



CHALLENGING AUSTERITY

May 2016

The impact of austerity measures on women's voluntary community organisations and the response of the women's sector

[Dr Sue Robson](#)

Associate Researcher

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PART ONE: THE IMPACT OF AUSTERITY MEASURES UPON WOMEN'S VCOs

1. INTRODUCTION

Support services for women are under threat from an unprecedented level of public spending cuts, with many organisations losing staff, reducing services or closing altogether.

This is a report of an analysis of a survey of women's voluntary and community organisations (VCOs) across the UK conducted by Women's Resource Centre (WRC) during April/ May 2016. WRC has gathered this evidence to demonstrate how far the cuts have destabilised the women's voluntary and community sector. The survey was conducted anonymously so that no data, information or comment can be attributed to any one organisation.

The report is organised into two parts: Part One analyses the survey data in relation to the impact of austerity and associated spending cuts upon the women's sector, Part Two begins to map out a manifesto for the women's sector to realise a five year vision for a diverse and energetic women's sector that is recognised as leading the struggle toward equality for women in the UK.

The findings of this report will inform WRC's future campaigning lobbying work and its strategic planning processes.

2. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY

There were 129 responses to the survey from across the UK, with the majority of responses (41%) coming from London and a further 16%, national organisations in England. responses from the regions and the other four nations was more limited, especially from Northern Ireland and Scotland. Two organisations did not state where they were based.

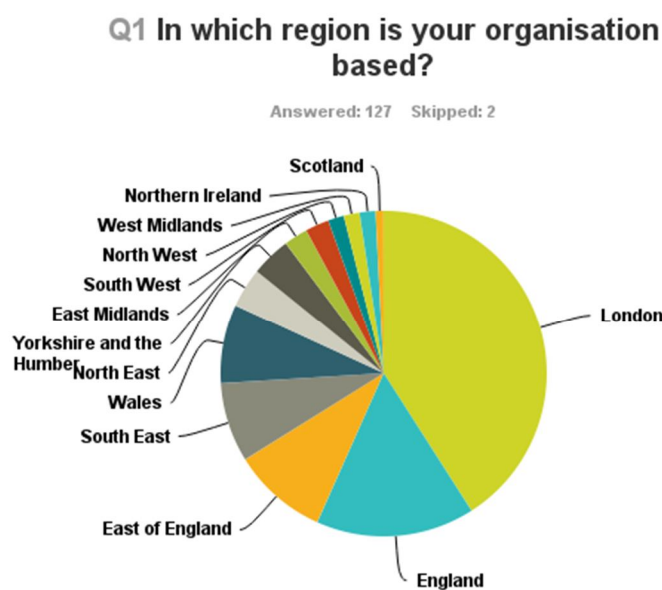
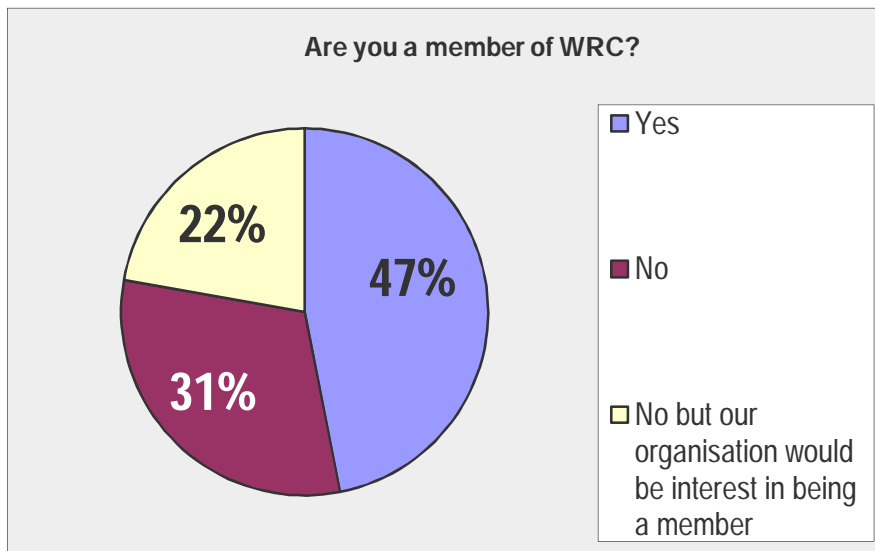


Figure 1: Illustrating regional and national distribution of survey respondents

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
London	41%	52
England	16%	20
East of England	9%	12
Wales	8%	10
South East	8%	10
Yorkshire and the Humber	4%	5
North East	4%	5
South West	2%	3
East Midlands	2%	3
West Midlands	2%	2
Northern Ireland	2%	2
North West	2%	2
Scotland	1%	1

Table 1: Number and percentages of survey respondents regionally and nationally

47% of those who completed the survey were WRC members and a further 22% were interested in becoming members.



Of the 129 responses, 63% (79) were from frontline women’s organisation running services for women and a further 7 (6%), women only projects within larger service. 16% (20) of the survey respondents were from second tier women’s organisations that offer support to women’s VCOs . Another four stated that it was both front line and second tier (one of these was a second tier VAWG perpetrator programme that also ran a national helpline).

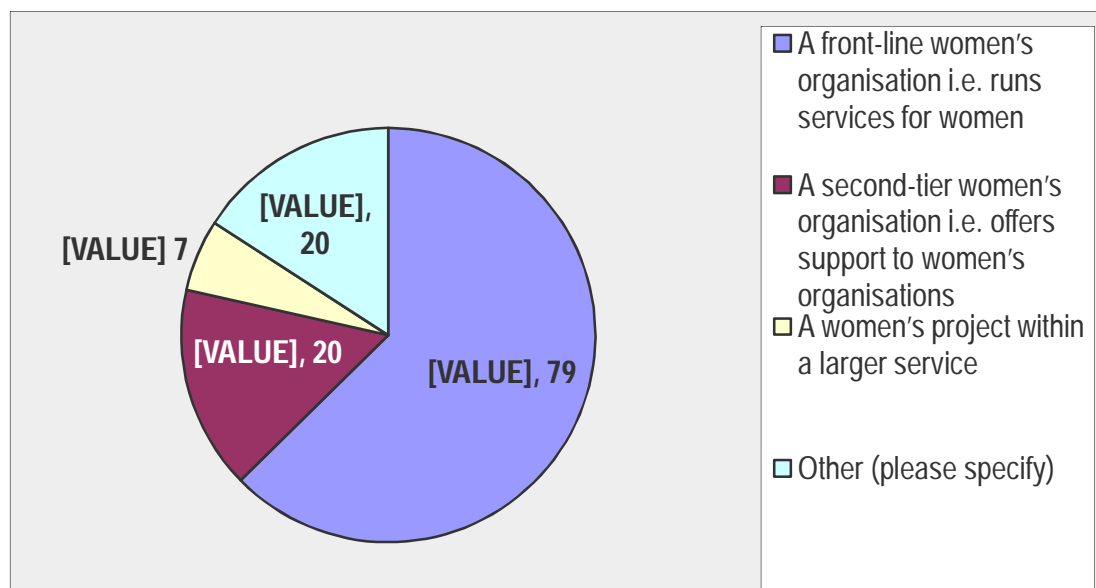


Figure 2: Illustrating number and percentages of organisation type that responded to the survey

The remaining of the 16% (20) that stated they were from other organisations, 7 of these were led by and for women.

- Workshops & services for women as part of a wider range of services/projects we provide.
- Specialist women's law team
- Organisation with special focus on women within wider population
- An online campaigning group
- a social enterprise set up for low income/unwaged women of older working age
- A community organisation, founded and run by women, providing opportunities to the community to improve lives
- A charity that runs women's music festival.

The remaining 8 were generic, or mixed organisation with a women only focus of some kind or another:

- We are the UK affiliate of an organisation for older people. We support programmes for older women and men, and carry out advocacy, communications and fundraising in the UK to support this work.
- Non gender specific project with around 95% of service users are women
- Health including mental health
- Front-line service for those living with HIV or affected by HIV
- counselling service for women, children and men
- Anti FGM charity focussing on research, advocacy and education
- An LGBT service delivery organisation with a specific Women's Programme
- A second-tier Advice organisation and a percentage of our membership are front line advice provider's women organisations.

One respondent was an individual that worked with women on a micro level since the Women's Project she worked for closed.

There was wide range of variance between the sizes of the organisations who responded to the survey, they worked with between 30 to 20,000 women in 2015 to 2016.

Between them the second tier women's sector agencies were supporting 7,969 women's VCOs.

We asked survey respondents to tell us if more than 50% of their service users identify with a particular community or group. **The results illustrate the breadth and diversity of the UK women's sector.**

Almost half (44%, 48) stated 'women with low incomes' and a similar proportion stated Black and minority ethnic women (43%, 46). Over a quarter (28%, 30), stated young women and a similar proportion stated older women (24%, 26). Almost a fifth of survey respondents (19%, 21) were working with asylum seeker women.

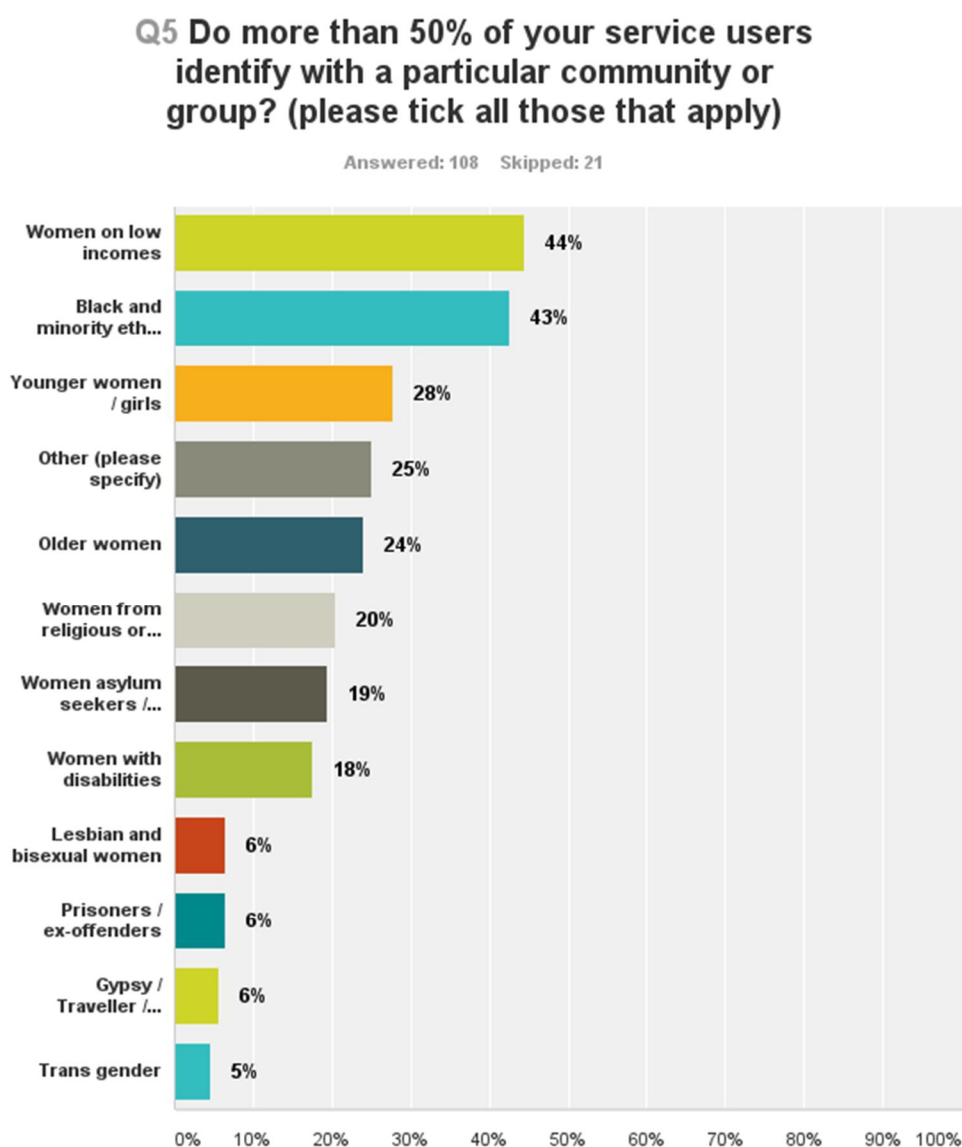


Figure 3: Illustrating the number of survey respondents who stated that over 50% of their organisation's service users belonged to a particular community group

Other community groups mentioned were:

- Migrants
- Mostly white women, with mental health issues.
- Physical health issues
- Women and children experiencing domestic abuse
- Women with mental health issues
- Women's organisations from Latin America

3. THE FINANCIAL HEALTH OF THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

A third of survey respondents (33%, 41) had organisational incomes in 2015/16 of over £500K. However a similar proportion (31%, 29) had incomes of under £100K with more than half of these stating an income of less than £10K.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Over £500,000	33%	41
£100,001 - £300,000	22%	28
£300,001 - £500,000	14%	17
Under £10,000	12%	15
£10,000 - £25,000	7%	9
£25,001 - £50,000	6%	8
£50,001 - £100,000	6%	7

Table 2: Organisation's annual income for 2015/2016

Although a majority (59%) of survey respondents said that their organisation had money in reserve, **almost a quarter of women's VCOs (24%) were reported to have no funding in reserve.** A further 17% responded that they were not sure of the answer to this question.

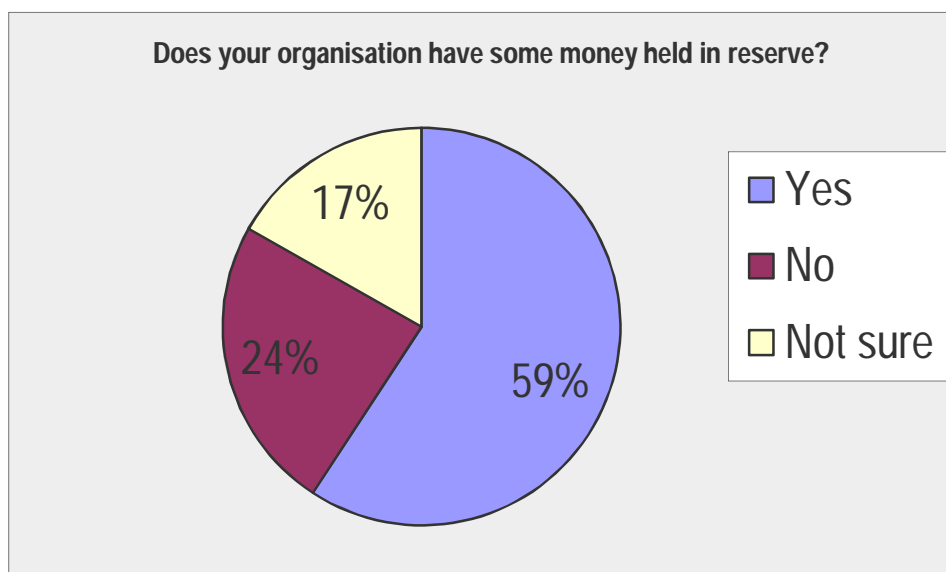


Figure 4: Illustrating the proportion of organisations who stated that they had funding in reserve

The survey results point to an overarching lack of sustainability within the women's voluntary and community sector. Over two fifths (42%) stated that they had less than three months of their annual income in reserve and a third (33%) under 6 months. Added together, three quarters (94%) of survey respondents stated that their organisation had less than 12 months of their annual turnover in reserve, with a minority (6%) implying that their organisation had some financial security (i.e. over 12 month in reserve).

For this survey respondent, representing a front line service for BME women in London, the situation for the women's sector in her area is devastating:

“Almost all over. Women's only provision in the local area has been forced to close.”

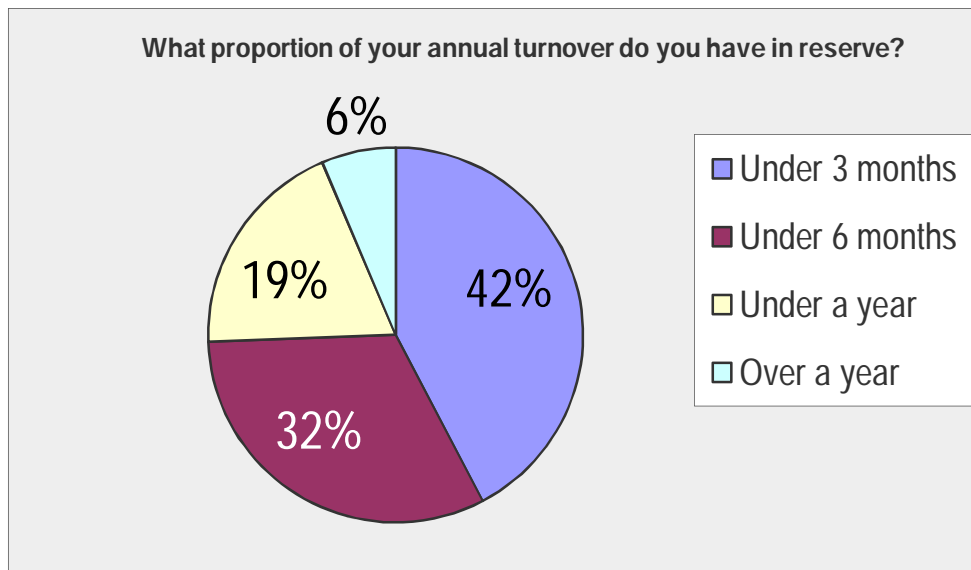


Figure 3: Proportion of your annual turnover that organisations hold in reserve

The survey results highlight that women's VCOs remain reliant upon grants from public bodies, with this being ranked highest most frequently as their main source income (8 out of 9). However contracts that are competitively tendered for also come high in the ranking (7.8), along with grants from charitable trusts (7.8), where there were the highest number of responses (108) and service level agreements (7.6).

Source of funding	Number of responses	Avg. Ranking out of 9
Grants from public bodies	89	8.0
Contracts (competitively tendered for)	79	7.8
Grants from charitable trusts	108	7.8
Service level agreements	74	7.6
Payment by results contracts	59	6.4
Self-generated income (raffles, activities, sponsorship etc.)	88	6.4
Donations	97	6.0
Other	56	5.0
Members subscriptions	64	4.8

Table 4: Showing ranking and response of main sources of income for Women's VCOs

Only just over a fifth (21%) of survey respondents stated that their organisation had secured more than 75% of their organisation's required income for the year. Just over a quarter (26%) had secured less than 20% of their income, again pointing to the precarious position of the women's sector in relation to financial stability and organisational sustainability.

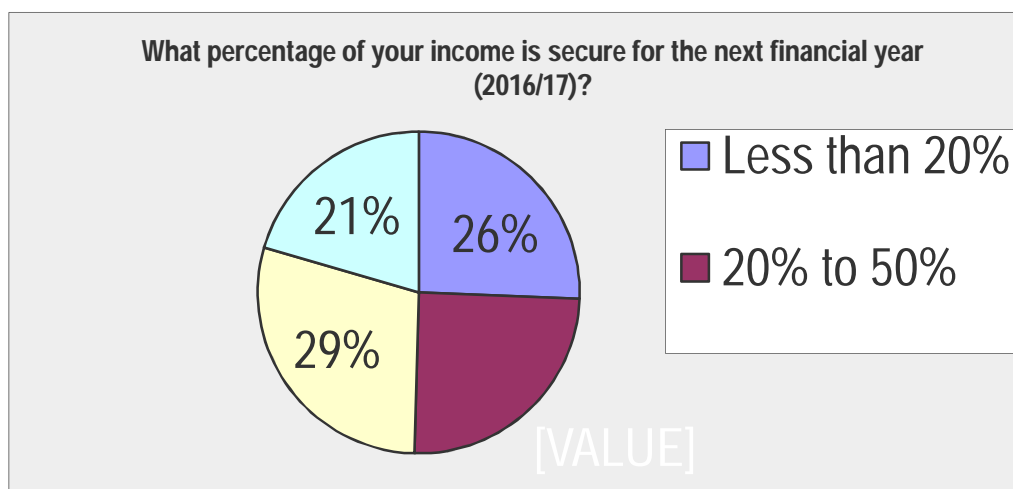


Figure 5: Illustrating the percentage of organisation's funding secure for this financial year

Almost half of survey respondents stated that their organisation's income had reduced during the last financial year. Only just over a third (34%) stated their income had increased. The remaining 19% reported no change.

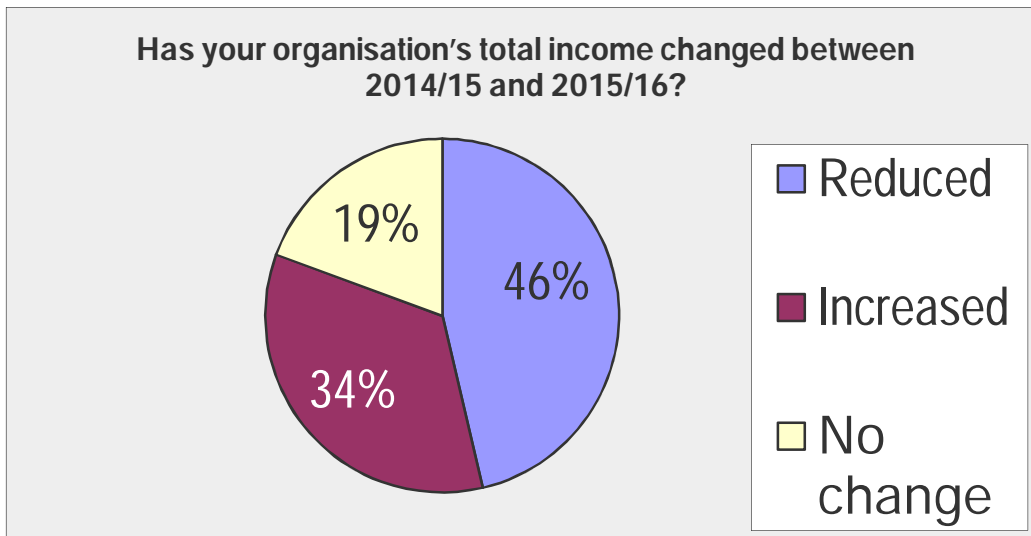


Figure 6: Illustrating whether organisation's income has increased, decreased or stayed the same

In the survey, we asked respondents those respondents who stated that they had reduced funding to tell us what they attributed this to. **Almost two thirds (64%) attributed decreased in their organisation's income directly to the Government's austerity measures, close to that (59%) was there being less grants available from charitable trusts, with almost half (49%) citing there being less grants from Local Authorities.**

A majority of those representing organisations with decreases in funding attributed it to a lack of support for women's organisations from national Government, with 2 fifths (41%) stating women were not a priority for the Government. Almost half (49%) cited that there was a lack of support for women's VCOs from Local Authorities and a similar proportion stating that commissioners did not value the holistic approach of women's organisations.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Government Austerity Measures	64%
Less grants available from charitable trusts	59%
Lack of support for women's organisations national government	51%
Lack of support for women's organisations from Local Authorities	49%
Less grants available from public agencies	49%
Women not targeted in national priorities	46%
Commissioning not valuing women's organisations/ holistic approach	44%
Women not targeted in local priorities	41%
Women/ women's issues not a priority for funding bodies	39%
Women/ women's organisations don't have enough say in decisions	34%
Economic Recession	32%
Lack of support for women's organisations from Clinical Commissioning Groups	32%
Lack of support for women's organisations from Local Enterprise Partnerships	24%
Other (please specify)	20%
Pressure to provide services to men	19%
Lack of support for women's organisations from Police & Crime Commissioners	15%
Misinterpretation of Equality Act 2010	15%

Table 5: If organisations had lost funding, to what did survey respondents attribute it?

Where organisations had experienced decreases in funding during the last financial year, over half (51%) had decreased staff by making staff redundant. Almost half (47%) had made cuts to staff hours.

One respondent stated:

"Staff became volunteers to keep us going."

In other cases, it was suggested that cuts in funding impacted upon volunteer recruitment and support.

"No time to recruit and support a volunteer team; more time spent in meetings with funders and writing applications."

Another was replacing staff with female social work students:

“Higher student workforce to replace those the organisations can no longer afford.”

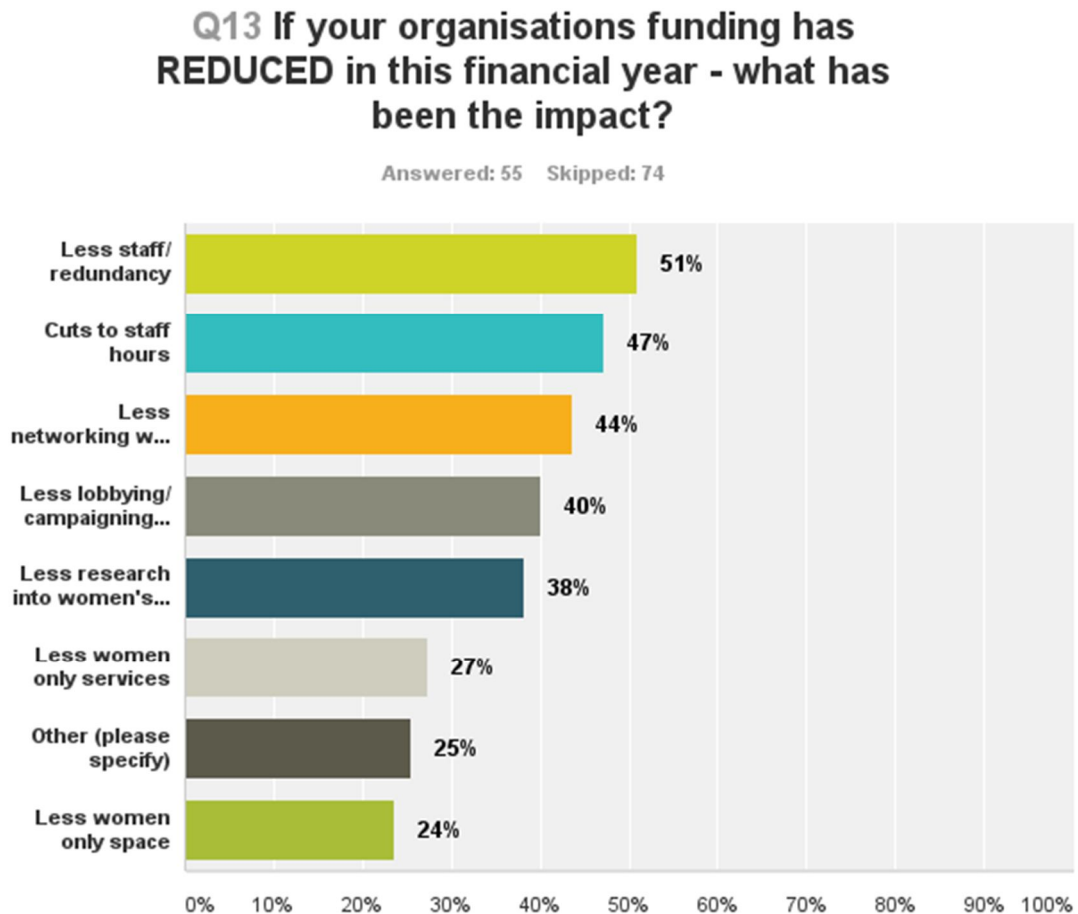


Figure 7: Illustrating the impact of reductions in funding to women's organisations

The survey results suggest that when funding is cut, understandably women's organisations prioritise their front line work and are more likely to make cuts in networking (44%), campaigning and lobbying (40%) and research (38%). However, impacts upon service users could not be avoided and around a quarter (27%) stated that they had made cuts to front line services, including increased waiting times and a similar proportion stated an impact upon their provision of women only space (24%).

The survey results highlight that reductions in funding to women's organisations impact negatively upon the employment conditions for staff and workloads increase in response to a growth in demand for women only services. The following comments from survey respondents reflect this:

“Job insecurity and overworked staff.”

“Far less delivery though demand has been increasing greatly.”

“Even though funding remained the same we were totally stretched to the limit and lost one member of staff.”

“Demand is the same but no workers to provide it.”

The survey findings suggest that women’s VCOs, particularly volunteer trustee Boards and management committee members have been faced with some very difficult decisions in relation to maintaining front line services.

“During 2014/15 and 15/16 we saw an 80% rise in demand - at a time we were experiencing financial crisis. This has only been avoided by the determination of our Trust Board to persevere and to divert resources from front line to financial challenge.”

These survey respondent’s comments suggest that cuts in funding can have disproportionate impacts upon the most marginalised women:

“No funding to support disabled women, e.g. signers.”

In the 34% of organisations where funding had increased in this financial year, the survey results suggest that the most direct impact was upon increased services (63%) and space for women (45%) and increases in staffing (63%). Other impacts highlighted by research participants were: a Better ability to focus on front line delivery and not fire-fighting, reaching out to more women, new premises and developing new services to meet women’s needs.

Answer Options	Response Percent
More women only services	63%
More staff	63%
More networking with other women's organisations and groups	45%
More women only space	45%
More lobbying/ campaigning around women's issues to influence policy	33%
Increased staff hours	33%
More research into women's issues	28%
Other	18%

Table 6: Impacts of increased funding to women’s organisations

However, almost half (45%) also reported that increased funding led to more networking with other women’s organisation and a third (33%) to more lobbying and campaigning and over a quarter reported that they were able to conduct research. Yet, highlighted by this survey respondent, there is an even greater need for these components of our work during times of austerity.

“Austerity means greater need for services/information/research/ awareness/ lobbying - all the work we do.”

Networking, research and campaigning are all vital components of women only services as it is these activities that bring about the structural changes required to eliminate discrimination and oppression and thus hold the potential to lead us to equality for women.

16% of survey respondents said that their organisations had successfully challenged a funding decision that would have had a substantial impact upon their work and a further 8% had a challenge pending. These challenges included: submitting Freedom of Information requests; writing to funders and to ministers and then using the media; working with independent consultants to sit down with commissioners and review their plans; speaking to leading individuals in commissioning bodies about the need for women only services; one to one conversations to present different perspectives on the women's sector; taking up speaking opportunities and raising visibility of women's organisation and the issues with other VCOs, local authority members and staff.

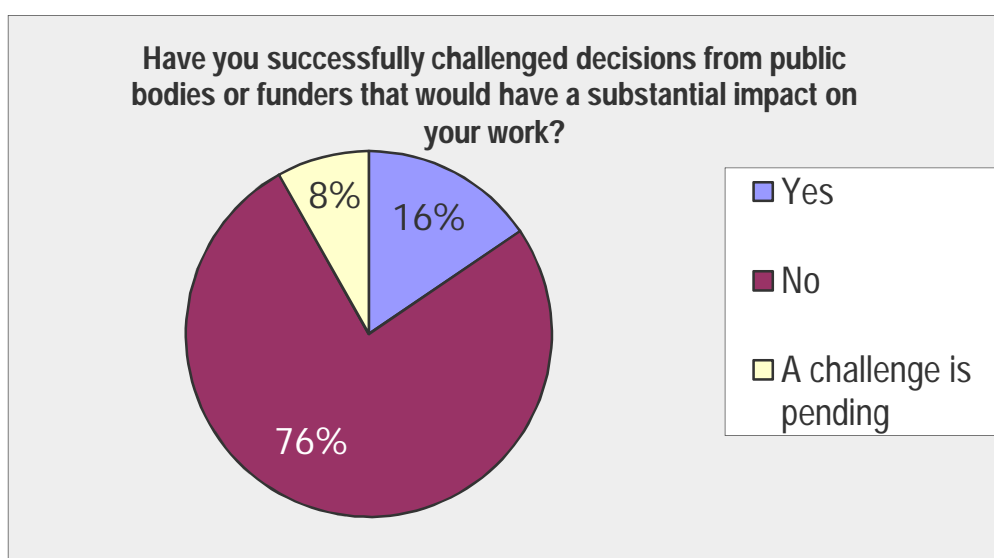


Figure 8: Illustrating the percentage of women's organisations challenging funding decisions

One survey respondent had been a witness in Rights of Women case against the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). These efforts resulted in new interim regulations for family law legal aid that were introduced on April 25th, 2016. The MOJ has committed to undertaking a review of the regulations for family law legal aid and the impact of the domestic violence evidence. In the meantime the Government has introduced interim regulations to deal with the two areas of concern highlighted: the time limit on evidence of domestic violence and evidence of financial abuse.¹

Examples of other concrete challenges to funding decisions that would have a substantial impact upon women are highlighted in the following examples:

"We are trying to get the local authority to fund our services which they make good use of either via a Service Level Agreement or to contribute to our core funding. We are challenging the fact that they are taking advantage of a Third Sector organisation knowing that we will not turn families away."

¹ <http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/news/>

"We are currently challenging county council, local authorities, CCGs and PCC regarding who takes some responsibility for funding services for survivors of sexual violence."

"Nationally via our membership of Rape Crisis England and Wales (on the continuation of Rape Support Fund for example and to feed into the National Task-force on sexual violence experienced by students at college/in education). On a local level we have challenged our local authority led county wide Domestic Violence Governance Board to include sexual violence in their remit and responsibility. This was a successful challenge and sexual violence is now included."

"We have had impact on the council's decision to increase our rent by 150%. The decision has been deferred 8 months, giving us time to look for new more sustainable premises."

"Currently waiting for the LA to make a decision before challenging the contract they award as it will not address the needs of BME survivors."

"Became part of the way commissioning is changing at county level so that the system is fairer and big agencies treated equally to small as victims needs put as priority not what agencies feel."

Survey respondents were asked to assess whether they thought that their organisation would still exist in 1, 2 and 3 years' time. This was scored on a rating scale with '0' being not confident at all and 3 being very confident. On average there was medium confidence that their organisation would exist in 12 months but confidence diminished each year, giving a strong sense of uncertainty about the future of the women's organisations.

Q17 How confident are you in the following statements?

Answered: 104 Skipped: 25

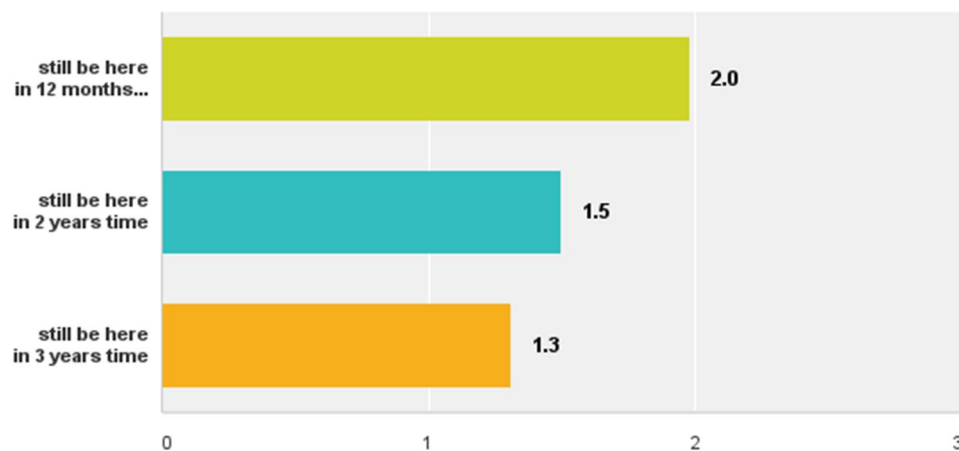


Figure 9: Illustrating levels of confidence about the future sustainability of women's VCOs

To quantify this sense of uncertainty further; only a quarter of survey respondents were very confident that their organisations would exist in 12 months' time, only 9% of survey respondents were very confident that their organisation would exist 3 years' time and 17% were not confident about it at all.

Answer Options	Not confident at all	Not sure	Confident	Very confident
We will still be here in 12 months	6%	15%	33%	26%
We will still be here in 2 years	13%	24%	31%	11%
We will still be here in 3 years	17%	32%	23%	9%

Table 7: Survey respondent's confidence about their organisations sustainability shown in percentages

4. THE DEMAND FOR WOMEN ONLY SERVICES

A staggering 83% of survey respondents reported an increase in demand for women only services, whereas none reported a decrease. As one survey respondent put it, there is an overriding sense of:

"More work, less money."

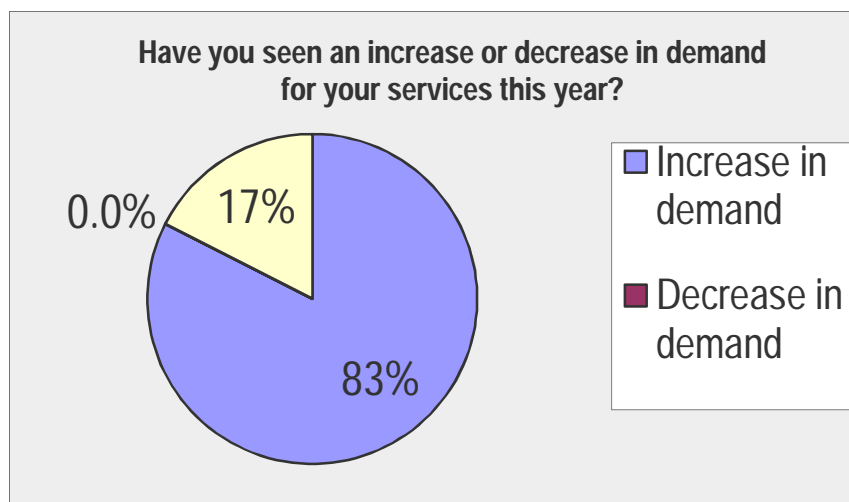


Table 8: Percentage of survey respondents that report an increase in demand for women only services this year



Figure 10: Text analysis of the words that survey respondents used when asked what increased demands for women's service was attributed to

Of 61 survey respondents who offered an explanation for the increasing demand for women only services, 46% (28) of them attributed this to increased public awareness of women's issues such as violence among women and girls (VAWG). For a large part this is said to have arisen as a result of media coverage of high profile cases and inquiries, such as the Saville Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and popular programmes, such as the Archers addressing issues of domestic abuse in their story lines.

"More and more survivors of sexual violence are coming forward to seek the support and justice they need and have every right to. This increase has in part be due to the extensive media coverage of high profile celebrity abuse cases, on child exploitation gangs and the national inquiry into institutional abuse."

"More media coverage of abuse and sexual violence has given more women the courage to come forward."

As testimony to the success of the women's sector in lobbying and campaigning to raise the profile of VAWG and bring about changes in the law, many survey respondents attribute the increase in demand for their organisation's services to improved responses by public agencies such as the Police, Local Authorities and NHS.

"Awareness raising campaigns run by ourselves and national bodies

"Change in law, demand following awareness."

"Welsh Government policy changes prioritising VAWG."

"Massive increase, I believe in part to Hertfordshire's clamp down on Domestic Abuse."

More demand for FGM training as a result of increased awareness of the issue and legal changes.

"The 'Consent is Everything' campaign by Thames Valley Police seems to have helped young women realise that they have been sexually mistreated. There is less confusion and self-blame and so they come forward.

"Effective partnership working; opening of Domestic Abuse One Stop Shop."

"An increased awareness of feminism and need for feminist spaces."

Although, as one research participant highlights, there is evidence of 'success in tendering and growth of services for which money is available,' the survey data also highlights competitive tendering is not an effective means of commissioning services for women. As highlighted in this example, competitive tendering can result in women's organisation responding to increasing demand with fewer resources to do so.

"The police, SARC and the whole CJS are referring to our ISVA service, although the PCC commissioned Refuge to provide it. Our bid cost a little more. We found out afterwards that we offered two more ISVA's. So we get the referrals Refuge can't handle because they are working to capacity, without the money to support them."

39% of survey respondents made a direct correlation between austerity measures and welfare reform and the staggering increase in demand for women's services. On the one hand the overall cuts in public services such as children's social care means there is less for women provision generally, then as more women are pushed into crisis as a result of welfare 'reform' and cuts in Legal Aid they end up seeking help and support from already overburdened women's organisations. There is evidence the BME women's sector is even more squeezed, as there is more demand for the kind of support that these organisations provide, whilst they are struggling with less resources and in this case, no statutory funding whatsoever.

"Due to Government's austerity measures, statutory & voluntary organisations have had to cut back on services provided. As a result small women's organisations (we are a specialist organisation) are seeing an increased level of referrals. However there has been no additional funding. For example, we are having to pick up all the cases for Asian women in the borough. There is a commissioned IDVA service in an organisation that only deals with high risk cases, so all the low to medium risk cases (which can also become high risk cases), all the homelessness and women who have no recourse to public funds are being sent to our organisation. This includes referrals from social services, housing department, Police, Victim Support. Despite the high demand for services and the diversity in the borough, we don't receive any funding."

Another development that is particularly affecting BME women's organisation is the global refugee crisis, whereby more women refugees and asylum seekers are coming to UK and needing access to services such as counselling.

5. CHALLENGES FACING THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

We asked survey respondents to tell us the three key issues, difficulties or challenges currently faced by your organisation at this time. 65% of respondent highlighted issues surrounding funding as their first priority and funding and funding related issues featured highest among all three of the key challenges highlighted. There is a general sense emerging from the data that women's VCOs are locked into their difficulties surrounding funding and this is severely hampering developmental work in relation to women's needs. There is also a sense of the funding environment being competitive to the point of becoming aggressive (dog eat dog!). Also of there being minimal funding available for the most marginalised of women, particularly those with more than one, or multiple protected characteristics.

"The funding that is available is minimal and not comparable to what is available for women generally or gay and bisexual men. That means we are extremely limited in what we can deliver and achieve in terms of substantial change and sustainable impact on health inequalities experienced by lesbian and bisexual women."

Related to concerns around funding and resources, survey respondents prioritised challenges and difficulties surrounding increasing demand for women only services set against rapidly diminishing staffing and other resources, including being able to effectively recruit, support and retain volunteers. Issues about securing and maintaining affordable premises also featured as common difficulties faced by women's VCOs.



Figure 11: Most important words and phrases in survey respondent's perception of challenges facing their organisation

Particular issues highlighted by survey respondents in relation to **funding** were as follows:

- Access private sector markets
- Changing the funding to a business model
- Commissioners not prioritising women's organisations, due to their lack of understanding of the value of the sector
- Commissioning decisions leading to competition in the sector
- Competing with large organisations for funding
- Culture of commissioning and tendering

- Cuts and savings due to government policy
- Decommissioning
- Delivering extremely challenging part payment by results contracts
- Diversifying funding sources
- Extremely limited funding available for lesbian and bisexual women's work
- Fragmented and short-term nature of funding and late notification of funding decisions
- Funders wanting 'quick fixes' - not prepared to invest in longer-lasting social change work
- Funds should be set aside by grants giving bodies for the organisations like us
- Gender and colour blind commissioning
- Groups less co-operative because competition for fund
- Increased competition/ aggressive competition
- Increasing on costs that are not covered by grants or contracts
- Lack of acknowledgement of BME issues in tenders and contracts
- Lack of staff so can't spend enough time on funding
- Lack of unrestricted funding to allow us to respond to emerging needs
- Lack of value to funders/the state of specialist women-only women-led organisations
- Larger organisations being awarded commissioning contracts over smaller organisations
- London Councils decision not to fund capacity building from 2017 onwards
- Losing contracts due to price auctions
- MOJ decreasing funding to this sector
- Move to gender neutral services as a result of commissioner pressure over previous few years
- Need for diversifying income/over reliance on statutory funding
- Not being able to compete with the giants who are not specialist providers
- Raising funding to survive; having sufficient independent evidence to apply to Lottery
- Recognition and financial support from the local authority
- Reduction in service due to reduction in local authority budgets
- Risk of competing with larger organisations who claim to be providing same services as we do
- Short term nature of funding to deliver long term support services
- Sourcing capital investment
- That, in Wales, everyone expects services to be free and funded by someone
- Underfunded core/central services needing to focus on income generation at the expense of other activities supporting women
- Unwillingness of funders to fully fund on a cost recovery basis

Particular **external challenges** highlighted by survey respondents among their three main challenges were as follows:

- Backlash from men's rights groups
- Cessation / removal of legal aid
- Changing legislation - particularly in terms of education (e.g. removing drama and PSHE from curriculum and schools turning to academies)
- Closing youth services makes it challenging to reach more young people
- Gender neutral & family work models

- Huge advocacy and campaigning needed for the problems faced by single mothers from refugee and migrants communities
- Lack of support for international development
- Lack of understanding by the efforts women who run organisations for women making each day to help each based on personal experience
- Lack of understanding of issues facing BAME women
- Misunderstanding of women-centered services generally/ Lack of understanding about the importance of women only spaces
- No statutory body taking responsibility for VAWG in Suffolk
- Regionalisation of services
- The hostile political environment
- Threat of privatisation of NHS services
- Toy/ book manufacturer obstinacy (gendered)
- Working in an area/county where the gendered nature of sexual violence is not recognized or acknowledged (so facing challenges about women only services)

Particular **internal challenges to women's VCOs** were highlighted as follows:

- Being heard
- Difficulty to maintain focus
- Ensuring holistic support for women in crisis
- Ensuring sufficient trustees for our companies
- Future leadership
- Group member decline/ membership reducing. In current austere times frontline organisations are more selective/ careful about paying for membership
- High staff turnover due to low wages and high demands
- Identifying the next challenge to invigorate supporters
- Job insecurity/ keeping staff from going to better paid jobs/ retention of key staff
- Lack of funding for training and development
- Lack of good quality sexual violence counsellors
- Lack of representation of BME women while they are a significant % of local population
- Maintaining gender specific services
- Needing to change governance structure
- Reporting requirements are hugely time consuming
- Staff burn out
- Trustee skills
- Unable to develop & diversify services due to funding insecurity
- Weak group solidarity, new generation of members versus older generation

Particular **internal challenges within the women's VCS** were highlighted as follows:

- Ending specialist services
- Lack of capacity in other women's organisation to work in partnership

- Lack of understanding of issues facing BAME women
- Lack of understanding of the value of second tier
- Overbearing second tier organisations that detract from front line work
- Racism from other women's sector agencies
- Specialist work for lesbian and bisexual women not seen as a priority for the women's sector or the LGBT sector

PART 2: 2021 VISION FOR THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

6. 2021 VISIONS FOR THE WOMEN'S SECTOR

6.1 VISIONING WOMEN'S VCOS IN 5 YEARS TIME



Figure 12: Most important words and phrases in survey responses about the about the vision for their organisation

Despite considerable challenges of the current economic and political climate, the survey data reflects widespread aspirational visions for women's VCOs to reclaim their independence. This includes resolve to diversifying funding streams and to mount a stronger lobby for women's equality. Unsurprisingly an overriding ambition is for women's VCOs to be solvent and to still be in existence in 5 years' time, but also to be vehemently resisting closure and the devastating losses that the women's sector has recently sustained.

"Preservation of the women's sector, over the last four years we have lost a lot of really good organisations who had built a wealth of skills and knowledge over decades for example the closure of Eaves. We have been providing specialist VAWG services for 35 years and we will fight for this to continue.

There are strong aspirations for women's VCOs to be leading the struggle for women's rights and human rights generally and within this influencing change at every level. The survey data reflects that women's VCOs remain committed, as they always have been, not just to delivering services in response to women's needs, but addressing the very conditions that determine women's lives. This encompasses challenging: legal structures, policy, service delivery, public attitudes and prevailing myths and most importantly ensuring women themselves are at the forefront of bringing about change.

"Still here, still supporting and lobbying for frontline women's organisations and the services they deliver. Ensuring women in disadvantaged areas have the opportunity to have their voices heard, continue to be the link between women on the ground and government."

In the five year vision for women's VCOs, women are empowered, safe and free from violence, have a better economic standing and ultimately equal. To achieve women's VCOs strive to support women = to

become activists, self-advocates and leaders, but most importantly, self-defining and having autonomous identities.

"To be more visible and successful in promoting women's issues at a strategic level as well as delivering more creative learning opportunities to enable more women to take leadership roles."

"We want our organisation to be a robust, thriving entity. We want a stronger voice - and to be a safe space, a Black feminist space, one where 'BME' women are able to continue come together to resist oppression including state oppression. We want to continue to define our own solutions to violence - and to support our autonomy as B'ME' women and girls."

Although an urgent need for secure, sustainable income is a major theme running through the survey, in the long term, the vision is for women's VCOs to develop independent sources of income. The survey data reflects women's VCOs aspiring to becoming less reliant on Local Authorities by generating more unrestricted income and developing diverse funding streams such as generating income from enterprise. There is an emerging sense from the survey data that more diverse funding streams would lead to: more independence, increased confidence, innovation and ideas, greater freedom for lobbying and campaigning and wider influence and clout.

"To have stable long-term funding so that we can concentrate on doing our valuable work and have the freedom to campaign and lobby without Government attempting to obstruct by placing conditions on any funding they do give us! Ultimately, to be able to reach every woman that needs us."

"My vision is for the organisation to be running with a surplus not a deficit and to have the capacity to develop new, innovative and specialist services instead of having to rely on restrictive and demanding contracts."

"To support and develop the small specialist women's sector, giving them confidence to compete and challenge large organisations/companies, generate unrestricted income, test new ideas/financial models to help the women's sector become more sustainable and command a seat at the table of all decisions makers."

The survey data reflects strong ambitions to rise to the challenge of increasing demand for women only services, whilst realising the potential of women's VCOs themselves.

"I would like a Women's Centre not just grabbing rooms in local Church."

For the survey respondents, their vision surrounding reaching the potential of women's VCOs to effectively respond to increasing demand involves the following measures: making better use of digital media and online technology, outreach work from satellite centres providing more women's services, delivering more prevention services, and incorporating services for children, including work in schools

"Our vision is to maintain and grow our services to meet the demand of mental health services for women affected by domestic violence. We would also want

to develop mental health services for children as there is currently only very limited provision in the sector.”

“Still based in our main centre with satellite centres all over our geographical area to ensure women are able to access counselling. A full team of qualified fully paid counsellors who see minimum 150 women a week and a thriving outreach service that accesses many spaces and runs prevention in-schools work across our area.”

Women’s VCOs also strive to have a wider geographical reach, with less gaps, ease of access for the most vulnerable and marginalised women and to develop models of good practice and excellence.

“To be the expert in the county for sexual violence to be a model of best practice as a rape crisis centre in the UK to not have a waiting list of people needing support for sexual violence to deliver an excellent service to survivors to meet the need i.e. increased support for young people; specialist support for adults with learning difficulties and access to services to those living in rural locations.”

The survey reflects that women’s VCOs are endeavouring to gain recognition for their good organisational leadership. Although this women’s VCO is facing difficult issues surrounding its funding, its attitude is positive and it is effectively responding to demand and achieving outcomes with good planning and strategic focus.

“We have continued to provide and develop a wide range of services to the members, to make difference to the lives of women by responding to their needs and inspirations and enable them to play a full active part in the community. The group has come a long way in empowering women within the community. Result of their trainings more than 65% of women have found jobs and another 35% are looking for jobs or planning to go further training courses. The remainder have simply raised their confidence and created a network of family and friends. Several new training initiatives are now underway. We were able to work more strategically. We have a business plan and funding strategy in place. This gives the organisation and its members distinct goals and objectives to work towards in the future and deliver more Health & wellbeing workshops, empowering women, reduce poverty.”

However, from another angle, in this example, although the women’s VCO remains positive and ambitious in its aspirations, meeting the currently unmet needs of these services for women suffering sexual violence relies upon a strategic approach from their partner agencies, including statutory commissioners.

“I want to be in a more stable financial position to be able to meet the demand for sexual violence (SV) services. I want to develop new services that provide for unmet need. I want to work more productively and effectively with key partner agencies (statutory commissioners) which requires them to have strategic intelligence. If they continue to work in silos with divergent strategic objectives funding for SV services will continue to fall through safety nets and be too dependent upon stakeholder’s individual whims and misunderstandings.”

According to the survey data, one of the keys to safeguarding women only services and the survival and development of small women's VCOs that can reach the most marginalised women is the development of women's partnership and consortia. However, there is a caveat to that, and whilst strengthening a partnership approach, we need to ensure that the identities of individual women's VCOs are retained.

"To work together with the two other key women's organisations in our area to develop a consortium and share premises. To safe guard our women only services and spaces and not to have face the same challenge to this every year."

"Strong and successful organisation promoting voice and choice for BME women in the NE and continuing to work in partnership across the sector as well as supporting smaller local BME women's groups to survive."

"In partnership with other organisations providing better services to the BAME communities covering a wider area."

6.2 VISIONING THE WOMEN'S SECTOR IN 5 YEARS TIME



Figure 13: Most important words and phrases in survey responses about the vision for the women's sector

Again in response the question "what is your vision for the women's sector in 5 years' time?" the survey data reflects firm aspirations if women's VCOs, work collectively and in collaboration the women's sector can surmount the current economic, social and political difficulties to bring about transformation and change.

"My Utopia is that we experience an almighty culture shift, and that women and the issues they face as a result of gender imbalance really starts to decrease!"

There is an expressed belief that that we are indeed "stronger together" and that the women's sector can be the leading champion for women's rights in the UK. This is how this vision for a strong, diverse

and energetic women's sector is captured by just one of many survey respondents who expressed something similar.

"A growing, expanding, robust sector championing women's rights and wellbeing with free provision of social welfare advice and legal representation. A sector empowering new generations to break the glass ceiling to achieve better political participation and gender equality in all spheres of public and private life."

Within this overarching vision for the UK women's sector in 5 years' time, the women's sector will be widely recognised by the Government, the public sector, commissioners and taken seriously by the media. This recognition will be expressed in the effective design and delivery of services for women and families, sustainable funding for women's VCOs and the women's sector valued for its knowledge and expertise, women will be a priority for commissioners, not an afterthought. According to the aspirations expressed in the survey, as outcomes of women's sector championing and leadership, in five years' time: women will have a high public profile, have more confidence to take action, be listened to and ultimately have more power. The following are examples of many comments from survey respondents that reflect the strength and conviction of these widespread visions and aspirations.

"Government to recognise gender inequalities as a real problem and driver for oppression for women we should be seen as a priority and essential source of support for women and families services should be designed to consider the role that women take on and how this facilitates women being isolated and services not meeting their needs."

"High in the public eye. Supported and championed by commissioners and police crime commissioners. To be seen as valuable and important to continuously fund."

"High priority for local and national government. All frontline services including police, housing, and education should integrate training and expertise from women's sector. Specialist women's services receive robust, reliable funding and support."

"We should be positioned as a key priority for politicians/government departments and key regional and local stakeholders such as PCC's/LA's and Health. This requires commissioning strategy for these agencies to be joined up and coherent."

Against the strength of these convictions, the survey responses reflect that those who work in women's VCOs recognise the magnitude of the struggle that lies ahead if we are to achieve the visions and aspirations laid out for the women's sector. The struggle for gender equality must be on all fronts and the UK women's sector is at the very heart of the struggle.

"Recognition of the need for and protection of women only services and spaces. Sustainable funding sources. The acknowledgement that gender inequality is far from resolved/achieved and that the women's sector is key to the work being done to challenge and change this."

With regards funding, on the one hand is the firm belief that the women's sector should be funded by the statutory sector for delivering essential services to women and that Central Government should ring fence and increase funding for this purpose. On the other hand is a belief that the women's sector needs to develop a new financial mechanism that is self-sustaining and allows financial security and independence from Government. Part of this mechanism must be about the expertise of women's VCOs being properly valued and remunerated.

"For a thriving women's sector, that is notoriously known for its expertise and prevention specialist services. A sector able to 'sell' expertise, and be paid accordingly, be less reliant on public funds or grants, i.e. build its own financial mechanism."

"Dedicated women's space is seen as essential. There is ring fenced funding for specialist services."

In addition to the delivery of services, the women's sector needs to be able campaign about inequality and injustice, this is its legacy from the Women's Movement. As such, receipt of Government funding either through grants or contracts cannot equate with gagging or silencing the women's sector and it is deemed important that second tier organisations like WRC are funded to provide a national voice.

"It should be a strong voice for women, able to lobby politicians and local authorities instead of being silenced by threats to funding and political choices."

"WRC is sustainably funded to be our voice at national level."

There is a sense emerging from the survey data that the women sector needs to be outside of the competitive tendering context all together, or at least mounting strong resistance towards it.

"The women's sector is outside of competitive tendering and the ridiculous hamster's wheel of raising funds for essential services."

"The negative competitive context which currently exists prevents us from being as effective as we should be and from developing and becoming stronger in relation to statutory partners. I want us to have a strong, powerful and meaningful voice representing the needs of the women and girls who use our services."

On specific the campaign and lobbying theme mentioned by two survey respondents is for the UK Government to sign up to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention) The Convention came into force on 1 August 2014 and as of May 2016, it has been signed by 42 countries, excluding the UK. There exist a firm belief that the convention would provide another mechanism to hold the Government to account on the funding of gender specific service and in particular, VAWG services for BME women.

"We need to be seen as credible leaders, experts in VAWG. Work collaboratively together to achieve increased funding, stop cuts to services especially to BME groups. Successfully made the case for gender specific services in all areas of the U.K. Government signed the Istanbul Convention."

“Personally I desperately want the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention (IC). It would give us a legal framework to hold them accountable to. The IC states that government must provide sufficient funding and resources for ending violence against women, and supporting them and their children when they have experienced violence.”

The protection and development of the BME women's sector, having been disproportionately affected by austerity and cuts in public services, is highlighted ²as integral to the vision for the UK women's sector as are all aspects in intersectionality and inequalities between women themselves.

“We want to see a stronger women's sector. However, we know that a stronger women's sector does not necessarily mean a stronger B'ME' women's sector, as other organisations too often grow at our expense. As such our primary commitment and our energies are focussed on building a strong, resilient, innovative, creative BME women's sector rooted in Black feminist values.”

As expressed in this survey response, the journey ahead will require campaigning and lobbying for structural changes in the law, but also a reflexive and structural analysis of how macro-economic forces such as capitalism and neo-liberalism have become supplanted within women's VCOs themselves. Our campaign to eliminate gender equality will rely upon rooting out the forces of discrimination and oppression from within our own sector.

“Pressing more politically and from all angles the need for prevention or abuse and understanding of gender in schools, with making PSHE mandatory as a starting point. Pressing for changes to legal aid to better support women facing abuse. Challenging the models based on capitalism that some of the national women's agencies already copy in terms of structure and pay. Women's collectives survived and thrived in Thatcher's Britain, we need to learn from those times and understand why.”

Where survey respondents expressed doubt that the current difficulties can be surmounted to achieve the visions and aspirations for a strong and energetic women's sector that is leading the way to women's equality, the barriers are perceived to lie within the sector itself. Particularly fragmentation and divisions that are being exacerbated by a culture that favours competitive tendering as the means of commissioning.

“I can't see the change that is needed happening as the women's sector appears to be fragmented and getting further destroyed by competitive business plans. I'd like to see the sector supporting the reason it exists and standing together in that endeavour.”

There is also a sense of the need for the development of a gender architecture in the UK that properly reflects the differing conditions for women in the four nations.

² 'Osborne's budget cuts will cripple services for vulnerable BME women,' Mary O'Hara, Wednesday 16 March 2016 - <http://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2016/mar/16/budget-cuts-domestic-violence-services-bme>

“In 3 to 5 years’ time we want to be recognised as the umbrella organisation for the women’s sector in Wales with the capacity to provide a strong voice for the sector.”

“Capitalising on favourable conditions in Scotland by improving number of women in powerful places, changing public discourses about gender and violence, building a proper funding system for women’s services in Scotland.”

Last but certainly not least there is a strong call for co-operation and collaboration within the women’s sector and belief that although the odds seem to be stacked against us, the women’s sector will survive as it has done for many years. Fuelled by, if nothing else its dedication and passion to support women and girls.

“Our vision is for a successful and thriving women’s sector working collectively to support and sustain. It has survived through the dedication, passion and commitment of women’s organisations to support women and girls, often with little or no resources. We will therefore continue - against all odds (as national and local Government decimate women’s groups and organisations), to promote women only spaces for women to come together to survive and thrive!”

7. THE FUTURE ROLE OF WRC

7.1 HOW WRC CAN HELP TO REALISE THE VISIONS FOR THE WOMEN’S VCOS AND THE SECTOR



Figure 14: Most important words and phrases in survey responses about how WRC can help to realise the vision for the women’s sector

Survey participants were asked to identify what WRC could do to support women’s VCS to realise their visions and the visions for the women sector. The responses can be grouped into the following thematic categories these are in order of the frequency that they appeared in the survey responses.

- Developing and delivering training (17)
- Campaigning and lobbying (13)
- Evidencing the need for women only (9)
- Encouraging networks and sharing good practice, resources etc. (9)

- Partnership and consortia development (7)
- Fundraising support (7)
- Information, advice and support (7)
- Research (6)
- Leadership and a voice for the women's sector (4)

Figure 15 on the following page illustrates thematic aspects of WRCs work that were deemed by survey respondents to help women's VCOs and the women's sector realise its visions. The shade is graded in order of the frequency they were mentioned.



Figure 15: How WRC can support women's VCOs to realise their visions

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on the **development and delivery of training** were:

- Affordable training on working with specialist groups including looked after young women, care leavers, LGBT community, Traveller women
- More online training perhaps? Webinars? E-learning.
- More sophisticated training, more pan London co-ordinated activity
- Provide accredited Leadership and management training to organisations like us
- Skills training that is accredited provided to groups signed up to being female centred.
- To facilitate workshops and training to advocate for the difficulties that women who are single parents from ethnic community with little English cope the live and her children
- Training for staff especially middle managers as many men rise up in our organisation through having more time and being pushier and get better recognition for their work!

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **campaigning and lobbying** were:

- Lobby the government to ring fence specialist DV funding, BME funding and SV funding so we no longer have to compete against one another for small pots of money. Increase the awareness around the fundamental importance of women only spaces and campaign for healthy relationships education in schools.
- Lobbying on the value of the sector.
- Media awareness on funding cuts
- More campaigning on the funding of women's services, more work with private sector networks and Corporate Social Responsibility
- Support to those challenging the law

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **evidencing the need for women only** were:

- By supporting our organisation with resources that evidence women only provision is essential
- Continuing to make the case for women-only women-led organisations.
- Making the case for gender specific mental health services
- Research that will enable the women's sector to highlight its distinctive contribution.
- Strengthening the arguments for specialist services
- Supporting the need for specialist women only services and the benefit that the small independent providers bring in terms of delivering tailored approaches that meet the needs of individual women (as opposed to the needs of commissioners). The innovation and development of practice and the importance of listening to the experiences of service users.

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **encouraging networks and sharing** were:

- Better joined up approach sharing ideas and fuller understanding of what the organisations do
- Connecting to other women's organisations
- Facilitating networks and conferences
- Helping us to work closer together and getting us on the map
- Sharing good practice

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **partnership and consortia development** were:

- Facilitating funding partnerships (or helping orgs to make those connections),
- Actively support partnership development, don't stop with training on partnerships.
- Continue to bring groups together to help with the process to establish the partnerships.
- WRC is already working with us to support us to achieve a significant aspect of our aspiration to work with the other key women's groups in our area and form the basis for a solid women's sector consortium.
- Arranging partnership events - matching suitable partners with each other (organisations not always aware of the range and reach of each other's work)

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **fundraising support** were:

- Organise meeting with funders to listen to our problems.
- Providing free targeted support and funding assistance, links to grants etc., increased opportunities for our participants.

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **information, advice and support** were:

- Briefings and information on key issues which we could disseminate to our members
- Information on new legislative procedures.

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **research** were:

- If you have research that would support our contention that what happens in terms of stereotyping in childhood affects later career choices and wider societal attitudes to women (and men), and possible to regarding women as second rate (leading to disrespect and even DV) that would be great.
- Pooling resources for research.
- Research the impact on poverty and cuts to services
- We need to see how cuts are effecting the other areas of UK, so your research is important to make comparisons, good source of reference.

Specifics highlighted by survey respondents on **leadership** were:

- Keep elevating women's voices.
- Leading by example
- To give voice to women's VCOs
- We need WRC to continue to speak out about the importance of our sector - the B'ME' women's sector.

Other areas that survey respondents highlighted that would help women's VCOs and the sector realise its vision were:

- Helping us make sure we are doing all we need to be safe and public
- Making a more vigorous and informed case for the second tier
- Mapping of provision in London (and nationally) for women

- Marketing support
- Providing a list of (by area) volunteers who wish to support groups.
- Raise awareness of LBT women's issues and support LGBT organisations and women's organisations to have specialist work for LB women and Trans people.
- Speak to the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health urgently to see the whole position. google them for contact
- We are looking to design a toolkit for health professionals, us working more closely will strengthen us and support the women's sector in gaps around health and women
- We want to work with WRC as partners on key policy areas and on sector sustainability.

Several survey respondents stated that WRC should just continue to do the things that is already does well.

“We need WRC as allies in our struggle.”

“You do a great job, as information is power and access to what is happening currently is good. All of the information is of interest to a cross section of women and for me and the women I work with and for it is all about diversity being accessible for all.”

However, there is also a sense emerging from the survey data that **WRC needs a much better reach**, local, regionally and nationally, this is even more vital as women's VCOs capacity to travel, engage and to network has diminished as a result of the impact of the cuts and having to prioritise front line delivery of services.. Some of the specifics highlighted by respondents were:

- Be more inclusive and supporting, our ability to access your support has in recent been drastically diminished, unfortunately.
- Doing more for small organisations
- It needs to have a footprint in Wales in order to be of any help
- Opening up training, support and consultancy resources outside London
- Reach out to groups and communities and run courses in our centre/venue as it is not always possible for us to attend trainings or workshops
- Supporting the sector regionally

7.2 ASPECTS OF WRC'S WORK THAT ARE MOST USEFUL

Survey respondents were asked to select which aspects of WRC work were most useful for them, Due to an error on the survey, they could only select the one that was most useful rather than making multiple choices.

Answer Options	Response Percent
Training	31%
Monthly e-news	16%
Tool-kits and guides	13%
Website	12.0%
Policy briefings	9%
Policy consultation	8%
Borough/ Council surgeries (women's orgs & commissioners)	7%
National Conferences	3%
One to one meetings	1%

Table 9: showing aspects of WRC's work that are most useful

7.2.1 OTHER ASPECTS THAT COULD BE USEFUL IF DELIVERED BY WRC:

- Admin help like being a postal address for us.
- Could only tick one in the above box, so - website, policy briefings, training
- Got this email but know v little of you and need to. Please contact me.
- Have always found WRC research and campaigns have strengthened our ability to argue for women only services and the specialism of the women's sector.
- I am not sure really as an organisation on the whole
- I was not aware of all you do so maybe more info sent to people to advertise what you do.
- Just knowing that there is a 2nd tier organisation who is able to campaign and keep the women's sector alive whilst we continue to help women and girls recover from these crimes.
- Leading partnerships for small orgs
- National conference (2)
- one to one meeting
- previously we had found all above very useful, but can no longer access
- Tool Kit and guide is useful to us
- Training (3)
- We don't use WRC a lot but its training sessions can be very good
- We would like more of the above to be available outside London
- Website
- Working in partnership / consortia leadership has been the most useful thing for us. As is WRC being an ally

Answer Options	Rating Average
Building Relationships with Funders and Commissioners	1.8
Fast Track to Successful Fundraising	1.8
Making the Case: Equalities and Human Rights	1.8
Strategic Planning	1.8
Innovation for your Organisation	1.7
Partnerships: Putting it into practice	1.7
Social Enterprise: Developing your Ideas	1.7
Social Enterprise: Bringing your Ideas	1.6
Business Planning	1.5
Finance Planning for Your Organisation	1.5
Train the Trainer	1.5
Commissioning: Understanding the basics	1.4

Table 10: Areas of training that are of particular interest to women's VCOs

7.2.2 OTHER AREAS OF TRAINING COULD BE USEFUL IF DELIVERED BY WRC:

- Affordable training on working with specialist groups including looked after young women, care leavers, LGBT community, Traveller women,
- Building relationships with funders
- Internal communications and organisational development specifically for women managers and women staff and training for men who manage women, and women who manage men.
- Media - feminist principles - campaigning etc.
- This is for me, not the organisation
- Training would all be useful but only if outside London!
- Working with children's service departments, working with the courts - these are two partnerships that I think most DV service providers struggle with. Housing too but less so for refuges.

Answer Options	Rating Average
Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)	2.41
Impact of austerity upon women	2.27
Women's Health/ Clinical Commissioning Group and HWBBs	2.21
The Equality Act 2010	2.05
Human Rights	2.05
United Nations CEDAW Convention	1.98
No recourse to public funds.	1.98
PCC Police and Crime Commissioners	1.88
Women in the Criminal Justice System	1.84
Devolution and combined authorities	1.62
Local Enterprise Partnership	1.40

Table 11: Areas of policy making and influencing that are of particular interest to women's VCOs

Again there were overarching concerns about WRCs reach outside of London, coupled with the diminished capacity of organisations to travel:

- Currently do not access training as too far away.
- Have access to all of these locally - and attend them. We don't need or have the budget to travel to events elsewhere.

7.3.3 OTHER AREAS OF POLICY MAKING AND INFLEUNCING THAT COULD BE USEFUL IF DELIVERED BY WRC:

1. All matters related to disability especially learning disability and mental ill health
2. Anything that affects lesbians and bisexual women
3. Devolved Welsh policy areas around Health, Education etc.
4. Not sure don't know enough
5. Sex and relationship education in schools
6. Welfare and benefits.

8. OTHER COMMENTS ON THE SURVEY

- Great work!
- I met Viv Hayes recently, and would like to say I found her awe inspiring. She's a powerful figurehead for WRC.
- In future if you think about the deliver the training outside, we are happy to offer a space to deliver the workshops because more organisation will benefit from being a member of WRC. WRC training and support are very useful to community organisation.
- Keep up the good work! (2)
- Please contact the faculty as above; give my name if you wish. This is a huge women's health issue which I cannot understand why there is no fuss about outside the clinical circle.
- Some of the figures I've submitted are for another charity I work for, but I am giving my details as a trustee of The Sophia forum and our issues are the same, except we work solely with women and girls living with HIV and experiencing GBV
- Thank you for all the training workshops and for making it possible for us to attend by keeping the fee reasonable and/or free.
- Thank you for the survey, I felt relieved for sharing some of my frustrations we face daily.
- Thank you sue for creating this useful survey! :)
- Thank you to WRC for remaining steadfast in challenging times. We see WRC as an important sister organisation, and we appreciate the organisation's commitment to our work. Over the last 18 months, we have felt this even more - and we are grateful.
- Thanks
- Thanks for all your support
- Thanks for hanging in there

“The world would be a different place without WRC.... :)”