

STATE OF THE SECTOR SURVEY OCT 2020



**COMMUNITY
LINKS BROMLEY**



INTRODUCTION

Bromley is the most populous of all the London boroughs and has a large number of older people and residential and care homes as well as being home to a significant BAME community. From our interactions, we know that across the whole of Bromley superb work is being undertaken by the sector in response to the current COVID -19 pandemic.

To gather more of a complete picture, we asked voluntary and not for profit organisations in Bromley during October to complete a short survey to help us improve our understanding of the sector's changing role and the challenges the sector faces.

We recognise that many organisations are stretched and may have had to change their operations and work schedules and so we are pleased to have received almost 40 responses.

Organisations of all types have advised on the funding challenges that they face, together with the difficulties of service delivery and engaging with service users.

Our aim is that the findings from this survey will encourage further investment into the sector and will better inform future planning and response.

A breakdown of the responses to the survey follows. A big thank you to all who responded.

Our first question asked where organisations deliver their services in Bromley. The vast majority (57%) said that they work across the whole borough. This was followed by Bromley Town with around 16% serving that community.

However, there are pockets that have a higher concentration of organisations delivering more locally, most notably the Mottingham and Penge areas.

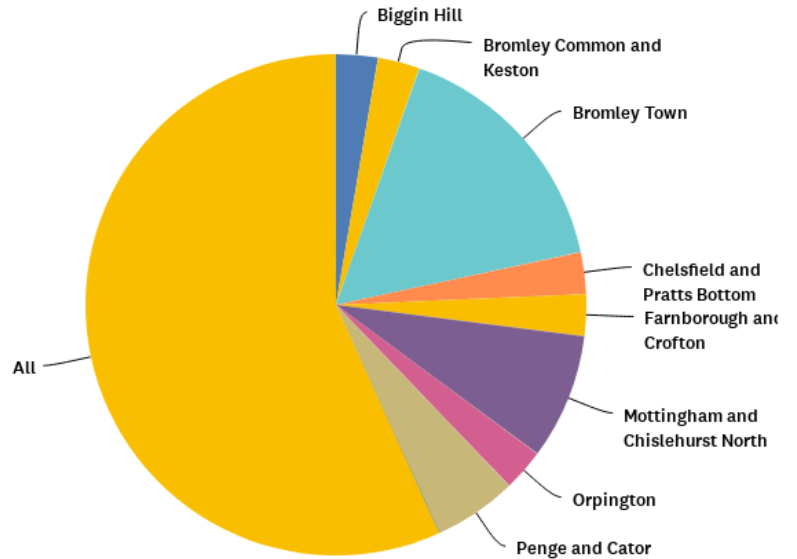
We then gave a range of options for organisations to classify what type of services that they offered.

The biggest single answers were children and families (32%) older people (27%), mental health (22%) and people with disabilities (19%).

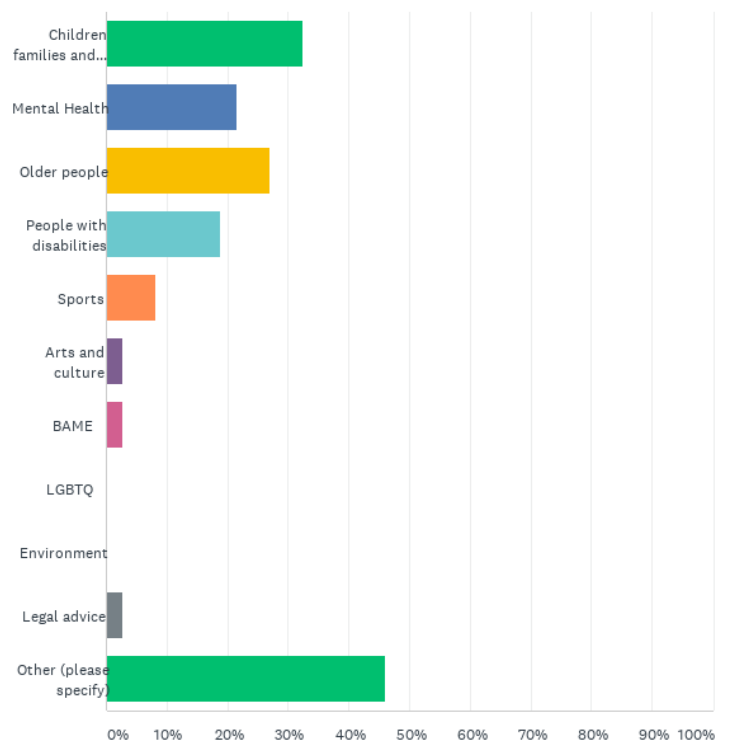
However, the largest response came under the heading other (46%). Several organisations covered all areas, offering a holistic package of support. Other help that was offered was focused on carers, the homeless, food poverty, victims of abuse, education, faith and community and cancers.

Other responses came from organisations providing sports and cultural activities, legal advice and support for BAME communities.

Q3 In what wards to you work?



Q4 What sector are you in?



The organisations responding to our survey indicate that based on turnover there is a mix of size of organisations in Bromley with the majority being small.

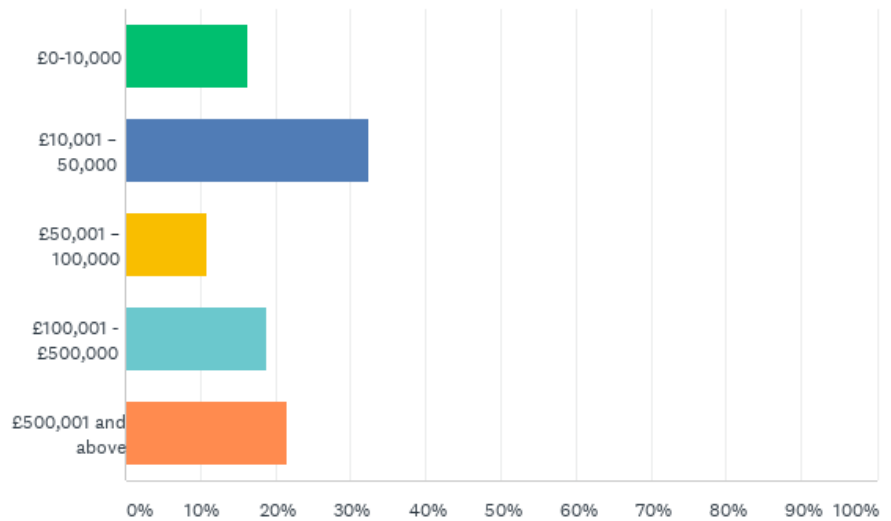
Around a third of those who responded have a turnover of between £10,001 and £50,000. Almost 50% have a turnover below £50,000. 21% have a turnover in excess of £500,000.

We recognise that during the past 6 months or so many organisations have struggled to secure funding from their usual sources, especially if trading. Many have had to bear increased costs for example in IT equipment and cleaning. This may have led to some organisations tapping into reserves to get them through this difficult period.

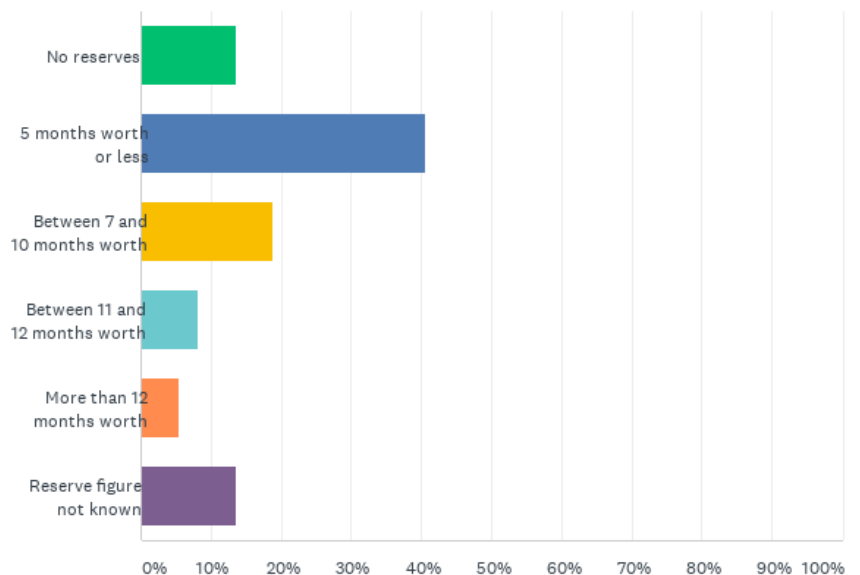
Responses to our survey suggest that 54% of organisations hold reserves of less than 5 months or none at all.

A third of responders have reserves of over 7 months. Over 13% claim not to know the level of reserves they hold.

Q5 What is your turnover?

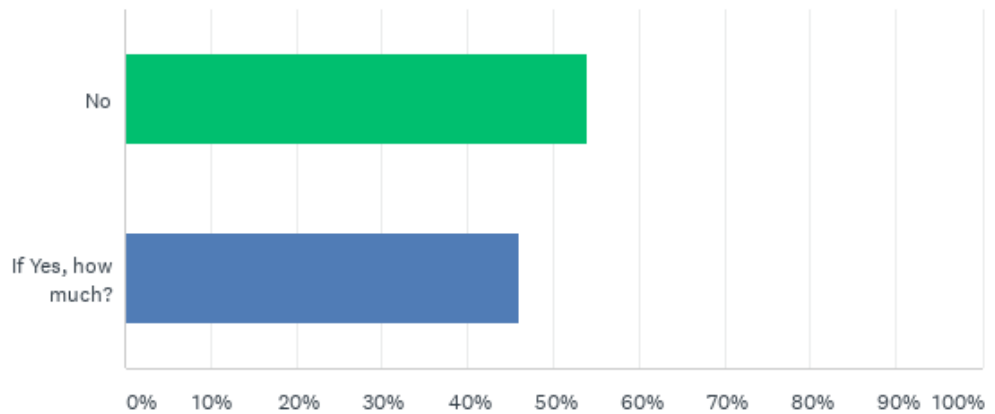


Q6 What %of annual turnover do you hold in reserve?



The chart on this page shows that 46% of responders were already using reserves. This ranged from a few thousands up to £100k and beyond.

Q 7 Are you drawing on these now or will you in the near future? If so how much

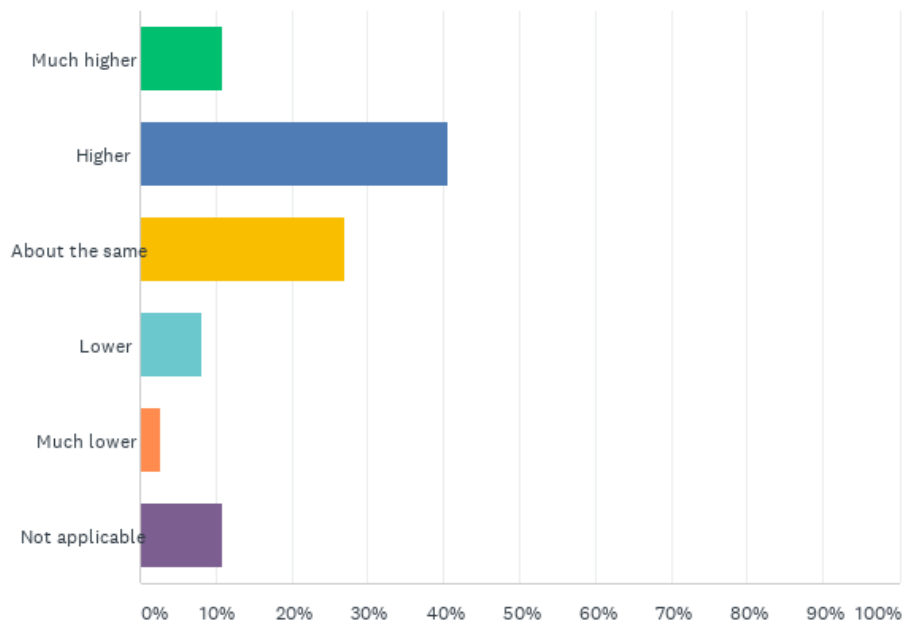


We were also keen to find out whether demand on the organisations had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and if so what those demands were.

Q8 Are the number of people seeking support from your organisation during the covid-19 outbreak higher or lower than before?

Responses received indicates that most organisations (51%) are experiencing higher or much higher demand for their services.

Just over 10% are experiencing lower demand.



The overwhelming need is for emotional support (68%). This is followed by information and advice (57%).

But as the chart shows, help is being sought across the board, especially, food, digital, funds, and other forms of physical support and activities.

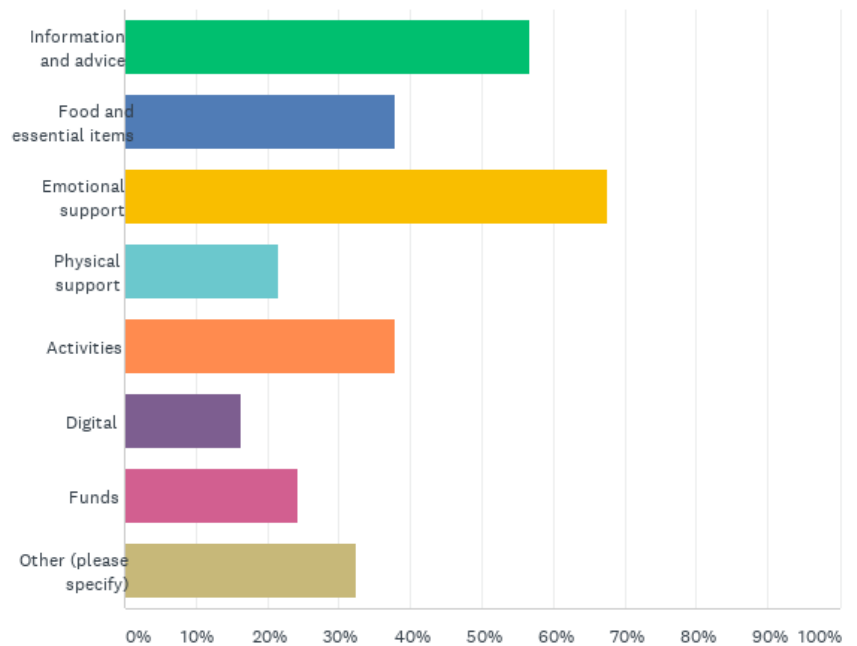
The "other" option selected by many includes domestic abuse, shelter and signposting to other organisations.

Just over half (51%) of staff and volunteers are still working, but a significant number (30%) are furloughed with a further 8% being made redundant.

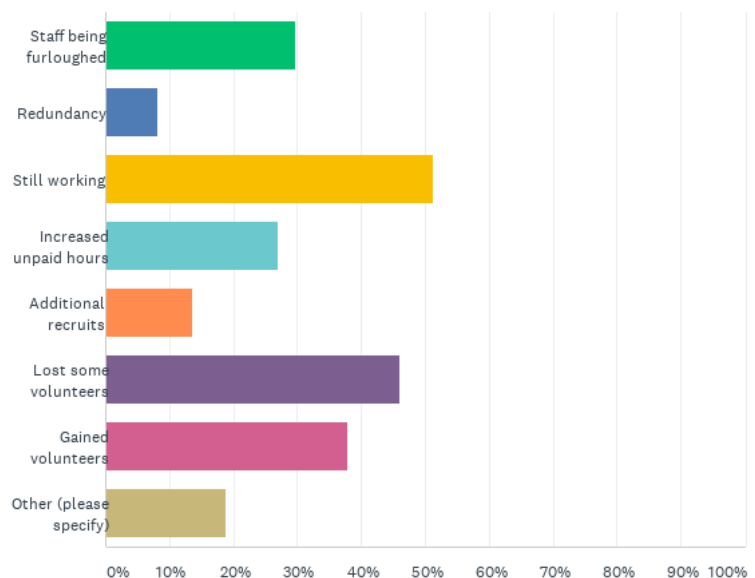
Over a quarter (27%) are working extended unpaid hours to cope with the increased demand.

There is also a mixed impact on volunteers with 46% reporting a loss of volunteers and 38% reporting gains. *"There was an increase in March. Then people returned to work, being furloughed again and now seeing people who have been made redundant, but who really want paid work..."*

Q9 If yes, what help are they seeking?



Q10 What impact has COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease) had on your staffing and volunteer levels?



Nearly 60% of respondents report a lack of contact with their clients through social distancing protocols. It is likely that the 32% who report a lack of access to premises also has an impact on contact.

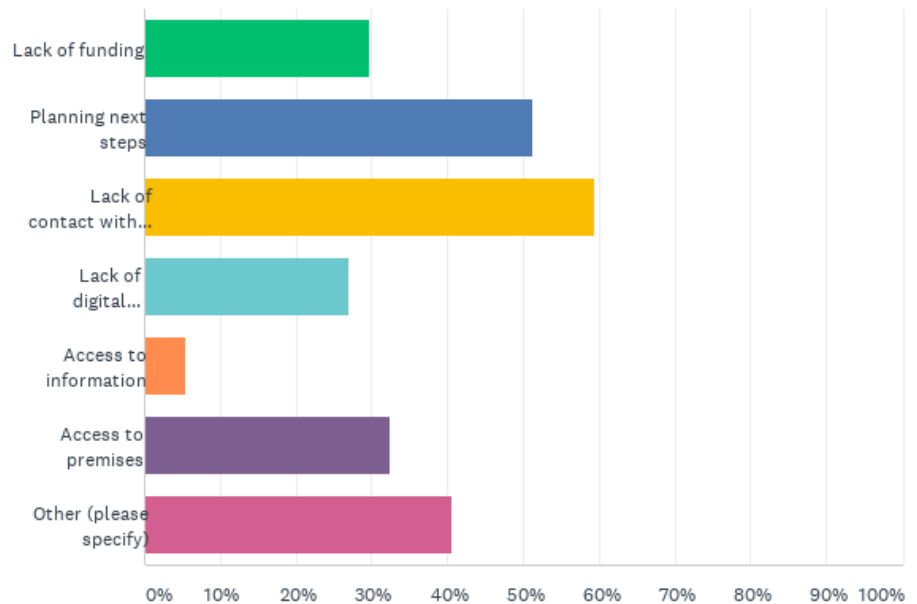
While there has been some COVID specific funding, 30% report a lack of funds as their biggest recent challenge. This explains why a number are using reserves.

The lack of personal contact is leading to more reliance on technology and over a quarter (27%) report digital skills or equipment as the biggest challenge they face.

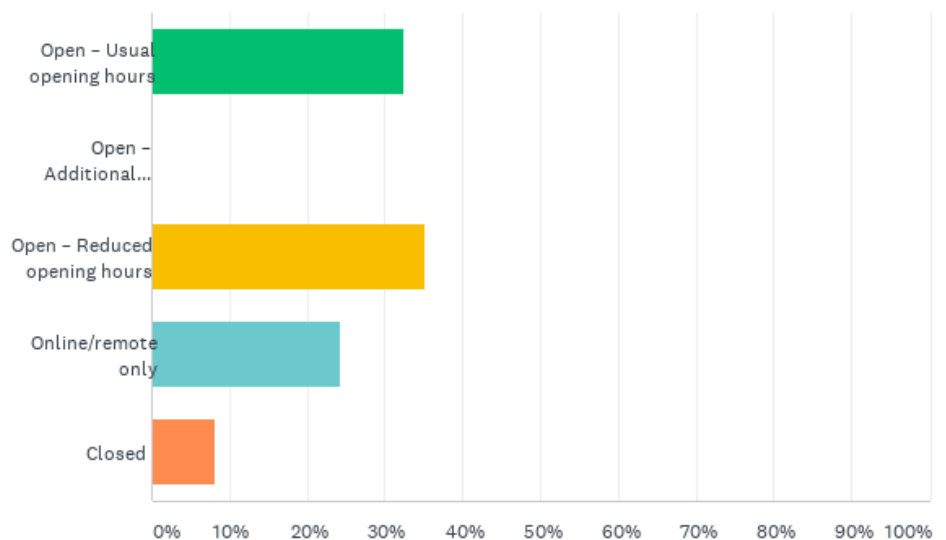
In "other" comments, many re-emphasise loss of funding and income when the costs to mitigate the effect of COVID are rising. Many cite an increase in demand at a time when retaining staff and volunteers is hard. Planning for the future is also proving difficult with the current uncertainty.

Two thirds of organisations are open with 35% operating on reduced hours. Around a quarter (24%) are operating remotely. 8% remain closed.

Q11 What have been the biggest challenges facing your organisation in the last 6 months?



Q12 What is the current status of your organisation?



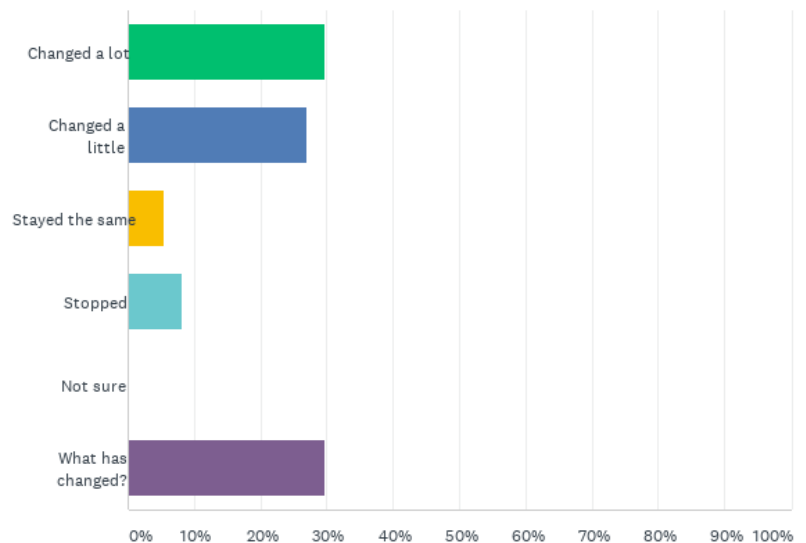
Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority of respondents have changed their service offer over the past 6 months, the majority significantly.

One respondent told us *"the foodbank has grown; advice services are more ad hoc and in different media; pastoral and home care are via phone; exercise has to be smaller numbers and more are using the church rather than the hall for more space; most activities are being offered in mixed mode - some present, some online."*

Seated meals have to a large extent stopped and restrictions and social distancing has reduced capacity for other get togethers.

Support for the homeless has been expanded as hosting and surfer surfing has stopped. Organisations now offer a triage and more holistic wrap around service to fill the gaps.

Q13 Have you changed or stopped delivering any services?



"We have been closed since 18/3/20 and only able to provide remote telephone support. Attempts to try video-conferencing were not successful due to low internet availability and Digital skills of our Client base."

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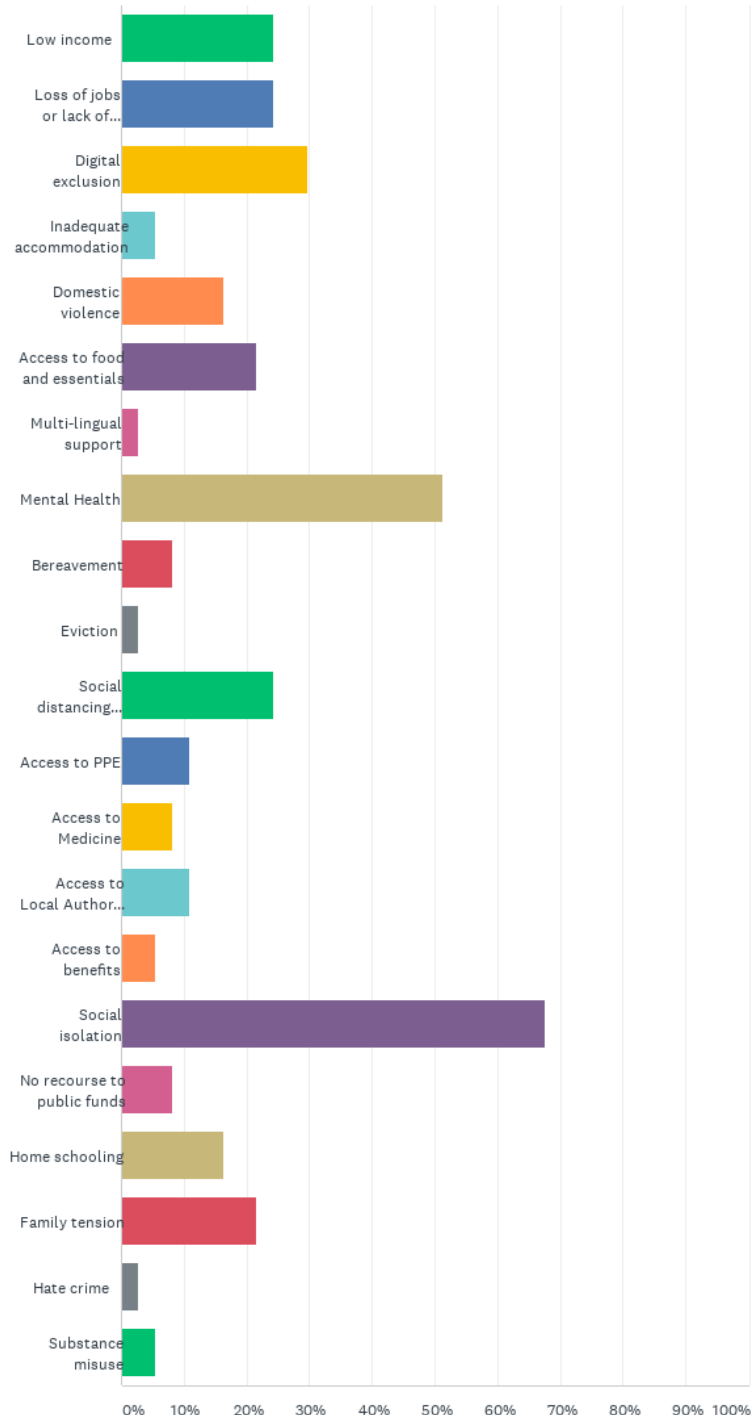


Q14 What is the biggest challenge your beneficiaries are facing during the outbreak? Please select no more than three.

Nearly 68% report social isolation as the biggest challenge facing beneficiaries. This is followed by mental health on 51%. There is a recognised link between the two. Between 25% and 30% report issues such as digital exclusion, low income and loss of employment and employment opportunities.

There is then a long tail of other challenging issues including meeting COVID rules and guidance, home schooling, family tensions and domestic abuse, substance abuse, access to central and local government support, access to essentials such as food, shelter, ,access to medicines and bereavement.

This goes to demonstrate very powerfully the diverse and shifting range of demands and challenges that local, often resource poor, organisations have coped with in the past 6 months. Many of these challenges are still current and will continue for some time to come.



Q15 What effect do you think the Coronavirus will have on your organisation in the short-term / crisis / survival mode / while restrictions are in place?

fundraising service users COSTS Significant support work due staff services able
 people reduction **will** restrictions **funding** time clients
 income **Lack** reduced **change** keep months online activity remain close
 Increase demand Increased

A major concern now is a lack of funding to meet increased demands on services and at the same time meet the higher costs of delivering those services, albeit through online delivery or through the cost of PPE and cleaning materials. The current situation means that many organisations cannot raise funds in the way that they would normally do. This is resulting in organisations raiding their reserves.

Many see the short term demand turning into a long term demand but without the required levels of funding.

Many report the changes that they have made to how they deliver services. While some have adapted to working online, for other services this is just not feasible.

There is also a detrimental impact on staff and volunteers mental health from the stress and additional pressures on them.

"Our regular funding is petering out so our reserves will run out."

"Lack of long term funding as funds diverted to short term emergency funding / mental health impact on service users and staff / reduction of face to face support with clients."

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Q16 What effect do you think the Coronavirus will have on your long-term future / recovery / revival phases / after the lifting of restrictions?

back restrictions lifted services restrictions support keep US long term
 funding able will grants people Challenge members
 office looking uncertainty return will need lost

The overall view of respondees was not overly optimistic. Funding will remain an issue as it becomes more competitive and remains focused on COVID-19 rather than long term recovery.

Remote working will remain in place for the foreseeable future where it is appropriate and can deliver. But it poses real challenges for those who rely on a more personal approach.

There is also a concern that even if the situation improves in the coming months, many clients will be too fearful of returning to the services. There is also a feeling that some long term underlying needs will have to be addressed and these may become more evident as time passes.

There is, however, a minority of organisations who feel that although smaller they will emerge as fitter and more agile as a consequence of the COVID-19 crisis. Some cite greater innovation, use of digital platforms and partnering.

"Uncertainty about grant funding in the longer-term and donations likely to be reduced as many regular members have been made redundant and job opportunities are now more limited."

"Getting back to where we were pre Covid will be hard, people might be loathe to meet each other."

"The pandemic has put our organisational fitness to the test, no doubt. It has been extremely challenging but the organisation, its operations and the overall service, even though small, is fitter for it."

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Q17 Have you identified any opportunities during this time? If not, please type in N/A

meetings homelessness ZOOM ways buildings will develop also funding now
 able Yes services virtual N Increasing online good USE
 community digital Opportunities support new need online services systems

Around a quarter report that they had not identified any positive opportunities during the pandemic.

Of those that had identified opportunities, these mainly relate to the adoption of more digital ways of remotely working with staff, volunteers, clients and members. This includes virtual meetings, fundraising events, e newsletters and new or adapted services. Some have reviewed systems and processes to work more smartly.

Others have viewed it as an opportunity to grow certain services and to expand awareness of the role that they play locally.

Organisations are now better prepared and know how to react to a future lockdown. But the last six months has taken its toll in terms of physical, mental and financial stress. They need to survive in the short term to be there for a next time.

"Increased online presence, flexibility of model, new innovations."

"Opportunities for more collaborative working."

"There is the potential to broaden the platforms used to deliver services, but we need to survive financially in the short-term in order to be able to build this up."

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Q18 What support would you like from Community Links Bromley? If none, please type in N/A

offer clients Will Bromley N community support Fundraising help Networking
 funding new volunteers training access helpful
 opportunities information good grants services

The majority of respondees identified access to information on sources of funding for COVID and non COVID projects and programmes as the most important form of support that Community Links Bromley can provide. Some also highlighted help with bid writing.

The other main request is around help in recruiting volunteers.

There is also an ask around creating more networking opportunities and the promoting of each others service between providers of support within the sector.

Advice on being COVID secure and assessing risk on returning to the working environment is also an ask. There is also a request for support for digital equipment for clients, first aid training for volunteers and a list of trusted contractors.

"Networking and access to potential grant providers."

"News of any new funding they might hear about. Continued help to Attract new volunteers."

Support on how to adapt our work, risk assessment if we decide to resume some of our work and capacity building

"Highlighting other fundraising opportunities, advocacy on our behalf, information and access to networks."

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Q19 If you have any other additional comments about the impact of COVID-19 upon Bromley's civil society, or any observations about the pandemic more generally please comment below.

seen community volunteers family people support
services lockdown need health help impact

In this last question we gave the sector a chance to cover anything that the survey had omitted.

There is a feeling that while some services can be delivered online, it is not a long term solution without a cost in mental health terms, as staff, volunteers and beneficiaries thrive on personal contact. The full impact of this is yet to be realised.

There has also been a realisation that an individuals circumstances can change quite suddenly and place them in a vulnerable position that requires help quickly.

There is a lot of praise for local communities in the way that they came together to support each other.

A final strong message is the Council needs to hear the sector and work with it to ensure that it remains sustainable given the growing reliance on it.

"Expect long term family breakdown across all areas and further demand..."

"New opportunity arises for wider discussion into local authority's growing reliance on the third sector orgs and volunteers to deliver services to people in need."

"This has highlighted the weakness of the funding model to sustain key services in the borough and it's ability to withstand major events."

"We have seen how well the local community has worked together to support one another."

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