



# Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE Sector in Worcestershire

Phase One

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*A report by Tiller Research Ltd on behalf of Worcestershire VCSE Alliance*

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## Executive Summary

**The Worcestershire VCSE Alliance provides a platform for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations to collectively amplify their impact, learn from each other and support positive change within their communities.**

The Alliance works with statutory agencies to bridge the gap that exists between voluntary and public sectors, helping to improve public services to better meet the needs of the local population. In its current phase, the Alliance is made up of 23 voluntary and community sector leaders.

### ***Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE***

The Worcestershire VCSE Alliance is undertaking a major research and evaluation project “Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE”, funded by Worcestershire County Council. The aim of this research is to build an evidence-based understanding of the key strengths of the sector, alongside robust evidence of impact. The research outputs will focus on providing a robust evidence base to inform a VCSE strategy that will strengthen the sector as a whole. The research results will be shared with the sector and statutory sector partners as a resource for identifying development opportunities, and will be used to inform the Alliance’s future priorities as it moves to the next stage of its development.

The project has two phases. This report presents the Phase One findings, which focus on intelligence gathering and scoping outputs. Phase Two will utilise these outputs to undertake research to better understand the reach, capacity, social impact, financial value and challenges of Worcestershire’s VCSE Sector.

### ***Methodology***

The VCSE in Worcestershire comprises registered charities and not-for-profit companies based in the county, unincorporated and informal groups, and local operations of national or regional charities and social enterprises. Information on these organisations and groups was collated from national registers, and from local data sets held by VCSE infrastructure organisations, district councils and Worcestershire County Council. Organisations were included in the base data set based on the following criteria:

- Organisation or group is currently active;
- Organisation has specific Worcestershire delivery;
- A not-for-profit organisation or group providing community benefit;
- The activity or group is not run by an organisation from the public or private sector.

The base data set was refined to remove duplicates. Organisations were manually assigned to one of twenty ‘nature of business’ categories based on their objects and/or public profile.

Initial findings were presented to the Worcestershire VCSE Assembly on 25th October 2023. Draft outputs were reviewed by facilitated discussion groups, key themes from which have informed the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

### ***Summary of Findings***

A total of 2,717 organisations and groups were identified as forming part of the VCSE in Worcestershire:

- 1,922 registered organisations that are based and operate in Worcestershire;
- 686 groups identified from local data sets that are currently operating in Worcestershire and are assumed to be unincorporated community groups;
- 109 charities and social enterprises not based in Worcestershire but identified as delivering services or activities in the county. These are predominantly large or major national or regional charities.

**The primary purpose of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire** is spread across 20 ‘nature of business’ categories. These are grouped into four overarching theme areas:

- Direct Health Outcomes (3%). These services directly address mental and/or physical ill-health;
- Directly supports health and wellbeing (22%). This includes provision of sports or physical activities, services to support disabled people and/or those with age-related support needs, support for people in crisis, and social support such as advocacy, advice, hardship relief or housing;
- Contributes to creating the right conditions for wellbeing (47%). Activities that are not necessarily directly focused on promoting health and wellbeing, but are likely to make a positive contribution to

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wellbeing nonetheless. This includes arts, education, youth work, social or hobby activities, and assets such as community buildings and outdoor spaces that host a range of activities and services;

- The remaining registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire (29%) do not provide community-facing activities, but provide support to those frontline organisations that do. By far the largest proportion of this group are fundraising and grant giving organisations. These are generally not open grant funds, but organisations raising funds for a specific building or purpose, such as a school PTA.

**The primary purpose of unincorporated VCSE groups in Worcestershire** is spread across a more focussed set of themes, with the vast majority delivering activities or services within just three of the 20 categories:

- Sport/ Physical Activity (59%)
- Social Connections/ Hobby Activities (24%)
- Community Support or 'Good Neighbour' Activity (9%)

The most common primary purposes of the group of 109 **registered charities and social enterprises operating in Worcestershire but registered elsewhere** were Social Support (30%), Mental Health (14%), Physical Health (11%), Disability or Age-Related Support (7%), and Community Support (7%).

### **Observations**

Four significant observations were made about this Phase One data set:

- **The VCSE Sector is not viewed or treated as a discrete entity**  
Lists from local authorities and sector infrastructure organisations were typically focused on a theme, such as mental health support or recreational activities, drawing no explicit distinction between services and activities delivered by VCSE organisations and those provided by public sector or even private sector providers;
- **The idea of a unified 'VCSE sector' feels inappropriate**  
The 'VCSE sector' in Worcestershire may be better understood as an amalgam of several different 'sectors', each with their own distinct characteristics, impact, opportunities and challenges;
- **Unincorporated groups are mostly focussed on recreation and social activities**  
There is evidence of several hundred unincorporated community groups and self-organising community activities throughout Worcestershire. The vast majority of these organise social or recreational activities, or undertake very localised community support or good neighbour activities;
- **Only a small proportion of registered VCSE organisations are known to stakeholders**  
Less than a quarter of the 1922 registered VCSE organisations based in Worcestershire were included in one or more of the local data sets. This suggests a significant discrepancy between the sector as defined administratively, and the 'VCSE sector' as a contributor to local networks and positive community impact.

### **Recommendations for Phase Two Research Priorities**

Three recommendations are made for consideration when identifying the research priorities for Phase Two:

- **Investigate service delivery of larger organisations**  
Much of the value of the sector is in collective impact. However, the individual reach and impact of larger organisations is significant. There would be value in undertaking additional work to identify 'services' in addition to 'organisations', particularly for larger organisations. This would enable a more complete understanding of the scale, reach and impact of the VCSE sector in Worcestershire;
- **Identify meaningful sub-sectors**  
In order to get a better understanding of the sector overall, it is recommended that consideration is given to identifying meaningful sub-groups of organisations that have similar characteristics and/or purposes. Such sub-groups are likely to have different potential impact, opportunities, challenges and support needs, consideration of which should enable more effective strategies for engagement;
- **Consider impact**  
Phase One has sought to identify the presence of organisations, but this says nothing about the impact achieved for individuals and communities, nor the scope of possibilities for the sector to support the ICS. Research to identify the impact of the sector would be a worthwhile addition to understanding the sector, and a key route to identifying sector strengths on which to build.

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## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the vital contributions of the voluntary sector infrastructure organisations and public sector partners who helped compile the data sets, and to Mike Rice of Worcestershire County Council for producing the maps in this report.

# Section 1 – Introduction

## 1.1 About Worcestershire VCSE Alliance

The Worcestershire VCSE Alliance provides a platform for Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations to collectively amplify their impact, learn from each other and support positive change within their communities.

The launch of the NHS Integrated Care System (ICS) in July 2022 saw strategic guidance to NHS organisations to work with their VCSE sector in the form of an alliance. Worcestershire County Council agreed to fund a VCSE Strategic Lead to establish and develop a Worcestershire Alliance. Further funding from the Health and Care Trust and NHSE enabled the Alliance to develop key areas of work.

Worcestershire VCSE Alliance works with statutory agencies to bridge the gap that exists between voluntary and public sectors, helping to improve public services to better meet the needs of the local population. In its current phase, the Alliance is made up of 23 voluntary and community sector leaders. This phase is being used to establish governance and priorities, embed principal ways of working and identify initial VCSE workstreams. The next phase will see a review of progress, a new wider engagement structure will be introduced and a VCSE strategy and delivery plan will be designed.

## 1.2 Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE Sector in Worcestershire

The Worcestershire VCSE Alliance is undertaking a major research and evaluation project “Understanding and Strengthening the VCSE”, funded by Worcestershire County Council. The aim of this research is to build an evidence-based understanding of the key strengths of the sector, alongside robust evidence of impact. The project has two phases:

- **Phase One- intelligence gathering and scoping**  
Collating information about VCSE organisations throughout Worcestershire, identifying geographic reach and the range of work being undertaken;
- **Phase Two- strengths, opportunities and gaps**  
Research to better understand the demographic reach, capacity, social impact, financial value and challenges of the VCSE Sector in Worcestershire.

The research outputs will focus on providing a robust evidence base to inform a VCSE strategy that will strengthen the sector as a whole. The research results will be shared with the sector and statutory sector partners as a resource for identifying development opportunities, and will be used to inform the Alliance’s future priorities as it moves to the next stage of its development.

## 1.3 This Report

Worcestershire VCSE Alliance commissioned Tiller Research Ltd to undertake the Phase One intelligence gathering and scoping exercise. This report presents the Phase One findings, focusing on outputs 4 and 5 of the project’s scoping document. In addition, the observations and recommendations in Section 4 contribute towards outputs 6 and 7:

4. Collation of existing mapping and research from across all districts;
5. Summary report of existing data produced providing a snapshot of the current VCSE Services in Worcestershire for the steering group to analyse.
6. Existing data gaps in VCSE service provision identified;
7. Project objectives scoped collaboratively and a detailed action plan produced for Phase 2.

## Section 2 – Methodology

### 2.1 Data Sources

The VCSE in Worcestershire comprises registered charities and not-for-profit companies based in the county, unincorporated and informal groups, and local operations of national or regional charities and social enterprises. Information on these organisations and groups was collated from the following sources:

#### 2.1.1 National Registers

National registers were used to identify VCSE organisations based in Worcestershire:

- **Registered Charities**

The Charity Commission website was searched for organisations that indicate specific operations in Worcestershire on their registration. This was cross-referenced with <https://charitybase.uk/>. Those registered at an address outside Worcestershire were manually reviewed to identify evidence of specific operations in Worcestershire, typically by reviewing the organisation's website and/or social media. Organisations were removed if information was found relating to operations, but this did not include operations in Worcestershire. All others progressed to the processing outlined in section 2.2 below. This provided a base data set of 1,930 registered charities.

- **Registered Companies**

Multiple searches were undertaken on the Companies House website to cover all permutations of the following:

- Registered office address includes one or more of: *Worcestershire, Bromsgrove, Droitwich, Evesham, Kidderminster, Pershore, Redditch, Worcester*;
- Company type: *Limited by Guarantee, Limited by Guarantee use of 'limited' exemption*;
- Company subtype: *CIC*;
- Company status: *Active*.

Data cleansing was undertaken to remove duplicates, and to remove organisations from outside Worcestershire but with a Worcestershire place name in their address. This provided a base data set of 1,370 Companies Limited by Guarantee and 187 Community Interest Companies.

- **Registered Mutual Societies**

The register of mutual societies was downloaded from the Financial Conduct Authority website. Societies based in Worcestershire were extracted by postcode, providing a base data set of 42 mutual societies.

- **Community Amateur Sports Clubs**

The list of community amateur sports clubs (CASC) registered with HMRC was downloaded. Clubs based in Worcestershire were extracted by postcode, providing a base data set of 72 CASCs.

This provided an initial data set of 3,601 VCSE organisations based in Worcestershire. Data cleansing was undertaken to remove duplicates (e.g. registered charities that are also a company limited by guarantee).

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### 2.1.2 Local Data Sets

Information about VCSE organisations operating in Worcestershire was kindly provided by:

- District-based voluntary sector local infrastructure organisations;
- Countywide VCSE infrastructure organisations and theme leads;
- Worcestershire County Council databases and organisation lists;
- District Council databases and organisation lists.

In addition, information was gathered from websites and social media of local host venues such as village halls.

Locally provided information was used in three ways:

- **To confirm and refine information identified from searches of national data sets.** The website search functions of Charity Commission and Companies House do not pick up organisations with gaps or errors in their records, such as spelling mistakes in their address. In addition, some small organisations operating in Worcestershire may have a registered office that is outside the county. Locally held information was used as a prompt to conduct searches for individual registered organisations that had not been picked up by the initial searches undertaken as outlined in 2.1.1;
- **To identify unincorporated voluntary and community groups operating in Worcestershire.** Local information was used to undertake individual searches for specific organisations. Due to the informal nature of many groups and frequent changes in operation, some form of independent confirmation of current activity was identified before including a group within the data set. Typically this was a recently updated website or social media post, either directly from the identified group or via a third party such as the host venue;
- **To identify national or regional VCSE organisations operating in Worcestershire.** A significant number of large charities and community enterprises have a presence in Worcestershire. Local information was used to identify specific Worcestershire-based services run by VCSE organisations based elsewhere. Nationally available services delivered remotely were not included. It should be noted that some national organisations have local branches that are independent registered organisations in their own right. Where services and activities are delivered by a local branch that is independently registered, organisations were not included in the list of national or regional VCSE organisations operating in Worcestershire.

## 2.2 Inclusion Criteria

The base data sets were analysed and refined as follows:

- **Organisation or group is currently active**  
Evidence was sought that organisations are active in some form, such as an up to date website or recent social media post. Filings for registered organisations were reviewed. Those noted on the relevant register to be dormant were removed, as were organisations that had not filed accounts for three years or that had zero registered income at their last reporting date. For recently registered organisations, local confirmation of recent activity was sought before an organisation was included.

- **Organisation has specific Worcestershire delivery**  
A small number of organisations have a registered office in Worcestershire but operate wholly outside Worcestershire. These were excluded.
- **A not-for-profit organisation or group providing community benefit**  
Organisations and groups were included if their stated purpose was for the not-for-profit benefit of a community and/or society at large. Where an organisation's purpose and operations are not a generally recognised VCSE purpose, or where they appear to be run for the financial benefit of individuals, they were removed. The most significant numbers of exclusions were made in relation to:
  - Companies Limited by Guarantee that, although not-for-profit, have a non-VCSE purpose, such as property holding for commercial companies;
  - Community-based activities that are run by a sole trader or private limited company charging a fee for participation.
- **Not public or private sector**  
Several public sector bodies organise and facilitate volunteer schemes, as do some private sector organisations such as care homes. For the purpose of this data set, it was not considered sufficient for an activity to be undertaken by volunteers for it to be considered part of the VCSE. The research sought to identify VCSE organisations and groups, not the scale and scope of volunteer activity.

There are challenges in confirming the status of organisations, in particular identifying whether hobby or social activities are run by an independent self-organising group, or are an activity managed by an organisation such as a local charity, national charity, or public sector organisation. In each case, a judgement was made based on the available evidence. The presumption was to include an organisation as an independent group unless evidence to the contrary was identified. This means it is likely the data set contains groups that are in fact activities run by larger groups or organisations.

## 2.3 Categories

Analysis of the recorded 'nature of business' of registered organisations was undertaken to identify suitable category groups. This resulted in a list of 20 categories:

1. Animal or Environment
2. Arts
3. Business Support (e.g. a primary purpose to support other charities or groups)
4. Community Support or 'Good Neighbour' Activity
5. Crisis Support
6. Disability or Age-Related Support
7. Education
8. Faith-Based Activities
9. Fundraising/ Grant giving
10. Heritage
11. Infrastructure (e.g. rural broadband, sewerage, renewable energy)
12. Managing a Community Asset (e.g. a village hall or community playing field)
13. Membership Organisation (e.g. social clubs)
14. Mental Health (primary purpose to address mental ill-health)
15. Physical Health (primary purpose to support people experiencing ill-health)
16. Research
17. Social Support (e.g. advocacy or welfare support other than in a crisis situation)



18. Social Connections/ Hobby Activities (e.g. non-sporting recreational activities)
19. Sport/ Physical Activity
20. Youth Work

As the purpose of this exercise was to identify organisations rather than operations, each organisation was assigned to one 'best fit' category based on their objects and/or public profile. Many organisations undertake activities or have an impact across multiple category areas, but in the vast majority of cases this is subordinate to their primary purpose.

Examples include:

- Sports clubs will build social connections and have a positive impact on the physical and mental health of their participants. However, these additional impacts are achieved as a result of delivering their primary purpose of sport or physical activity;
- Many organisations use arts activities to deliver community, support or mental health objectives. These organisations were allocated to 'Education', 'Social Connections/ Hobby Activities', 'Disability/ Age-Related Support' or other relevant primary purpose category. 'Arts' was reserved for those organisations whose primary purpose is the development or presentation of visual arts, performing arts or other arts forms.

## 2.4 VCSE Assembly Review of Draft Outputs

Initial findings were presented to the Worcestershire VCSE Assembly on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2023. With 71 delegates representing Worcestershire VCSE organisations and 29 stakeholder representative, the draft outputs were reviewed by facilitated discussion groups. Four questions were discussed by each group, with responses recorded by the group facilitator:

- Focus on the initial findings:
  - How might these findings be helpful for your organisation?
  - How might these findings be helpful for the VCSE as a whole?
- Identifying potential research focus for Phase 2:
  - What additional information would help to strengthen the impact of your organisation's services?
  - What additional information would help to strengthen the VCSE's contribution to the ICS?

Group outputs were qualitatively analysed to identify key themes to inform the conclusions and recommendations of this report.

## 2.5 Known Gaps

The Phase One data collation was consciously the first step of a longer journey to develop an understanding of the VCSE sector in Worcestershire. The focus was on creating a 'big picture' overview of the sector sufficient for identifying the most useful research questions for Phase Two. It is important to bear the following in mind when reviewing the results:

- The results relate to **organisations not services**. A small proportion of Worcestershire based VCSE organisations deliver multiple services from multiple venues around the county. In addition, 109 regional or national organisations were identified as having specific operations in Worcestershire, sometimes in multiple locations. This means that the mapping outputs only records each organisation once, and so does not include every delivery location for all organisations;

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- The data collation relied on **registration information**, which is not always an accurate indication of current operations. For example, organisations may have a registered address that is different to where their operations are based.;
  - The **allocation of organisations to categories** was a judgement call. More in-depth investigation is required to confirm allocations, and to fully understand situations where organisations deliver services and impact across multiple categories;
  - The current data set has an **absence of evidence of impact**. Although the income of organisations has been used to indicate the scale of operations, this is not a sufficient proxy for fully understanding the capacity or impact of the sector. One of the strengths of the VCSE sector is harnessing volunteer capacity to deliver positive impact with limited financial resources. Even where organisations have significant financial resources, this is not sufficient in isolation to understand the scope, scale or quality of positive impact achieved for individuals or communities.

These gaps are unlikely to significantly distort the overall picture of the VCSE sector in Worcestershire. However, they are likely to mean that more granular analysis will be less accurate without additional data. This also means that there are currently gaps in understanding the full scale, reach and impact of the VCSE sector in Worcestershire, in particular that of larger organisations.

## Section 3 – Summary of Findings

### 3.1 VCSE Organisations Registered and Operating in Worcestershire

A total of 1,922 locally based VCSE organisations were identified that are registered and operate in Worcestershire. Figure 1 indicates the location of these organisations based on Lower Super-Output Area (LSOA), which are defined areas of 400-1,200 households used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for reporting local statistics such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).

The mapped address is the main delivery location of the organisation where identified. For organisations with multiple delivery locations, or where a primary delivery location has not been identified, the mapped address is the organisation’s registered office. Figure 2 shows a district breakdown of the county map, with LSOAs highlighted where they rank in the top 20% of LSOAs in England on the IMD. Full size versions of these maps are available in Appendix A.

The proportion of Worcestershire VCSE organisations based in each of the six districts is:

- Bromsgrove: 12%
- Malvern Hills: 21%
- Redditch: 8%
- Worcester: 19%
- Wychavon: 26%
- Wyre Forest: 14%

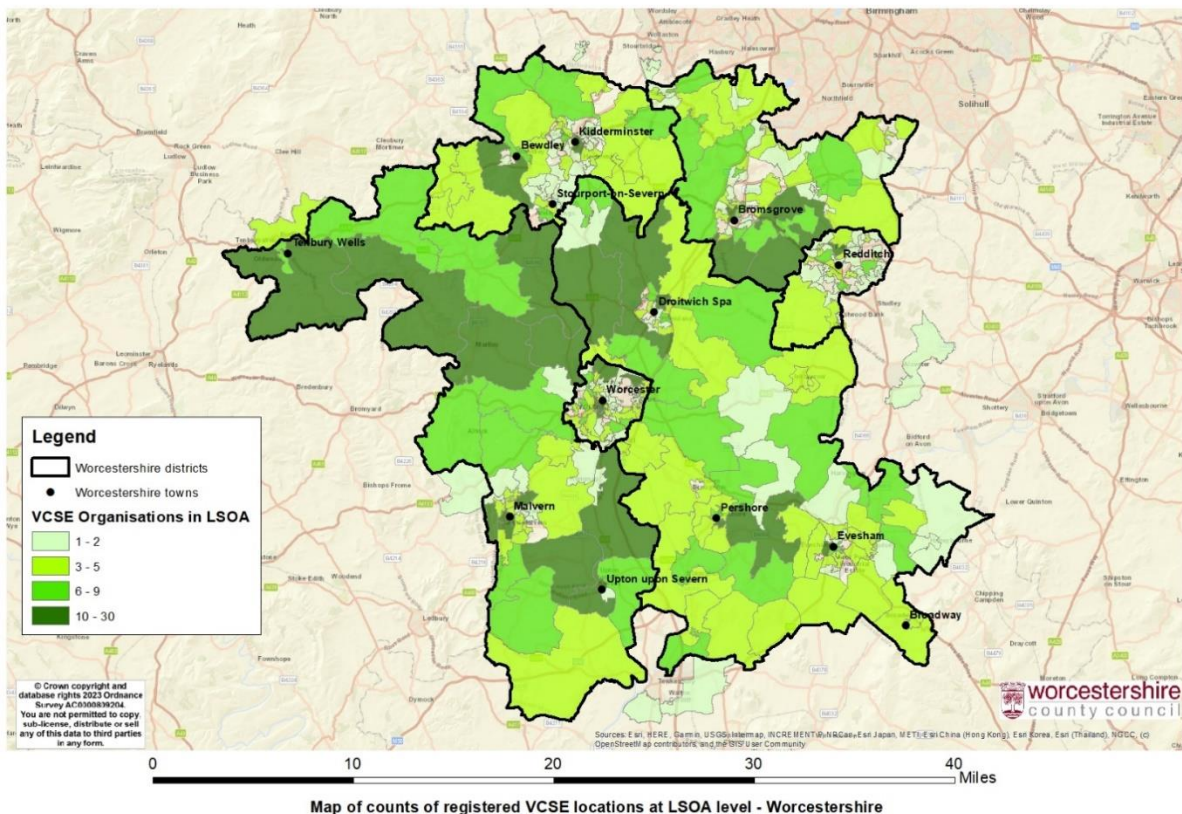


Figure 1: LSOA of registered office and/or main delivery addresses of Worcestershire VCSE organisations

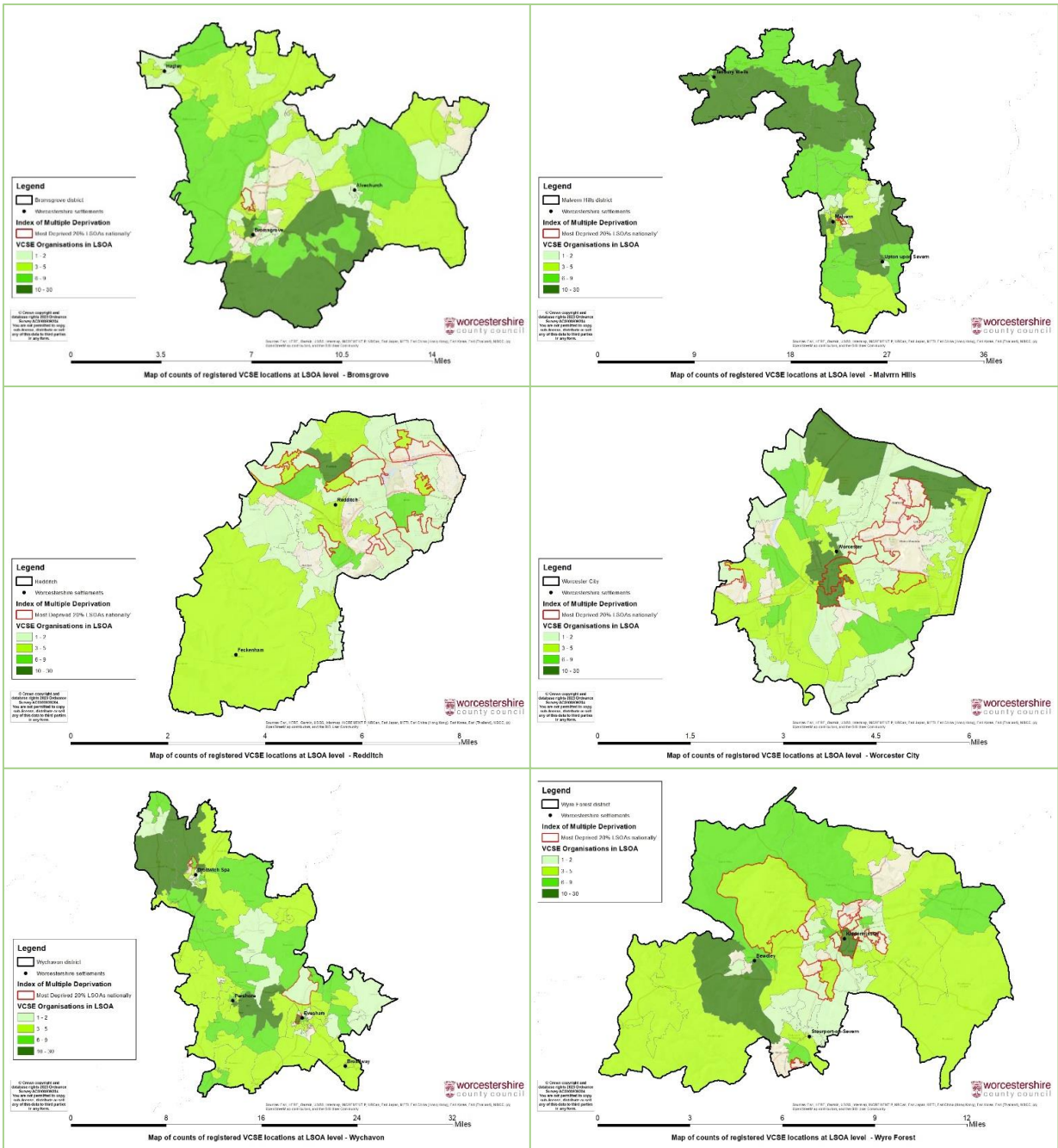


Figure 2: LSOA of registered office and/or main delivery addresses of Worcestershire VCSE organisations by district

### Local Awareness

Of the 1922 registered VCSE organisations identified as based in Worcestershire, just 438 (23%) were included in one or more of the local data sets. Similar proportions appeared on lists from sector infrastructure organisations (14%) and local authorities (15%), with 6% appearing on at least one list from both a local authority and a sector infrastructure organisation. This indicates that a significant proportion of sector organisations are not active in local networks.

Many of these will be organisations that would experience limited benefit from wider contact, such as school PTAs. Nevertheless, this raises the question of why such a large proportion of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire are unknown to sector stakeholders, and what- if any- benefits may be gained by addressing this gap.

### LSOA decile

Figure 3 shows the Index of Multiple deprivation decile locations of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire. Organisations are proportionately more likely to be located in areas of middling to lower deprivation, with very few based in the areas of highest deprivation. However, this is not necessarily an indication of where an organisation delivers its activities or services.

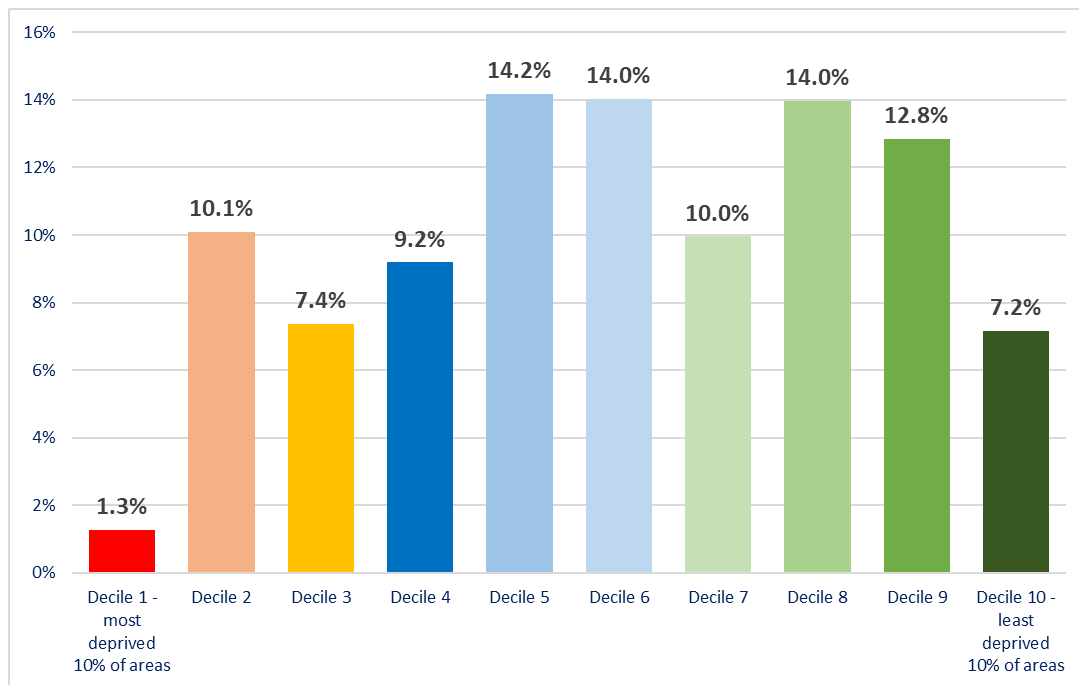


Figure 3: LSOA locations of VCSE organisations in Worcestershire, based on Index of Multiple Deprivation decile

### Primary Purpose

Figure 4 illustrates the breakdown of the primary purpose of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire. Maps showing the main delivery location (where known) or registered office address of organisations by primary purpose can be found in Appendix B.

To consider the contribution of the VCSE sector to the health and wellbeing of communities in Worcestershire, the 20 primary purpose categories have been grouped into four themes:

- 3% of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire have a primary purpose relating to **direct health outcomes**. These are services that directly address mental and/or physical ill-health;
- 22% of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire have a primary purpose that **directly supports health and wellbeing**. This includes provision of sports or physical activities, services to support disabled people and/or those with age-related support needs, support for people in crisis, and social support such as advocacy, advice, hardship relief or housing. These organisations undertake activities that are likely to reduce the risk of mental and/or physical ill-health;
- 47% of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire have a primary purpose that **contributes to creating the right conditions for wellbeing**. These activities are not necessarily directly focused on promoting health and wellbeing, but are likely to make a positive contribution to wellbeing nonetheless. This includes arts, education,

youth work, social or hobby activities, and assets such as community buildings and outdoor spaces that host community and/or wellbeing activities;

- The remaining registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire do not provide community-facing activities, but provide **support to the frontline organisations** that do. By far the largest proportion of this group are fundraising and grant giving organisations. These are generally not open grant funds, but organisations raising funds for a specific building or purpose, such as a school PTA.



Figure 4: Primary purpose of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire

## Age

Figure 5 illustrates the breakdown of the age of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire. The majority of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire are well-established, with just over half having been formed more than 20 years ago (51%).

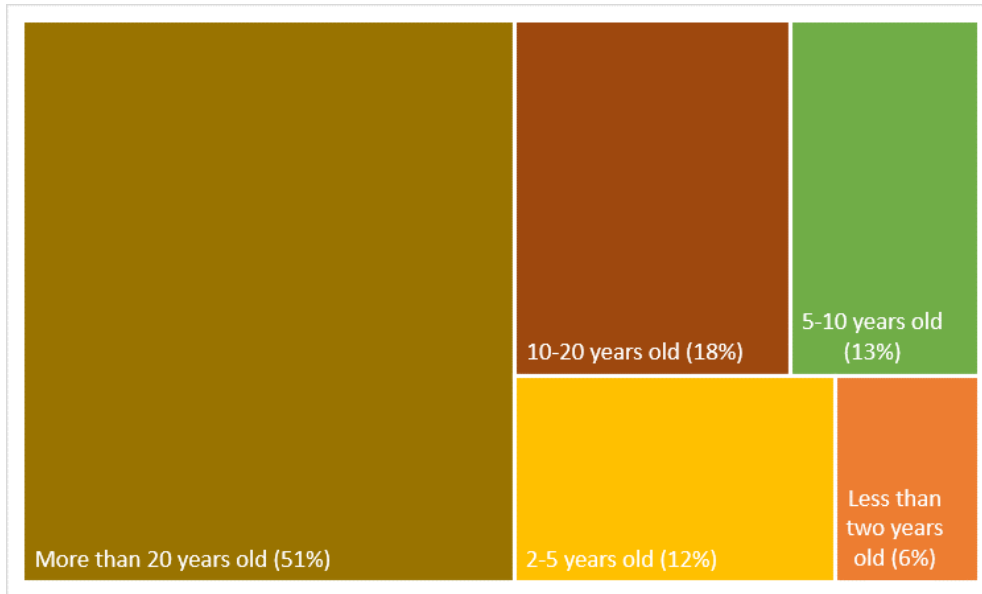


Figure 5: Age of VCSE organisations in Worcestershire

## Size

Figure 6 illustrates the size of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire based on income. The majority are either small organisations with incomes between £10,000 and £100,000 (37%) or micro organisations with an annual income below £10,000 (45%).

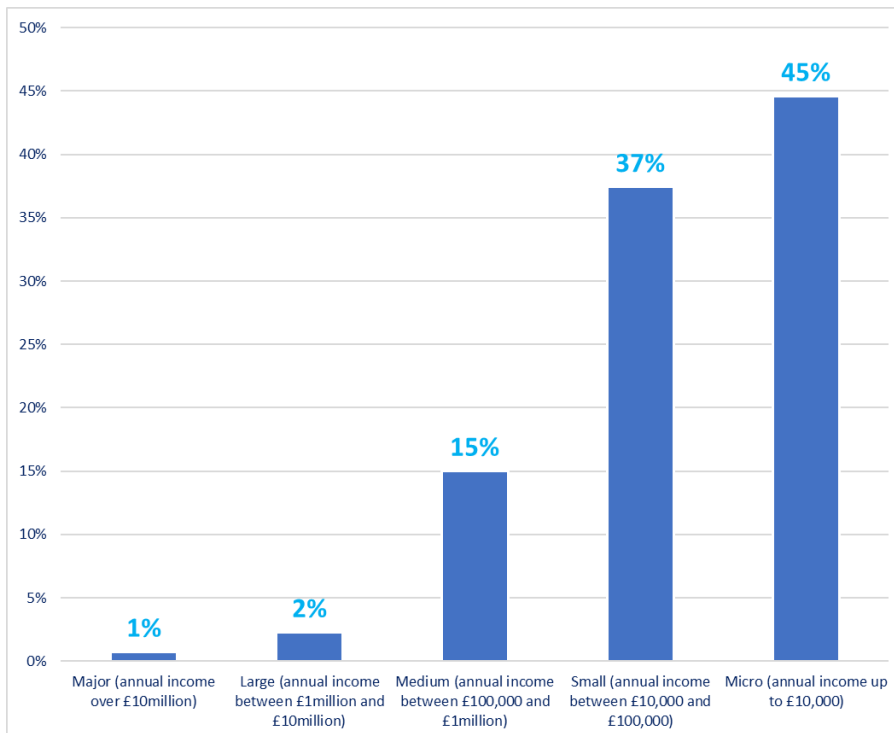


Figure 6: Size of registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire, using NCVO categories. This chart is based on a sample of 1366 organisations where financial data is available

### 3.2 Unincorporated VCSE Groups in Worcestershire

A total of 686 groups were identified from local data sets that are currently operating in Worcestershire and are assumed to be unincorporated community groups. Of these, around three quarters are groups known to sector infrastructure organisations such as Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Young Solutions and/or district Councils for Voluntary Service (74%), with 28% known to a local authority. Just 4% were known to both a sector infrastructure organisation and a local authority, with 2% identified by neither.

Figure 7 illustrates the LSOA locations of the main delivery address of unincorporated VCSE groups identified in the local data sets. This is unlikely to be a complete or fully accurate picture of unincorporated community groups in Worcestershire, due to limitations outlined in section 2. Nevertheless, the data set gives a good high-level overview of the locations and purpose of these groups. District maps are provided in Appendix C.

Figure 8 shows the postcode locations of activities. This shows how the identified unincorporated groups are generally clustered. Clusters are typically either linked to areas of highest population, or indicate a busy village hall or other community building that hosts a large number of independent group activities. A busy village hall will often host a range of activities delivered by a range of private, public sector and VCSE providers, in addition to self-organising unincorporated community groups. As such, some community buildings may host many activities and services, but few unincorporated VCSE groups.

The identified unincorporated VCSE groups were most likely to be found in middle-ranking areas of deprivation, and notably less likely to be found in areas of highest deprivation, as shown in Figure 9.

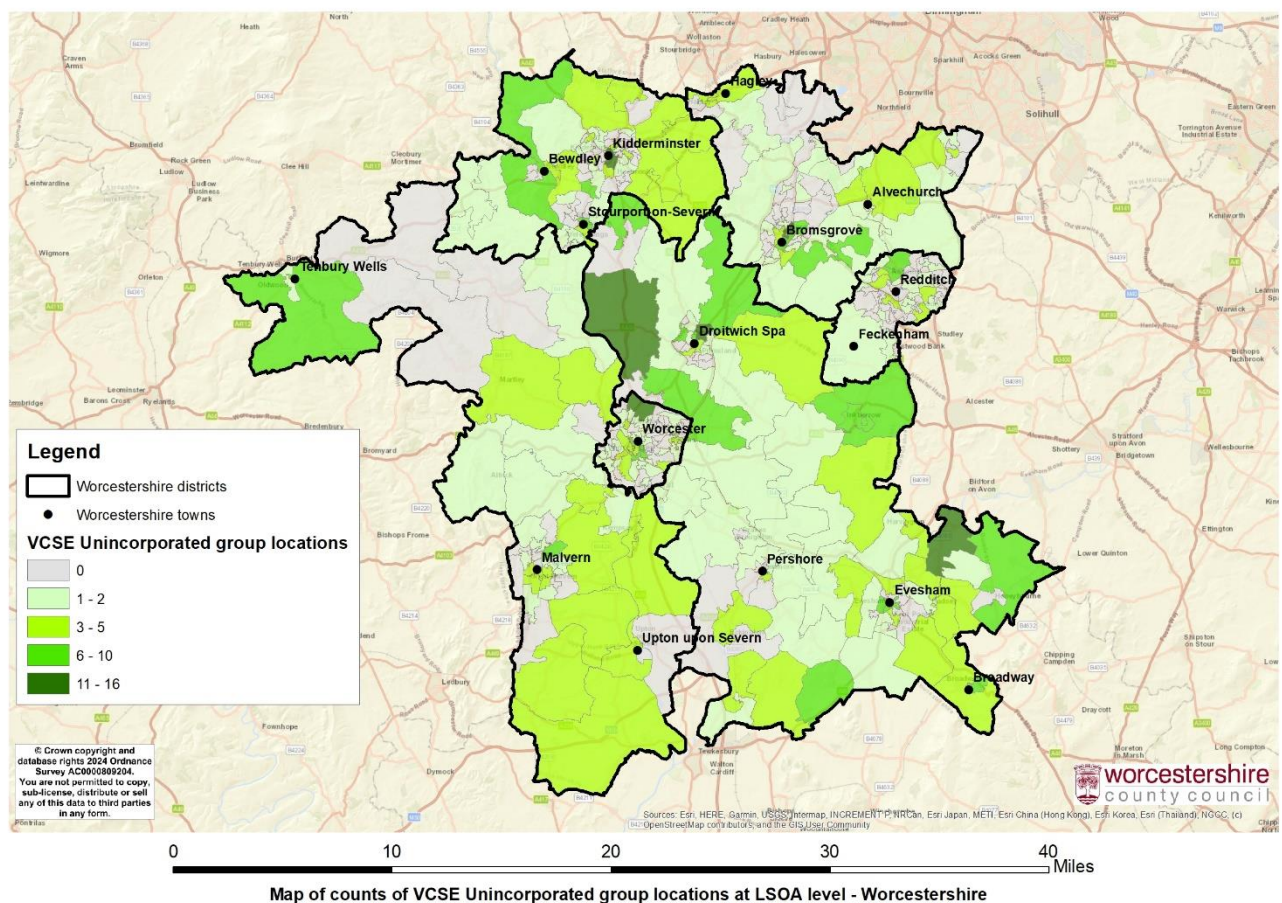


Figure 7: LSOA of main delivery addresses of unregistered Worcestershire VCSE organisations



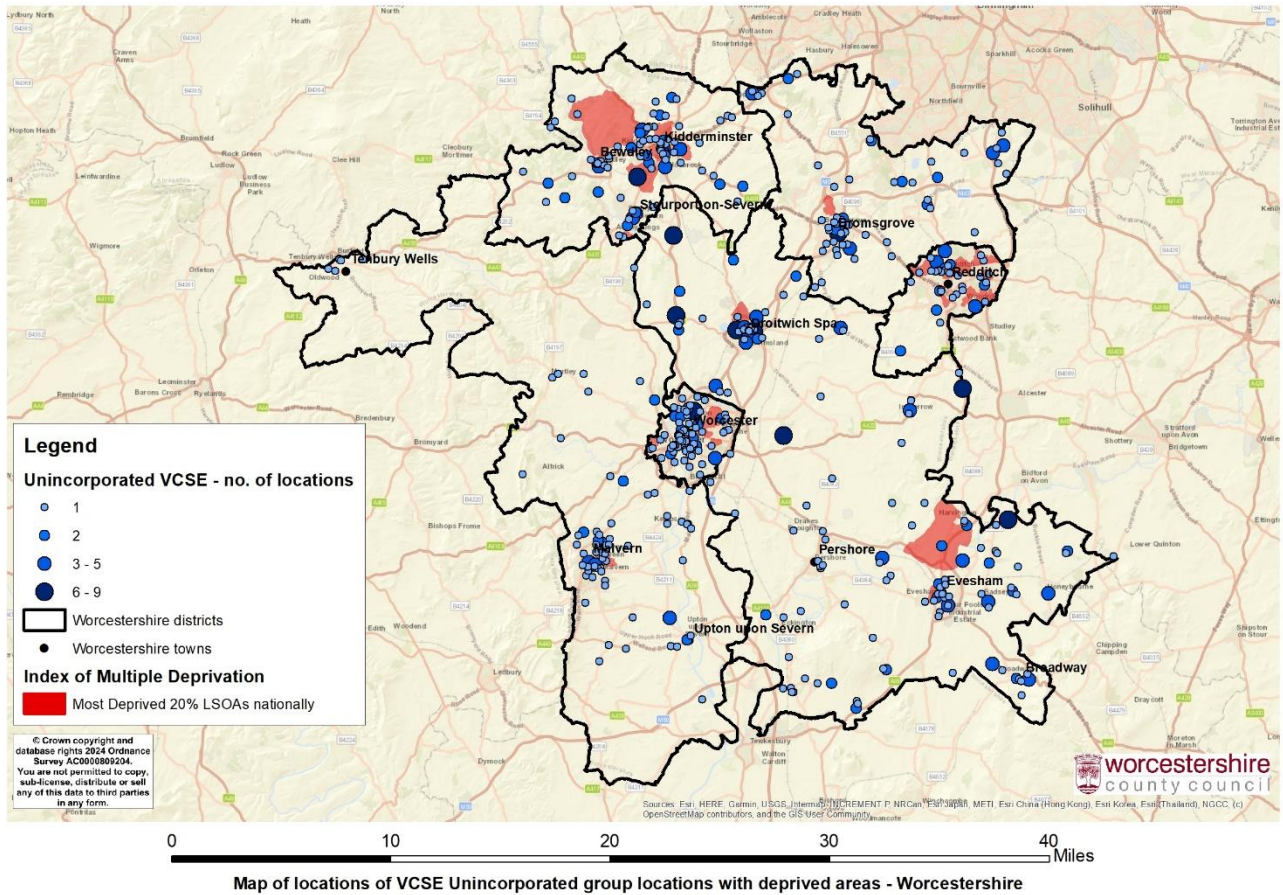


Figure 8: Postcodes of main delivery addresses of unregistered Worcestershire VCSE organisations

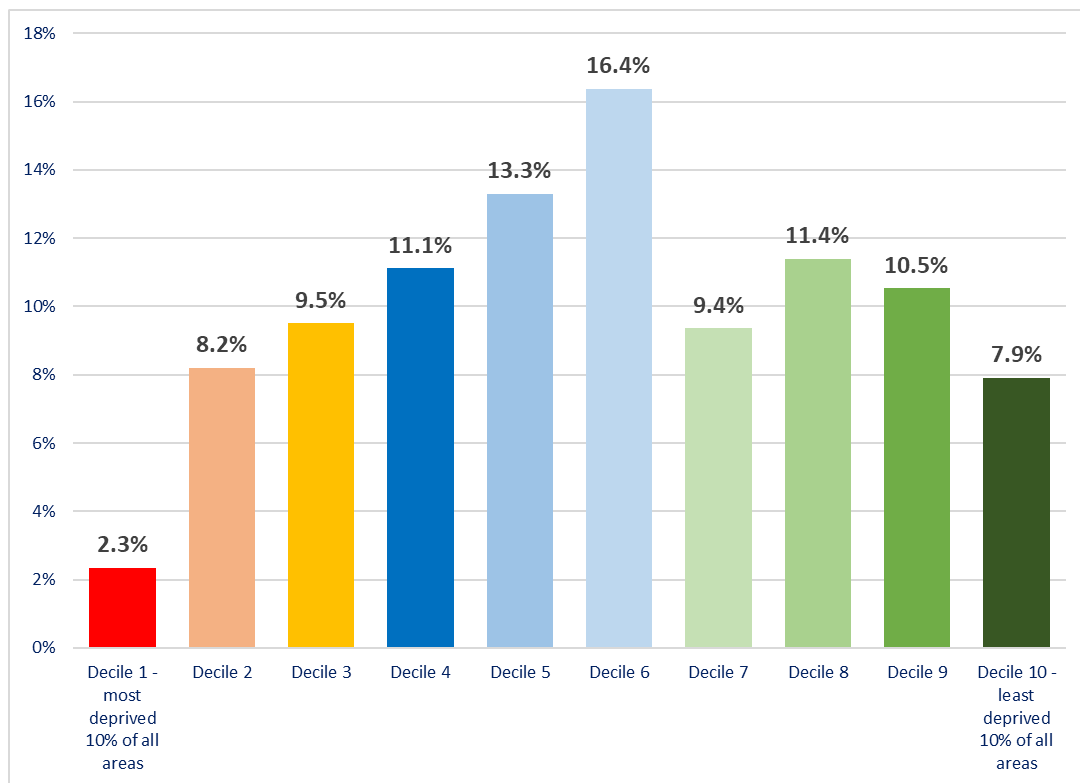


Figure 9: LSOA locations of unincorporated VCSE groups in Worcestershire, based on Index of Multiple Deprivation decile

### Primary Purpose

The primary purpose of the vast majority of identified unincorporated VCSE groups was within just three of the 20 categories identified in section 2.3 (figure 10):

- Sport/ Physical Activity (59%)
- Social Connections/ Hobby Activities (24%)
- Community Support or 'Good Neighbour' Activity (9%)

The locations of groups in each of these three categories are mapped in Appendix D. It is possible that the relative size of these groupings has been somewhat distorted by the available data. Active Herefordshire and Worcestershire has a large database of sports organisations that may mean that a greater proportion of all sports groups have been identified than is the case for non-sports groups. Nevertheless, it is notable that unincorporated groups in Worcestershire do not have the same breadth of purpose as registered groups, with most existing to provide recreational or social activity of some kind.

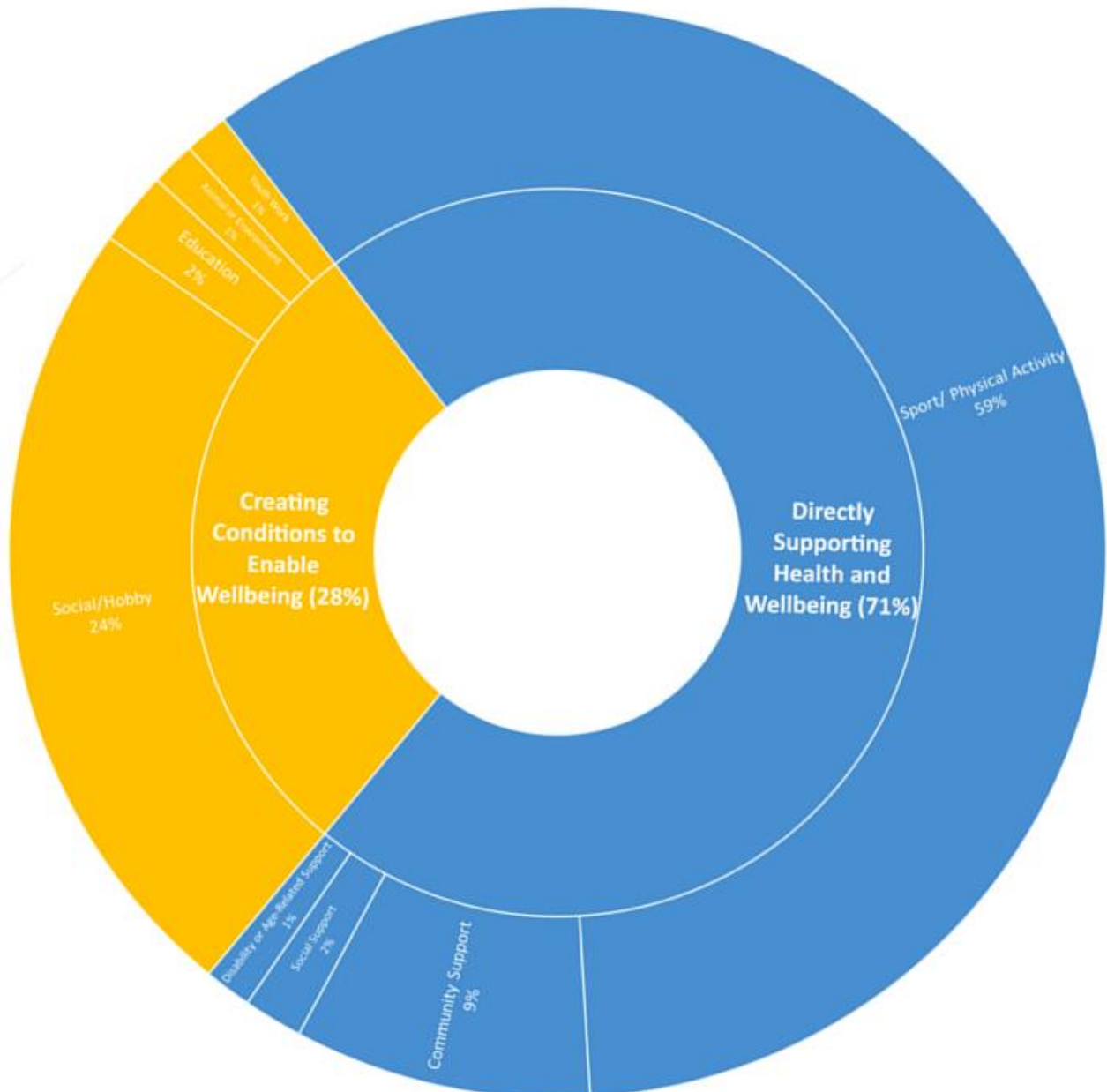


Figure 10: Primary purpose of unincorporated VCSE groups in Worcestershire

### 3.3 Regional and National Organisations Operating in Worcestershire

The active presence of regional and national charities and social enterprises operating in Worcestershire is not clear cut, as several large charities have legally independent local entities. Other complications include:

- It is not always easy to distinguish between self-organising local groups that are affiliated with a national organisation, and groups ‘run by’ that organisation;
- There are organisations where some, but not all, local groups are independently registered: Scout Units, for example, are all regarded as separate charities, but are not required to register with the Charity Commission under all circumstances<sup>1</sup>;
- A small number of organisations would appear to be focused on Worcestershire, but have a registered office address in another part of the country;
- Some resource databases, in particular those managed by local authorities, list sources of information and support that may only be available remotely, e.g. via telephone or online support. Although evidence was sought of an active physical presence in Worcestershire before including an organisation on this list, the default position adopted was to include an organisation where there doubt.

A total of 109 charities and social enterprises not based in Worcestershire were identified in one or more sets of local data as delivering services or activities in the county. A list of these can be found in Appendix E. The most common primary purposes of this group were Social Support (30%), Mental Health (14%), Physical Health (11%), Disability or Age-Related Support (7%), and Community Support (7%).

### 3.4 Review of Discussion Groups at the VCSE Assembly

The Worcestershire VCSE Assembly was held on 25th October 2023. Initial data from this research was presented and considered by facilitated discussion groups. Key themes were identified as follows:

Element	Questions	Key Themes
<b>Focus on Initial Findings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How might these findings be helpful for your organisation?</li> <li>• How might these findings be helpful for the VCSE as a whole?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding who is doing what and where</li> <li>• Identifying potential gaps in services</li> <li>• Identifying collaborative opportunities</li> <li>• Informing planning- internally and collaboratively</li> </ul>
<b>Identifying Potential Research Focus for Phase 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What additional information would help to strengthen the impact of your organisation’s services?</li> <li>• What additional information would help to strengthen the VCSE’s contribution to the ICS?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More granular detail (searchable?)</li> <li>• Service mapping in addition to organisational mapping</li> <li>• Impact</li> <li>• Funding sources</li> <li>• System map of council, NHS, VCSE</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.scouts.org.uk/por/13-trusteeship-property-and-equipment/rule-131-charity-requirements/>

## Section 4 – Observations and Recommendations

The purpose of this Phase One report was to collate existing mapping of VCSE organisations from across Worcestershire, and create a summary report of existing data to provide a snapshot of the current VCSE organisations in the county. The collated data set will be reviewed by the project steering group before deciding the next steps for the project. This final section highlights some key observations that may help inform the design and focus for Phase Two.

### 4.1 Observations

#### 4.1.1 The VCSE Sector is not viewed or treated as a discrete entity

Local data sets tended to focus on services and activities from a community or participant perspective. Lists from local authorities and sector infrastructure organisations were typically focused on a theme, such as mental health support or recreational activities, drawing no explicit distinction between services and activities delivered by VCSE organisations and those provided by public sector or even private sector providers.

There is also the potential conflation of ‘volunteer activity’ and ‘the VCSE sector’. Some public and private sector organisations involve volunteers, and some VCSE sector organisations are run mostly or completely by paid staff. This raises the question of what could or should be understood and communicated to be the distinctive features of the VCSE sector.

#### 4.1.2 The idea of a unified ‘VCSE sector’ feels inappropriate

A report by Tony Chapman (Durham University, 2022)<sup>2</sup> suggests that it is better to think of the VCSE sector as ‘three sectors in one’, with organisations of different sizes typically having very different purposes, reach, impact and support needs. The data examined for Phase One support the view that the ‘VCSE sector’ in Worcestershire may be better understood as an amalgam of several different ‘sectors’, each with their own distinct characteristics, impact, opportunities and challenges. Appropriate ‘sub-sectors’ may or may not be based on the size of organisations based on income.

There may be value in seeking to develop an understanding of the ‘sub-sectors’ of the VCSE within Worcestershire, and identifying the opportunities (and resulting benefits) of developing approaches to interaction, communication and support that are tailored to the characteristics and potential impact of these sub-sectors.

#### 4.1.3 Unincorporated groups are mostly focussed on recreation and social activities

There is evidence of several hundred unincorporated community groups and self-organising community activities throughout Worcestershire. The vast majority of these organise social or recreational activities, or undertake very localised community support or good neighbour activities. Recognising this should provide a strong framework for future work to understand the impact of and opportunities to strengthen these groups.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.stchads.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/SUMMARY-REPORT-The-structure-dynamics-and-impact-of-the-VCSE-sector-in-Cornwall-and-Isles-of-Scilly-February-2022.pdf>

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**4.1.4 Only a small proportion of registered organisations are known to stakeholders**  
Less than a quarter of the 1922 registered VCSE organisations based in Worcestershire were included in one or more of the local data sets. This suggests a significant discrepancy between the sector as defined administratively, and the ‘VCSE sector’ as a contributor to local networks and positive community impact.

There would be benefits in developing a deeper understanding of why such a small proportion of registered not-for-profit organisations are known to sector infrastructure organisations and stakeholders. Together with point 4.1.2 above, this may usefully lead to better understanding of the VCSE sector as a collection of sub-sectors, which in turn should enable the development of effective strategies for engaging with and supporting each of these groups.

## **4.2 Recommendations for Phase Two Research Priorities**

### **4.2.1 Investigate service delivery of larger organisations**

With 82% of identified registered VCSE organisations in Worcestershire considered to be ‘small’ or ‘micro’, much of the value of the sector is in collective impact. However, the individual reach and impact of larger organisations is significant. There would be value in undertaking additional work to identify ‘services’ in addition to ‘organisations’, particularly for larger organisations. This should also consider the services delivered by non-Worcestershire charities and social enterprises in the county. This would enable a more complete understanding of the scale, reach and impact of the VCSE sector in Worcestershire.

### **4.2.2 Identify meaningful sub-sectors**

In order to get a better understanding of the sector overall, it is recommended that consideration is given to identifying meaningful sub-groups of organisations that have similar characteristics and/or purposes. Such sub-groups are likely to have different potential impact, opportunities, challenges and support needs. Considering these by sub-group, rather than viewing ‘the sector’ as a single entity should enable the development of more effective strategies for engagement.

### **4.2.3 Consider impact**

Phase One has sought to identify the presence of organisations, but this says nothing about the impact achieved for individuals and communities, nor the scope of possibilities for the sector to support the ICS. Research to identify the impact of the sector would be a worthwhile addition to understanding the sector, and a key route to identifying sector strengths on which to build.