



# Community Space Barometer 2

April 2023



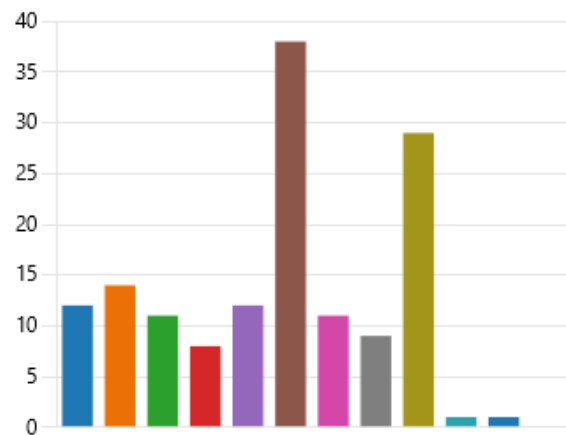
# Community Building Barometer

This research came about as a result of the survey done by Pro Bono Economics and the VCSE Data and Insights National Observatory at Nottingham Trent University in February 2023. Community Matters supported this survey, and probably provided a significant number of respondents. The data from the survey was interesting and covered the whole of the sector. However we thought it would be useful to have a subset that just looked at Community Buildings who have a very specific set of issues tied to their funding model. Using a subset of the State of the Social Sector Survey we surveyed community buildings during a four-week period in March 2023 to look mainly at the current issues with recruiting staff and volunteers.

Firstly, the results

We had 146 responses

● East Midlands	12
● East of England	14
● London	11
● North East	8
● North West	12
● South East	38
● South West	11
● West Midlands	9
● Yorkshire and Humber	29
● Wales	1
● Scotland	1
● Northern Ireland	0



We asked about the number of staff organisations had. 23% had no paid employees at all, using volunteers and possibly some self-employed individuals to undertake cleaning. Many organisations made extensive use of part time roles. The average number of paid employees across the respondents was 5.2, but this is skewed by the 5% of respondents who have over 20 employees

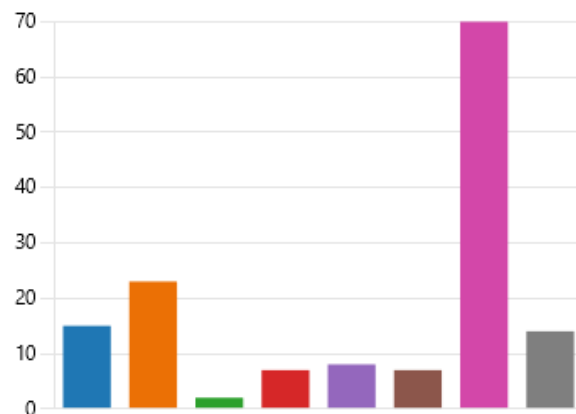
Nearly a third of respondents had recruited in the previous 6 months. We asked how easy recruitment had been. A third of respondents reported that recruitment had been difficult.

● It was very hard to find staff ( po...	10
● It was hard ( but we recruited)	42
● It was neither easy or hard	14
● It was not difficult	12
● We Have not recruited	68



Key issues identified for this were the low pay that organisations were able to offer, and the small number of hours that the roles offered. This is likely to continue to be an ongoing issue for community buildings.

● Low pay	15
● Small number of Hours	23
● Location	2
● Flexibility of hours	7
● Skills shortage	8
● Competition from others in the ...	7
● We have not recruited	70
● Other	14



We also looked at how organisations advertised their vacancies. By far the most popular form of advertising was social media, using Facebook and in some cases LinkedIn. A few organisations made use of online recruitment sites such as Indeed or read, and in one case they used Charity jobs. On the whole, advertising for vacancies was done in house using free opportunities.

We then turned to looking at volunteers who are key to the running of many community spaces. Nearly 60% of respondents had recruited volunteers in the previous six months. Again many organisations are reporting issues with the recruitment of volunteers, with 46% reporting difficulties and 10% saying they were unable to recruit.

**“We have a dedicated staff member whose role is to recruit and support volunteers. They are integral to our organisation and we cannot function without them and have recently set up a working group to focus on recruitment and retention of volunteers”**

● We failed to recruit any volunteers	16
● It was hard ( but we recruited)	52
● It was neither easy or hard	27
● It was not difficult	24
● We have not recruited	27



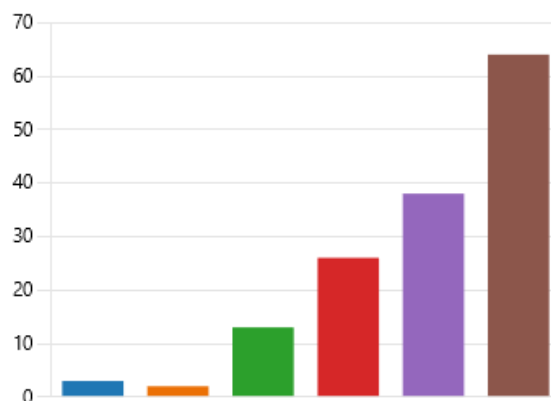
One of the other difficulties is finding volunteers either with the correct skills, or who are willing to undertake specific roles

**“Although we have successfully recruited trustees and volunteers we haven't been able to recruit to the roles we most need. We also have struggled with the capacity of paid staff to support volunteers.**

**We have been trying to recruit to specific admin-based volunteer roles since August and can never seem to fill them. We have many people wanting to support children's activities, mostly mums from the local school.”**

The other issue that the research highlighted was the age profile of volunteers. Although we were aware anecdotally of this, the research showed a stark lack of volunteers in the younger age groups.

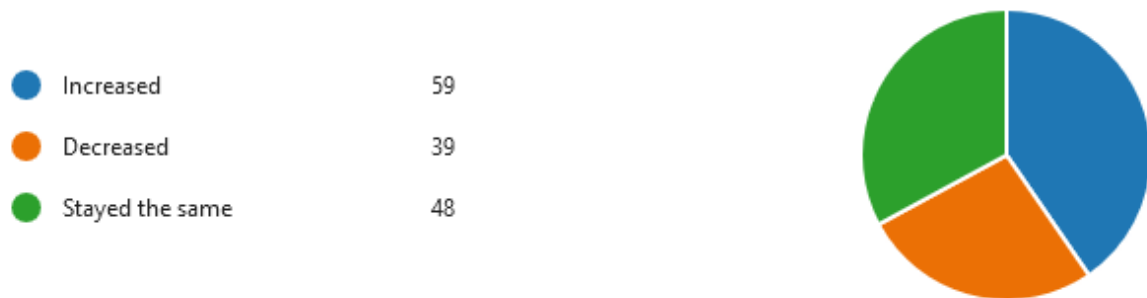
● Under 20	3
● 20 to 30	2
● 30 to 40	13
● 40 to 50	26
● 50 to 60	38
● over 60	64



**“We always need people to help us with gardening. Now that the council aren't cutting grassed areas in the centre of our village, it will look a mess. The 2 gardeners we have are in their 80s and no younger people put themselves forward to help. We also have 14 litter pickers, of whom 7 who litter pick regularly. Our main litter picker is arthritic and in her 70s and finding it difficult, yet nobody else puts themselves forward to help.”**

Again we asked about how organisations recruited volunteers. In most cases it was through their normal communications channels relying on the organisation's newsletters or social media. Only 4% of respondents made use of external services such as their local CVS or Volunteer centre.

Finally, we looked at how healthy bookings are in community buildings since COVID, as this underpins buildings sustainability.



It is heartening to see that in just over a third of cases bookings have increased, although in another third their bookings have decreased. Given the current financial pressures there must be a significant question mark raised over their long term viability.

**“Since COVID some of our regular groups never returned and bookings had dropped however we are starting to see an increase in private bookings as well as new regular groups starting up, some of which are local small businesses.”**

We recognise that volunteers are vital to the continued functioning of community buildings. And as one respondent said:

**“Time available for volunteering is limited for people in the 50 and below brackets due to work and family pressures etc This means that they are more selective about when they are available to volunteer, or what they are willing to do when they volunteer - they want to feel that the limited time they can give is valuable to them and valued by us. We have trouble with work/life/ balance with Trustees as well. Government have said for years that they would like to encourage more volunteering and Trusteeship but have done little to make it accessible. White papers and lords papers come and go with little development or progress. I am looking at the results of the trial of a four day working week - the initial reporting suggests it was positive, and with two bills making their way through Parliament about working time - this could be an opportunity for the Government to make Volunteering a key part of society”**

Perhaps one of the points to take from this is that more needs to be done to promote volunteering to younger age groups, possibly by the use of micro volunteering schemes.

There are a specific set of issues for volunteers in community buildings. In many cases the responsibilities are greater than in other not for profits. As another respondent pointed out:

**“Recruiting people to take responsibility for community buildings is hugely challenging as the volunteers take on considerable responsibility and they are often under-appreciated (eg with hall hirers assuming they are paid and putting unreasonable demands on them). The volunteers we need are people to join the Management Committee who are then the Charity Trustees. This role isn't something people should take on without understanding what the responsibilities are. If they properly understand, it quite reasonably puts people off.”**

To conclude, in many cases the information on the recovery of room bookings shows a possible light at the end of the COVID tunnel. However, the issues about staff recruitment and the recruitment of volunteers poses some serious questions for the future.

There needs to be a better way to promote volunteer opportunities for those organisations running community buildings.

Looking at the age profile of current volunteers, we believe that there is a need to find an effective way to engage younger people to consider volunteering. Perhaps by concentrating on the idea of micro volunteering that might better meet the individual's needs and time constraints. This would help set the attitude that volunteering is something people would want to do.

Community buildings are not alone in struggling to find new trustees. The current trustee recruitment organisation offers a really useful service, but the requirement on organisations managing a building are in part different from other organisations. Perhaps there is now a need to create a central resource to support the Trustee recruitment for Community Buildings.