



# OUT OF DIFFICULTIES GROW MIRACLES

-the state of the voluntary sector in  
the midst of a cost of living crisis



# Introduction

This is the latest survey from Support Cambridgeshire. It was conducted in February and March 2023 when we were in the heart of the cost of living crisis. This new crisis replaced the crisis of the pandemic and we continue to see the sector needing to be there for local communities and how the sector has become the essential safety net for many. We have looked at:

- Section 1 - Issues and barriers facing groups.
- Section 2 - What services groups want.
- Section 3 – About the groups responding.

As well as the survey we have analysed data from the charity commission and 360 Giving for organisations in Cambridgeshire (this work was carried out by David Kane <https://dkane.net>)

- Section 4 – Analysis of the sector from open data sources

This work helps us to understand the local sector and the issues it is facing and gives us and other parties vital information about the type of support that is most needed. It also helps us identify how we are doing and how we can improve our offer and services.



# Section 1 - Issues and barriers facing groups

We wanted to take the temperature of the sector and to find out what issues were causing them concern and what they thought would be important to their work. The list of issues and barriers were developed by our team based on our work with groups and on national research. We tried to keep the questions to a reasonable length but despite this we know the survey does take a long time to answer.

We identified funding and volunteer recruitment as the issues we thought would be most of an issue and the areas where we wanted to ask more questions. Our hypothesis about the most important issues proved to be correct but we could have explored any of the issues in more depth as all are areas that will impact groups.

We asked a number of questions about how the cost-of-living crisis was impacting groups as we wanted to reflect this new pressure separately. The survey was carried out before the crisis had time to show its full impact on the sector.

The pandemic increased the pace of change for groups in a lot of areas. How we all deliver services, communicate, and build relationships has changed and we have to continue to adapt without losing what was good about how we used to work. The sector continues to grow, to adapt and to innovate in order to ensure that services are there for those that need them.

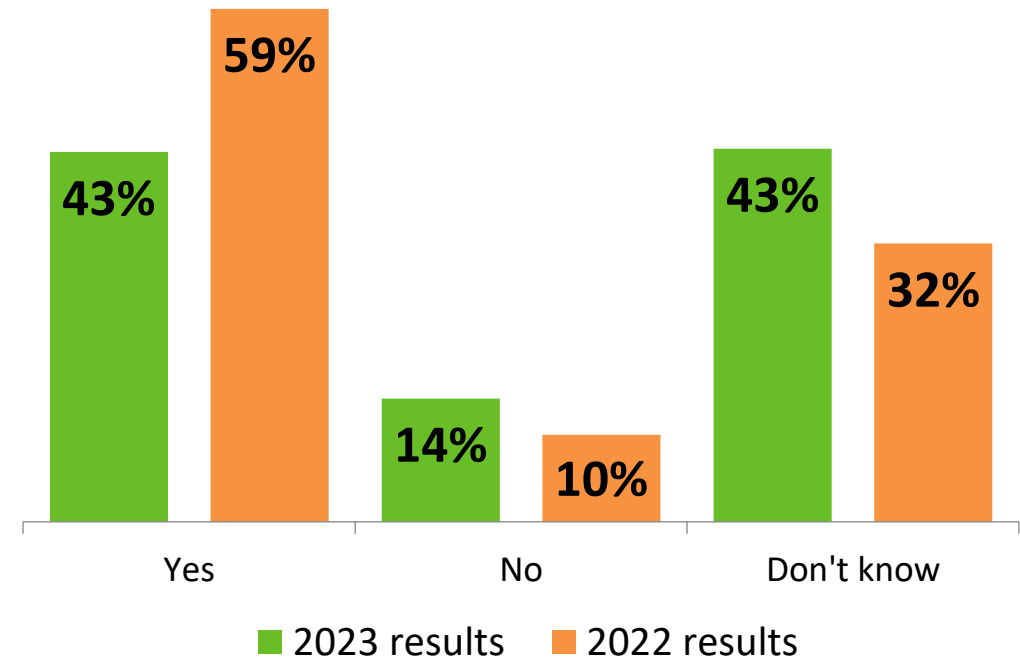
# Is next year going to be better than last year?

**There has been a marked drop in optimism in the last year, with only 43% of groups believing the next year will be better than the last.**

We are also seeing more groups who are uncertain and this probably reflects that there is little clarity about when the current crisis might ease.

Those organisations with an income below £10K are more optimistic (with 66% saying next year will be better). This may indicate that optimism is closely related to the ability to find the money needed to deliver services but may reflect the wider recognition of a bigger picture that larger groups have.

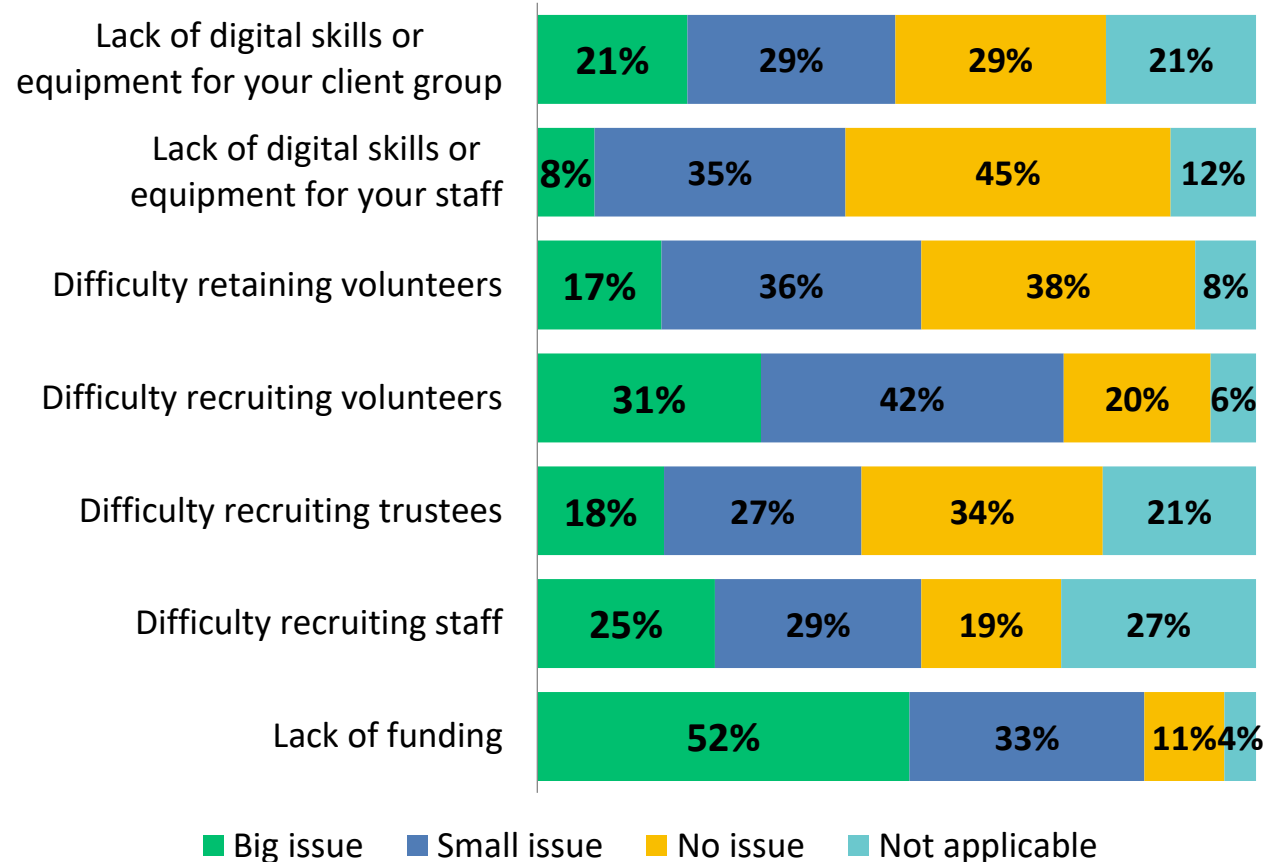
Is next year going to be better than last year?



# Barriers

The principle barriers facing groups are the lack of funding and their difficulty in recruiting volunteers. The size of the organisation by income shows differences with the larger ones being more worried about funding and the smaller ones more worried about recruiting volunteers.

In the comments the main issues continue to be about money and volunteering, especially the lack of core funds and the number of older volunteers who are not being replaced when they move on.



Did respondents think these things were barriers to their groups work?

# What are the barriers? - Comments

Securing funding for core costs / unrestricted funds

Massive barriers with funding - some of the core services we offer aren't funded by any agency and instead we have to rely on grant funding or fundraising

We can recruit volunteers for one-off events but finding people who are prepared to make a regular commitment (e.g. monthly meetings, decision-making roles) is proving difficult since the pandemic.

Competitive tendering processes and short cycles being draining on staff and creating precarious conditions for employment.

We are at a breaking point of having become so big as organisation that it becomes more and more difficult to provide the stability and consistency required as purely volunteer-led organisation, in particular in the areas of volunteer management and fundraising.

Finding volunteers with sufficient skills to take on leadership roles.

Core funding, high utility costs, not enough time!

People who have returned to work post pandemic are time poor, reducing the amount of time they are able to spend volunteering or caring for their elderly relatives. This has an impact on the group who are fewer in number whilst being asked to help more frequently.

Massive barriers with funding - some of the core services we offer aren't funded by any agency and instead we have to rely on grant funding or fundraising

Feeling overstretched and undertrained for the job. Having big expectations as a charity but not the resources as individual staff members to actually fulfil them.

# How issues have changed

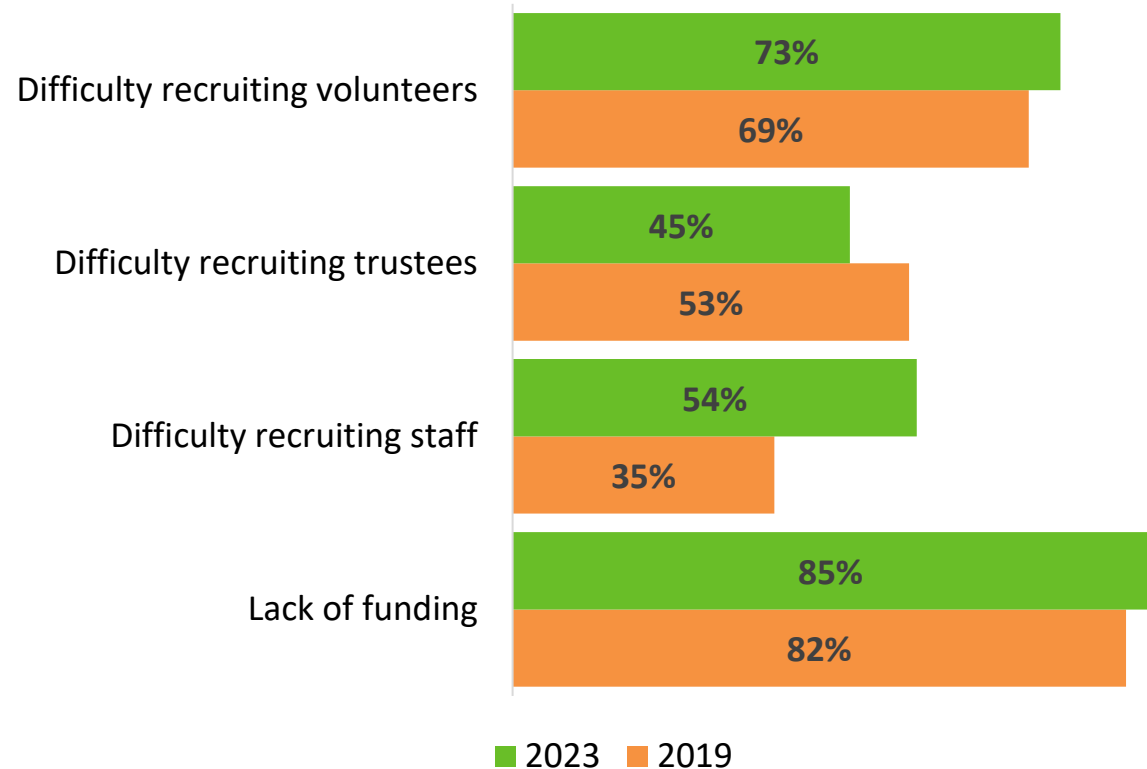
Looking at the barriers now and pre-pandemic we see similarities, but both the two main issues impacting groups have got slightly worse.

The big difference is groups reporting issues with recruiting staff this may be related to some of the comments about what is asked and expected of staff.

*“All staff are over stretched”*

*“Feeling overstretched and undertrained for the job”*

*“Staff ability to work the hours we need”*



The percentage of groups indicating that there is an issue pre and post pandemic.

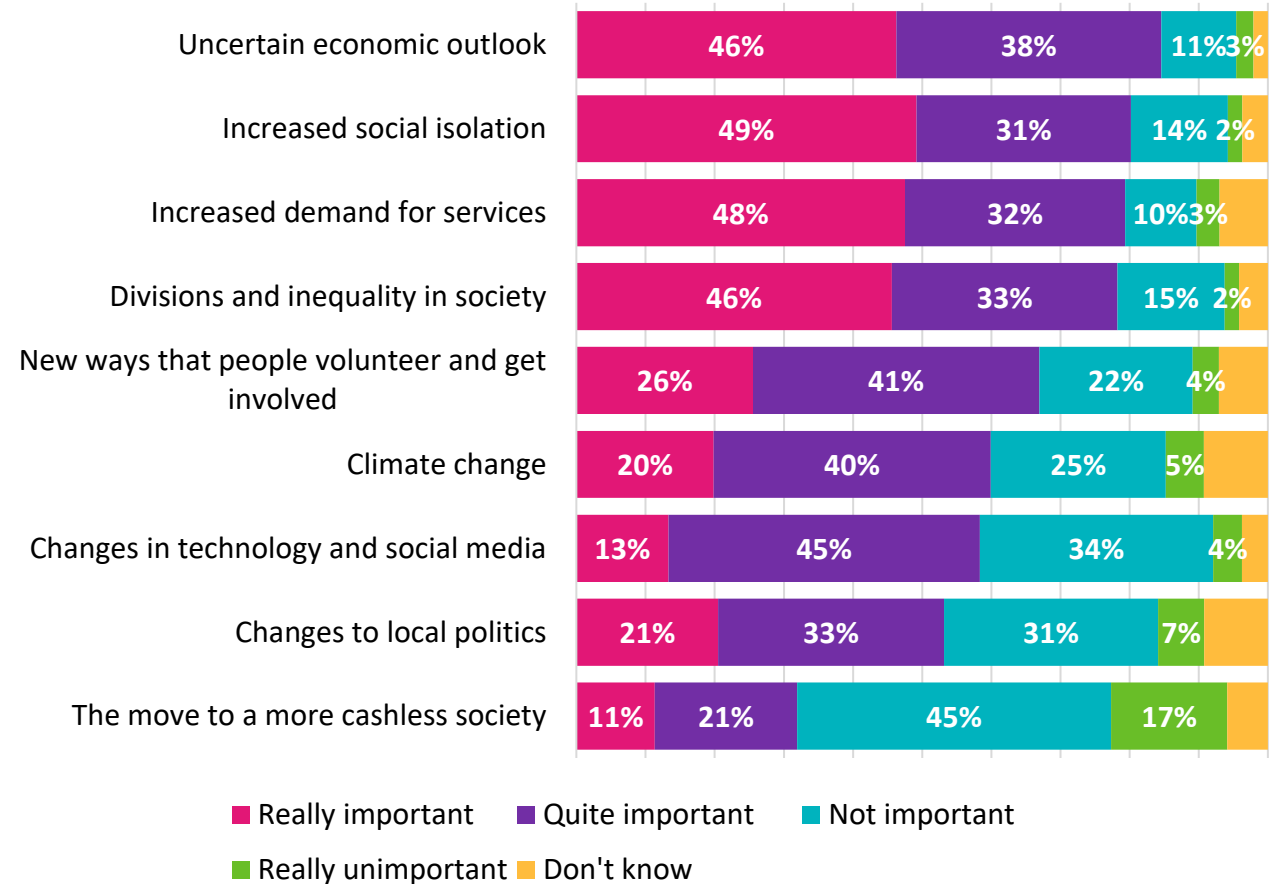
## General issues impacting groups

We asked about the issues that respondents felt were important to the work of their organisation.

Uncertain economic outlook was the biggest issue, closely followed by Increased social isolation, Increased demand for services and then divisions and inequality in society.

It is clear that external factors are of issue to most groups as over half said all issues were of some importance apart from the move to a cashless society that was only important to 32%.

### How important do you think the following things are to the work of your organisation?



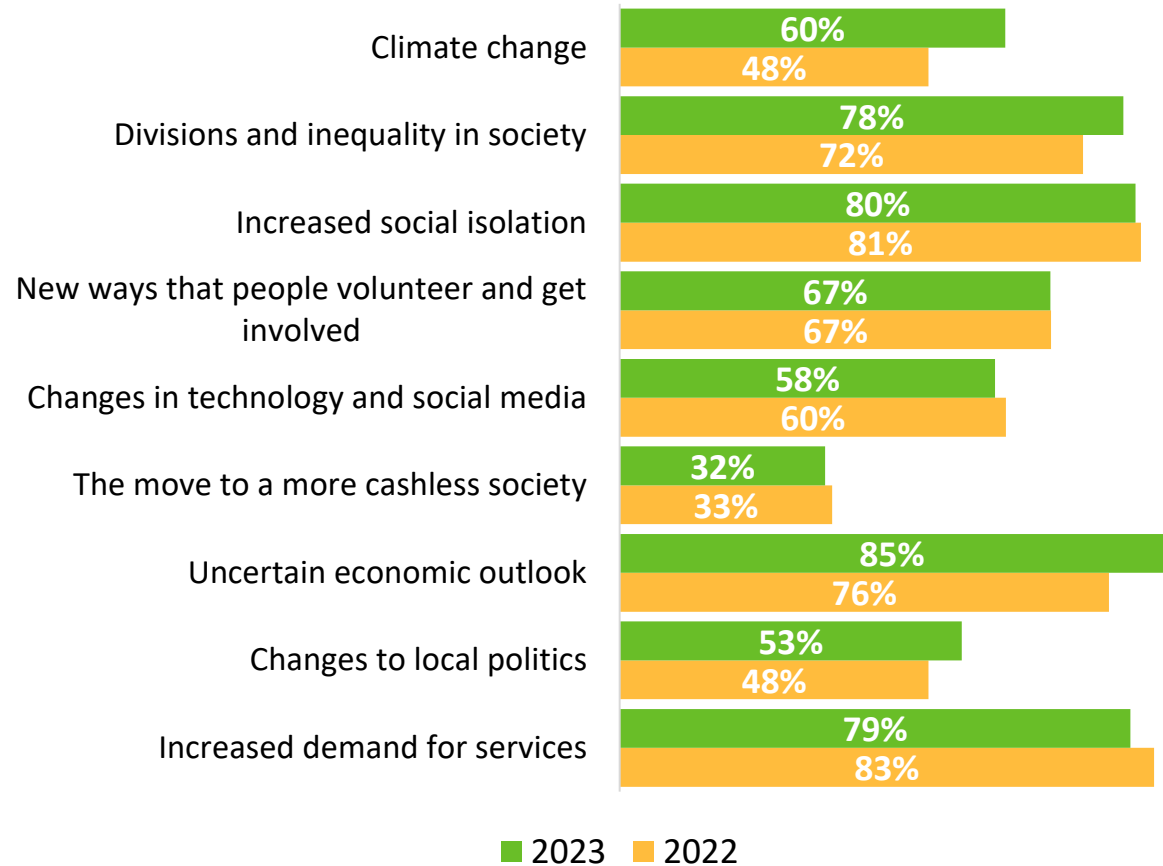


# How issues have changed

It is the second year we have asked groups about the issues impacting them.

We have seen climate change changing the most with a jump of 12% in a year but it still remains one of the less important issues. We have seen 'Uncertain economic outlook' jumping by nine percentage points and also jumping from the third most important issue to the most important one. This will be down to the cost-of-living crisis and how this impacting both the groups and those they work with.

The percentage of groups saying that the following issues were really or quite important to their work.



# What are the issues? - Comments

It is hard to plan when you don't know if financing will still be in place in a year's time.

We need to expand to keep up with demand, but don't have the funding to do it.

Our parents are being hit by food increases, utility costs going up enormously, together with rising mortgages... so many are struggling with the cost of living, but earn just too much for the government support currently on offer

This is the first year we have consciously tried to be more sustainable. This includes ensuring that traders at our events have sustainability policies and/or practices

Uncertainty impacting staff who are anxious about lack of security/ changes within the charity

Climate change anxiety is very prevalent now which increasing pressure on mental health services.

Our users will mention the inequality and we see their struggles

Many more referrals for befriending - lack of services - especially for carers who do not live alone, but situation very similar.

People are having to watch what they spend on and this affects charities as they're not getting the cash donations and yet demand has increased

Many of our clients would slip through the net if there were not volunteer led community schemes to help them

Harder to reach those affected [by social isolation]; yet they would benefit the most from the services we offer

Moving to cashless could make small groups like ours more onerous to run.

# Impact of cost of living

The cost of living crisis was impacting groups both as their costs were increasing,  
*“Cost of materials for goods, cost of groceries”*

At the same time the needs of those they work were increasing.

*“Increased complexity in casework - multiple factors for each client”*

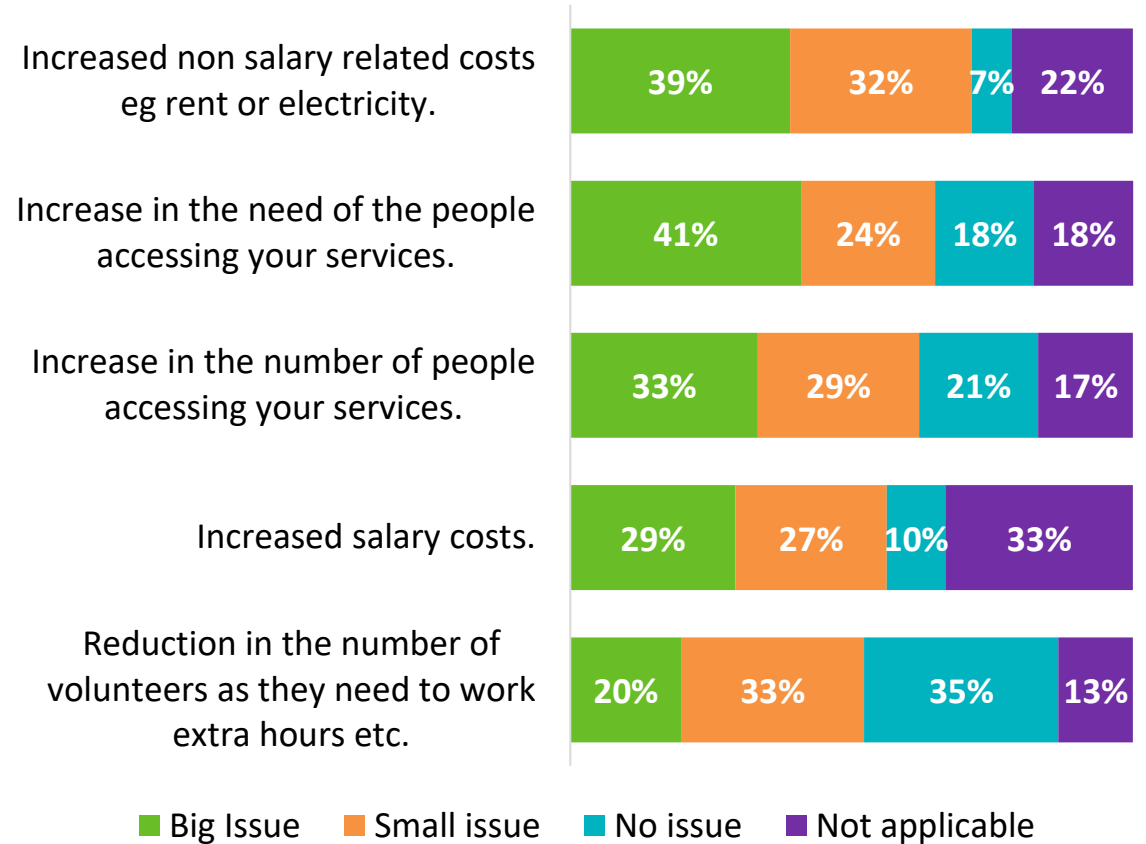
There is also pressure around salaries

*“Salaries not keeping pace with inflation so staff considering other higher paying jobs in order to pay their bills”*

All this is putting additional strain on groups with one respondent simply commenting

*“Fed up of battling”*

## What impact has the cost of living crisis had on your organisation?



# Fundraising issues

Fundraising continues to be an issue for all groups, and this was true at all levels of income.

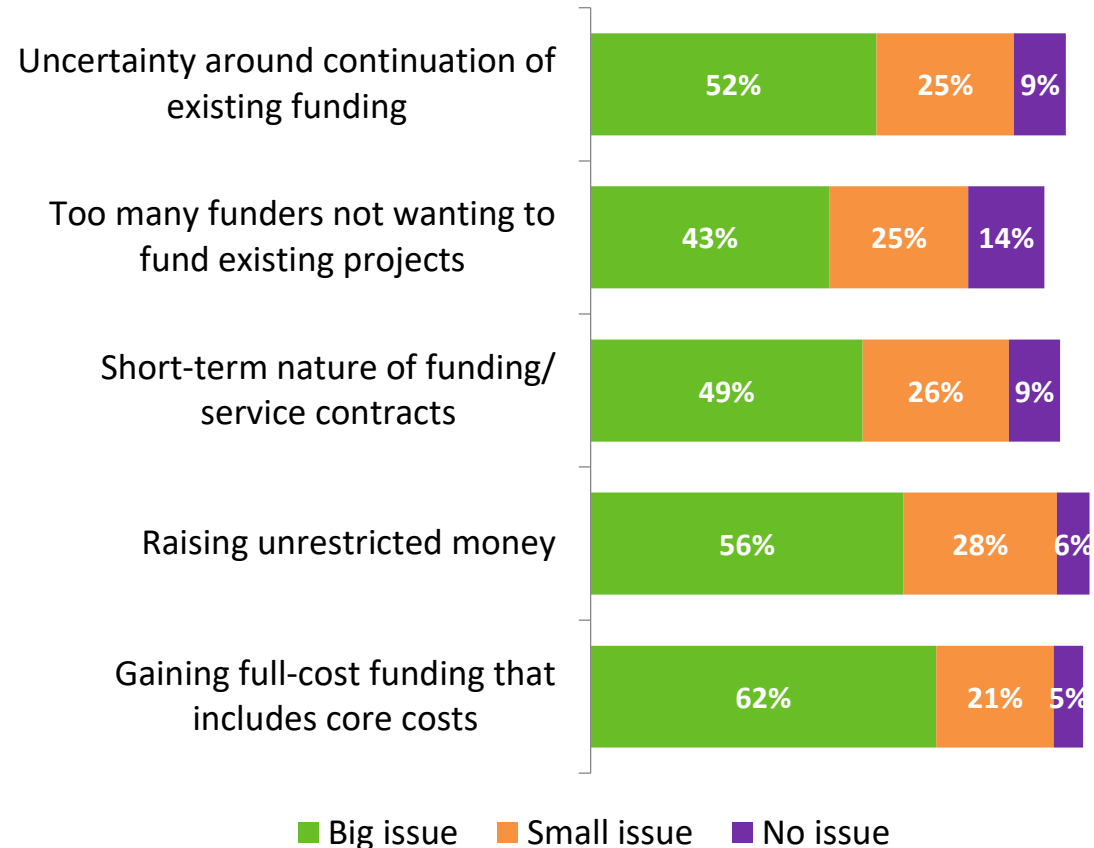
The difficulty in raising money for core costs or for unrestricted funding is clear and this is exasperated by the uncertainty that groups are feeling about the continuation of funding.

When asked about other issues respondents noted

*“The competition involved in securing grants. Very time consuming and most come to nothing. “*

*“The time lag between applying for grants and the award. Impossible to plan”*

**Please indicate which of the following funding issues impact you.**



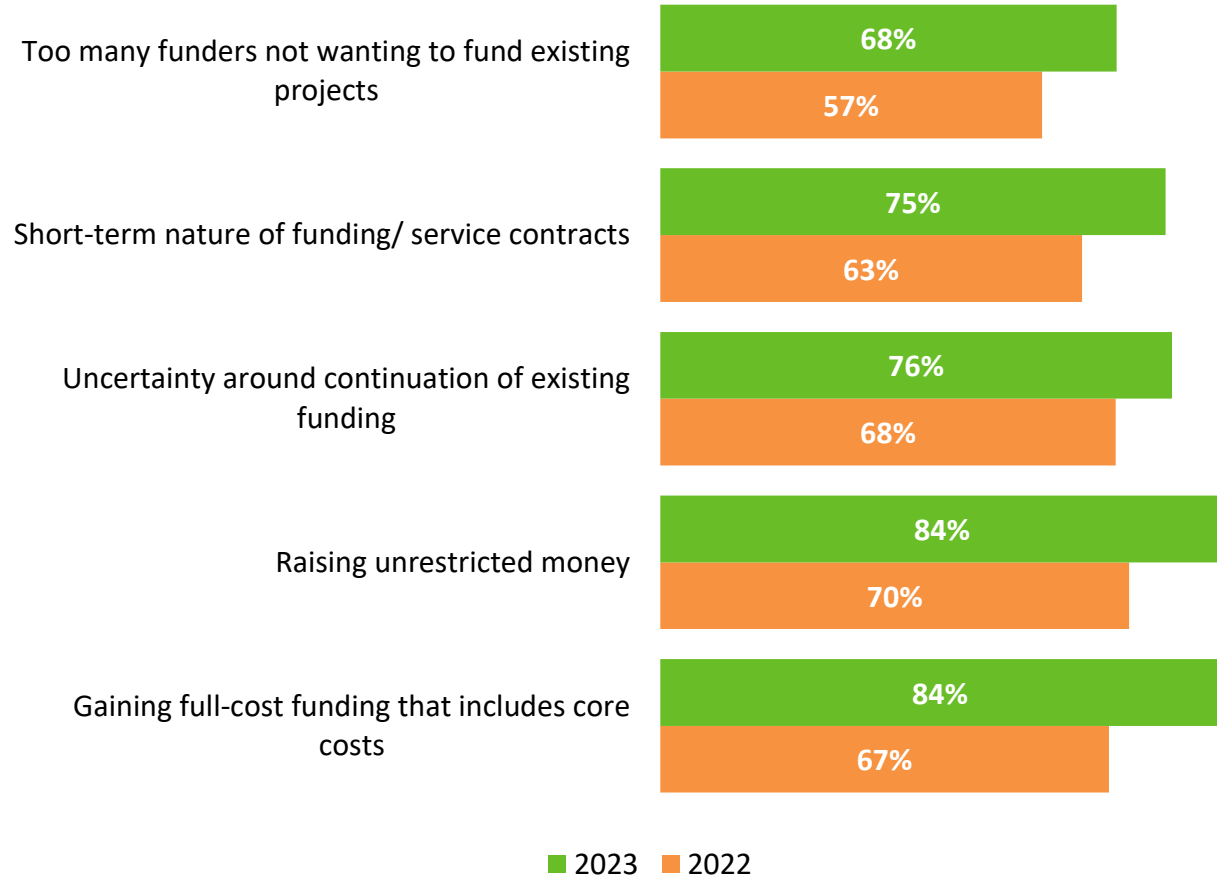
# Fundraising issues

All areas of funding are showing as being of issue to a higher percentage of groups this year over last.

Interestingly when you look at the results by income those with a higher income are showing more groups with an issue in all areas apart from uncertainty around continuation where things are more equal.

Notably when asked about the gaining of full cost funding including core costs ALL groups with an income over £50K reported some sort of issue with 81% of groups with an income over 100K seeing this as a big issue.

## Funding issues impacting groups.



## Volunteer recruitment issues

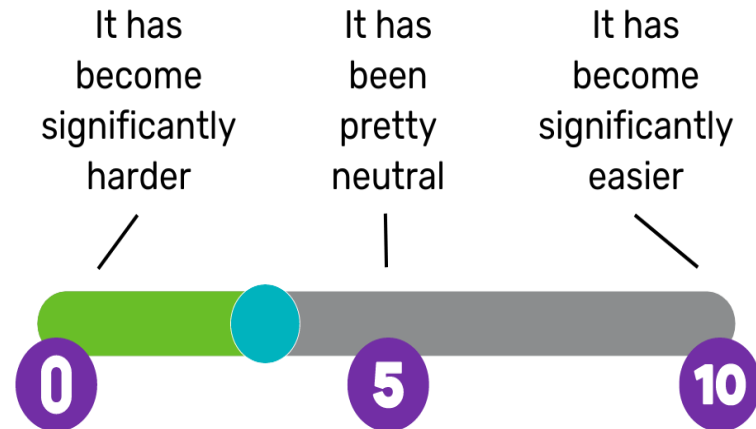
Volunteer recruitment is harder than it has been for the majority of groups. This will be a reflection of national trends as highlighted in the Community Life Survey 21-22.

*“In 2021/22, 16% of respondents took part in formal volunteering at least once a month in the past 12 months, in line with rates in 2020/21 (17%). However, these participation rates are the lowest recorded since data collection started.”*

The experience people have volunteering is important as to whether they come back, and given people dip in and out this impacts recruitment.

*“It is how people experience the different elements of the volunteering journey that is important for both their overall satisfaction and the likelihood that they will continue. This is true for all who have volunteered, regardless of who they are. Experience matters for future involvement.”*

(NCVO’s Time Well Spent.)



3.6

We asked ‘How has volunteer recruitment been for you’ on a scale from 0 ‘A lot harder to recruit’ to 10 ‘a lot easier to recruit’

The average score was 3.60.



## Section 2 - What services groups want.

Support Cambridgeshire through both Hunts Forum and Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service (CCVS) provide services and support to groups across the county. The importance of this is recognised by groups when we ask what they want from us. This helps us to determine our work programme, but it also demonstrates that there is a need to fund infrastructure groups to ensure a thriving and varied voluntary and community sector.

The work we do falls into three broad categories

1. The provision of support advice and training to give those involved with groups the knowledge and confidence to deliver their services.
2. Networking and relationship building that enables groups to come together with others from the sector and also with businesses and statutory providers that leads to mutual support, knowledge sharing and partnerships.
3. The representation and championing of the sector. We know the fantastic work groups do and the incredible difference they make to people's lives, we aim to make sure that others are aware of this and recognise the importance of supporting groups.

# Networking is important

One of our key functions is to help build relationships by running networks that. Whilst most would prefer these to be in online the preference for this has reduced.

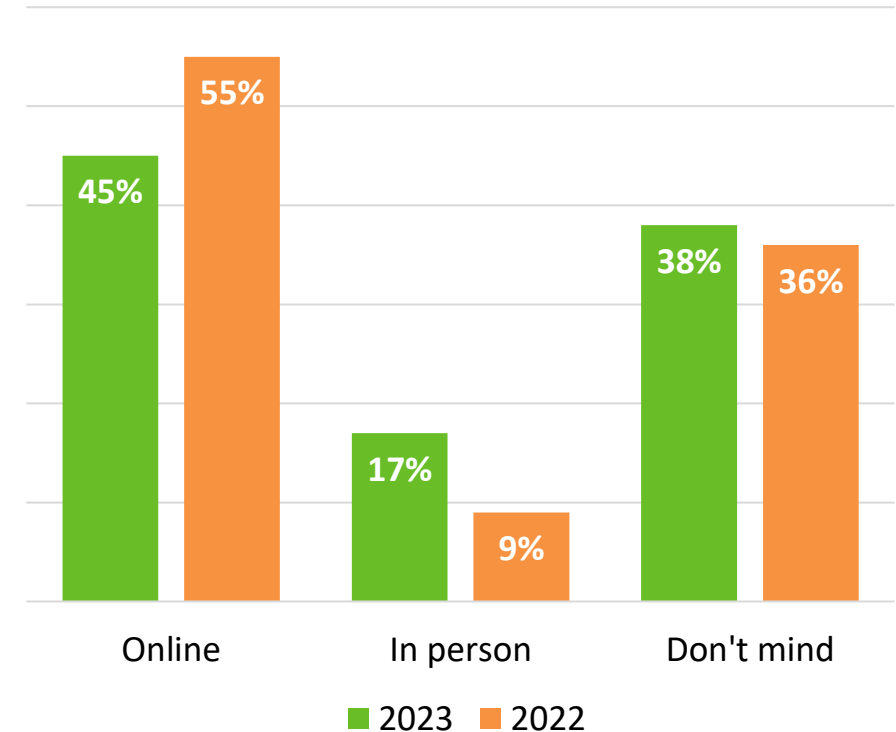
We found that nearly three quarters (74%) of organisations wanted support to build relationships with business and nearly two thirds (63%) wanted help to build partnerships or relationships with other voluntary organisations.

Smaller groups and those who were volunteers indicated that they struggle to find the time to attend even though they recognize the benefits.

*“Networks are great but, same as many people running very small charities, I wear many hats and only have a limited amount of hours to devote to networks. If I'm not careful, I could be at meetings all the time with limited benefit.”*

(comment from respondent)

**How would you prefer networks were run?**





# Representation

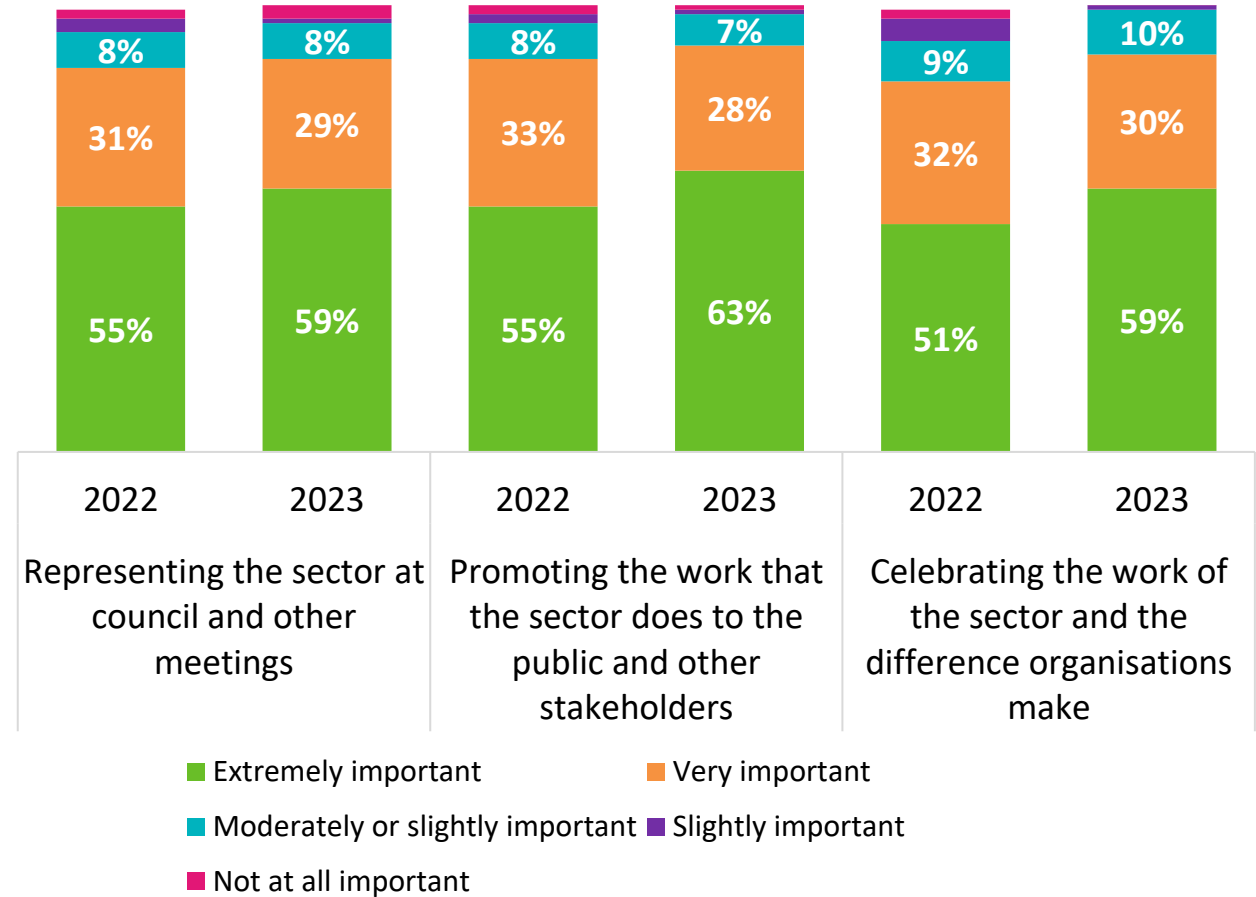
We can see that there has been an increase in the importance placed on the work Support Cambridgeshire does around representation and voice over the last year. A big part of our role is to be the champion of the sector and to act as the collective voice when talking to statutory stakeholders and partners.

There was a clear vote of support for the work that was carried out in this area across all organisation sizes and all districts.

*“We need decision makers to be aware of the needs and challenges of charities.”*

(comment from respondent)

The importance of representation and voice



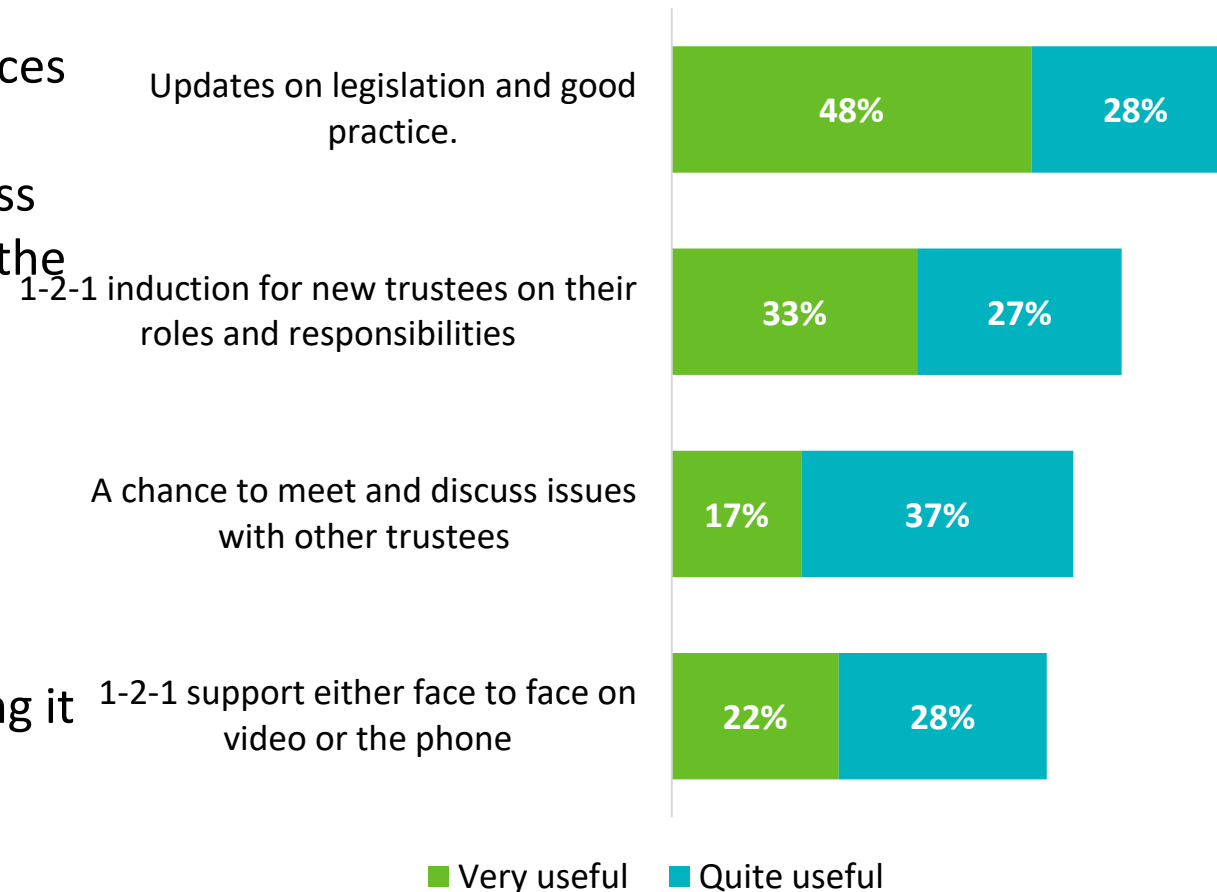
## Trustee support

As well as asking trustees about the services they think would be useful we also asked how and when they would prefer to access services. This showed the preference for the following training and event types.

- Face to face 18%
- Online 39%
- Always available 43%

There is some enthusiasm for weekend courses with just under half (48%) thinking it would be very or slightly useful.

### Services that trustees think would be useful



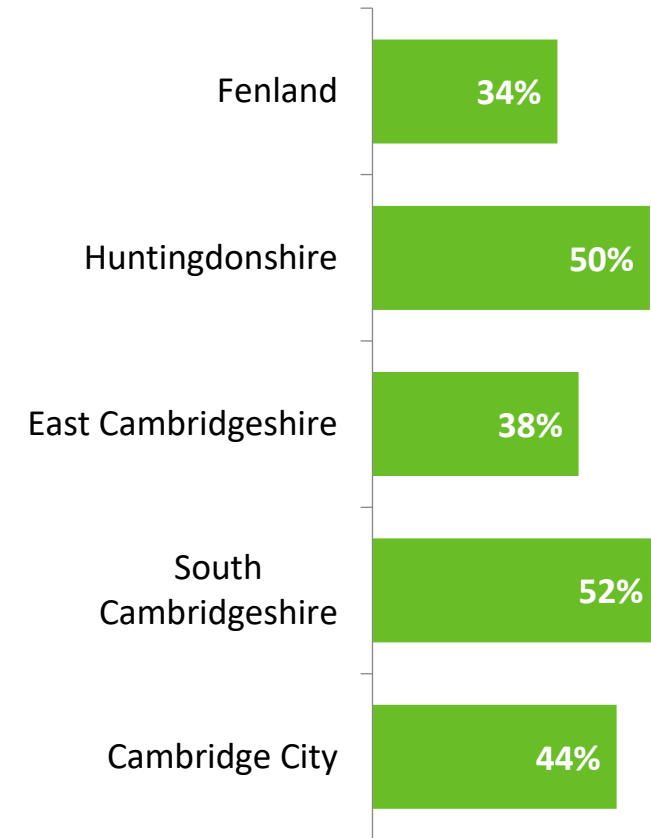
# Section 3 – About the groups responding

The survey is aimed at Cambridgeshire voluntary groups and all others are removed from the data set.

Of those responding 56% were members of CCVS and 44% were members of Hunts forum whilst 24% were not members of either.

The bulk of those replying were registered charities (60%) or Charitable Incorporated Organisations (14%). 13% were unregistered community groups, and there were small numbers of clubs, sports clubs and town or parish councils. A number of groups also self identified as religious organisation or linked to churches or schools.

We ask where groups work. 45% worked in just one district and 14% worked in all five districts. We continue to see less groups working in Fenland and East Cambs completing the survey.

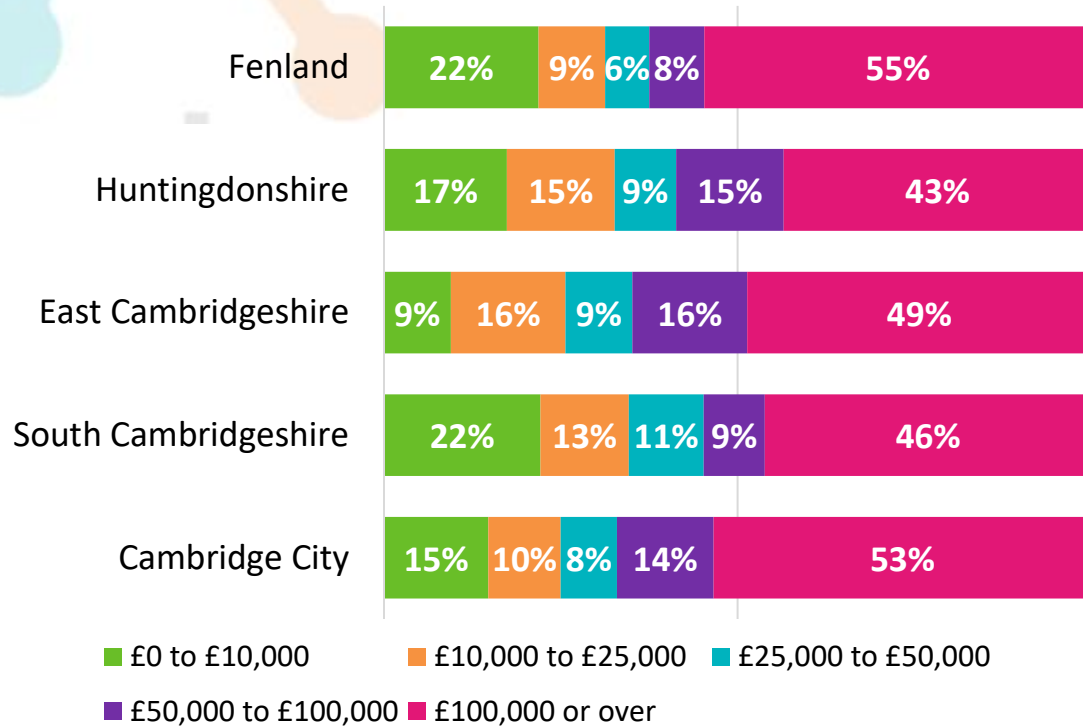


What districts groups work in  
(Multiple answers possible)

# Size of groups responding

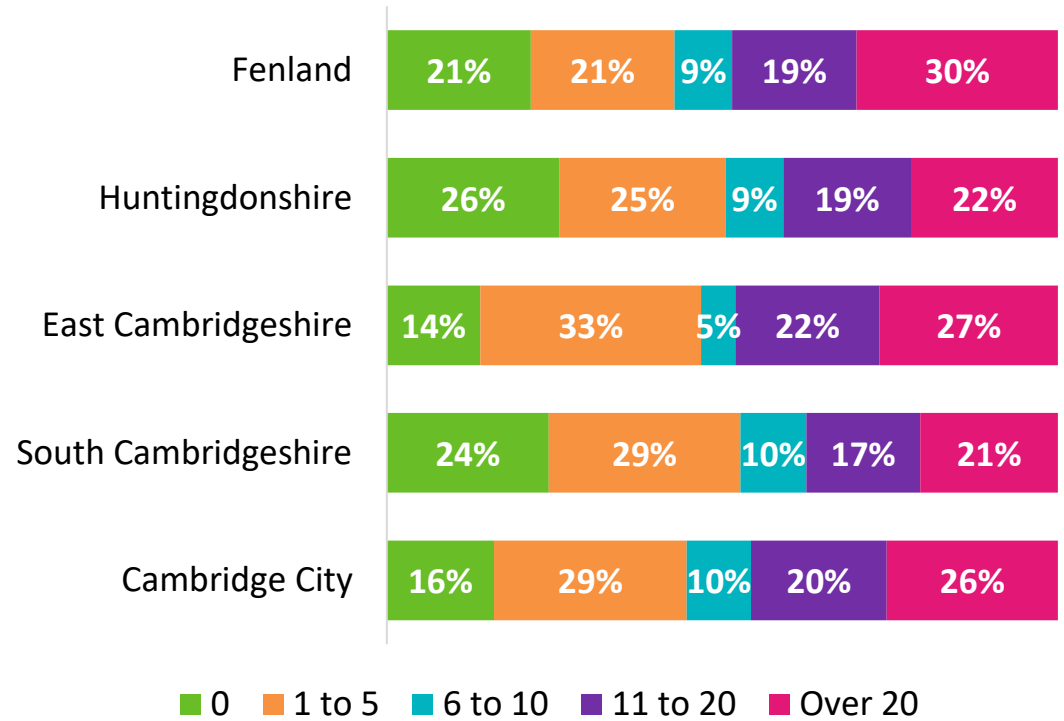
## Income

52% of the groups that responded had an income of £50,000 or less.



## Staff levels

61% of the groups that responded had five or less staff.



# Volunteer numbers

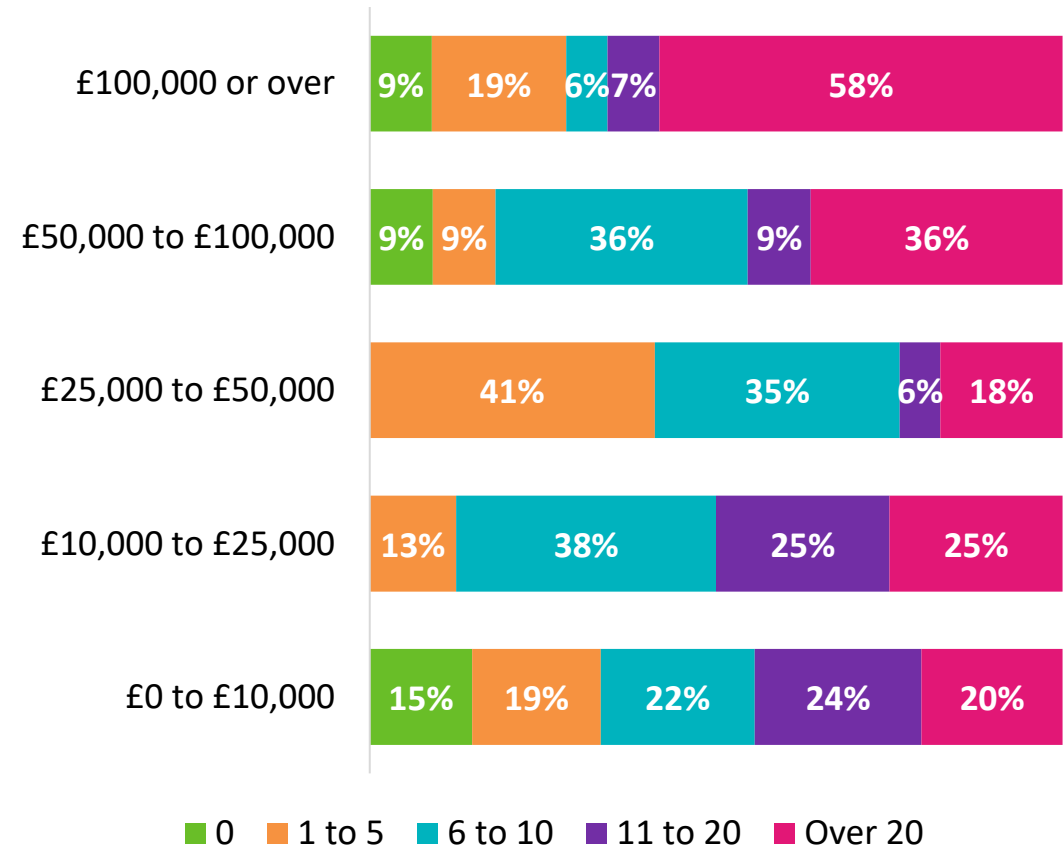
The majority of groups responding used volunteers in some way with only 8% of those responding stating they did not use any volunteers. 36% had 20 or more volunteers.

When asked if the volunteer count had changed over the last year 27% of groups reported it was bigger and 28% smaller. Just over a third (35%) of organisations had changed how they recruited volunteers.

*“We don't really struggle to retain volunteers as they traditionally hang-on until someone else takes their place, but the problems with recruitment mean we have elderly volunteers who would desperately like to step-down but don't out of guilt - this puts more pressure on them.”*

(comment from respondent)

**Number of volunteers by income**



# How groups raise funds

As well as asking about the techniques used we also asked about what people would like support to look at. The top five were

- Running a local lottery
- Target high net worth individuals
- Use crowdfunding
- Legacy funding from people's wills
- Get funds from businesses

We also asked if groups had a fundraising strategy and 35% did and 22% wanted to find out about developing one.

Groups are reporting that it has been more difficult to raise funds in the last year.

## Fundraising techniques used by groups



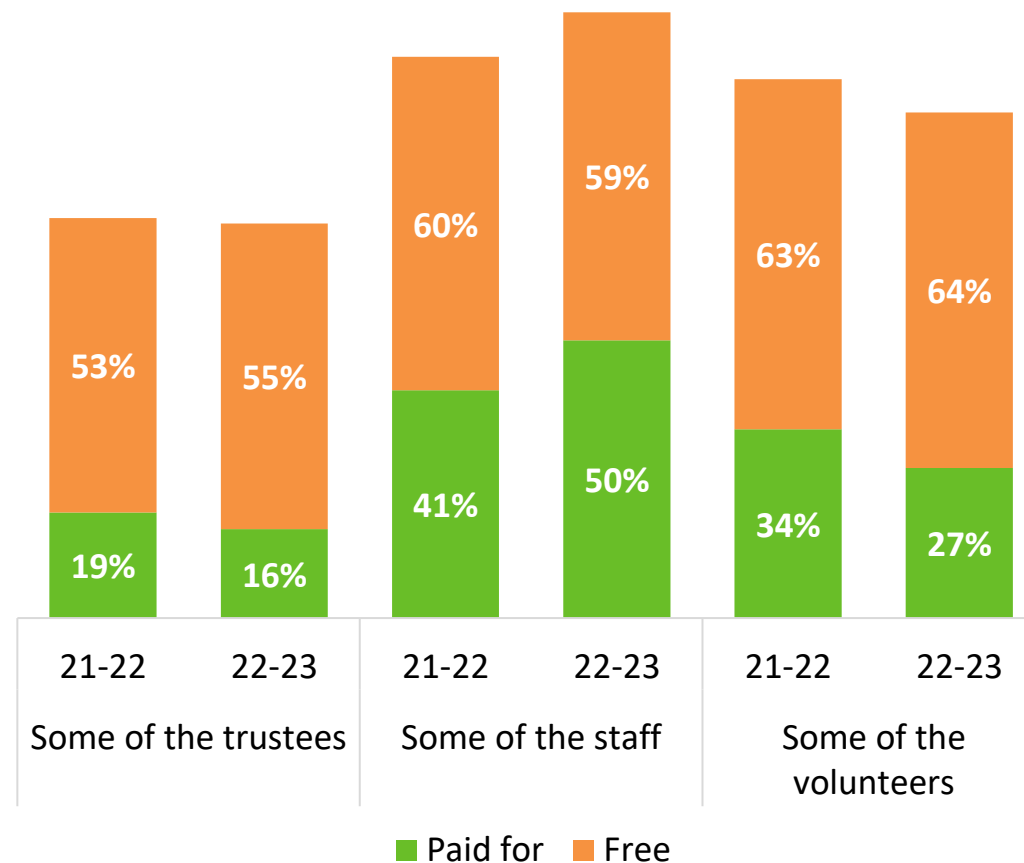
# Training undertaken in the last year

We are seeing similar levels of training this year compared to last but with an increase in paid for training for staff and a reduction in paid for training for volunteers.

40% of groups did no training at all and 36% of groups offered some paid for training for one or more of their staff, trustees or volunteers.

There is still a greater preference for online training with 45% preferring this (this has increased from 42% from last year). 30% of people wanted always available training and only 25% in person training.

Comparison of who recieved training





## Section 4 –The voluntary Sector in Cambridgeshire

We commissioned Kane Data [www.dkane.net](http://www.dkane.net) to undertake some data analysis of charities and funders in Cambridgeshire using Charity Commission data and supplemented by other sources including the 360Giving Data Standard.

This section of the report presents information on a subset of the charities whose registered office address is within the boundary of Cambridgeshire, as well as those who told the Charity Commission that they operate in Cambridgeshire. Some charities were then excluded from the analysis to provide a population of charities that reflects those that work mainly within Cambridgeshire. The primary reasons for exclusion were:

- They mainly work at a national or international level.
- Their work is mainly or wholly connected with the work of the University of Cambridge or other universities.
- The charity's main activity is the operation of an independent school.

The first selection of charities based on the above criteria was then refined in consultation with Support Cambridgeshire to produce an agreed list of charities for inclusion.





## Headlines

- 2,100 charities operate in Cambridgeshire
- In 2021-22 (the latest year with full financial data), they had an income of nearly £300m and spending of £270m.
- These charities employ an estimated 5,300 people, with over 30,000 volunteers and nearly 11,000 trustees recorded with the Charity Commission.
- Most charities are small: over 80% have an income of less than £100,000. The largest six charities, with income over £10m, account for 29% of total spending.

# What do charities in Cambridgeshire do?

- Based on ICNPTSO – this is applied by machine learning, so doesn't always get the answers right.
- Bubbles are sized based on the number of charities, so small charities dominate.
- Lots of smaller grantmakers providing scholarships & small grants.
- Churches and other religious groups are also numerous.
- Community and economic development activities also includes Village Halls and similar charities.

<https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/1425021/>





# Largest charities in Cambridgeshire

By spending 2021-22

| Name  | Spending (£m) |
|---|---------------|
| Wood Green Animal Shelters  | £18.1         |
| East Anglia's Children's Hospices                                   | £14.2         |
| The Papworth Trust  | £13.5         |
| The Ely Diocesan Board of Finance                                   | £10.8         |
| YMCA Trinity Group  | £10.8         |
| Arthur Rank Hospice Charity   | £10.3         |
| Addenbrooke's Charitable Trust                                      | £8.2          |
| The Edmund Trust  | £6.4          |
| The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire Cambridgeshire Northamptonshire | £5.8          |
| Magpas  | £4.8          |

## Cambridgeshire charities by local authority, 2021-22

We can see that the highest level of charities per head is in South Cambridgeshire, with 3.8 charities per 1,000 people. The lowest is Fenland with 1.7. Looking at charitable spending, the highest is in Cambridge, with charities spending the equivalent of £653 per head. For Fenland the figure is £128 (note that these figures are likely to reflect the number of large charities based in areas).

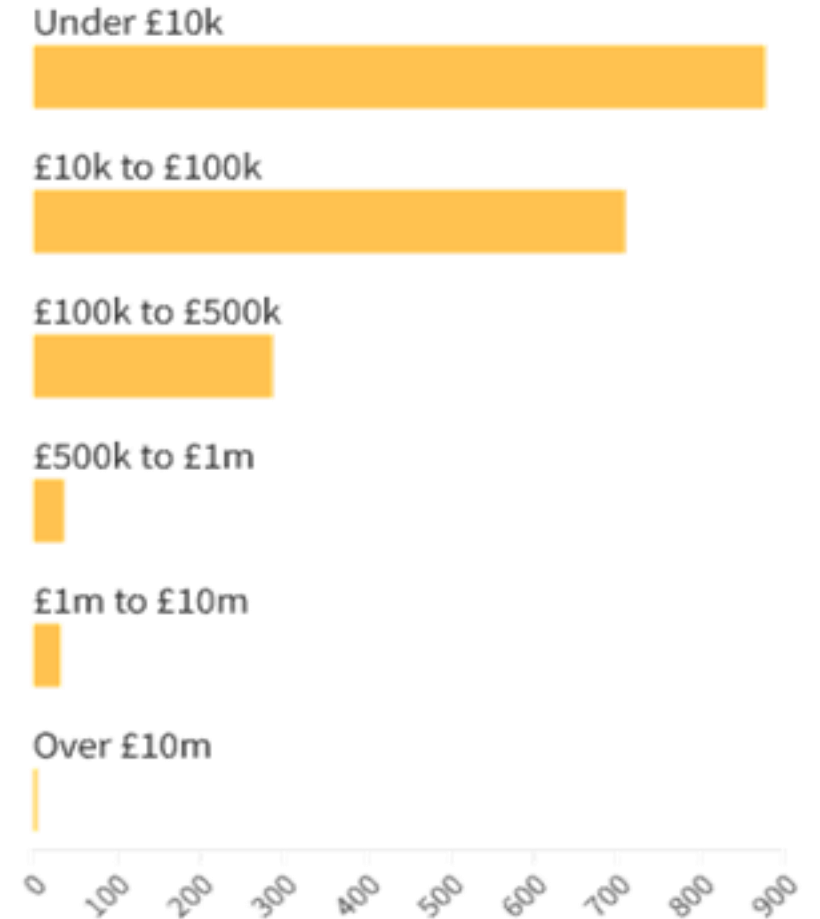
| Local Authority      | Number of charities | Spending (£m) | Charities per 1,000 people | Charity spending per head (£) |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Cambridge            | 398                 | 94.5          | 2.8                        | 653                           |
| East Cambridgeshire  | 259                 | 23.8          | 2.9                        | 270                           |
| Fenland              | 174                 | 13.2          | 1.7                        | 128                           |
| Huntingdonshire      | 449                 | 60.7          | 2.5                        | 334                           |
| South Cambridgeshire | 613                 | 76.5          | 3.8                        | 469                           |

## Charities in Cambridgeshire by income band, 2021-22

The pattern of charities by size in Cambridgeshire follows the national pattern, with most charities being small. Using bands based on annual income, 45% of the charities in our population have income under £10,000, with 96% having less than £500,000. Just 40 charities, around 2% of charities, have income of over £1 million.

The converse picture is found for spending, with the economic weight of the sector concentrated in the largest organisations. The largest 2% of charities with incomes over £1 million are responsible for over 55% of spending, while the smallest 45% of charities with income under £10,000 make up less than 2% of spending.

### Number of charities

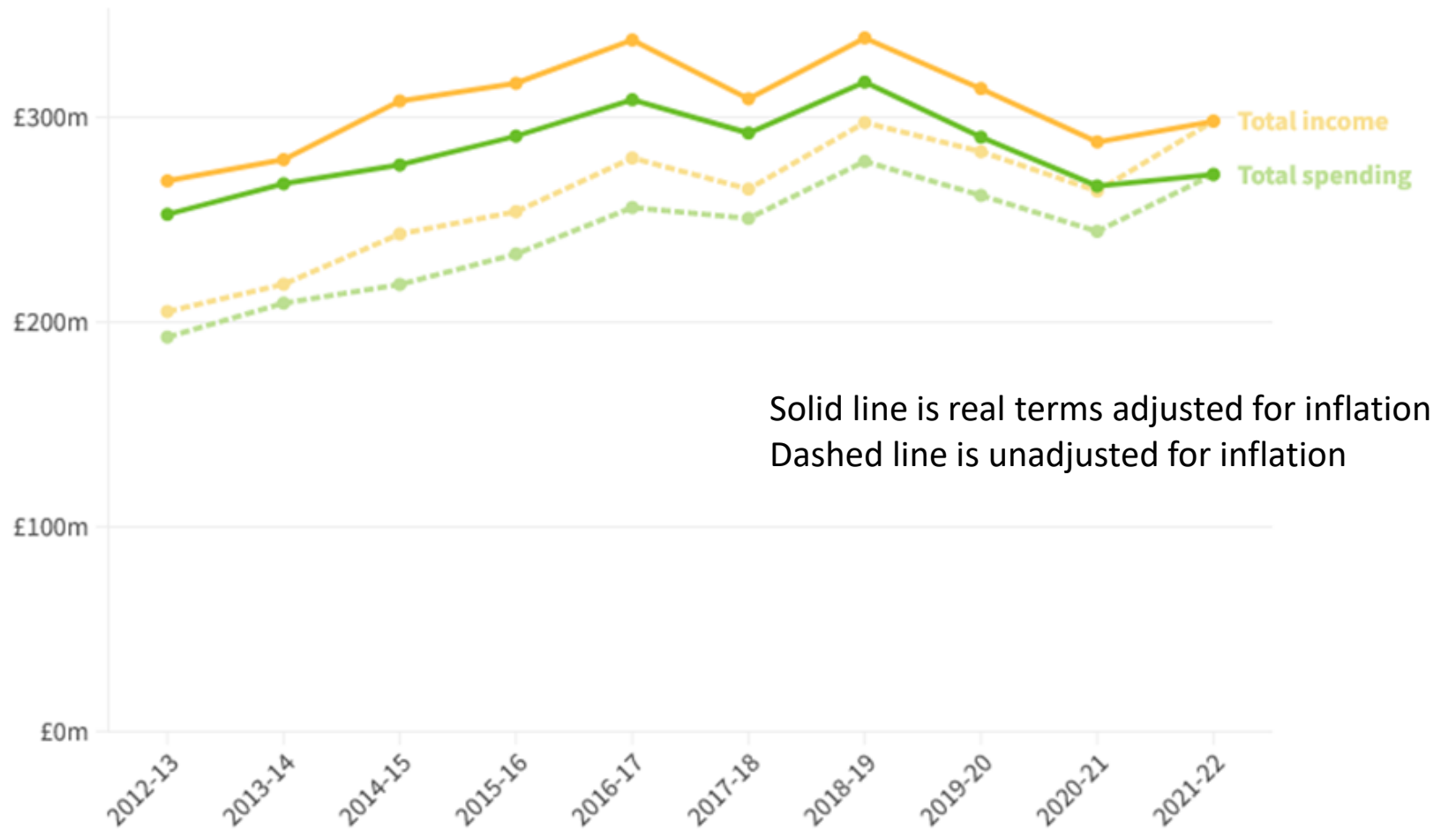


<https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/14250166/>

## Changes to charity income over time.

Historic data suggests that the total spending of charities in Cambridgeshire has risen in cash terms over the last ten years, from around £193m in 2012-13 to £272m in 2021-22, although after adjusting for inflation the sector has seen falls in spending and income of around 12% since 2018-19.

<https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/14250270/>





## Staff and volunteers

Figures from Charity Commission data suggest that charities in Cambridgeshire have around 31,000 volunteers, 11,000 trustee positions and 5,300 employees. The number of employees includes an estimate for employees of charities with income under £500,000 as they are not required to report this information to the Charity Commission.

Half of charities have between 5 and 12 trustees, which is the range recommended by the Charity Governance Code.

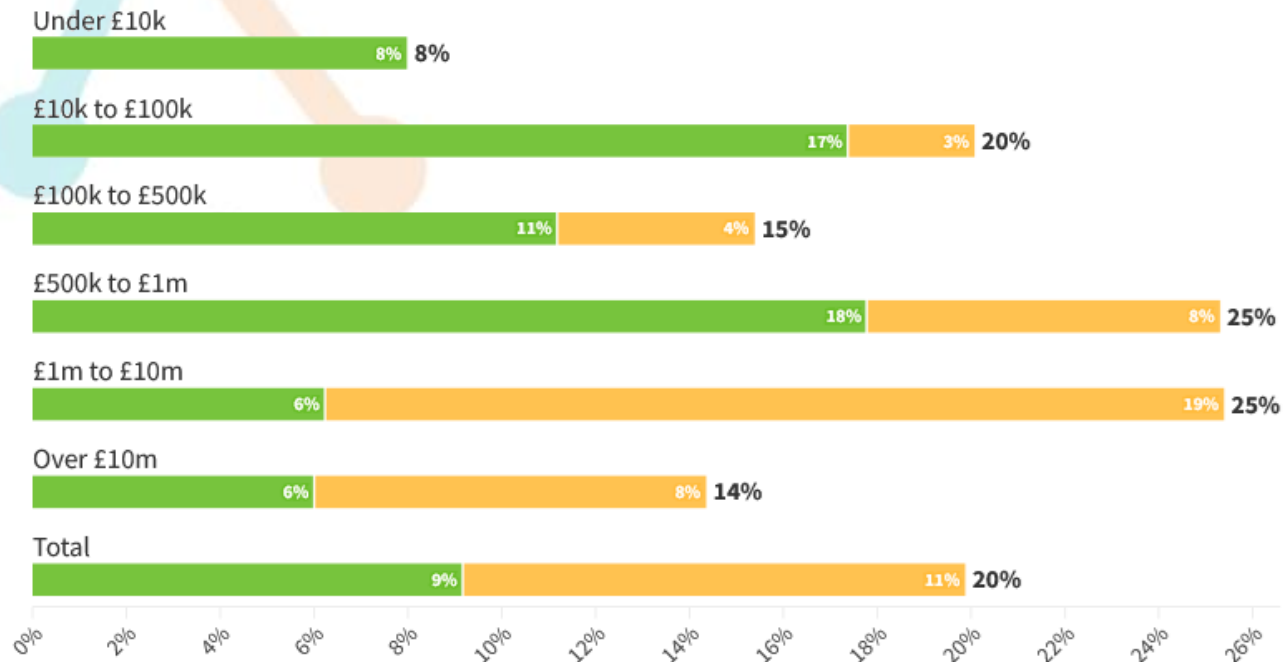
| Income band  | Paid staff   | Volunteers    | Trustees      |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| Under £500k  | 1,718        | 20,264        | 10,261        |
| £500k to £1m | 515          | 1,718         | 314           |
| £1m to £10m  | 1,522        | 4,306         | 305           |
| Over £10m    | 1,506        | 4,292         | 74            |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>5,261</b> | <b>30,580</b> | <b>10,495</b> |

# Income from government

## Cambridgeshire charities income from government

% of income from government, by income band, 2021-22

■ % income from grants ■ % income from contracts



Source: Kane Data analysis of Charity Commission data

<https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/14250333/>

- Charities in Cambridgeshire receive around 20% of their income from government (central or local).
- This figure is highest for charities with income between £500,000 and £10m – with 25% of income.
- 40% of charities have a financial relationship with government, with 7% having a government contract and 37% receiving a grant from government.



## Largest grant funders to Cambridgeshire charities by grant amount, 2021-22

The largest funder from the grantmakers who have published data is the National Lottery Community Fund, who made 43 grants totalling £1.3 million. Other large funders include Esmée Fairbairn Foundation who made a large social investment grant to the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire. BBC Children in Need, DCMS and the National Lottery Heritage Fund all made over £300,000 in grants to Cambridgeshire charities in 2021-22.

| Name   | Number of grants | Total amount (£) |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| The National Lottery Community Fund            | 43               | 1,299,250        |
| Esmée Fairbairn Foundation                     | 1                | 975,000          |
| BBC Children in Need                           | 5                | 398,551          |
| Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport | 4                | 377,363          |
| The National Lottery Heritage Fund             | 5                | 348,877          |
| Garfield Weston Foundation                     | 15               | 247,500          |
| Paul Hamlyn Foundation                         | 1                | 170,750          |
| Co-operative Group                             | 39               | 111,406          |
| Youth Music                                    | 1                | 99,824           |
| The Henry Smith Charity                        | 1                | 91,500           |



# Conclusions

The end of the pandemic was not the chance to catch our breath, look up and take stock of what we had learnt, both the good and the bad. Instead, we swapped one crisis for another and the sector did its learning and catching up whilst ramping up to ensure that services were continued and developed to meet a different need.

The survey results show that there is uncertainty about the future and that people are less optimistic than in the previous year. Yet we can see groups continuing to deliver and looking at how they adapt and develop in order keep delivering.

*“We have lots of opportunities and exciting projects coming up. 2022 allowed us to build up a lot of new connections and strong relationships, which are likely to result in additional funding this year.”*

But the sectors star is in the ascendance as statutory bodies look towards us and communities to deliver results and services in a radically different way. It remains to be seen if there will be the real will and the resources to make the changes, but we have not been in a place like this with opportunities like this for a long time.

*“The reputation of our organisation continues to grow. Our residents have more and more confidence in seeking help from us. And we have stronger than ever links other organisations. All of this puts us in a good position to fulfil our aims and objectives.”*



# Next steps

We hope that this survey helps to build understanding of the voluntary and community sector in Cambridgeshire. We hope that it will show the variety and size of the sector but also the issues it faces as society battles with aftermath of the pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

There has been a growing recognition of the importance of the sector and the role it plays to help communities and individuals thrive. This has resulted in unprecedented interest in what the sector can offer and how it can help alleviate some of the issues that government at all levels is trying to address.

We will look at how we share this information to raise awareness of the state of the Cambridgeshire VCS, so that we can help groups find more volunteers, raise more funds and build better relationships. Change and adaptation is essential for the sector and the same is true for us at Support Cambridgeshire, we will look at how we can use this information to improve our work and our offer to all the VCS across the county.

We will use the survey to help us advocate for change. Change from statutory partners. Change from funders of all types. Change in how VCS organisations work. Change in how VCS organisations are supported. Change in how the sector is seen and supported by the public.

To find out more check out <https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk/news/state-sector-survey/>



# Methodology

This was a return to the traditional state of the sector survey but with funding to look at some additional information. We have tried to keep some of the same questions as in previous years in order to help us to map trends but at the same time we are looking at how we can improve the survey both to increase responses, but also to increase how useful the results are.

The survey was shared widely by Support Cambridgeshire partners and also by other organisations we work with. This resulted in 262 responses which is slightly higher than the pre pandemic average and up on last year. We have tracked responses and we still see a majority of responses coming from newsletters, we have also found that asking partners such as local authorities and organisations like the community foundation is a good way to share the survey. We get minimal responses from social media but given that it is easy to do this it may well be that keeping it at the front of people's mind is important. 74% completed the survey from links in newsletters or e-bulletins, 18% from partners emails, and 7% from links in social media posts.

This year we have also worked with David Kane <https://dkane.net/> to analyse some of the datasets that are available from the Charity Commission and the Grantnet. This has provided us with extra knowledge and should be something we look to repeat on an annual basis if possible. We have also developed a pilot to look at below the radar groups and this will be reported separately, this is something we may well to look to build on in the future.

# Your county, your voice, our support

Support Cambridgeshire helps community groups and organisations to strengthen and grow, providing a range of advice, training and support.

We are a partnership between Hunts Forum and Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service. We recognise the need for greater cross-working and the ability to provide a high-level offer to charities, village halls and parish councils.

We would like to thank all those who have taken the time to complete this survey as well as the funders that make this and all our work possible.

Written by Mark Freeman

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