**Understanding the VCSE sector’s**

**support needs in Redcar and Cleveland**

**Summary of Survey Findings**

**November 2024**

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**Understanding the VCSE Sector’s Support Needs in Redcar and Cleveland**

**Summary of Survey Findings**

**1. Background**

The Woodsmith Foundation worked with a number of partners to design and deliver a survey to find out more about the support and development needs of organisations in the local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector in Redcar and Cleveland. The partners for this work are Lloyds Bank Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, Rank Foundation, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council, Tees Foundation, and Woodsmith Foundation. The partners were supported by Angela Portz Associates.

The purpose of the survey was to find out about what support and services the VCSE sector needs and how it would like those services to be provided. It explored what organisations need now and, in the future, and what might have helped when they were starting out. The survey also explored where VCSE organisations currently get their support.

The survey was live during August and September 2024 and took about 10 minutes to complete. Responses were anonymously collated for this summary report and for the partners. Respondents were offered the opportunity to volunteer to take part in follow up focus groups to explore some questions in more depth. Respondents who were unable to make the focus group date were offered one to one interviews with the associates who supported the partners with this work. This summary report will be circulated to all respondents who requested a copy and gave their contact details.

The findings of the report will be used to help the partners explore how we might commission and fund support that will meet the needs of, and advocate for, VCSE organisations in Redcar and Cleveland.

Support for VCSE organisations often happens through a local support provider - often referred to as a VCSE Local Infrastructure Organisation. This webpage from NAVCA explains more about what a Local Infrastructure Organisation does <https://www.navca.org.uk/what-our-members-do>

We would like to thank all the VCSE organisations that participated in the survey, focus groups and one to one interviews. We value the time they gave to this research.

**2. Survey Responses**

There were 63 responses to the survey. The partners for this work reviewed the anonymised, summarised findings from the survey and agreed areas of interest to explore further at the follow up discussions with survey respondents.

We then held 2 face-to-face focus groups in Grangetown, with a total of 11 participants. The focus groups were facilitated by Woodsmith Foundation associates Angela Portz and Michelle Smith, with no funders present at the groups. The participants were survey respondents who were willing to attend a focus group to give more detailed responses.

Associates also carried out 4 in-depth one-to-one phone calls with survey respondents who were unable to attend the focus groups.

Following completion of the focus groups and interviews Angela Portz analysed the data and views expressed to inform this summary report.

**3. Headline Findings From Survey Responses**

**3.1 Type of VCSE organisation who responded**

* 56% registered charities or Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs) which is the structure that allows you to be incorporated as one entity rather than being a charity and then also having to be a limited company
* 19% informal / community groups (unincorporated)
* 14% Community Interest Company (CIC)
* 11% other

**3.2. Size and scope of organisations who responded**

Responses were received from;

* Organisations with income ranging from £500 per annum to £1million
* Organisations who employ staff (59%) and those that do not employ staff (41%).

The majority of respondents (86%) use volunteers to deliver their work (over and above volunteer trustees).

There was a good geographic spread of respondents delivering across Redcar and Cleveland.

**3.3. Early stages support needs**

Respondents who considered support needs in the early stages of setting up an organisation said that all the support needs listed were fairly equal in priority, this being advice on;

* Legal structures
* Health and safety
* Safeguarding
* The right constitution
* Basic accounting
* Opening a bank account

**3.4. More established support needs**

Respondents who identified themselves as being more established clearly felt strongly about needing more support with;

* Advice on funding and fundraising
* Recruiting and managing volunteers
* Diversifying income
* Networking with other groups

**3.5. Well established support needs**

Respondents who identified themselves as being well established and growing were also clear on the areas they needed support with, these being;

* Advice on fundraising and funding
* Help to demonstrate their impact
* Support with strategic planning
* Ways to influence policy

**3.6. Where do you access support at present?**

Replies varied according to size and type of organisation, as well as the particular need.

* 23 respondents said they received support from 4 named infrastructure support organisations across the area.
* Community Interest Companies cited specialist support such as LARCH and the School for Social Entrepreneurs. CICs and larger voluntary organisations were more likely to pay for services e.g. from an accountant or HR advisor.
* Sports groups, church groups and uniformed services groups quoted access to some support through their governing bodies or national infrastructure.
* Over half quoted using online search engines, for example to find templates for policies and procedures.
* Some were aware of national services such as NCVO and Locality.
* Some groups accessed support from funders e.g. a support package attached to a grant.
* Some groups were using services provided by a local authority e.g. safeguarding training, funding newsletter.
* Some groups had found volunteers to help with specific pieces of advice and support.

**3.7. How and when do you want to access support?**

There was strong support for all delivery methods listed in the support needs with face to face support ranking highest, closely followed by self service resources online. There was a keen desire for training, both online and face to face with peer-to-peer support networks not far behind.

Most respondents were keen for support to be delivered in the daytime, but a significant number were interested in evening support. There was less interest in support being offered at the weekend.

**4. Focus group and one to one feedback**

The focus groups and one to one interviews gave us the opportunity to explore further key areas of interest to the partners.

**4.1. What do groups want in future?**

The responses were very variable. There is variation from those who know what is possible with well-funded infrastructure and have experienced this in the past, and those who have not had the opportunity to do so.

Areas of importance that were highlighted in the discussions included:

* A strategic role from the service provider – adding value to individual organisations as an overarching representative body.
* Networking/facilitation role - bringing people together for various purposes such as sharing information and gathering views for the purpose of influencing policy and funding.
* Good quality communication from the service provider to the VCSE sector.
* ‘Harnessing the power of the private sector’ – mostly in terms of volunteering, in kind support, etc but a clear role and desire for the service provider to work better with businesses.
* Training in core topics e.g. roles and responsibilities of being a trustee was quoted multiple times.

**4.2. What would services look like? What type of delivery?**

There is a willingness to access information and advice online, either through good quality resources or online meetings.

There is much acknowledgement of the benefits, flexibility and convenience of online meetings and training opportunities, but there is still a desire for some face-to-face contact, both with the provider and with each other – ‘this is where the magic happens’.

**4.3. What is important about the service provider in terms of local knowledge, experience, understanding, culture, history, place?**

* The majority felt very strongly that local knowledge, experience and understanding was critical. They felt that trust between the local sector and the service provider was essential and recognised that this would take time to develop with the provider.
* Some had high expectations of the level of understanding that a provider should have; ‘I expect them to know my organisation and my place in the local sector and landscape’.
* There was a strong feeling that the provider should know their opposite numbers in the neighbouring areas so that they can liaise with them and be able to make appropriate referrals to other sources of support.
* There was a strong feeling that there should be a local base and presence.

**4.4. What should the service provider do, and not do?**

There was recognition of the need to prioritise within the confines of the budget available and not to spread resources too thinly; there was a desire for the organisation to stay focused on its priorities in supporting the VCSE sector.

Attendees and interviewees felt that good and accurate advice and guidance on core issues was critical e.g. HR, setting up a new organisation, policies and procedures, funding advice and income generation and support for trustees. They also talked about networking, influencing, advocacy, strategic work and harnessing the power of the private sector.

The strongest comments around what a service provider should ***not*** do was be competition for the front line and to avoid conflict of interest with VCSE groups.

**4.5. Leadership support**

We used the focus groups and one to one calls to explore what organisations might want in terms of leadership support. As might be expected, answers were variable depending on the respondent’s role, size of organisation, and stage of development.

Overall, there was enthusiasm for support for trustees with bite size training in relevant topics, as well as training for staff in topics such as finance and HR.

Those from CICs felt particularly unsupported and identified peer support as a possible solution, particularly from those who have experience of similar challenges.

Several respondents said they had taken part in leadership mentoring schemes previously and would do so again if one was available.

**4.6. Sustainability of the service provider**

We asked the focus groups and one to one participants how they saw the future sustainability of a provider. There was not a great deal of willingness to pay a membership fee, although some acknowledged willingness to pay for some chargeable services, such as HR advice, training courses or a payroll service. Overall, it was felt that the provider should negotiate funding from the public sector, bring in its own grant funding, and explore relationships with the private sector.

*“Sustainability comes from them being successful strategically”.*

**4.7. Support for Volunteering**

Many of the smaller organisations described an organic process of recruiting and retaining volunteers and appeared very self-sufficient. The larger organisations expressed a need for more formal support, such as advertising of volunteer roles. Some people commented on using a local authority training programme that others were unaware of.

Overall, there was support for the role of the service provider in raising the profile of volunteering within the wider community and within business and the private sector.

**5. Next steps**

The partners who commissioned the survey form a Steering Group which is thinking about how it can better resource a local support offer for the VCSE sector. Their first step was to better understand from the VCSE sector what support they would like to see in Redcar and Cleveland. The survey has helped shape the Steering Group’s thinking and the partners have collectively put a pot of funding together to commission and fund a VCSE infrastructure support service for Redcar and Cleveland for the next three years.

The next step will be to develop a grant specification that details the service the partners would like to fund. The specification will be released in December with a closing date in the New Year. This will give potential applicants time to develop partnership approaches if they wish, and to reflect on the survey findings. We hope this will mean that applicants will be able to demonstrate how they might best serve the VCSE sector responding to the VCSE sector’s feedback in this report.

We anticipate that a grant will be awarded to the successful grant applicants by the end of March 2025 and following a mobilisation period, a funded VCSE support service will be live by the summer of 2025.

**6. Contact details**

If you have any questions about the survey or this report please email [info@woodsmithfoundation.org.uk](mailto:info@woodsmithfoundation.org.uk)