



'We need to unleash the potential'

Thurrock's Voluntary Sector & TCVS' Role

A Snapshot: Autumn/Winter 2023



Purpose of the Report

- To describe the depth and breadth of the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise (VCFSE - the Sector) in Thurrock
- To articulate the strengths, weaknesses and issues of the Sector
- To make recommendations to statutory partners and CVS about how best to support the sector to thrive in the current context

The background features a photograph of two hands clasped together at the top left, and a row of white paper cutouts of human figures holding hands below. The right side of the slide is decorated with abstract, colorful curved shapes in shades of blue, green, purple, and orange.

Section 1: The Sector in Thurrock

- Constituted Charities
- Social Enterprises
- Informal Groups
- Issues and Challenges for the Sector

Overview of the Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector in Thurrock - Key Facts

Source – Essex Community Foundation/University of Durham Nov 23



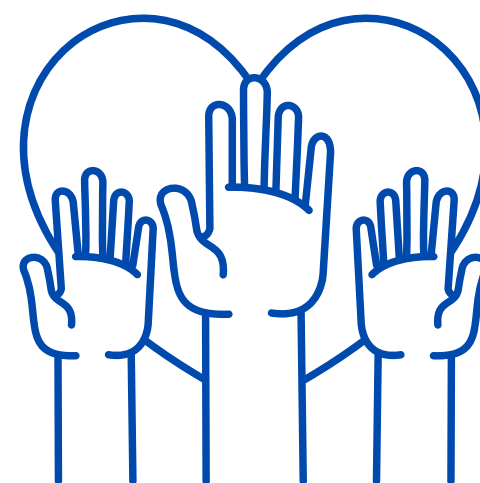
VCFSE Groups in total



FTE workers employed in the VCFSE sector



Regular volunteers in Thurrock

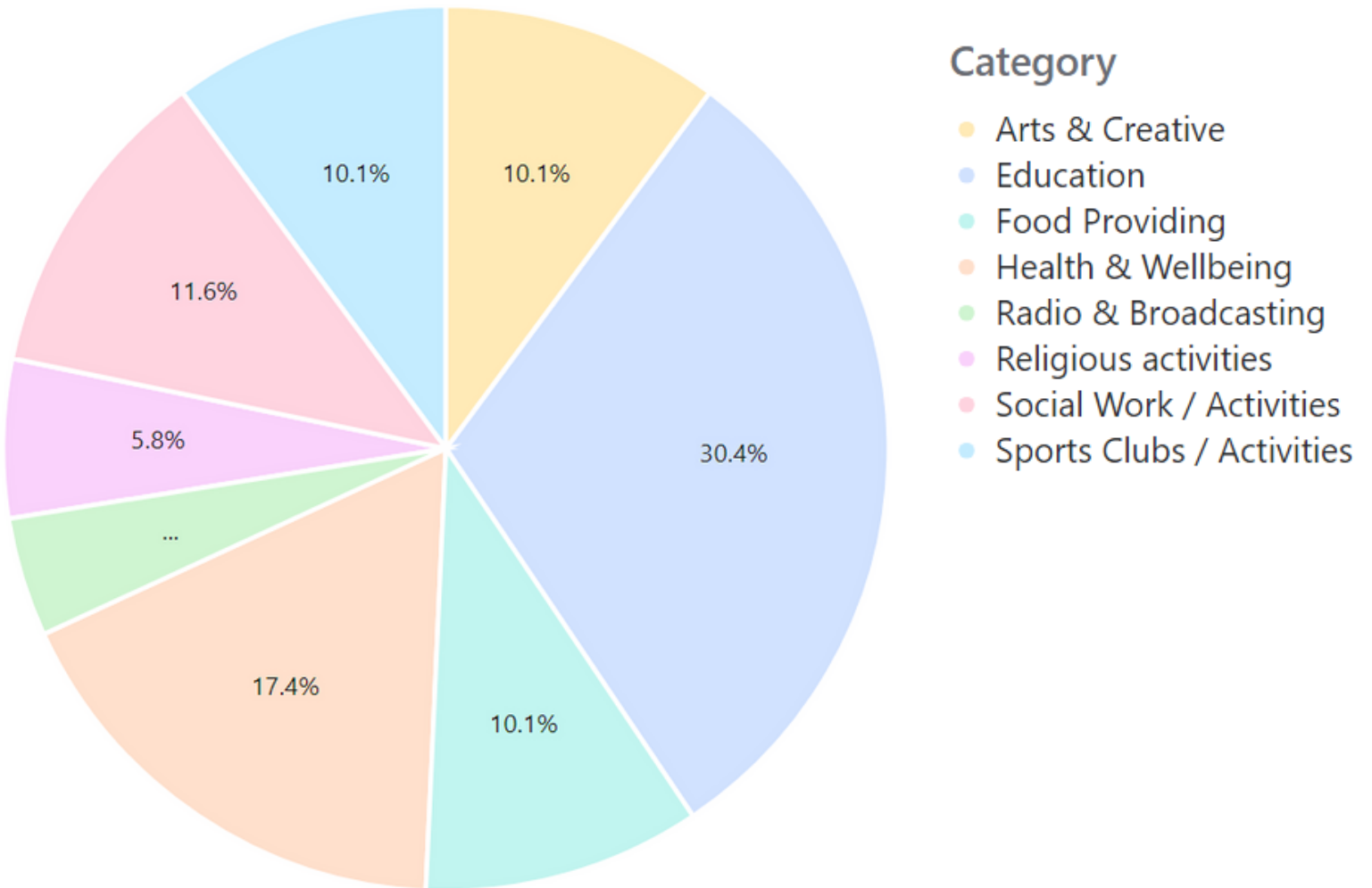


Community Interest Companies in Thurrock

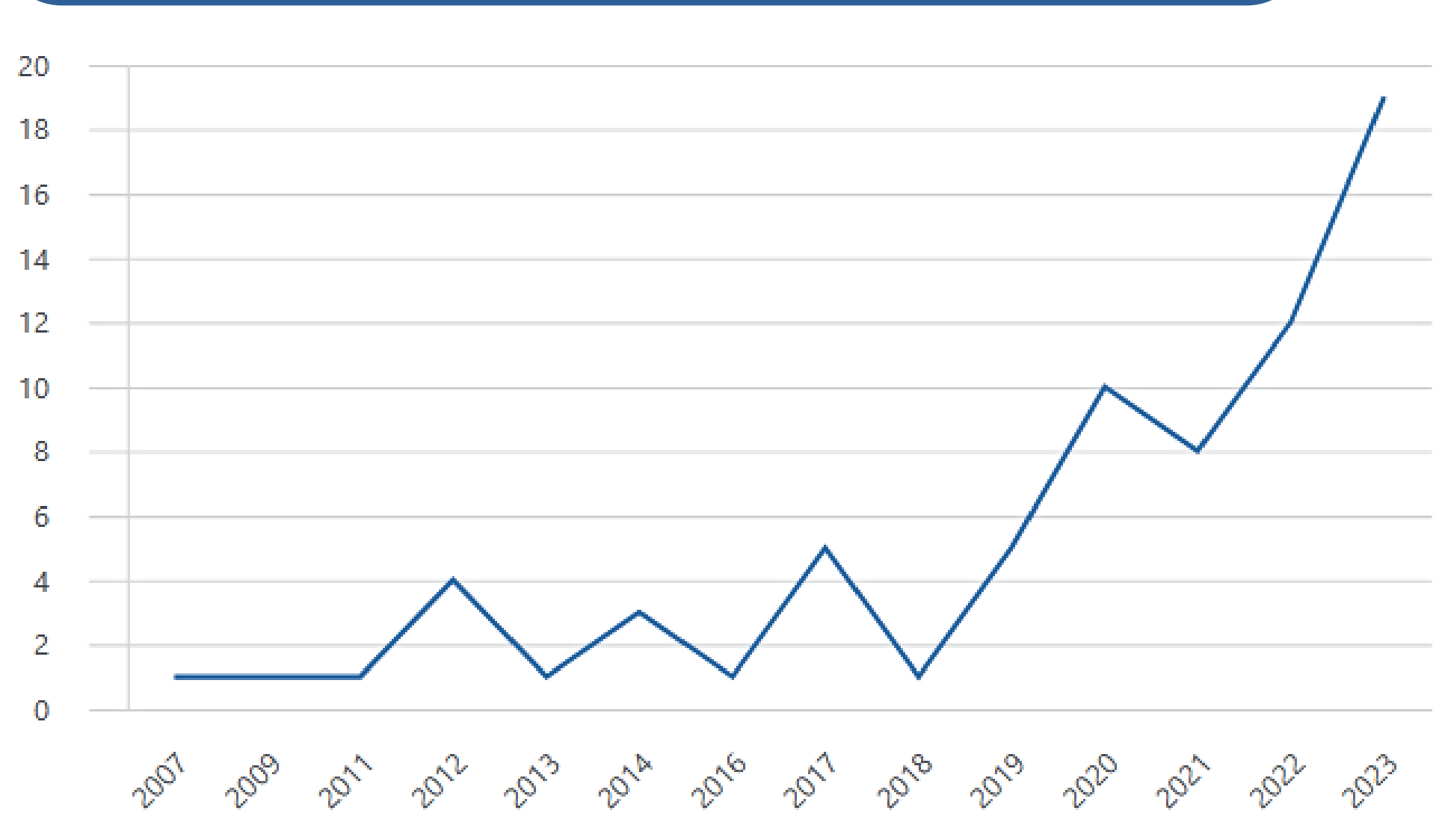
Source: Audit – November 2023



Nature of Business



Number of community interest companies registered each year





Charity Commission Database

Source: Audit - October 2023

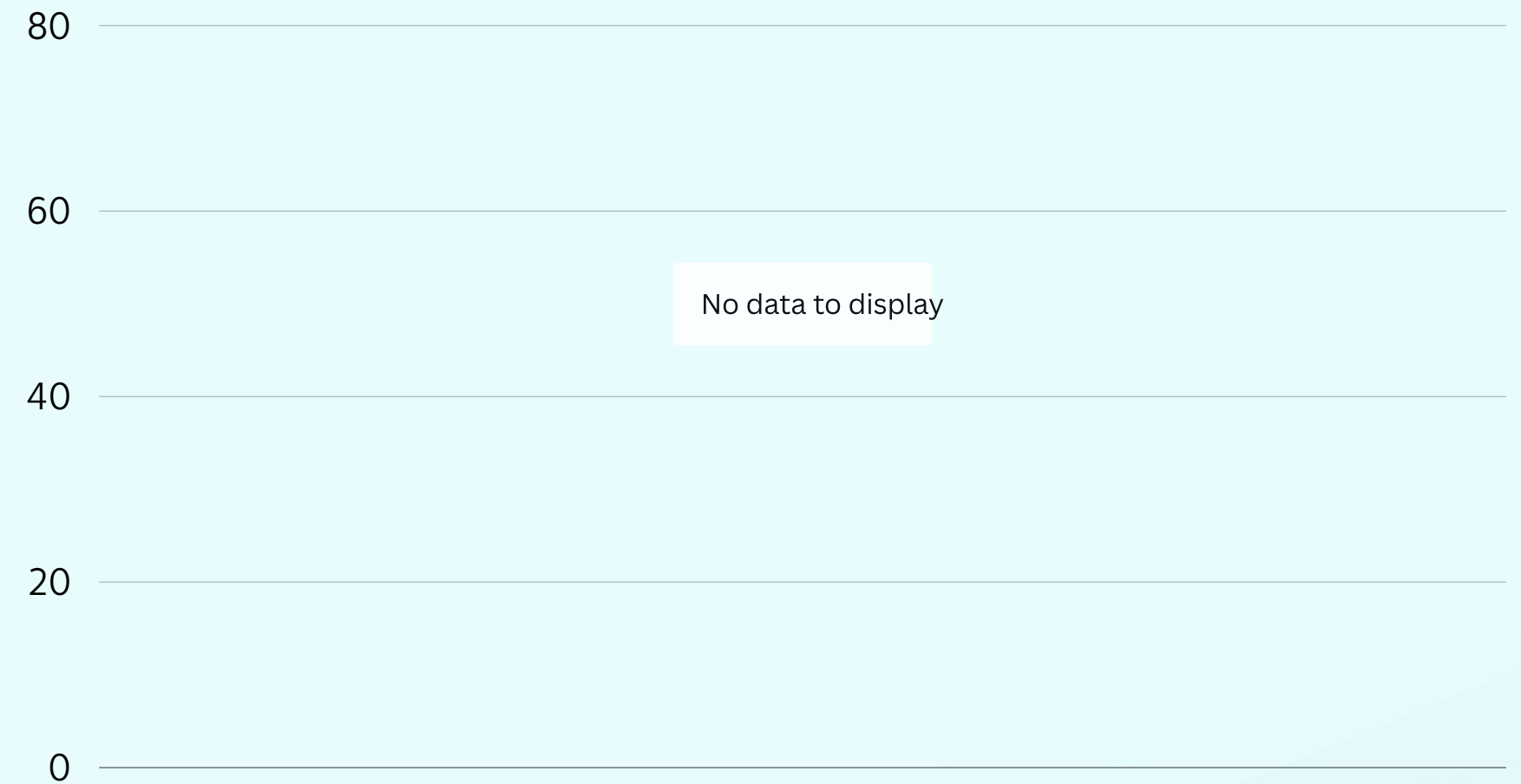


What the Charity does:

No data to display

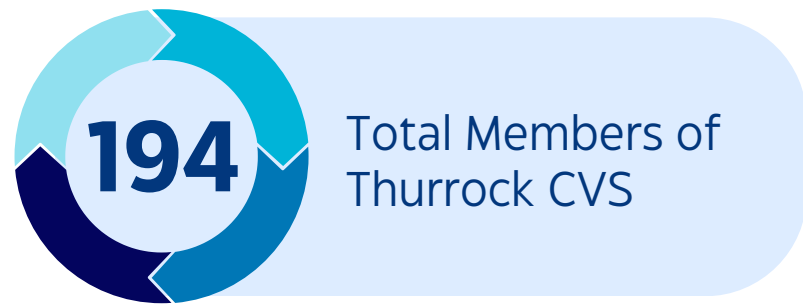
Citizenship,
Development,
Employment

Income (Ending 2022)

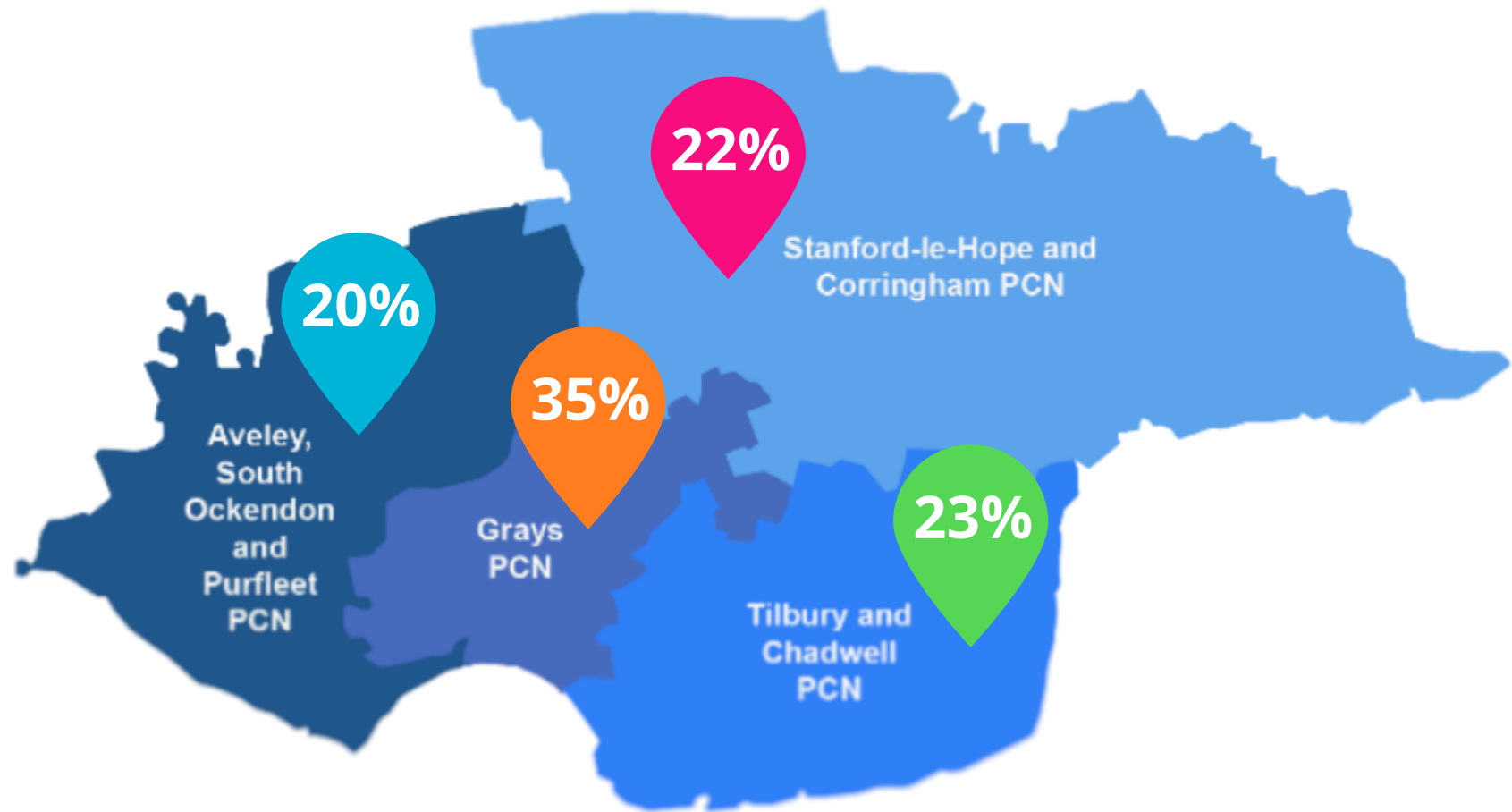




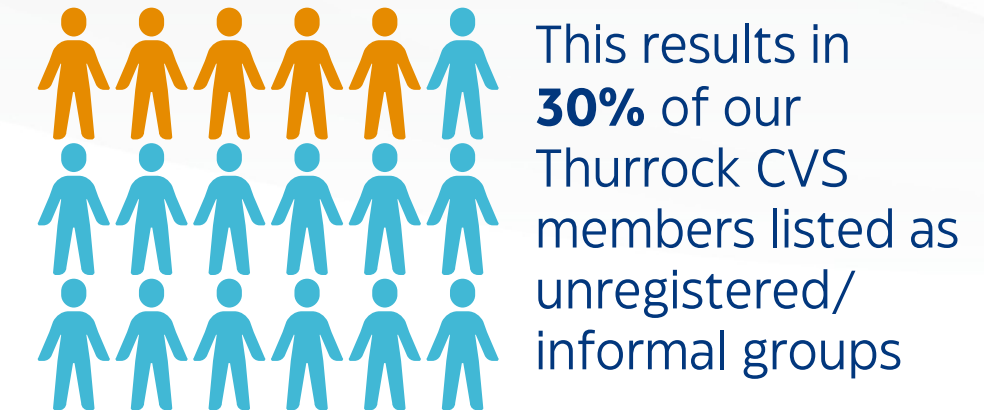
Thurrock CVS Members



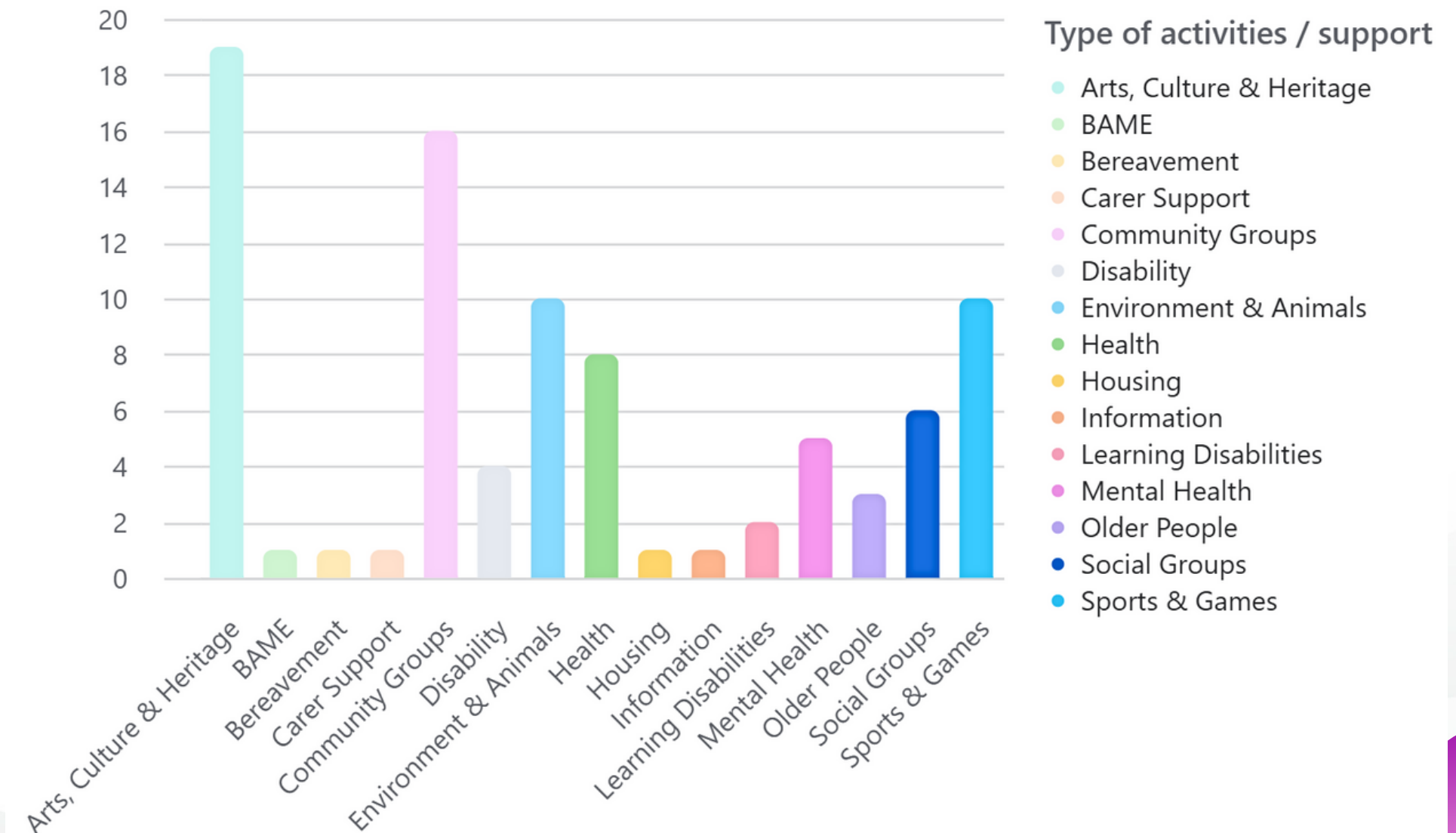
Service / Activity Coverage by PCN Area



Informal / Unregistered Groups



Activities / Support of Informal/Unregistered Groups



What we need less of...



Chasing and nagging (whether that is having to remind/chase council officers, volunteers, utility providers, our cleaner, voluntary group partners.....)



Sharing irrelevant information and navigating onerous reporting systems



Short term, insecure funding. Funding applications – the rolling treadmill



Worrying about how to reach the people with the biggest need and how to publicise our group



Feeling financially insecure and always rushing to get things done at last minute.



Less duplication – copying different activities we already have.



Liaising with bureaucracy – Housing issues / planning

What we need more of...



Funding to plug service gaps:

- Activities for babies/young toddlers and their carers, young people 12+
- Written Advocacy
- Educational Activities to help broaden residents' horizons
- Self-advocacy groups
- Residents bus transport
- Accessing green spaces



More support with:

- Campaigning
- Marketing our groups
- Collaboration and sharing resources
- Growing our charity and social enterprise
- Support with trustees and volunteers



Focus on inequalities:

- Increase scope to more deprived areas in Essex.
- Engaging with a broader range of local communities.

What are the Sector proud of?

“A thriving village shop and Post Office”

“Support during the COVID pandemic and new housing”

“We became part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio”

“Successful campaign to reopen the post office in Corringham”

“A space where all in the community are welcomed to come into, and to use outside of regular working hours”

“Film creative, people and place funding”

“Adapting our offer from lessons during the pandemic and responding government changes.”

“Support and friendship to regulars and occasional ‘newbies’ ”

“Helping to combat isolation, for many this is the only time that they socialise.”

“Platinum Jubilee Pageant with Thurrock participants in June 2022”

“Everything!”

“Maximising and exercising personal choice and control”

“Continued operation of the hall and a village charity for nearly one hundred years”

“Thurrock Voices survived the pandemic and continues to provide opportunities for local residents to enjoy being part of an informal and friendly group”

Section 1: Summary



The VCFSE sector is a large employer in Thurrock providing a huge range of social value



There is a recent and rapid growth in the number of community interest companies registered in Thurrock.



The majority of registered charities in Thurrock have an income of less than **40k** and are therefore run mainly by volunteers



Volunteering alone contributes the equivalent of **£7.5m** to the Thurrock economy



There are few registered charities in the **£70k to £1m** range, possibly indicating the challenge of moving from grants to commissioned income.



There are common challenges regarding rising costs, difficulty recruiting staff and volunteers, increased complexity of service delivery and increased demand for services



Passion to be involved in shaping the future of Thurrock





Section 2: Strengths and Weakness of the Sector

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Opportunities
- Threats

Sector Reflections : Strengths



**Our volunteers,
members and people
are our biggest
strength**



**Our passion and
commitment to our
causes and the
Thurrock community**



**Our connection
to our
community**



**Our
entrepreneurship
and expertise**



**Our creativity
and innovation**

Sector Reflections : Weaknesses



**Financial insecurity
and reduced
investment**



**Difficulty recruiting
volunteers**



**The power/influence
to enact change at a
higher level**

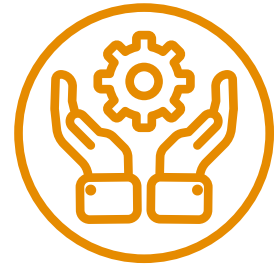


**Financial resilience
to weather cost of
living pressures**

Sector Reflections : Opportunities



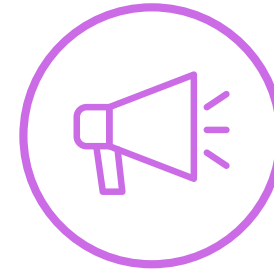
The opportunity is there for the third sector to take a greater leading role in Thurrock.



Opportunity to shape the new council administration and operating model. Opportunity to shape commissioning.



Opportunity of economic growth in Thurrock through FreePort, DP World, population expansion. Exploit our strategic location.



The chance to spread voluntary sector ethos ever wider and influence the statutory service providers as to what communities need from those providers.



The opportunity to influence local decisions, particularly on "green" issue



To support the sector to better measure and understand its impact with strong and clear evidence.

Sector Reflections : Threats



Threats from larger national organisations pushing smaller local organisations out of the market by bidding for funding and undercutting costs then delivering inferior services.



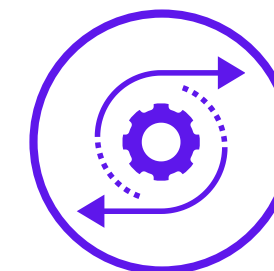
The worry that the statutory service providers are finding it harder to provide top-class services and the voluntary sector is, having to pick up so many of these services.



Threats from funding shortages – reduced grants, more competitive grant application and bureaucratic procurement rules.



Threats from constant changes, the council bankruptcy, changing personnel, the lack of morale in the sector when grants are oversubscribed and new procurement changes.



Uncertainty of future as to whether Thurrock can continue as a unitary authority and impact of that on the sector.



Section 3: Recommendations

This section describes the observations and recommendations on how best the CVS and Statutory Partners can support the sector.

Observation and Recommendations: Statutory Partners



Funding Approach

- Funding is getting more challenging and time consuming. We need funding to follow the service user.
- Competition amongst the sector can reduce collaboration, integration and partnership working.



Commissioning Approach

- For commissioners to work with the sector to identify gaps. A more strategic approach to commissioning the voluntary sector where we match asset and opportunities in Thurrock.
- Work with the sector to better understand gaps in communities and how to encourage those traditionally less likely to start something new or volunteer to get involved in the sector.
- Better understand the nature of the voluntary sector in Thurrock – many organisations are run purely by volunteers and are very informal. They are often surviving from one grant to the next.



Relationship and Trust

- Uncertainty around the future of Thurrock council is causing great anxiety in the voluntary sector – an ongoing dialogue is key to manage anxiety and help understand the opportunities that exist.



Enabling Environment

- Support with data and informatics where the sector may lack capacity
- Opening up the council and NHS support – marketing, data, training, office space...
- Help to bring people together more

Observation and Recommendations: Thurrock CVS

Rebranding and Relationship Building

- To plot and develop systems for monitoring and evaluating the impact of the wider sector the CVS first needs to build trust in and across the sector to share their data, knowledge and learning.
- As part of the re-positioning and re-branding of the CVS as part of its representative role it should promote positive stories from the sector to the local authority, health and across the public – this will support groups who have limited capacity in this area.
- Outreach within the sector – beginning simply by getting out and getting to know the sector beginning with some of the key community champions will positively and slowly build the much-needed trust in the CVS and provide opportunities for communities to feed into the future strategy and position.
- Lack of engagement in the survey and not really knowing what the TCVS is and what it can offer highlights the need for a marketing strategy / getting out there.





Infrastructure Support

- **Membership** – many organisations registered to work in Thurrock with company's house or the charity commission are not members of the CVS. The sector feels less together and formal as other parts of the Essex.
- **Identifying community gaps** – catalysing new opportunities, bring groups together and making new things happen driven by communities.
- **Volunteers** – those accessing volunteers are, on the whole, not using the CVS to recruit. Finding and upskilling trustees is also a big challenge.
- **Training priorities** – focus on training priorities such as funding, income generation, demonstrating your impact, communications, social media.
- **Social enterprise sector** – how can the CVS better support the growth in the social enterprise sector?
- **Financial sustainability** – there is a lack of a central point of information for funding opportunities alongside the necessary support to successfully apply for grants. Opportunity to build peer support networks.

Representation, Partnership & Collaboration

- Thurrock is an area of many different places; different identities and different people – this was clear from the engagement with those who got involved in this work. By bringing together the sector better in a more regular, perhaps informal way through activities such as networking events it feels that this would strengthen the role of the CVS as a facilitating catalyst and build connections that enhance knowledge and could reduce future inequalities across the borough. Without coming together this will negatively impact on the growth and potential of the sector in Thurrock – trust between organisations, partnerships and peer support across them is vital to build and support those with ever-growing complex needs, holistically.
- Technology and access to the digital world when mentioned was described as more of an issue for beneficiaries of organisations rather than the organisations themselves. This might be due to many being volunteer led and extremely passionate – getting things done in their own time with their own resources. Access to funding for IT infrastructure and data management is a big barrier – this is something worth further exploring as many of the smaller groups are likely not aware of what might be available to them as well as the risks of handling data. Too this would have an impact on the ability of groups being able to share their impact – many completed surveys to say they don't know how many beneficiaries they have.
- More partnerships – how to bring everyone together – role of infrastructure support to catalyse and inspire where there are community gaps.





Section 4: Methodology

This section shows how we developed the report and includes brief case studies from the sector detailing their work in Thurrock.

Data Collection

No data to...

Third Sector Trends,
2022 survey data.



Office for National Statistics (ONS) and government department statistics on local demographics, health, social and economic wellbeing in areas.



National data sets on VCSE finances including reports from the Charity Commission, the NCVO UK Civil Society Almanac and 360Giving.



Charity Commission database and Companies House.



Thurrock VSCE Senior Leadership Group.



7 individual interviews



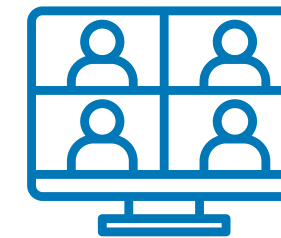
17 survey responses



Responses gathered at December networking event and input from Senior Leadership Team meeting in November



Thurrock CVS worth of the sector report 2023.



An independent associate of the CVS carried out the interviews with support from a volunteer who provided the quantitative data.

“Thank you to everyone who supported this study – especially the volunteers and team at TCVS and those who participated in the focus groups and interviews. Without you this would not have been possible.”

“I'm not sure that the members of Thurrock Association of Forums know how TCVS can help them.”

Areas of Potential Support

- Encouraging banks to work better with voluntary sector organisations.
- Making grant applications
- Sourcing free or reasonably-priced and accessible venues for Open meetings of Forums within their location. Some Forums are spending more than their total admin money on paying for a meeting venue. (The Beehive is busy and out of budget.)
- Streamline the newsletter with subheadings that can drop down to e.g. "Want to volunteer? Events"? Etc.
- Link better with the council on how information is shared via email as information is currently being missed.



Thurrock
Association
of Forums

Interview: Thurrock Association of Forums

- There is confusion around the TCVS offering e.g. are the Healthwatch team and the social prescribers employed by TCVS, or NHS, or social services, or are they independent?
- Various projects pop up but we are not entirely sure how they relate to our communities.
- Each Forum has their own needs: some run community cafes and other projects where they need volunteers, others concentrate on assessing local planning applications and responding accordingly; they engage with their local councillors and provide feedback to the council of matters affecting their community; some hold events and/or regular open meetings.
- Sometimes there are speakers from the council, police or other organisations; standing items on the agenda are the Local Plan, S106 contributions, Lower Thames Crossing, feedback from the council, as well as the usual minutes, matters arising etc.
- TAF share notifications of each others' events and exchange ideas/good practice.
- TAF's only income is the recently agreed admin money from the council. But the TAF bank account is used as a holding bank for any Forums who are changing banks or are new and have not yet set up their own bank account.
- TAF provides a collective voice for all the Forums, and the delegates are used by various authorities for consultation.
- Previously there was a budget of £10k available for TAF – there is now £600 which held by the council and can be used for activities.
- It is getting harder to get volunteers hence the work has been scaled back.

Interview: Thurrock LGBT+ (small charity)



“Lots of voluntary groups think we don't really deserve the funding, we did too - but we do!”

- TCVS recognised there wasn't a voice for the LGBTQ+ community and got us going through the CEO and infrastructure support functions helping us finding out how to set up and find funding. Templates for the constitution and the offer to read through a funding form and make suggestions has been really helpful.
- The TCVS newsletter is a great resource for us to reach a wider community as well. We put content into it on our events to promote them through the newsletter. It reaches lots of people not just those interested in what we do.
- To apply for funding we really need a book-keeper and accounts being done – could the CVS support us in bringing groups together to access such resources?
- The CVS created our logo for us and ran useful training with the local college on how to utilise social media and canva – we'd like more on marketing.

“When those coming to the events tell you what it means to them I enjoy it. But when there's lots to do it can be overwhelming. As we have grown it's got harder.”



Interview: Interview: Happy Go Lucky Families (new group)

“There’s no opportunities and skills are low – if you’ve got to feed your kids you have to survive. Survival mode makes it hard to trust. We need to help more people. Politics and individual ego gets in the way.”

- We began in April 2023 by supporting working families who have children with disabilities and special needs – over time more and more people have asked for support. We are wholly volunteer run and led.
- We collect donations of clothes and household items and deliver them for free. Larger items are moved on demand due to storage.
- TCVS supported us with a stall at the big lunch event in the summer holidays where we had clothes, toys, baby bits etc. and helped us to develop our structure – there are 5 Directors and 10 volunteers. 3 tonnes of clothes would have been recycled – there are over 600 on the FB page, where individuals can request support.
- We run tea and coffee mornings with 30 attendees; it’s been a tough year for people so these included money management; debt strategy; trading and investments. This was funded by the college and ASDA who paid for DSL training and our safeguarding lead. We used the rest for petrol, cleaning and an arts and craft event. Most of the grants come through the CVS and we put things out in their newsletter.
- The families are a big range of disabilities and challenges– we include everyone in what we do.
- We are a non-profit organisation limited by guarantor – we plan to move to registered charity status in the new year.

“People have no jobs – policing has been massively reduced and there’s no patrols. People are getting poorer and poorer and then they turn to crime. I saw a fight outside my house. There’s no police stations and people don’t feel safe.”

Interview: Thurrock & Brentwood MIND (Registered Charity)



MIND
Thurrock
and Brentwood

“We would like the CVS to be more active with volunteering – support with recruitment, finding trustees with a service that can skill up people interested in being trustees.”

- We supported 15,000 people last year – crisis situations are ever increasing – we provide early intervention through to crisis response and residential services in partnership and collaboration.
- We have not had much time to connect locally since covid, they are mostly the larger groups – partnerships and accessing funding is challenging and time consuming for smaller groups. Small groups need support to apply for funding, processes too need to be simplified to be accessible for them too. Mentoring is needed – the Senior Leadership Team Network might support this with MIND as a key mental health lead.
- We would like to be more connected – we are used to partnership working – we need to change the culture – there are large groups locally that we refer to but not the other way. The CVS needs to support changing the culture and reduce silo working. Small groups need help and we would be prepared to work with them where they bring value by linking up on contracts and applications.
- We made a funding application with the CVS – there was lots of paperwork which would be challenging for a small application.
- There have been instances where the CVS has had a conflict of interest against other members of the sector when applying for funding especially with the local authority. Trust around this and clarity in the role of the CVS needs to be restored and communication external and across the sector improved. This has caused long-term challenges in accessing funding for all – especially where the CVS had a very close working relationship with the local authority.
- The CVS can be a provider where there is a gap in provision that no one else can fill and/or a catalyst for filling community gaps.
- Match-making – if TCVS knows who the organisations are and then look at the opportunities that come out and join them together with capacity building support where needed.



“They are not my go to place; they haven’t been for years I would like that to change.”

Interview: One Community (Registered Charity)

- TCVS should diversify their income beyond the local authority to secure their future and redefine their relationship with them. At times residents have not known the difference between the CVS and the council. As a small organisation but we’ve not had a lot of support from the CVS. We too know we need to diversify our income and invest in income generation – we are currently recruiting a business development role and always have someone with these skills as a trustee.
- The CVS’ plans and delivery needs to be focused on what is in the best interests of the sector (be in tune with what members want) and community – a rebranding exercise could also support this. The CVS are meant to resource the sector not do it themselves.
- We are seeing more people coming to us as local authority services are reduced. People will tell you what they want, we need to listen to people – all our programmes come from the community.
- The CVS need to separate themselves between the council and the CVS. People good at writing bids – in my time there – there was too much reliance on the council and not enough alliance with the sector.
- We like the funding tip offs on the TCVS website – support with applications is missed.
- There are lots of opportunities within industry locally, but people don’t have the functional and life skill sets (generations of families have never worked) – our programmes are bespoke, we don’t have traditional volunteers – we have a VIP programme that enables people to work out what they are good at and develop opportunities from there to build pathways to long term employment.
- We have connected with the volunteer centre –however our bespoke approach to volunteering means we don’t advertise roles in the usual sense which make it challenging to work with the them. Any processes around volunteer recruitment need to be less rigid.
- We have a young population and suicide is common for under 25s. If someone lacks paper qualifications, they think they have nothing to offer – we empower people to see the skills they do have and encourage them to support others.
- We are a community anchor organisation – we would like bigger space – there are lots of spaces, but they are often not welcoming or feel inclusive.
- Suggestions: networking events, seeking volunteers, digital action plan, support for social enterprises...

