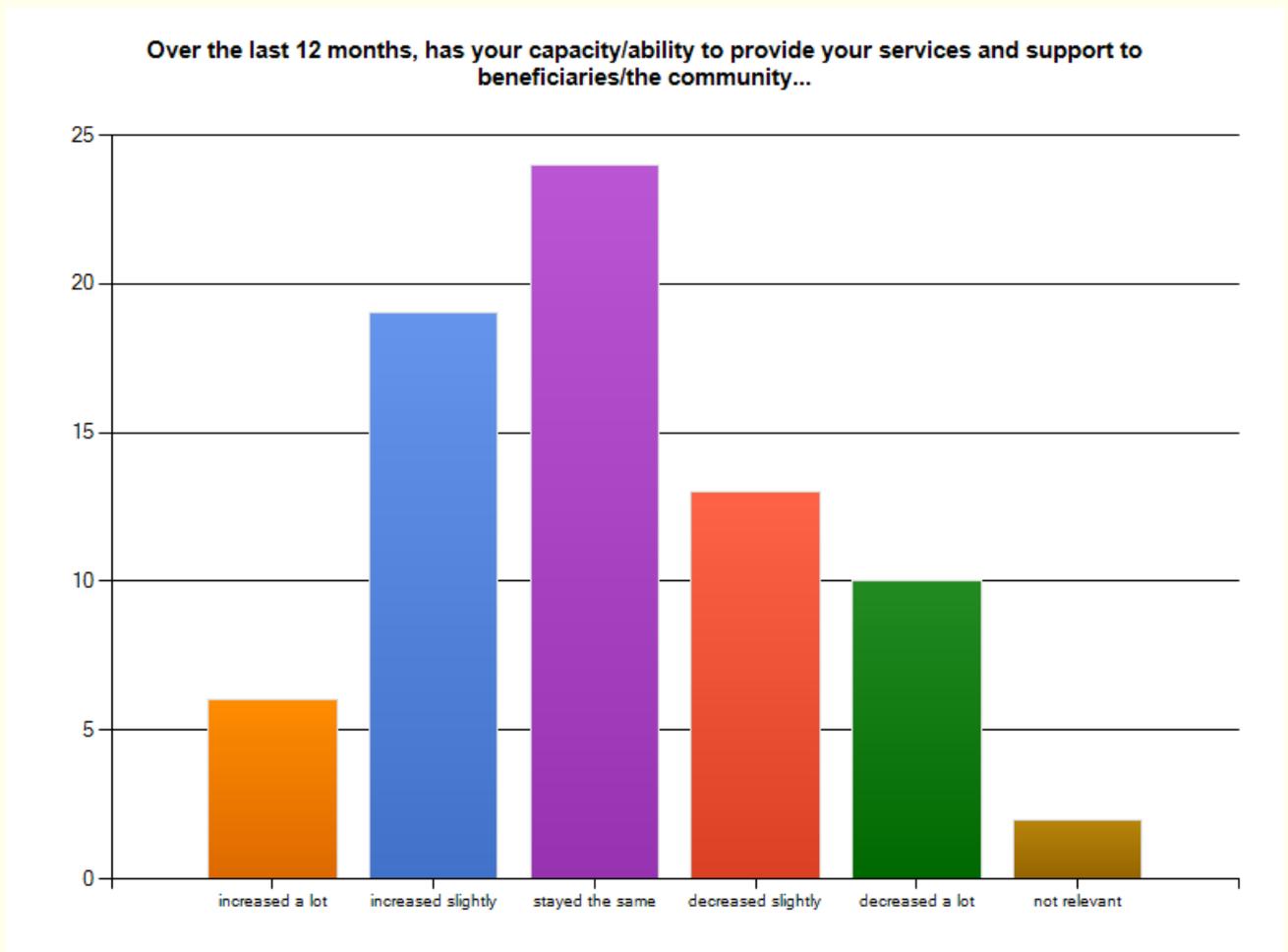
VCS leaders responding to this survey emphatically endorsed the widely-held notion that the Sector has faced a widespread increase in demand: over three quarters of all organisations surveyed registered an increase of some kind; nearly half said this was a slight increase in demand. Size of organisation has been of no consequence: the Sector has been subject to change across the whole range of groups and organisations.

(ii) Changing Capacity to Deliver Services

Respondents were asked to share information on two questions concerning their capacity: one relating to the changing number of employees (if relevant); the other relating more generally to the organisations ability to deliver support services. As can be seen from the charts below the majority of organisations saw little change in their staffing. The high response for 'not relevant' in terms of the number of employees came from those smaller voluntary organisations who are predominantly volunteer led. From the snap shot of organisations that completed the survey, over 3,000 volunteers have supported the delivery on their services during the last 12 months, with over 4,000 hours per week being offered by volunteers.

Over the last 12 months, has your number of employees...



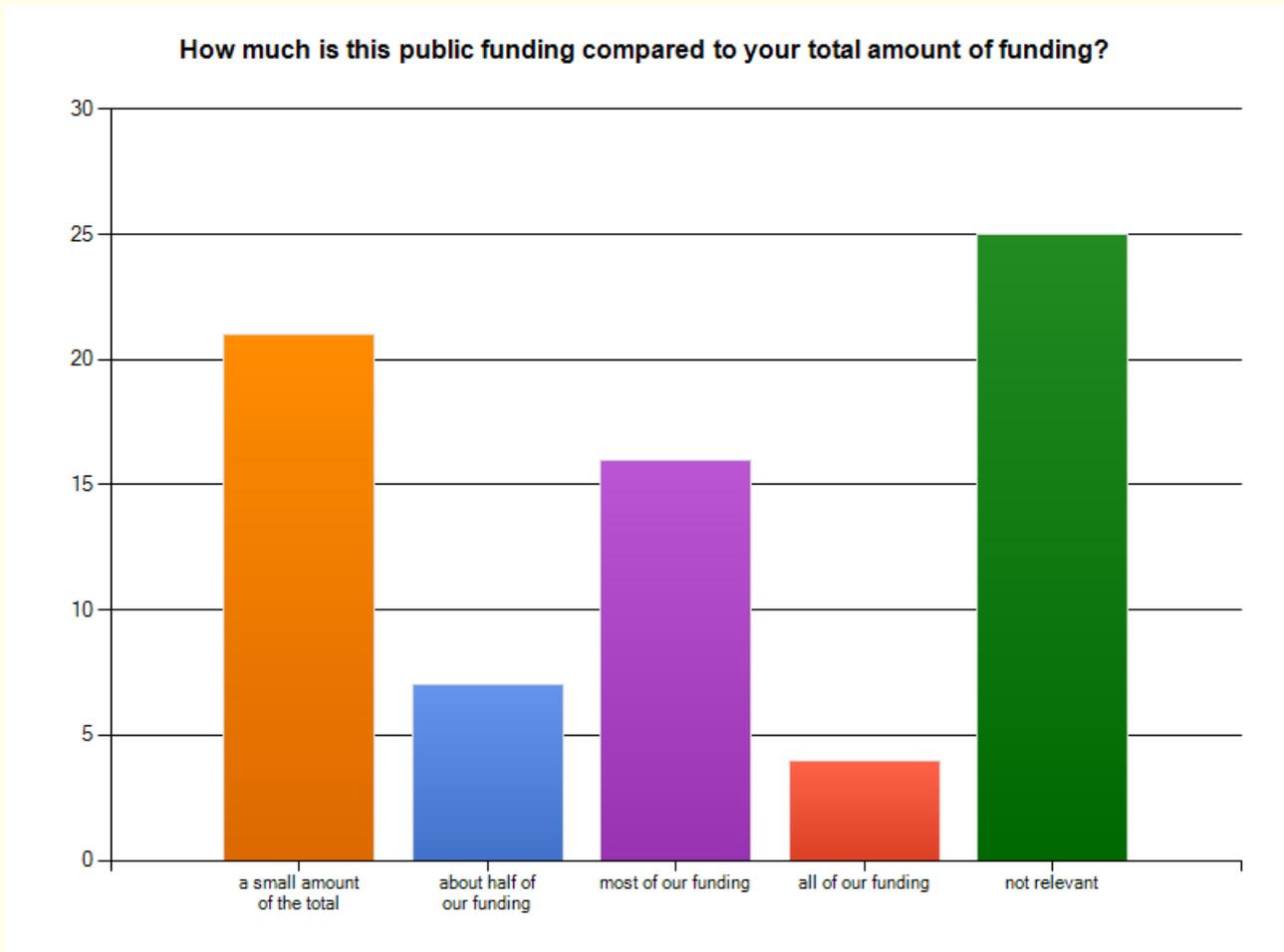


It would appear that the smaller organisations had the greatest ability to increase their capacity to deliver services to meet the demand.

This would suggest that smaller organisations have the ability and the flexibility to harness and gain the extra capacity needed to meet the growing demand on their services. The medium to large sized organisations showed that although demand for their service was increasing their capacity to deliver services had stayed the same, or indeed decreased.

3. Views on the Future

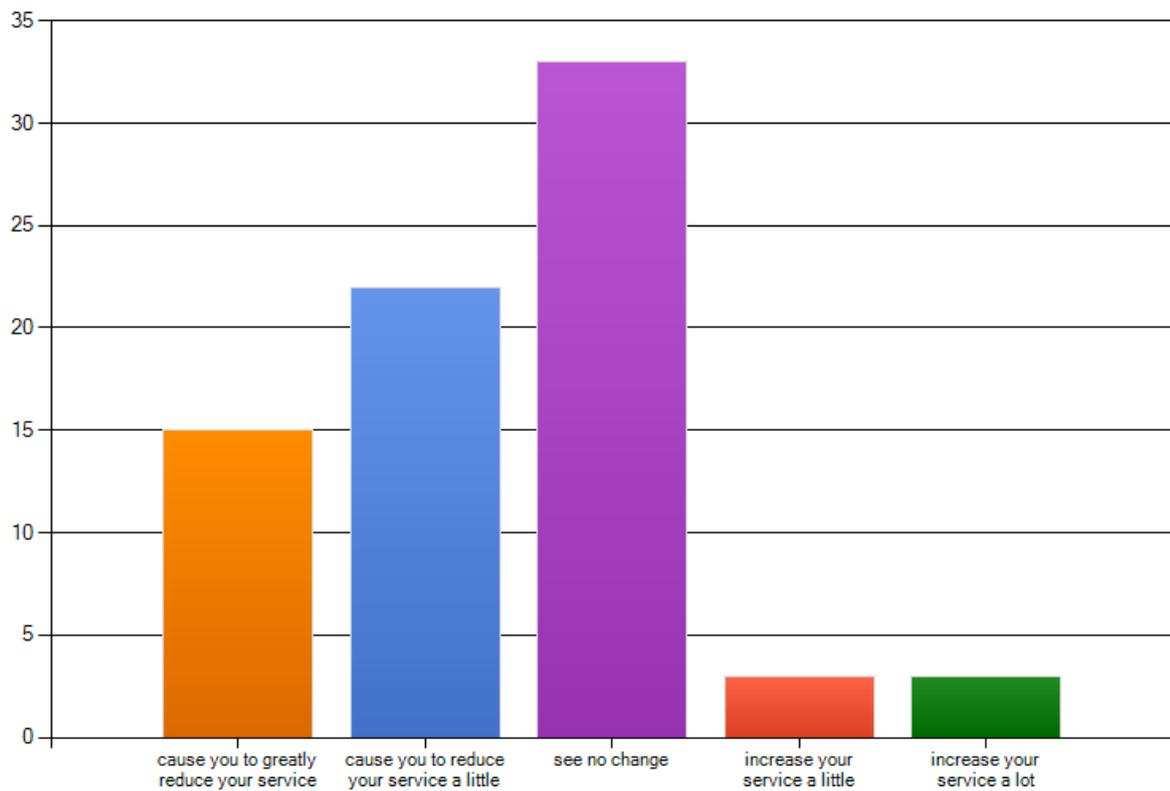
(i) Funding Environment



The continued recession-led squeeze on public finance is well-documented. VCS concerns focus naturally on the issue of how organisations will sustain themselves and continue to deliver vital services in the future. Respondents to this survey were invited to share information on the extent to which public funding plays a part in their income mix.

Of those who responded to the survey, the majority were not reliant on the public sector for their funding or this funding only made up a small amount of the total of their income. Around a quarter of those from small and medium sized organisations reported that it was most of their funding.

Overall, do you feel that your funding position and sustainability over the next 12 months is likely to...

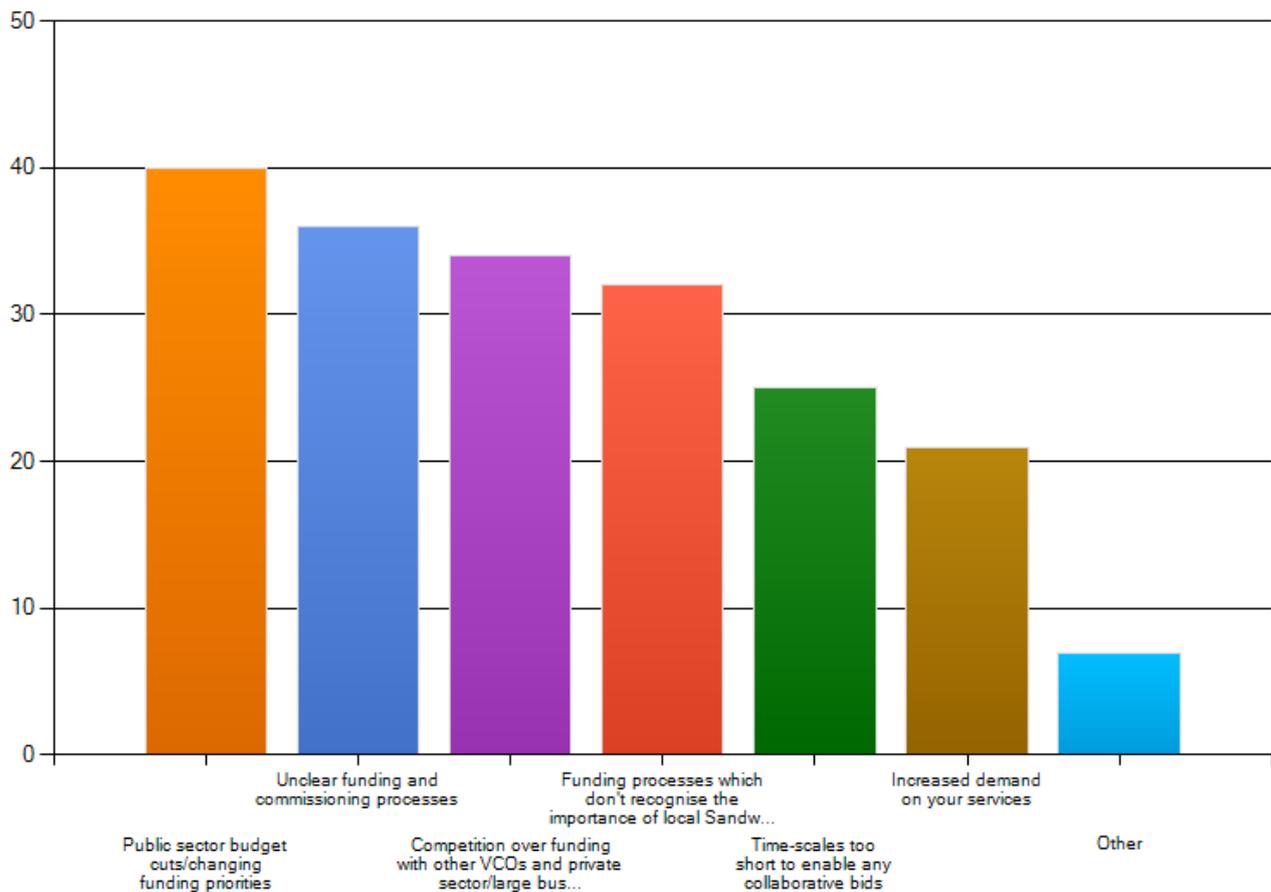


Views given in response to questions on funding and sustainability over the next twelve months was one of mixed optimism, given the current circumstances. Over a third of organisations seeing little change to their funding position, and under half of those responding expecting they will need to reduce their services in coming year.

Given the changes in the way that funding in the future will come to Sandwell, it is likely that there will be a reduction in the amount available from the public sector and that the voluntary and community sector will need to access external funding to deliver their services.

SCVO records show that in terms of the organisations they have supported since 1 April 2011 over £1,000,000 of external funding has been successfully drawn into Sandwell from the VCS.

It is encouraging that organisations feel that their future funding position will see little or a slight reduction in the services they provide.

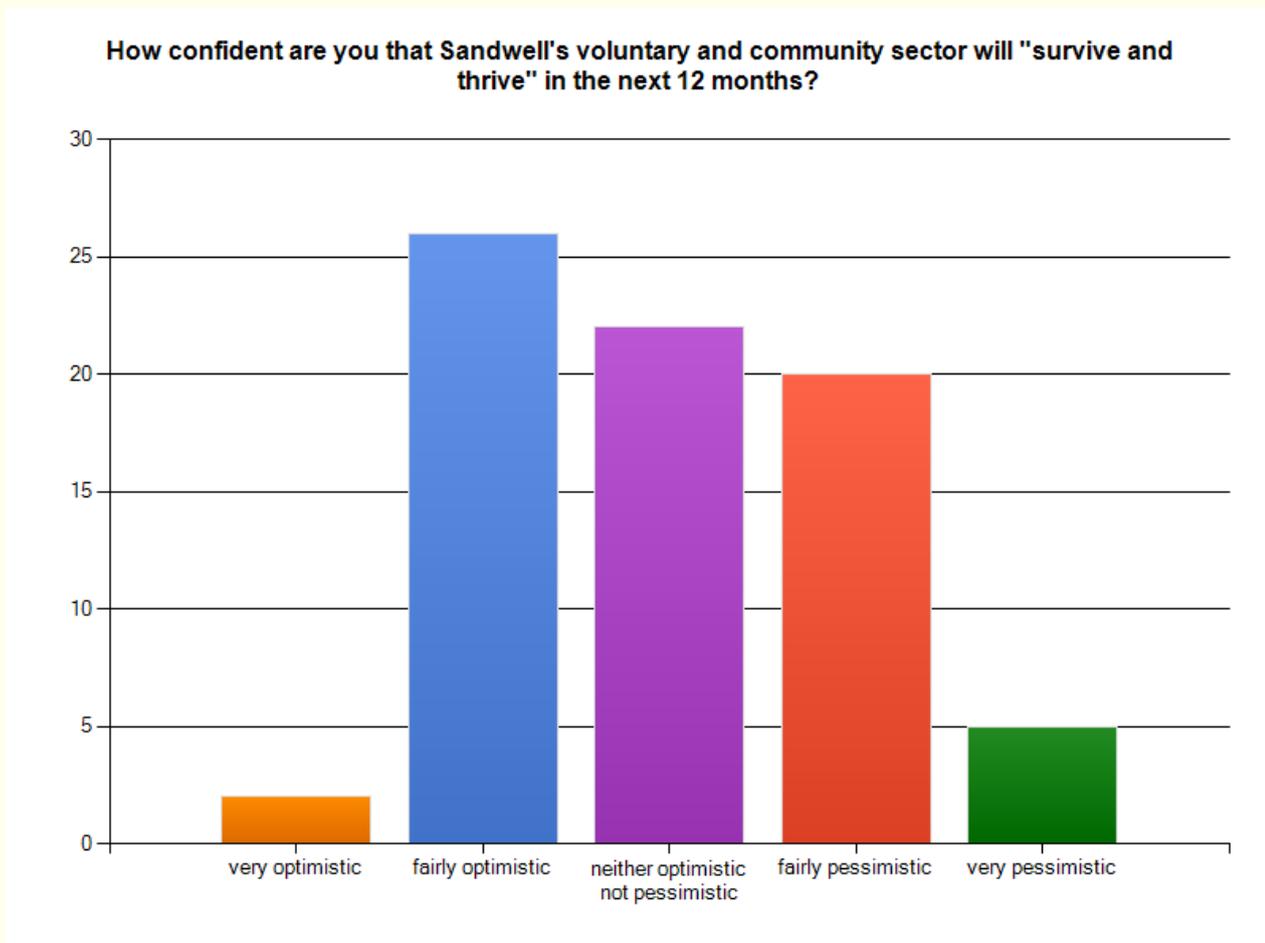
(ii) External Threats**What do you feel are the greatest threats to your organisation at present?**

Respondents to the survey were invited to share their views and perceptions on which external factors they considered pose the greatest threats to their organisation at present, choosing any from a list of options or adding their own.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the top three threats which registered the most votes were funding-related: Half of leaders surveyed felt that reductions in public sector budgets and changes to priorities was a great concern, whilst over one third of respondents voted for unclear funding and commissioning processes and competition over funding with other voluntary and community sector organisations and the private sector/large businesses. Well over half of all respondents chose one of these three options. There were strong feelings about need to secure Sandwell services for Sandwell residents.

Included within a wide range of ‘other’ threats identified by respondents was the difficulty in securing funding to cover management costs (full cost recovery), a loss of income from investments, and declining numbers of members.

(iii) A “Thriving and Surviving” Voluntary and Community Sector



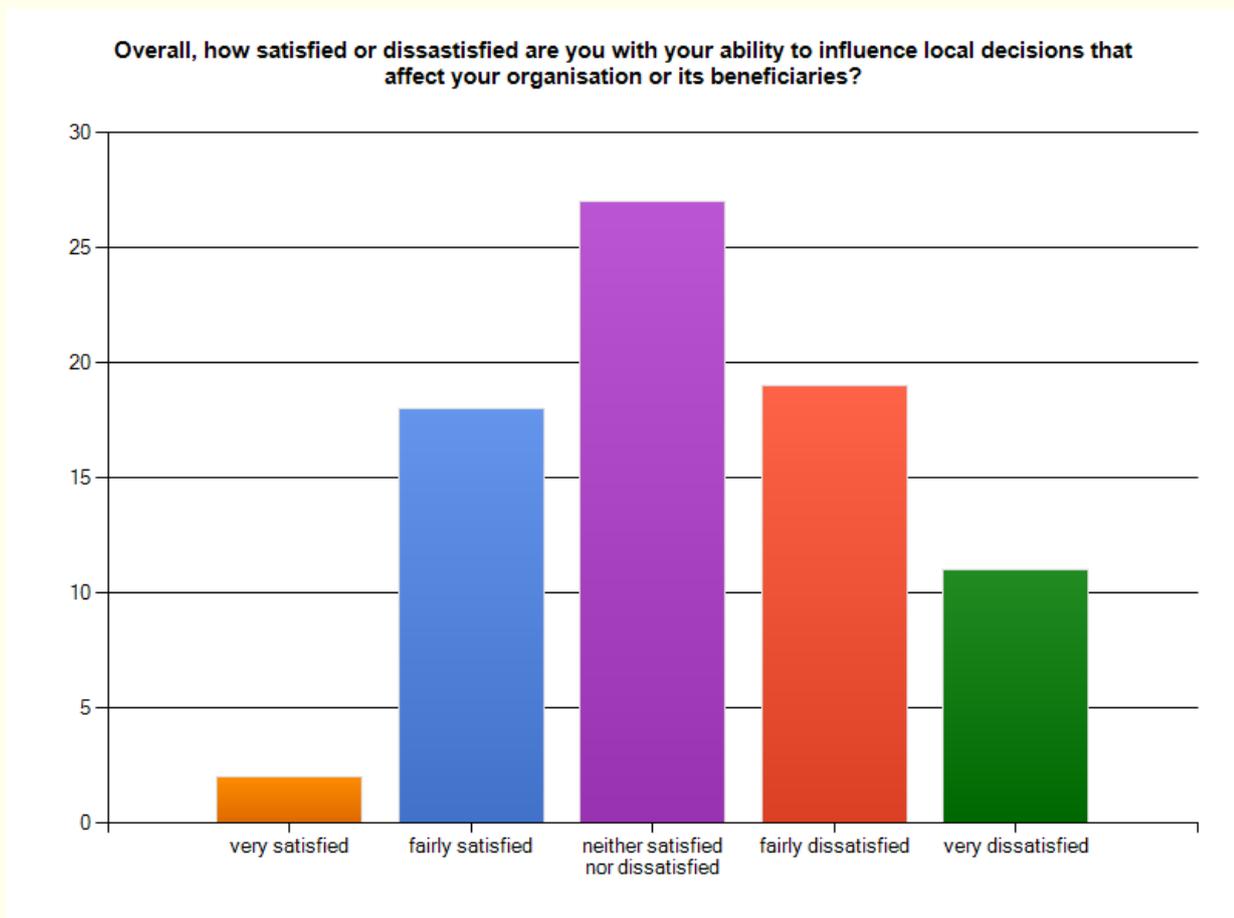
In response to the difficulties caused by the current economic downturn, much partnership energy has been focused on supporting local businesses in Sandwell to “survive and thrive”. As an important part of the local business community, what do Sandwell’s Voluntary and Community leaders consider the prospects for their Sector are in the coming year?

Overall, the answer differed considerably to the response received 2 years ago. Back then over half of all respondents were optimistic, including one in six leaders ‘very’ optimistic about the future. This isn’t the picture today, with a quarter being undecided or being fairly pessimistic.

Taking these figures, size of organisation would appear to be a clear indicator on confidence in the future, with a much greater proportion of medium organisations feeling pessimistic rather than optimistic, and a clear increased proportion of smaller groups feeling optimistic rather than pessimistic. This would seem to back up the results of the answers to the capacity and demand on services questions highlighted in Section 2 above.

4. Engaging Local Public Sector Partners

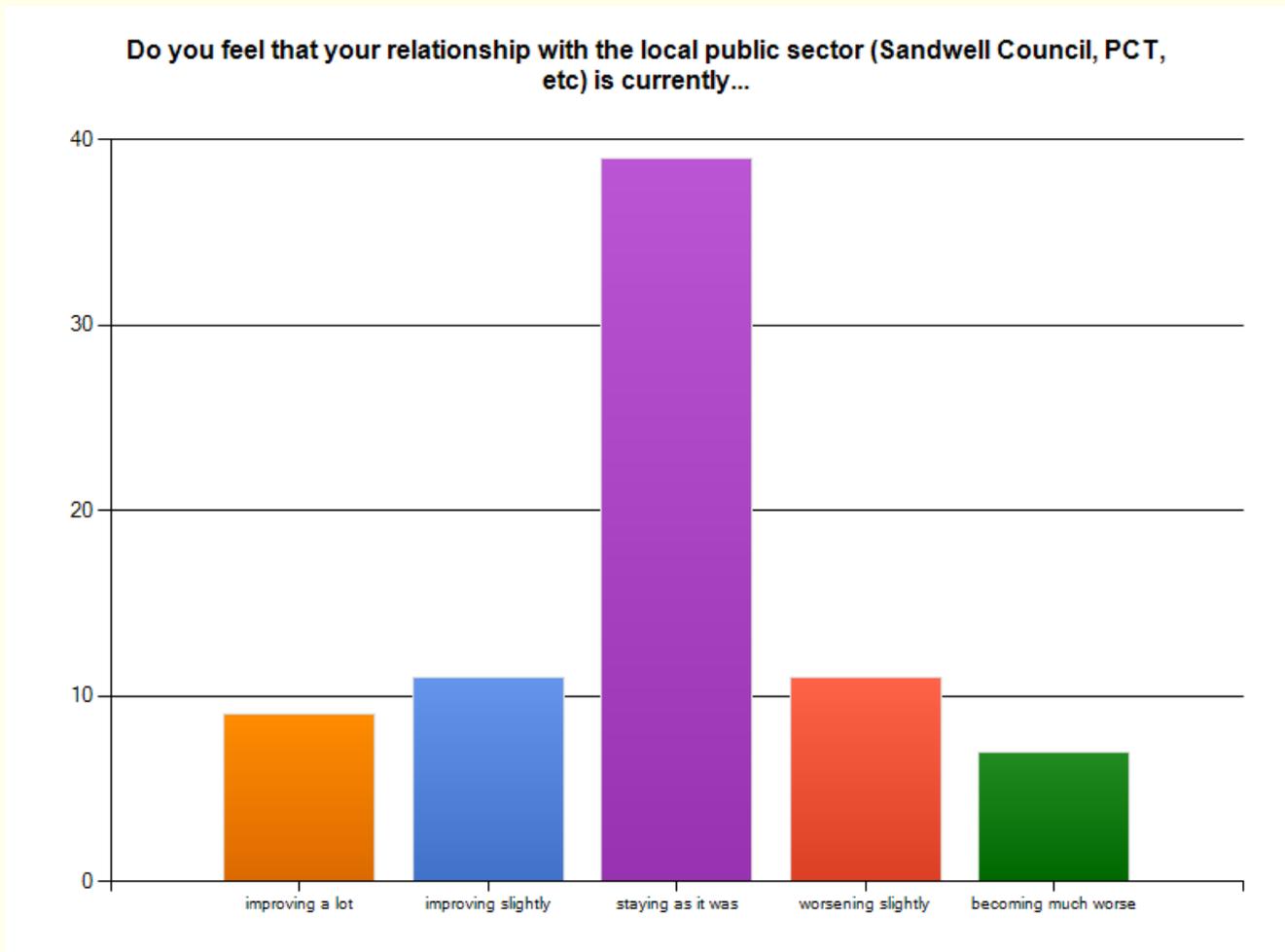
(i) Influencing Decisions



The VCS is a key partner in both delivering and shaping public services in Sandwell – with organisations and community groups often taking on a dual role of providing services and advocating on behalf of local residents and communities. But to what extent do leaders feel that the Sector is really being engaged in decision-making processes?

The headline figure looks clear enough: Almost half of Sector dissatisfied with their ability to influence local decisions. This is a worrying response, given the important role that the VCS has to play in helping to design and shape how services are delivered locally.

(ii) Relationship with Local Public Sector



Survey respondents were invited to share their views on their relationship with public sector partners in Sandwell – in particular on its ‘direction of travel’, i.e. whether the relationship is improving, staying as it is, or becoming worse.

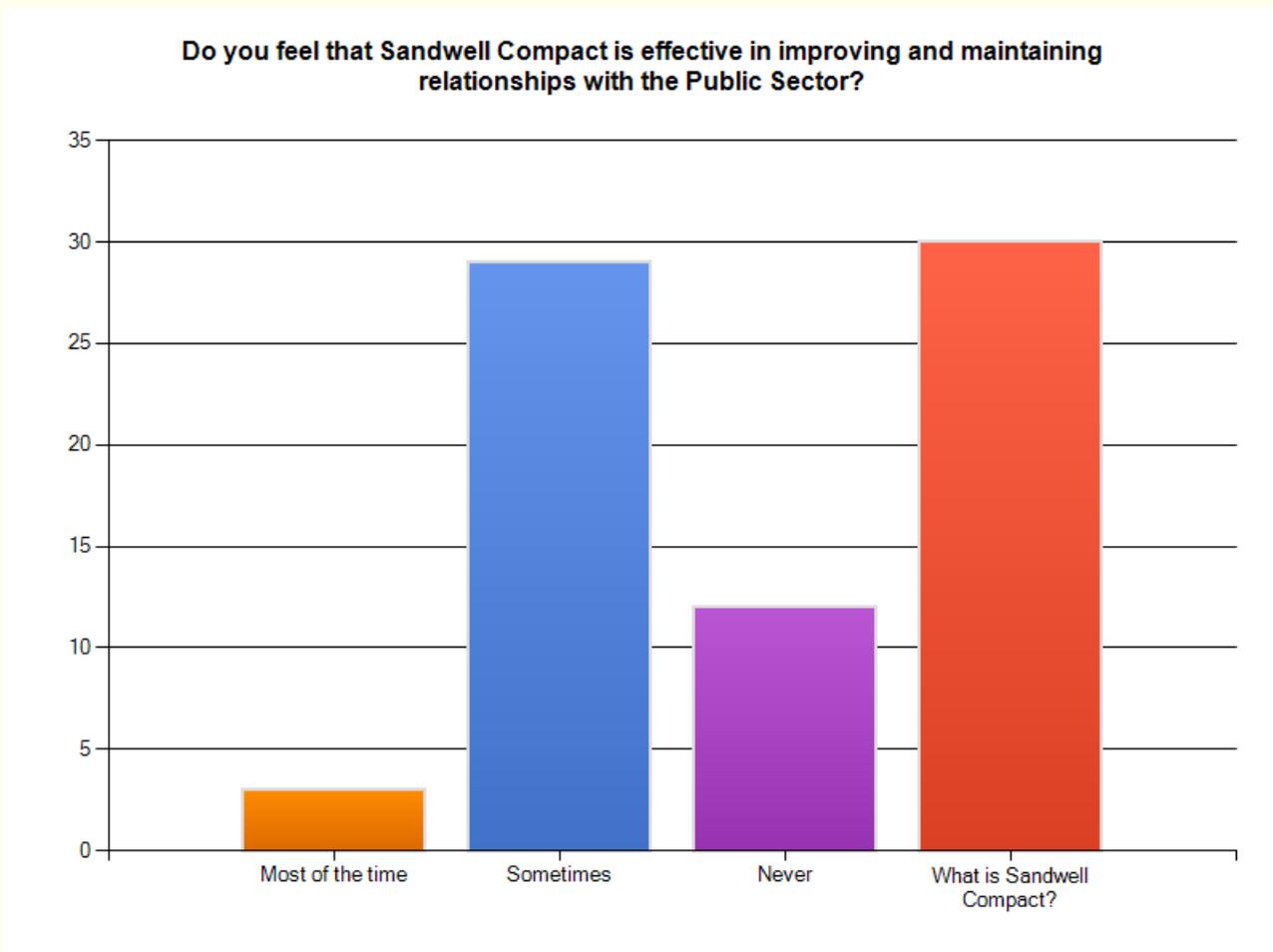
Half of VCS leaders surveyed consider their relationship with the public sector to be staying the same with a split between the remainder of respondents feeling either an improvement or worsening. The majority of respondents seeing an improvement were the the smaller and larger organisations and those who felt that the relationship worsening being consistently reported across all sizes of organisation.

This response, when compared with the ability to influence decisions is of concern. It would appear that despite relations staying much the same or improving the sector still feel an inability to influence.

This could in part be due to the fact that a great deal of change is taking place within the public sector, with the Council restructure, the demise of the Primary Care Trust along with the local formal joint working structures being Sandwell Partnership disappearing.

It is important that mechanisms are created for the Voluntary Sector to have a voice and much work is being undertaken by SCVO to enable this to happen through the ongoing support for and creation of thematic partnerships.

(iii) Sandwell Compact use in improving and maintaining relationships



The Compact's aim is to help improve relationships between the voluntary sector and statutory sector.

Although there was a cross-spread of organisations that felt that the Compact had sometimes been effective in improving and maintaining relationship with the Public Sector, the same amount did not know what Sandwell Compact was. Much work is needed to help to raise the profile of Sandwell Compact and its benefits.

5. Next Steps

SCVO will take forward the learning and insights from this survey to support its work promoting the value of Sandwell's Voluntary and Community Sector and the difference it makes in meeting the current and future needs of Sandwell's communities. In particular these findings will be shared with local public bodies to support and add to focus the efforts to create an environment for a thriving Voluntary and Community Sector.

Further information on this survey, intelligence on Sandwell's Voluntary and Community Sector, and information on SCVO's support role can be obtained from Mark Davis, SCVO's Chief Executive Officer, on 0121 565 8939, email mark@scvo.info

SCVO would like to thank all Voluntary and Community Sector leaders who participated in this survey.

6. Appendix

6.1 Method

6.2 Survey script

6.1 Method

The '5 Minute Leaders Survey' was designed and undertaken using the web-based Survey Monkey tool. 799 VCS organisations received an email inviting them to participate and the details of the survey were further promoted in SCVO newsletter. Organisations could complete the survey on-line or submit their responses confidentially by post to SCVO. The e-mail was sent out on the 9 September 2011 with an initial deadline for responses of the 7 October 2011. This deadline was extended until the 21 October 2011, allowing a 6 week period for completion.

The survey received a total of 83 responses: 10% of the total number of VCS organisations known to SCVO.

The survey captured responses from a cross-section which was broadly representative of the VCS in Sandwell as a whole:

- **48%** of those surveyed were small groups; this compares to an estimated 59% count of small groups across the whole VCS (based on SCVO's database)
- **23%** of those surveyed were small to medium organisations; this compares to an estimated count of 28% across the whole VCS
- **29%** of those surveyed were large organisations – the same proportion of large groups found across the whole VCS

For the purposes of this report, definitions of 'small', 'medium' and 'large' are based on annual income; this is provided as a guide, whilst recognising the arbitrary nature and natural exceptions and limitations of this.

- 'Small' organisations have an income not exceeding £15k;
- medium organisations have an income not exceeding £250k;
- large organisations have an income in excess of £250k per annum.

6.2 Survey Script

SCVO is an independent charity supporting charities, community groups and not-for-profit organisations in Sandwell. We invite you as a leader within the local Voluntary and Community Sector to share your views on the current health of our Sector in Sandwell. This information will be used to support our engagement with the local Public Sector and to evidence the huge worth of organisations like yours and its value to the people of Sandwell.

The information you give to us will be treated in the STRICTEST OF CONFIDENCE. Figures drawn from this survey will only be shared as a collection of data: no individual information/names of participants will be disclosed to any third party. Outcomes from this will be shared in the next SCVO.INFO newsletter and on our website www.scvo.info

Please complete as much as you can on this survey. If you have any questions relating to this survey, or if you feel SCVO can help you in any way, please contact Leona Bird on 0121 525 1127, email leona@scvo.info. Please complete by Friday 7 October 2011.

SECTION 1: ABOUT YOU

Your Name:

Name of your organisations/group:

Your position (eg, Chair, Manager)

E-mail or telephone number:

SECTION 2: YOUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS/YOUR SERVICES

How many employees in Sandwell do you currently have?:

Over the last 12 months, has your number of employees...

- Increased a lot
- Increased slightly
- Stayed the same
- Decreased slightly

- Decreased a lot
- Not relevant

Over the last 12 months, has your capacity/ability to provide your services and support to beneficiaries/the community...

- Increase a lot
- Increased slightly
- Stayed the same
- Decreased slightly
- Decreased a lot
- Not relevant

How many volunteers have support you over the last 12 months (including committee members)?:

Approximately how many volunteer hours are given to your organisation per week?

Approximately how many different people in Sandwell benefitted from your services over the last 12 months?

Over the last we months, has the demand on your services...

- Increased a lot
- Increased slightly
- Stayed the same
- Decreased slightly
- Decreased a lot
- Don't know

SECTION 3: YOUR SUSTAINABILITY/LOCAL PUBLIC BODIES

Approximately how much was your organisation's expenditure in Sandwell over the last 12 months?

What do you feel are the greatest threats to your organisation at present?

- Unclear funding and commissioning processes
- Funding processes which don't recognise the importance of local Sandwell provision
- Public sector budget cuts/changing funding priorities
- Increased depend on your services
- Competition over funding with other VCOs and private sector/large businesses
- Time-scales too short to enable collaborative bids
- Other

Approximately how much funding have you received from the local public sector (eg Sandwell Council, PCT, etc) in the last 12 months?

How much is this public funding compared to your total amount of funding?

- A small amount of the total
- About half of our funding
- Most of our funding
- All of our funding
- Not relevant

Overall, do you feel that your funding position and sustainability over the next 12 months is likely to...

- Cause you to greatly reduce your service
- Cause you to reduce your service a little
- See no change
- Increase your service a little
- Increase your service a lot

How confident are you that Sandwell's voluntary and community sector will "survive and thrive" in the next 12 months?

- Very optimistic
- Fairly optimistic
- Fairly pessimistic
- Very pessimistic

Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your ability to influence local decisions that affect your organisation or its beneficiaries?

- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Do you feel that your relationship with the local public sector (Sandwell Council, PCT, etc) is currently...

- Improving a lot
- Improving slightly
- Staying as it was
- Worsening slightly
- Becoming much worse

Do you feel that Sandwell Compact is effective in improving and maintaining relationships with the Public Sector?

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Never

- What is Sandwell Compact?

Do you have personal experience of where the Compact has been used?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please share your experience here, or indicate whether you would be happy for a member of SCVO to contact you to obtain further information, again in the strictest of confidence.