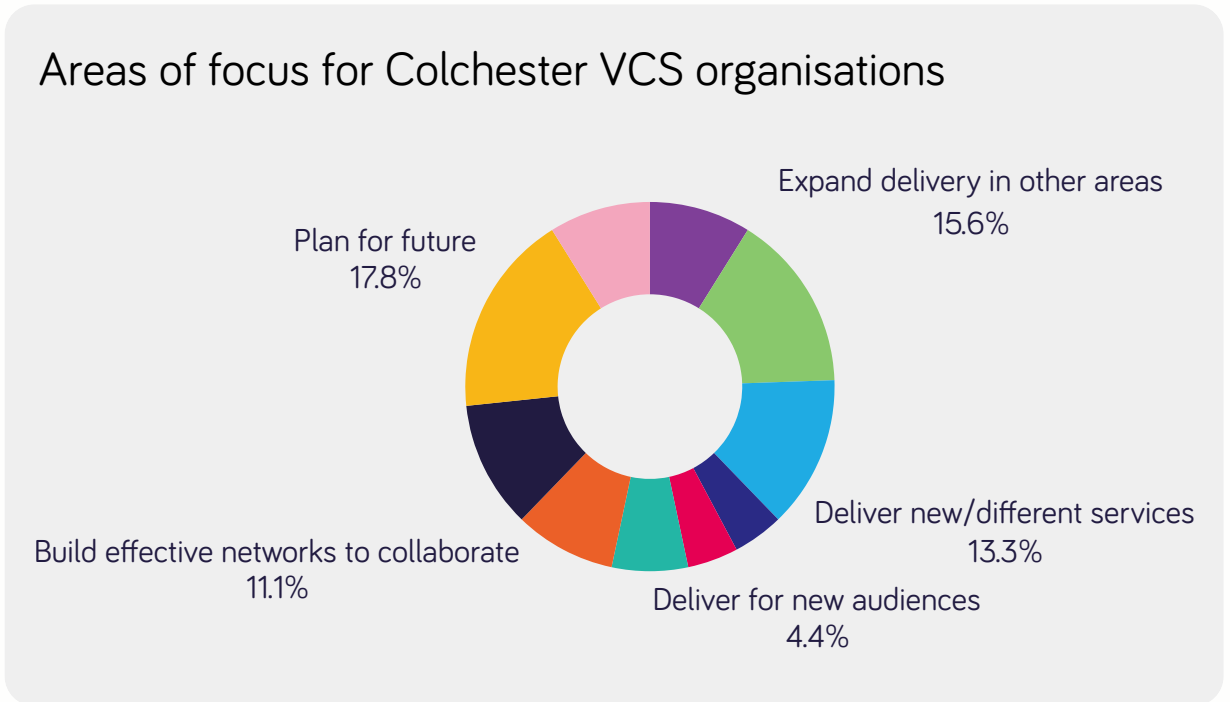
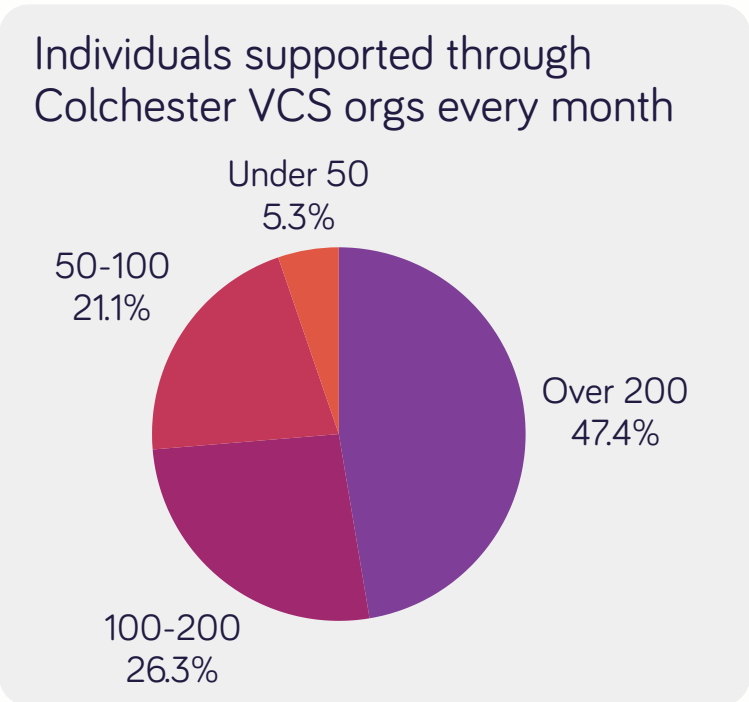
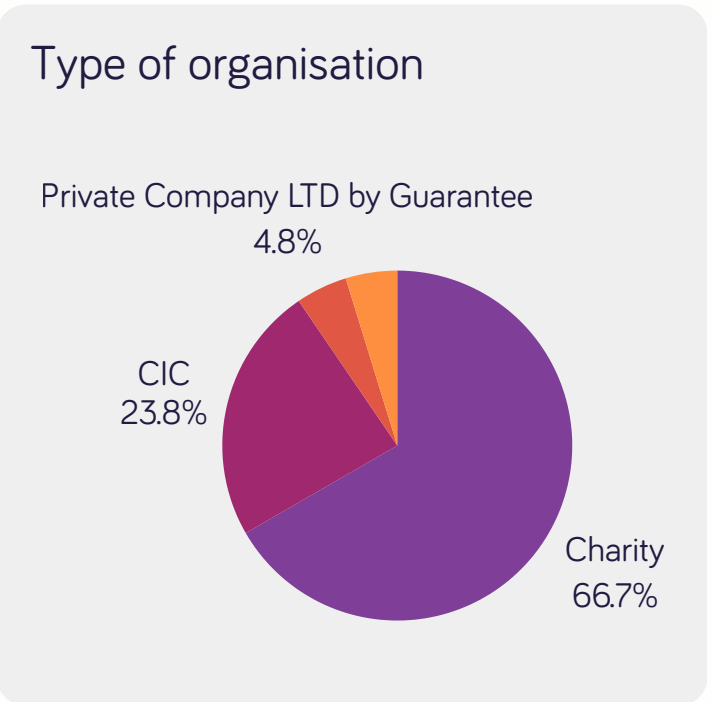
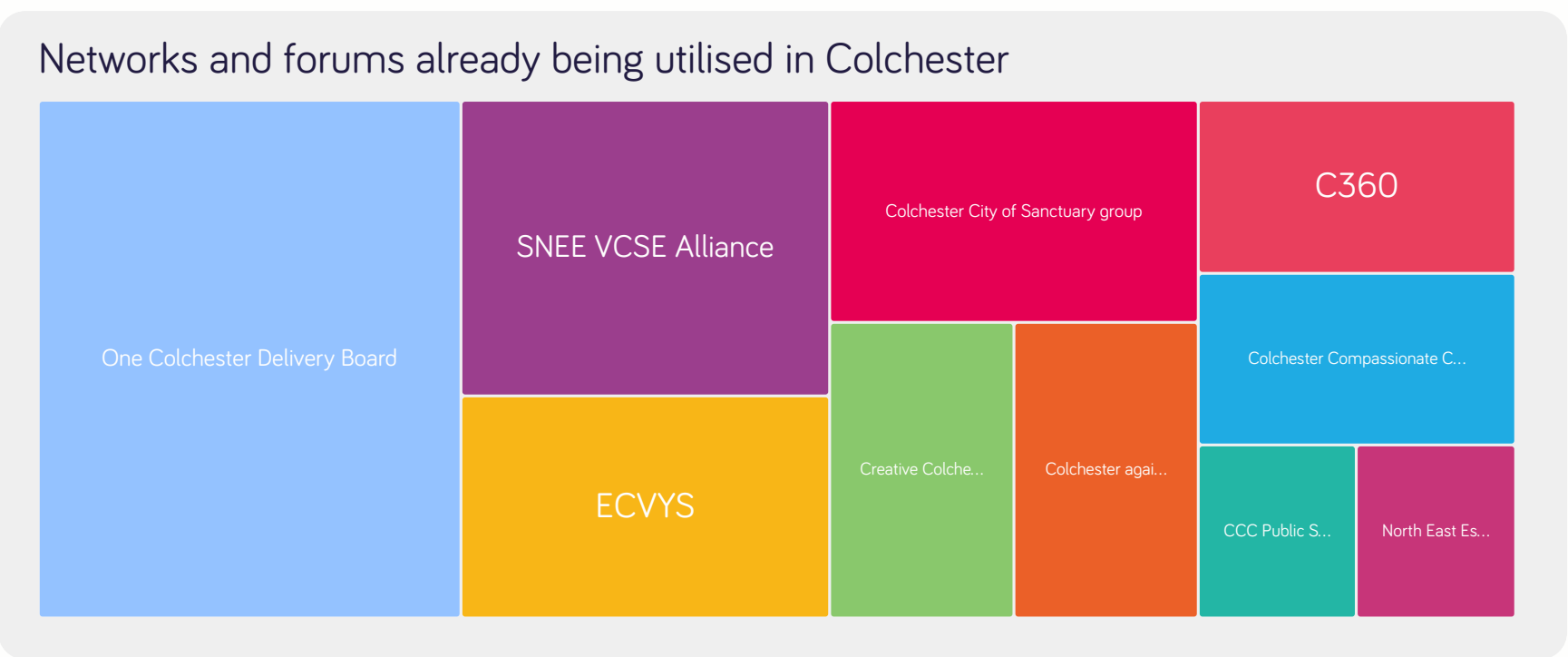
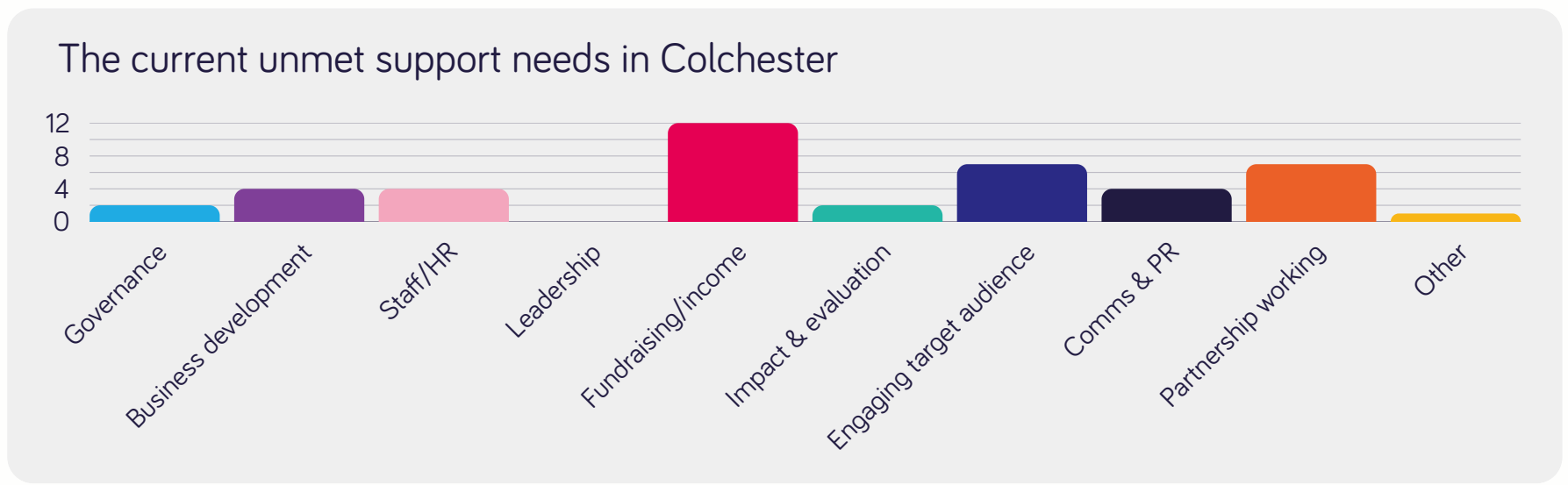
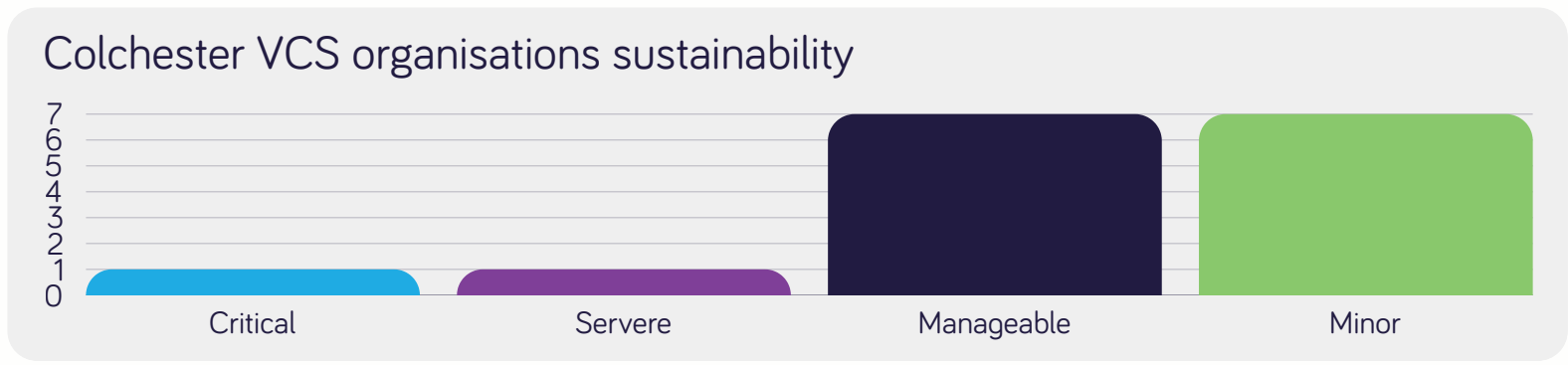




This place plan, is based off of **21** VCS organisations completing the survey.





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Fundraising and income generation is the most common unmet support need, followed by **engaging target audience** and **partnership working**. Practical support needs might need to look like;

Learning opportunities:

- Diversifying income
- Fundraising skills and delivering effective campaigns
- Developing effective networks
- Asset-based-community-development
- Trustee recruitment and developing highly skilled boards
- Access to practical training and development opportunities
- Leadership Support/Mentoring

Developing Networks:

- Funders/Commissioners (SPoC)
- Meaningful networking spaces
- Leaders/Founders support spaces
- Local business relationships
- Community Impact

Bespoke support might include:

- Provide the right level of support at the right time
- Matchmaking and brokering service with other local organisations - Peer-to-Peer mentoring

Community Participation:

This needs to link with the growing and changing populations and demographics. This area needs to be linked to the wider Alliance Place Plans with a coordinated approach across the system to being community led.

What does the survey not tell us? What does their response tell us beneath the surface?

Many groups and organisations have expressed a desire to expand their delivery into new areas, services, and audiences. However, they also highlight significant challenges, including the lack of time to plan for the future, difficulties in recruiting staff and volunteers, and ensuring a quality experience for those involved.

While we would expect leadership, business planning, and recruitment and retention to be higher priorities, these organisations seem to be caught in a cycle of needing funding to deliver more services rather than being able to focus on strategic organisational and business development.

This raises the question of whether funders and commissioners are creating an environment that prioritises immediate service delivery over long-term organisational sustainability. Additionally, it might be that leaders of VCSE organisations only know what they know, and there is a need to upskill them to see the bigger picture.





This place plan, is based off of insight from **One Colchester**

What else have we found/heard?

Funding

Many voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations struggle with securing funding, particularly for core operational costs. While project-based funding is more readily available, it often leaves essential day-to-day expenses, such as staff salaries, rent, and infrastructure, unsupported. This creates financial instability and forces organisations into a continuous cycle of searching for new funding sources to stay afloat. Long-term sustainability remains a pressing concern, as reliance on short-term grants makes strategic planning difficult.

Quality Leadership and Training

Quality training that genuinely improves practice is highly valued, as is support for leadership development to navigate the challenges of short-term funding cycles and frequent staff changes. Many organisations require training in areas like safeguarding, mental health first aid and digital skills. However, cost barriers and limited availability of training providers create difficulties in upskilling teams effectively, leading to gaps in knowledge and capabilities.

What support would you value right now and in the future?

Reliable Long-Term Funding

Organisations consistently highlight the need for stable and predictable funding sources. This allows them to plan for the future, sustain their operations, and expand their services without the constant uncertainty of financial instability.

Effective Multiagency Working and Partnerships

Support in fostering partnerships and enhancing multiagency cooperation can lead to more comprehensive and coordinated service delivery.

Training for Staff and Volunteers

Equipping workforce with the skills to meet needs within their communities. Investing in staff helps in creating a supportive environment and improves the overall well-being of both workforce and recipients.

Recruitment and Retention

Assistance in their workforce planning, attracting volunteers and ensuring they have a positive and rewarding experience, which in turn helps in maintaining a steady volunteer base.

Have you accessed anything past or present that has been particularly useful?

Organisations have found several key elements particularly useful, including forming partnerships and networks, collaborating with various agencies, and working together. They have benefited from signposting, understanding, and multiagency efforts. Financial support has come through funding groups, donations, and resources. Additionally, training courses, such as those offered by C360, have been valuable. Overall, these efforts have been supported by the City Council and other organisations.

01



03



02



04



Top challenges:

Workforce

Recruiting and retaining both paid staff and volunteers remains a critical issue for organisations in Colchester. Finding individuals with the right skills and availability can be challenging. Effective matchmaking is essential to bridge this gap. Additionally, it is crucial to equip leaders and people managers with the skills needed to address these workforce challenges, ensuring they can attract, retain, and support a diverse and capable team to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Networking

Given the city's rapid growth and diverse communities, enhanced networking and collaboration are essential to foster knowledge-sharing and peer support among organisations facing similar challenges. Building a more cohesive support network would help organisations navigate challenges more effectively and avoid duplication of efforts. Commissioners and funders play a crucial role in creating the conditions that allow for better partnership work, ensuring that organisations can collaborate and support each other to meet the evolving needs of the community.



What's the plan going forward?

Urgent things we must do:

Continue listening work across Colchester, to help populate a more detailed picture with support of C360, Neighbourhoods and City Council.

Embed Place Plan and approach in to local Alliance Place Plan

- Present to SNEE VCSFE Assembly
- Present to Place Partnership Group
- Present to Colchester Health & Wellbeing Board

Gain a deeper understanding of the existing networks and forums within the system, their aims and objectives, current active members, and potential for growth to better meet the needs of partnership working challenges.

Gain a deeper understanding of VCSE organisations providing support, mentoring, funding, guidance, or training to other VCSEs, to better understand the nature of their offers, how these are being resourced, and what ongoing support they may need. This will help ensure that support is coordinated, inclusive, and accessible.

Leadership, People and Learning

Leadership & Organisational Development

- **Leadership Upskilling:** Equip leaders with strategic thinking, change management, and resilience skills to move beyond reactive service delivery.
- **Trustee & Governance Support:** Provide training and peer learning for trustees to strengthen governance and accountability.
- **Business Planning & Sustainability:** Help organisations develop long-term plans, diversify income, and build reserves.

Workforce & Volunteer Development

- **Recruitment & Retention Support:** Offer tools, training, and matchmaking services to help organisations attract and retain staff and volunteers.
- **People Management Training:** Develop leaders' and managers' skills in supervision, wellbeing, and inclusive leadership.
- **Volunteer Experience Design:** Support organisations to create meaningful, rewarding volunteer roles that encourage long-term engagement.

Skills & Training Access

- **Core Training Provision:** Facilitate access to safeguarding, mental health first aid, digital skills, and other essential training.
- **Barrier Reduction:** Explore ways to subsidise or pool training resources to overcome cost and access issues.
- **Quality & Relevance:** Ensure training is practical, up-to-date, and tailored to the real-world challenges VCSEs face.

Strengthening Partnerships:

Collaboration & Connection

- **Peer Networks & Forums:** Develop spaces for VCSEs to truly connect, share learning, and collaborate.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Facilitate stronger links between VCSEs, statutory services, and funders to align efforts and reduce duplication.
- **Knowledge Sharing Platforms:** Develop digital or physical hubs for sharing resources, opportunities, and good practice.

Funding & Investment Readiness

- **Funding Navigation Support:** Help organisations identify and apply for appropriate funding opportunities.
- **Investment in Core Capacity:** Advocate for and facilitate funding that supports development functions, not just project delivery.
- **Data & Insight Sharing:** Support organisations to collect and use data to demonstrate impact and influence policy.

Universal Offer

- Ensure communications are shared locally for access to Essex-wide resources, learning and training opportunities.
- Provide first point of contact for VCS support
- Identify bespoke support through a scored application process to identify key models for local needs.
- Provide insight and support needs to Your Community Essex elements
- Continue to gain insight and develop plans



Sources:

OneColchesterSingle Point of Commissioning (SPoC)Report

NEE Community Asset Mapping

Learning Partnership with University of Essex



The insight and research highlights several key challenges and areas for improvement for the Voluntary, Community, and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in Colchester. The insight emphasises the need to better align services with the changing and diverse population needs. It also points out the tension between building resilience for individual organisations versus the sector as a whole, suggesting that competitive funding environments can hinder collaboration. Network assessments reveal that smaller, often unregistered groups lack connections, which limits their ability to access support and partnership opportunities.

Additionally, it has been noticed that there is a high prevalence of CICs in Colchester and the funding challenges they face due to their legal structure. The insight calls for a clear understanding of place in policy and community contexts and stresses the importance of strengthening the VCSE sector's positioning and relationships to achieve long-term impact. To address these challenges, a shared approach across the system is recommended, potentially involving a system-level working group.

Given Colchester's rapid growth and increasing diversity, it's crucial to ensure that services and the VCSE sector are equipped to meet the needs of more diverse communities and families. This requires strategic planning, enhanced collaboration, and targeted support to build a resilient and responsive VCSE sector.