Sandwell Voluntary and Community Sector - Leaders Survey Report - Autumn 2012

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). During September and October 2012 SCVO invited the VCS in Sandwell to share information and views on the current and future state of Sandwell's VCS.

The survey received a total of 73 responses: providing just over a 9% return rate. This report draws out key information and is split into the following sections:

Section 1 – Headline Finding

Section 2 – Sandwell VCS Service Delivery

Section 3 – Financial Position

Section 4 – Threats

Section 5 - Trends

Section 6 – SCVO's Service to You

Section 7 – Recommendations and Next Steps

Section 8 - Appendix

This report also draws on data about Sandwell's VCS held by SCVO's web-based database www.sandwellvcs.info which details 773 active community organisations in the Borough in November 2012. The report has been compiled by Leona Bird, Strategic Engagement Officer, at SCVO.

Further information on this survey, intelligence on Sandwell's Voluntary and Community Sector, and information on SCVO's support role can be obtained from Nick Drew, SCVO's Strategic Engagement Manager, on 0121 565 1127, email nick@scvo.info

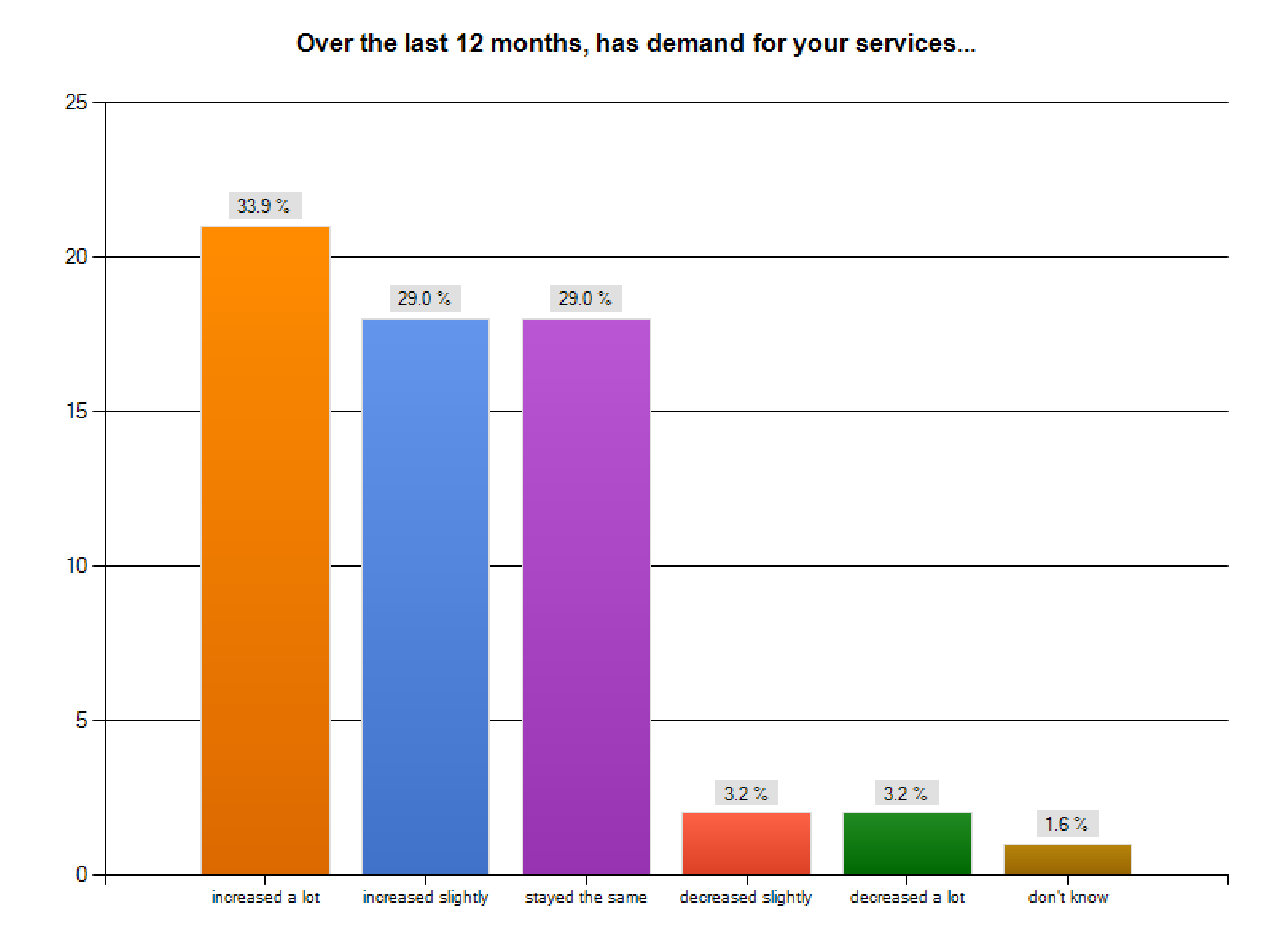
For the purposes of this report, definitions of ‘small’, ‘medium’ and ‘large’ are based on annual income; this is provided as a guide, whilst recognising the arbitrary nature and natural exceptions and limitations of this.

- ‘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

- General concerns across the Sector with increasing demand and widespread reduction in services in the coming year.
- More organisations spending reserves than adding to them, causing instability and potential masking long term difficulties.
- The majority of organisations do not receive any Public Sector funding.
- There is a squeeze where 1 in 7 organisations see an increase in demand, a decrease in capacity and also likely to see a reduction in service which will potentially leave these organisations vulnerable.
- The greatest threat for organisations is time-scales being too short to enable sufficient time to formulate bids or collaborations.
- The sector’s ability and optimism over what influence they have over local decisions and relationships with local public sector partners are all lower than in 2009.

2. Sandwell VCS Service Delivery



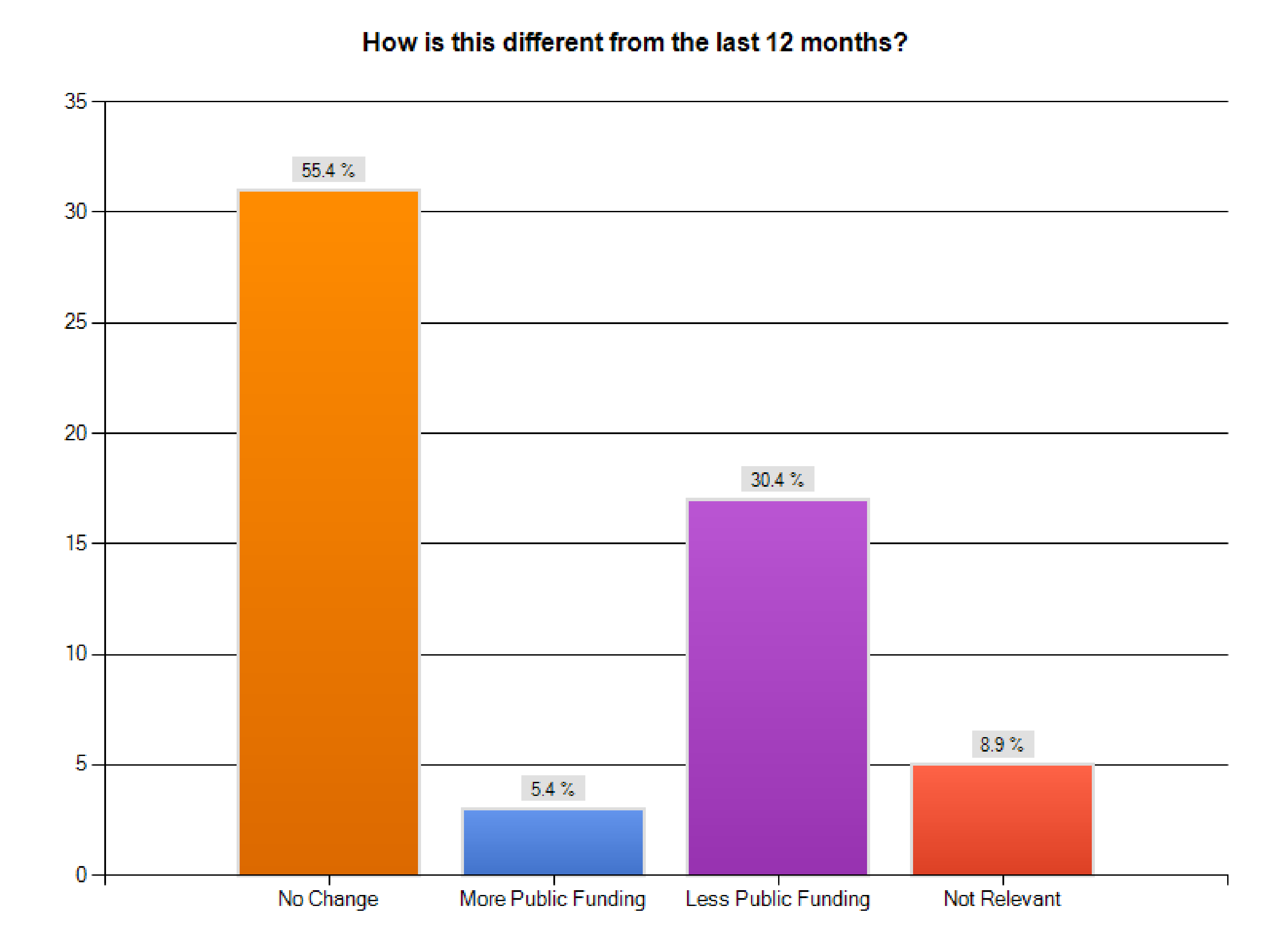
Changing Demand for Services

One of the key issues looked at was the demand on services, whether need or take-up of services is increasing and also whether an organisation's capacity is growing to meet the need.

With regard to demand for service – over a third saw that this had increased with just over a quarter staying the same. Over half of Respondents reported an increase in demand. Amongst those Respondents, just over a third of them (37%) reported an increase in capacity to meet the demand, greater than one quarter (27%) who overall saw an increase in capacity. This is clearly a good sign, but in many cases demand has gone up but not capacity.

3. Financial Position

(i) Have organisations operated at a loss, broken even or benefited from a surplus

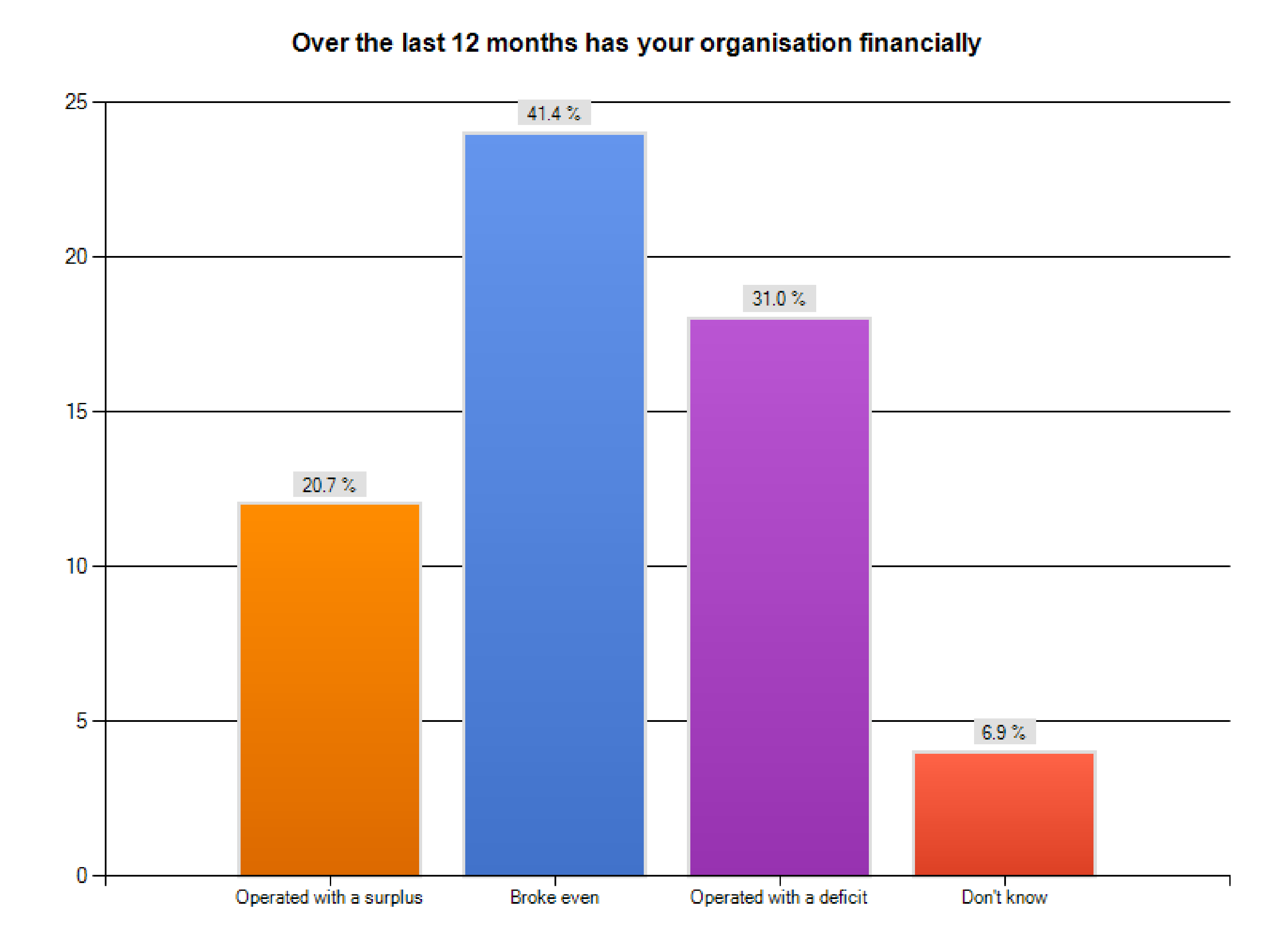


Organisations were asked about their financial health and whether or not they were breaking even, doing better or worse financially over the last 12 months.

It is worth noting that those who reported they were operating at a loss, also have fewer resources and the greatest demand for their services. Amongst those who used their reserves, 6 out of 18 had decreased capacity (one third) which is higher than the overall rate and shows that there is a clear link where capacity is reduced that organisations continue to provide services but dig into their reserves.

Organisations that are valued and utilised by local people are undermining their long-term sustainability by spending their reserves.

(ii) Funding received from the Public Sector

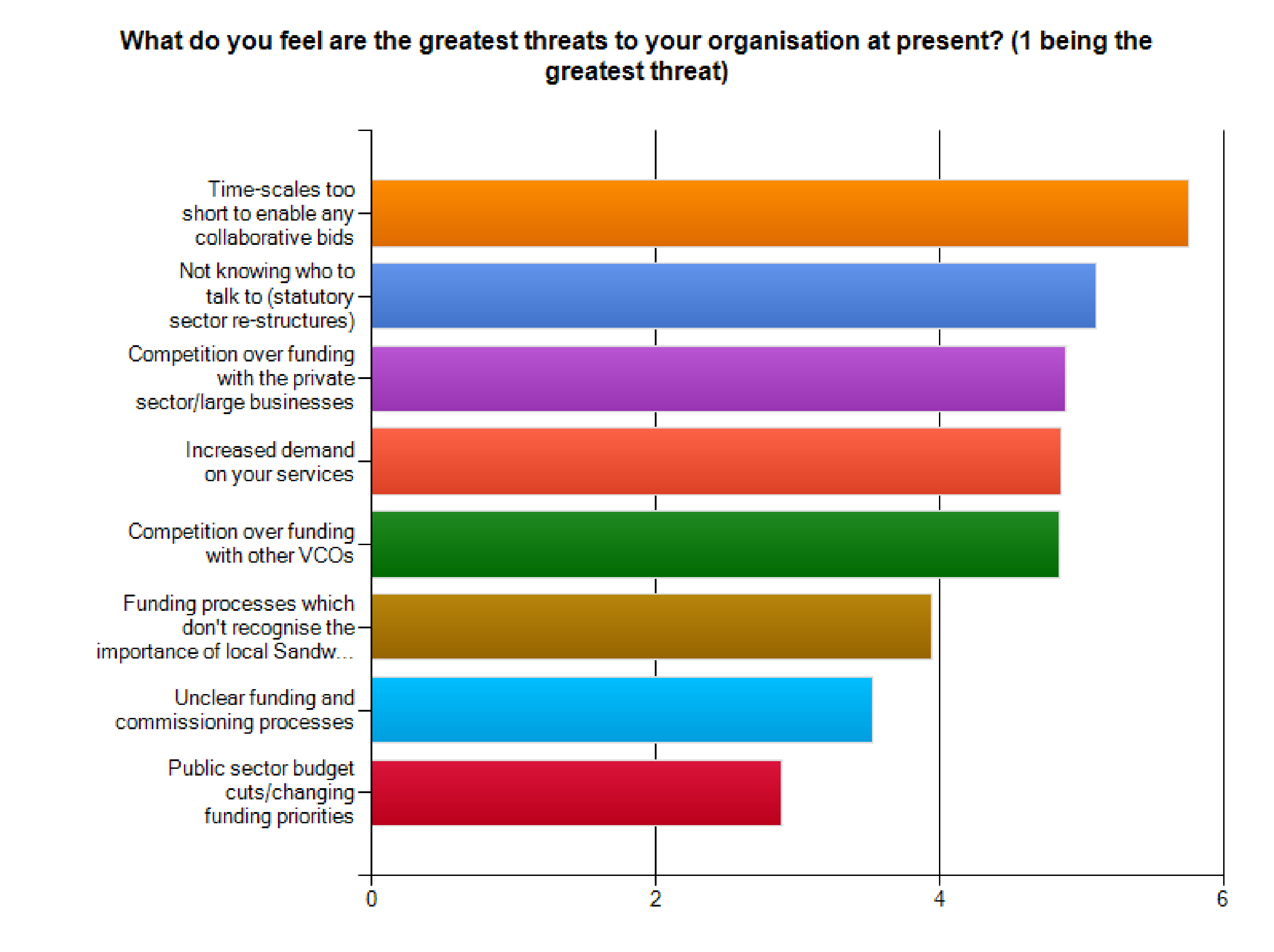


Half of all respondents reported that funding received from the Public Sector was only a small amount (less than a quarter) of their total income; over one third of respondents received no funding at all from the Public Sector. Those with significant amounts of public funding are in the small minority.

Over half of respondents reported that there had been no change in the amount of Public Sector funding compared to 12 months ago, with just under a third reporting less public sector funding. Looking forward to the next 12 months just over a quarter (28%) see no change in their funding position and sustainability with just over a quarter (28%) expecting to see a small reduction and one quarter seeing a great reduction.

There was a level of despondency amongst respondents in terms of the Sector's ability to survive and thrive over the next 12 months, with just over one third being neither optimistic nor pessimistic and just over one quarter feeling fairly pessimistic.

4. Threats



The greatest threat viewed by organisations were those of time-scales being too short to enable any time to formulate collaborative bids, followed closely by the difficulties that re-structures in the public sector have caused for organisations not knowing who to talk to. Organisations were given the opportunity to add additional threats to the VCS as they saw them. Services being redesigned and developed regionally rather than in individual boroughs was identified along with constantly working at capacity to do more and the impact that this is having on staff.

5. Trends

Smaller organisations (income - £0 – 15,000) – the majority of organisations have seen **demand for their services stay the same** and their **capacity to deliver stay the same**. None of the Respondents reported they had operated with a surplus, with the **majority breaking even**. **Public sector funding cuts and changing priorities** was seen as the **biggest threat**. The majority of these organisations **received no funding from the public sector** and this was no different from the previous 12 months. These organisations were **fairly optimistic that they will survive and thrive in the next 12 months**. They were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their ability to influence local decision making and felt that relationships with the public sector was likely to stay the same.

Medium Organisations (income -15,000 – 250,000) – the majority of organisations have seen **demand for their services either increase a lot or slightly**, however, their **capacity to deliver services had stayed the same**. Most Respondents were reporting their organisation was **operating with a deficit**. **Competition over funding** was seen as the biggest threat for these organisations. Many of these organisations reported that **public sector funding was a large part of their income** with the majority seeing no change to this over the last 12 months. The future sustainability of these organisations was that they would **need to either reduce their services greatly or slightly** over the coming 12 months and they were neither optimistic nor pessimistic that the sector would survive and thrive in the next 12 months. They were also neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their ability to influence local decisions and could see their relationships the public sector staying the same.

Larger Organisations (income – Over £250,000) – the majority of organisations had seen **demand for their services either increase a lot or slightly** with their **capacity to deliver their services staying the same**. The majority of the organisations had **operated with a surplus or broken even**. **Public sector budget cuts** were seen as the biggest threat. As with medium sized organisations, public **sector funding was a large part of their income** with the majority seeing no change in this over the last 12 months. The future sustainability of these organisations are that they would need to **reduce their services a little** over the coming 12 months and they were **neither optimistic nor pessimistic over the sector's ability to survive and thrive** in the next 12 months. They were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied over their ability to influence local decisions and saw their relationship with the public sector staying the same over the next 12 months.

6. SCVO's Service to You

Organisations were asked various questions about the services provided by SCVO in order that feedback received would help to ensure it continues to improve and be responsive to the needs of the organisations it supports. Respondents highly value SCVO's communications including its e-bulletins, newsletter and website.

In addition to this there was a high regard for the Capacity Building Support provided around funding, governance, business planning, financial planning and quality systems support.

The Strategic Engagement support of SCVO in facilitating Forums and networks for the Sector to have dialogue both with each other and also with statutory partners was also valued and that these should continue to be accountable individuals representing the views of the Sector on key partnerships when there is an opportunity to influence and shape decision making.

7. Recommendations and Next Steps

Smaller organisations are less reliant on public sector funding and are the ones who are more able to adapt to the changing environment that the effects of the recession are having. **Helping those medium sized and larger organisations to look at and consider growing and diversifying the sources of their income in the future is a priority**. **There is a need to lobby and challenge Funders** around **short-timescales** and the difficulties that these present to the Sector in getting organised to apply. Building relations and strengthening those with the statutory sector partners and understanding the changes, restructures and reorganisations that are taking place, is needed to ensure that the Sector know who to talk to, to influence local decision making.

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.

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

8. Appendix

8.1 Method

The 'VCS Leaders Survey 2012' was designed and undertaken using the web-based Survey Monkey tool. 773 VCS organisations received an email inviting them to participate and the details of the survey were further promoted in SCVO's newsletter and weekly e-bulletin. Organisations could complete the survey on-line. Organisations were given from the middle of September 2012 to the middle of October 2012 to complete the survey.

The survey received a total of 73 responses: just over 9% of the total number of VCS organisations known to SCVO.

8.2 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 19 October 2012.

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 demand for your services...

- Increase 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

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

SECTION 3: YOUR SUSTAINABILITY/LOCAL PUBLIC BODIES

Approximately what was your income over the last 12 months?

- £0-£15,000
- £15,000 - £250,000
- Over 250,000
- Don't know

Over the last 12 months has your organisation financially

- Operated with a surplus
- Broke even
- Operated with a deficit
- Don't know

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
- Not knowing who to talk to (statutory sector re-structure)
- Increased demand on your services
- Competition over funding with other VCOs

- Competition over funding with private sector/large businesses
- Time-scales too short to enable any collaborative bids
- Competition over funding with other VCOs and private sector/large businesses

Please provide details below of any other threat your organisation is experiencing which is not listed.

What percentage of funding do you receive from the public sector (eg Sandwell Council/Sandwell PCT)? Please express your answer as a %

How is this different from the last 12 months?

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
- Neither optimistic nor pessimistic
- Fairly pessimistic
- Very pessimistic

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

SECTION 4: SCVO'S SERVICE TO YOU

Please rate from 1-5 SCVO's Communications including its newsletter, e-bullewtin and website (1 being the highest value to your organisation)

Please rate from 1-5 SCVO's Capacity Building Support to include Funding, Governance, Business Planning, Financial Planning and Quality Systems advice (1 being of highest value to your organisation)

Please rate from 1-5 SCVO's Strategic Engagement role including its facilitation of informal networking opportunity, Strategic Forums (eg, Children and Young People Forum, Health and Social Care Forum), gathering intelligence through Sector surveys, expressing the views of the sector to senior statutory partners, organising specific events and conferences on issues of importance (1 being of highest value to your organisation)

In terms of strategic engagement support to the Voluntary and Community Sector, please rate the importance of the following (1 being the most important to you)

- Regular communication with the public sector
- Regular face to face meetings with key lead officers from the public sector

- Facilitating a Voluntary and Community Sector response to national and local policy
- The involvement of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the design and shaping of new services
- Having accountable individuals from within the Voluntary and Community Sector to represent the views of the sector on key partnerships.

Do you feel that SCVO has...

Adapted its services in the current environment.

Adapted its leadership role in the currently environment

Promoted equal rights and social justice

Prioritised people in Sandwell who suffer disadvantage

Enabled all people to play a part in their community

Promoted diversity and worked to tackle discrimination

- Very well
- Quite Well
- Not very well

Many thanks for your time and support in completing this survey. All information given is in the STRICTECT CONFIDENCE if you have any queries completing this survey, please contact Leona Bird on 0121 525 1127.