



**Dorset
Community
Action**

**TELLING THE STORY:
THE VOLUNTARY AND
COMMUNITY SECTOR IN DORSET**

PREPARED BY

**DR SUET YING HO
INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT
REGENERATION AND PLANNING**

**FOR
DORSET COMMUNITY ACTION**

DECEMBER 2009

*Registered in England
Charity Registration Number: 1060910
Company Registration Number: 3320011
Company Limited by Guarantee*

Foreword

'I was amazed at a number of facts within this Report, staggered by the sheer numbers and diversity of groups involved, and encouraged by the local nature of volunteering. Dorset is a very caring county and our community-mindedness stands out from this Report. This is an encouraging place to start. There are of course challenges, but together in partnership we can overcome them.

I encourage you to read the Report and see how you can help further develop the Third Sector in Dorset'.

SIMON RAYNES
Chairman
Dorset Strategic Partnership
(2005 – 2009)

Voluntary and community groups are a very significant part of Dorset's life. Groups contribute both economically and socially, and deliver a vast array of services. This report brings together results of DCA's Audit of the sector in 2007 with the results of central government's National Survey of Third Sector Organisations in 2008. The report shows that we have an income of £174 million (80% of Dorset County Council), employ over 5000 full time equivalent posts (3.6% of Dorset's workforce) and our volunteers would cost at least £45 million a year to replace with paid staff. However we are still sometimes sidelined or dismissed as insignificant when compared to the public and private sector. Hopefully this report will help to dismiss this myth and help other agencies value the work that all voluntary and community groups, both large and small, do to improve the quality of life for Dorset's residents and what more they could do with the right opportunities, encouragement and support.

Although the sector as a whole is significant in size and activity it is predominantly made up of small, very local groups with limited time and energy to get involved in training, consultations, decision making, etc. Therefore there are challenges here for both statutory agencies and organisations like DCA that support and advise frontline groups to provide appropriate services, and effectively involve and engage them.

I would like to thank Jane Raimes, my predecessor, for planning the 2007 audit and bringing partners together to design the process and find the money to pay for it. Also I would like to thank Alannah Bolt for seeing the project through and the steering group of statutory agencies and others who oversaw the entire project from beginning to end.

STEVE PLACE
Chief Executive
Dorset Community Action

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Simon Raynes and Steve Place

INTRODUCTION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAIN REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

[APPENDIX 1](#) [Tables and graphs relating to main report](#)

[APPENDIX 2](#) [Additional statistics from 2007 audit](#)

[APPENDIX 3](#) [Questionnaire from 2007 audit](#)

[APPENDIX 4](#) [Case study interviews](#)

[APPENDIX 5](#) [Focus groups](#)

[APPENDIX 6](#) [References to main report](#)

[APPENDIX 7](#) [Authorship and Methodology](#)

TELLING THE STORY: THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR IN DORSET

Introduction

In 2006 preparation began for an audit to ascertain the breadth and depth of the work of thousands of Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations in Dorset. The last survey had been conducted in 1996 / 97 prior to local government reorganisation.

Jane Rimes, then Chief Executive of Dorset Community Action (DCA), gathered together a cross sector steering group from local authorities at County and District level with other voluntary sector organisations and Bournemouth University researchers who were employed to carry out case studies and focus group interviews.

DCA led the process, and in 2007 the survey 'Valuing our Voluntary and Community Sector' (Appendix 3), was sent to over 3,000 organisations including small community groups, registered charities, social enterprises and many other Third Sector organisations.

While the report was being compiled, in 2008, a new National Survey was issued by the Office of the Third Sector (OTS). This was done in order to create a baseline for National Indicator 7 – 'creating an environment for a thriving third sector'. NI 7 was included in Dorset's Local Area Agreement so the report was halted to allow for the inclusion of the National Survey results.

The final report was prepared based on the evidence from the Dorset Community Action 2007 Audit, with additional statistics from the 2008 National Survey of Third Sector Organisations, commissioned by OTS. 'Telling the Story' is a concise document highlighting the most relevant evidence from the 2007 Audit, particularly with regard to NI 7.

Topics covered in the final report include the economic and social values of the voluntary and community sector in Dorset, the sector's characteristics and geographical coverage, the types of services and their relevance to the Dorset Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement, sources of funding and support needs of the sector. Recommendations have been put forward to help the sector and the statutory bodies to work together towards the NI 7 target set for 2011.

TELLING THE STORY: THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR IN DORSET

Executive Summary

The report *Telling the Story* provides an analysis of the voluntary and community sector in Dorset, drawing on an audit carried out in 2007 and a national survey published in 2009. It examines strengths and weaknesses in the light of a national indicator (NI7) *creating an environment for a thriving third sector* and makes a set of recommendations.

The audit demonstrated that voluntary and community organisations provide a wide range of services and activities for the residents of Dorset, both in the urban and rural areas. Within the voluntary and community sector in Dorset there are 1700 registered charities and an estimated 2 - 3000 small, unregistered community groups. Key findings from the analysis include:

- The total income of the voluntary and community sector is estimated to be £174 million per annum, equivalent to 82% of Dorset County Council's annual income
- The sector employs approximately 5,060 people (full-time equivalent), or 3.6% of the workforce in the county, and the total wage bill is estimated to be in the region of £105 million per annum
- The economic replacement value of volunteering is approximately £45 million per annum

In addition to its contribution to the local economy, the sector contributes to the social fabric of Dorset, benefiting diverse groups such as children, young people, older people, people with disabilities and faith communities. Volunteers also benefit in gaining skills and improved social networks; the county has over 74,000 hours of volunteer time per month.

In terms of the sector's activities and services:-

- Approximately 30% of the activities concern the arts, culture, sport and recreation; 23% of activities are employment or economy related and 20% cover health and social care
- 55% of voluntary and community organisations have an income under £10k per year, and 44% operate mainly in local neighbourhoods

These characteristics are similar to nearby counties such as Devon and Somerset.

The types of service provided by the sector largely correspond to the priorities set out in Dorset's Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement, but the overall portfolio of the sector is not balanced, with notable shortfall in Access to services, employment and leisure.

In terms of the income pattern, about half of the grants for the sector come from county / borough / district councils and the proportion of income from contracts is lower than national average. There are issues around commissioning, in particular the lack of full cost recovery.

The capacity of organisations is an important element for a thriving sector and the audit also indicated the nature of its support needs. This highlights issues around funding advice and impact monitoring. In terms of contributing to local decision-making – another key element of a thriving sector – it is significant that only 10.5% of organisations found this very easy or easy and a quarter found it difficult or very difficult.

For the National Indicator 7 'creating an environment for a thriving third sector', Dorset's baseline score in the National Survey is 15.4% (compared to the national average of 16.2%). This means that 15.4% of the respondents to the survey perceived that local statutory bodies have a positive influence on their success. The target for Dorset is 19.0% by 2011. The report concludes that in order to achieve the target, both the sector and the statutory bodies need to work together, targeting the following areas:-

- The capacity of voluntary and community organisations in relation to LAA priorities
- The capacity for fund-raising and tendering for public sector contracts
- Enhanced impact monitoring
- Better understanding of the decision-making process and policy procedures
- Enhanced engagement infrastructure
- Enhanced commissioning strategy
- Improved arrangements with statutory bodies.

TELLING THE STORY: THE VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR IN DORSET

1. INTRODUCTION

Dorset is one of the smallest Shire counties in England in terms of population, but is home to numerous Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is host to the Dorset and East Devon World Heritage Site, otherwise known as the Jurassic Coast. Life expectancy is two years longer than the national average, and it is ranked second as having the happiest retirees in Britain¹.

There are 1700 registered charities, plus an estimated 2 - 3000 small, unregistered community groups in Dorset, providing various services and activities to its residents, both in the urban and rural areas. In 1999 Dorset Community Action (DCA) began to develop support services for voluntary organisations and community groups in Dorset where very little had previously been available. This was based on the recommendations of a survey conducted in 1996 / 97.

In 2006 / 07, a cross sector steering group, led by DCA and funded by the Dorset Strategic Partnership, commissioned an audit of the voluntary and community sector (VCS) with the aim of providing a comprehensive picture of the sector in Dorset.

2. NATIONAL CONTEXT

Eighteen months after the DCA commissioned audit, the Office of the Third Sector² (OTS) conducted the National Survey of Third Sector Organisations. OTS was set up by the Government in recognition of the importance and the potential of the third sector's contribution to the Government's drive for strong and prosperous communities. The 2006 Local Government White Paper set out the priorities and underpinned the New Performance Framework for local authorities and local authority partnerships. Of the new set of National Indicators, the most relevant to this report is NI 7 'creating an environment for a thriving third sector', which is included in Dorset's Local Area Agreement.

The measurement of NI 7 is based on the extent to which third sector organisations perceive statutory bodies in their local areas have positive influence on their success. According to the National Survey results published in 2009, 15.4% of third sector organisations in Dorset agreed that statutory bodies in the County had positive or very positive influence on their success. In other words, the NI 7 baseline score for Dorset was 15.4%, against the national score of 16.2%. The target score for 2011 is 19.0%, a 3.6 percentage increase for Dorset³.

The **aim** of this report, therefore, is to provide an analysis of the voluntary and community sector to help the sector and its relevant partners to formulate strategies and action plans in order to achieve the 2011 target and at the same time increase the capacity of the sector to meet new challenges.

The analysis in this report is mainly based on the DCA 2007 Audit, supplemented by the National Survey results where appropriate. For the comparative elements, the latter will be used for the sake of statistical validity.

¹ The Guardian, 17 May 2009 'How Britain is coming to terms with growing old' pp 28 - 29

² OTS is under the Cabinet Office. The Third Sector refers to non-governmental and non-profit making organisations such as voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises and development trusts

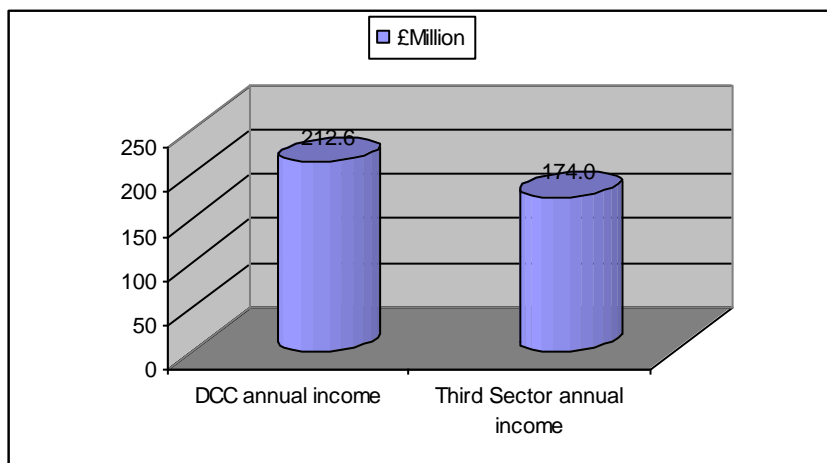
³ The score is indicative and may be adjusted after the second survey in 2010

3. The Economic Value of the Voluntary and Community Sector

The 2007 Audit shows that voluntary and community organisations make up 86% of the third sector in Dorset⁴. The remaining 14% include social enterprises, co-operatives, grant making bodies and others. Thus in formulating policies and action plans for the third sector, the specific needs of voluntary and community organisations should be at the forefront.

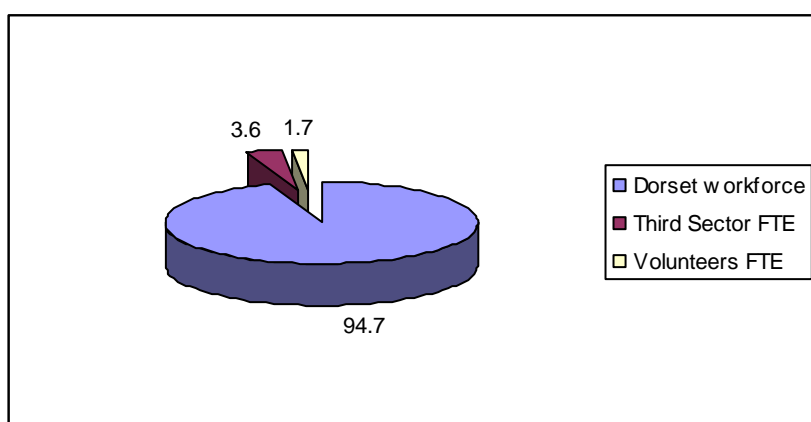
The sector plays an important economic role in Dorset, with an estimated annual income of £174 million and employing an estimated 3.6% of the workforce in the county. The annual economic replacement value of volunteers' contribution is estimated to be £45 million.

3.1 Income



According to the 2007 Audit, the total income of the 724 organisations that returned the questionnaire for the Audit was £40,023,263. Assuming that the profile of the respondents is broadly representative of the sector, the estimated total income is around £174,014,187 per annum⁵. To put it in perspective, the total income of the Dorset County Council was £212.6 million for the financial year 2007-08 (excluding capital investment)⁶ and the income of the sector is estimated to be about 82% of the income of the County Council. In other words, the sector is a substantial force to be reckoned with in Dorset.

3.2 Employees and Wage Bill



⁴ See Appendix 1, Fig 1 for a breakdown of organisational types

⁵ It is based on the assumption that the total number of third sector organisations is around 3130, the number of organisations that were sent questionnaires for the Audit. The factor used for all the estimates in this section is 23/100

⁶ Dorset County Council, Summary Accounts for 2007-08

The 2007 Audit showed that among the respondents, a total of 1,803 staff were employed. The full-time equivalent (FTE) number of staff was estimated to be 1,164 (see Appendix 1, Fig 2). Assuming the profile of these organisations is broadly representative of the sector, it is estimated that about 5,060 people are employed by the sector. This amounts to 3.6% of the workforce in Dorset⁷.

Assuming the average weekly income in Dorset is £397 per week⁸, the total salary for the 1,164 employees amounts to £24,029,616 per annum. It is estimated that for the whole sector, the total wage bill is around £104,476,591 per annum.

3.3 Volunteers Replacement Economic Value

The majority of voluntary and community organisations rely on volunteers to deliver their services and run their activities. According to the Audit, there were 12,238 volunteers plus 5,942 trustees among the 724 respondent organisations. Assuming the profile of the respondents is broadly representative of the sector, it is estimated that around 79,043 people are, or have been, involved in volunteering⁹.

To estimate the replacement economic value of the contributions of volunteers and trustees, the total number of hours contributed is a useful tool. It was estimated that the hours contributed by volunteers amount to 45,736 hours per month. Together with 28,488 hours per month contributed by trustees, the total number of hours per month amounts to 74,184.

Assuming the working week to be thirty-seven hours, the estimate is equivalent to the work of 501 full-time staff. For the whole sector, it amounts to 2,178 full-time staff, or 1.7% of the workforce in the county. This means that the replacement economic value of volunteering is estimated to be £44,968,017 per annum.

Table 3.1 Economic Value of the Voluntary and Community Sector in Dorset

	Respondents (724 organisations)	Estimate for the Sector	As a Proportion of Dorset County
Income	£40,023,263	£174,014,187	82% of DCC annual income
No of Employees FTE	1,164	5,060	3.6% workforce in Dorset
Annual Wage Bill	£24,029,616	£104,476,591	
No of Volunteers Equivalent of FTE	501	2,178	1.7% of workforce in Dorset
Annual Economic Replacement Value	£10,342,644	£44,968,017	

Source: Dorset Community Action 2007 Audit; Dorset Community Strategy: The Evidence Base 2006; Dorset County Council Summary of Accounts 2007-08

⁷ According to the Dorset Community Strategy: The Evidence Base November 2006, it was estimated that the total number of employees was 139,500

⁸ Data from the Dorset Community Strategy: The Evidence Base November 2006

⁹ It is likely that some people may be involved in more than one organisation thus the estimate could be on the high side

4. **The Social Value of the Voluntary and Community Sector**¹⁰

The contribution of the sector cannot, and should not, be measured by economic value alone. From the 2007 Audit, 91% of the respondents mainly served individuals or groups of people joined by place or interest (the other 9% mainly served other organisations or the environment). The beneficiaries included diverse groups such as children, young people, older people with disabilities or medical needs and people from specific faith communities.

A majority of the organisations (57%) helped between eleven to five hundred people, while a fifth (20%) helped over one thousand people (see Appendix 1, Fig 3). In addition to the number of people helped, people who volunteer also reap benefits. Volunteers generally lead more active lives, have better social networks and in some cases, acquire skills and experience which will help their employment prospects¹¹.

According to the 2007 Audit, most organisations feel that the value of their activities is to help eg 'bringing people together and making more friendships and networks in their community', followed by 'people helping and supporting other people in need' and 'people taking part in their local community activities and events' (see Appendix 1, Fig 4 A and B). All these attributes are important elements of a strong and inclusive community – one of the main priorities of the Dorset Community Strategy.

5. **Characteristics and Geographical Coverage**

From the above analysis, it is obvious that the sector plays an important role in Dorset's local economy and social agenda. In the light of this key role it is useful to understand the characteristics of the sector.

5.1 Characteristics

There is a good mix of long-standing organisations in the county, as well as newly established ones. The 2007 Audit showed that 11% of the respondents were established before 1900. The majority, 60%, were established after 1970, and about a quarter of those were established since 2000. Some of the characteristics are as follows:-

- Voluntary and community organisations make up 86% of the third sector;
- Most of the organisations are independent / stand alone (66%);
- 76% are registered with the Charities Commission;
- A large proportion of the organisations mainly carry out their activities in their neighbourhoods (44%)
- The majority of the organisations do not have paid staff (65%)
- The majority of the organisations have an annual income under £10K (55%)

The National Survey, which included only those organisations registered with the applicable registering bodies eg the Charities Commission or Companies House, shows that in Dorset a smaller proportion of organisations (45%) have an annual income under £10K.

Using the National Survey statistics for comparison, the voluntary and community sector in Dorset tends to be operating more locally and in a smaller scale compared to the national averages. Compared to counties with similar characteristics, the characteristics in Dorset County are similar to those in Devon and Somerset. See Table 5.1 for comparative figures.

¹⁰ Office of the Third Sector is developing a project 'Measuring Social Value of the third sector'. The project focuses on the development of 'Social Return on Investment' (SROI), a tool to evaluate the social impact of the third sector, specifically to develop a financial proxy value of social change brought by third sector services.

¹¹ From Leeds Voice (2007) The ripple effect: The economic contribution of the voluntary, community and faith sector in Leeds.

Table 5.1 Organisational Characteristics

		National	Survey	2008	Results	
	Dorset 2007 Audit	Dorset	Devon	Somerset	W Sussex	National Average
Activities mainly at neighbourhood level	44%	46%	48%	50%	36%	34%
No paid staff	65%	68%	63%	70%	59%	56%
Annual income under £10K	55%	45%	42%	45%	33%	36%

Source: Dorset Community Action 2007 Audit and National Survey of Third Sector Organisations 2009

According to the National Survey, one fifth of the voluntary and community sector in Dorset employed five or less staff, with only 8% of them employing more than five staff. This, however, is in accordance with the trend of businesses in Dorset, where the majority of firms employ five or less staff but in total employ a larger proportion of the workforce¹².

There are, however, benefits for smaller organisations in public service delivery. From the 2007 Audit case studies, one interviewee said,

'Because we are small, we can respond far quicker [to local needs] than perhaps a local authority or a Primary Care Trust might be able to'.¹³

In order to increase the involvement of the sector in public service delivery, commissioning policies should take into account the local nature of the sector's services and its relatively small operational scale. See Section 11.3 for recommendations.

As 66% of the respondents are standalone or independent organisations, it is important to ensure that there is an umbrella organisation to represent their interests and to support their needs. DCA is currently performing such role but its capacity should be reviewed and if required, increased. For example, there may be a need for district development workers to support small organisations that are based in local neighbourhoods or villages. The recommendations in Section 11 will require increased capacity of Voluntary and Community Sector umbrella organisations eg DCA for effective implementation.

5.2 Geographical Coverage

For the size of Dorset County, it is impressive that twenty-four respondents are Dorset based but serving the UK or have an international remit. One hundred and one respondents provide services to the whole of the county. A substantial proportion of the respondents provide services to their local districts, neighbourhoods or villages.

Among the respondents, 31% of the voluntary and community organisations are based in West Dorset; while 19% are based in North Dorset. Compared to their share of the county population, there is an over-representation of voluntary and community organisations in these two districts (see Appendix 1, Fig 5). It should be noted, however, that these two districts are more rural in nature compared to the others, and thus the organisations tend to be smaller in size and mainly serve a small geographical area eg their local villages or neighbourhoods.

¹² Dorset Community Strategy: The Evidence Base, November 2006, p17

¹³ From one of the case studies. Please refer to the Appendix 4 for further details

6. Types of Service, Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement

The types of service by the voluntary and community sector mostly fall into three categories: arts, culture, sport and recreation (30%), employment / economy-related (23%) and health and social care (20%). Compared to the National Survey results, the proportion in arts, culture, sport and recreation is about the same as the national average, at 31%¹⁴, but lower in the employment / economy-related category, where the national average is 49%. For health and well-being, the national average is 17%.

With regard to Dorset Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement, the strength of the sector is that their wide range of services and activities correspond to most of the LAA priorities. The weakness, however, is that against the majority of the priorities, the sector does not provide a balanced portfolio (see Table 6.1). The main concern is that only a very small minority of the respondents have their main services matching the following priorities:-

- Access to services, employment and leisure
- The environment
- Safer communities
- Affordable housing

The very limited contribution to the access agenda is a major concern, as it is one of the main issues in the county. Many places are not well served by public transport and it is one of the key priorities of the Community Strategy. Indeed in one of the focus group meetings, smaller organisations cited 'help with transport' as their support need.

The 2007 Audit does not reflect the substantial contribution of national organisations to the environment, such as the National Trust. Dorset County Council employs a team of rangers who are supported by volunteers in their work on the environment.

Another area of work which is not well-represented is the equality and diversity agenda. According to the 2007 Audit, when asked what sections of the community the respondents provided services for, less than 0.5% of the entries included specific ethnic groups, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems and refugees and asylum seekers. It is understandable that black and minority ethnic groups are not the beneficiaries, as only 1.3% of the population in Dorset is non-white¹⁵. The equality and diversity agenda, however, includes other groups mentioned above. Local authorities have to meet the Government's equality agenda¹⁶ and it is an area in which the voluntary and community sector can make substantial contributions.

Although in relative terms the sector provides a reasonable level of services in health and social care for the older population, this issue should be higher up on the agenda, as the County's population is likely to remain skewed towards a larger proportion of older people compared to the national average. The sector should be well-placed to tailor make services at the neighbourhood level.

If the sector is going to increase their role in public service delivery, it is necessary to review the capacity of the sector against LAA priorities on the one hand, and the commissioning strategy of the statutory bodies on the other. See Section 11.1 and 11.3 for recommendations.

¹⁴ The comparison is indicative only. In the National Survey respondents were asked to tick 2-3 boxes for their main activities, whereas in the DCA Audit only 1 box was ticked

¹⁵ Dorset Community Strategy: The Evidence Base November 2006 p 63

¹⁶ See IDeA (2009) Key Principles: Equality Framework for Local Government

Table 6.1 Mapping Voluntary and community sector Activities to Local Area Agreement Priorities

Main Activities	No of Organisations	% of Organisations	Corresponding to LAA Priorities
Arts, culture, sport and recreation	225	30	Culture / Health and Well-being
Education, research, employment and training	135	19	Economy
Social care	98	14	Ageing / Health and Well-being
Religion and religious culture (non-welfare)	91	13	
Health	47	6	Health and Well-being
Economic / community dev't / regeneration	30	4	Economy
Third sector development	29	4	Strong and inclusive communities
Environmental sustainability	22	3	Environment
Law, crime, human / civil rights and information	16	2	Safer communities
Housing	11	2	Housing
Transport	11	2	Access to services, employment and leisure
Others	8	1	
Not Known	1	0.1	
Total	724	100	

Source: Dorset Community Action 2007 Audit and Dorset Local Area Agreement II 2008

7. Sources of Funding

7.1 Main Source of Income

About half of the respondents cited membership fees, donations and fundraising as their main sources of income. One fifth of the respondents had earned their main income and supplemented it by other sources. Only 16% cited grants as their main source of income.

For organisations with their largest single source of income from grants, 50% of the organisations receive their grants from Dorset County Council, district / borough councils or town and parish councils (see Appendix 1, Fig 6). According to the National Survey, voluntary and community sector organisations in Dorset received a higher percentage of their income from grants from the county / borough / district councils (23%) than the national average (11%)¹⁷.

¹⁷ The criteria in the National Survey are slightly different from the DCA Audit. This is just to indicate how Dorset compares with the national average.

The main issues with regard to grants are:-

- Short-term nature of funding - difficulties in long-term planning
- Constantly changing framework - difficulties in understanding
- Changing priorities of funding bodies – difficulties in bidding¹⁸

Organisations are also concerned that funding seems to be project-based and they find it difficult to secure funding for day-to-day core costs of running their organisations. This is particularly relevant for smaller organisations. One interviewee summed up the situation:-

'We just want to be financed to help us carry on with what we have done and it has been well proven that we need it; it has been well proven that we have done a good job but you can't get the running cost. Every scheme that you go down they [the funders] say what's new, but there's nothing new'.

7.2 Sources of Main Contract

Only 3% of the organisations cited contracts as their main source of income. This is no surprise as the majority of organisations have mixed sources of income. Of the contracts, the majority of them were from statutory bodies, with Dorset County Council topping the list, followed by the district and borough councils (see Appendix 1, Fig 7).

According to the National Survey, the national average for income in the form of a contract is 5% from county / borough / district councils, whereas in Dorset it is 8%. However, organisations in Dorset received less from local NHS bodies at 2%, compared to the national average of 4%.

Not all organisations want to bid for contracts. Some of the smaller organisations mainly rely on their income from membership and donations, and fear that if they bid for contracts they would be seen as a public service organisation, not a voluntary one, and as a result lose the good will, and donations, of the local communities¹⁹.

However, there are also organisations which would like to get more involved in public service delivery. According to the 2007 Audit, of the 137 respondents who expressed interest in securing more contracts, almost two-thirds (60%) would be interested in more contracts from the County Council, while one-fifth (20%) would be interested in contracts from NHS Dorset.

7.3 Issues in Commissioning Services and Contracts

There are, however, issues regarding the current commissioning framework and process. At the 2007 Audit focus group meetings, the single most important complaint was the failure to recover full cost. Organisations complained that statutory bodies did not understand voluntary and community organisations' cost and accounting requirements and relied too much on the willingness of them to take on additional work for no additional money. One attendee said,

'Commissioners... do take the voluntary sector for granted. I think they know there is a good will to do something and they rely on that'.

The other issue raised by the focus group is the commissioning process. It is seen as a 'bureaucratic burden', requiring a lot of form filling but within a very short time scale (sometimes within a week). The other issue is the duration of the contract. One attendee gave an example of an eighteen month contract:-

¹⁸ Based on the DCA Audit case studies and focus group meeting. See Technical Report for details.

¹⁹ Comments made during a focus group meeting for smaller organisations. See Appendix 4 and 5 for details.

'By the time you get the contract... (it) generally has only fourteen or fifteen months to run. You have then got to recruit, get the thing going and then got to wind down again so there is just not enough time.'

According to the National Survey results, 16% of the Dorset respondents were very or fairly dissatisfied with the opportunity for three year or longer funding / contracts, as opposed to 3% that were very or fairly satisfied.

See Section 11 for recommendations to address these issues.

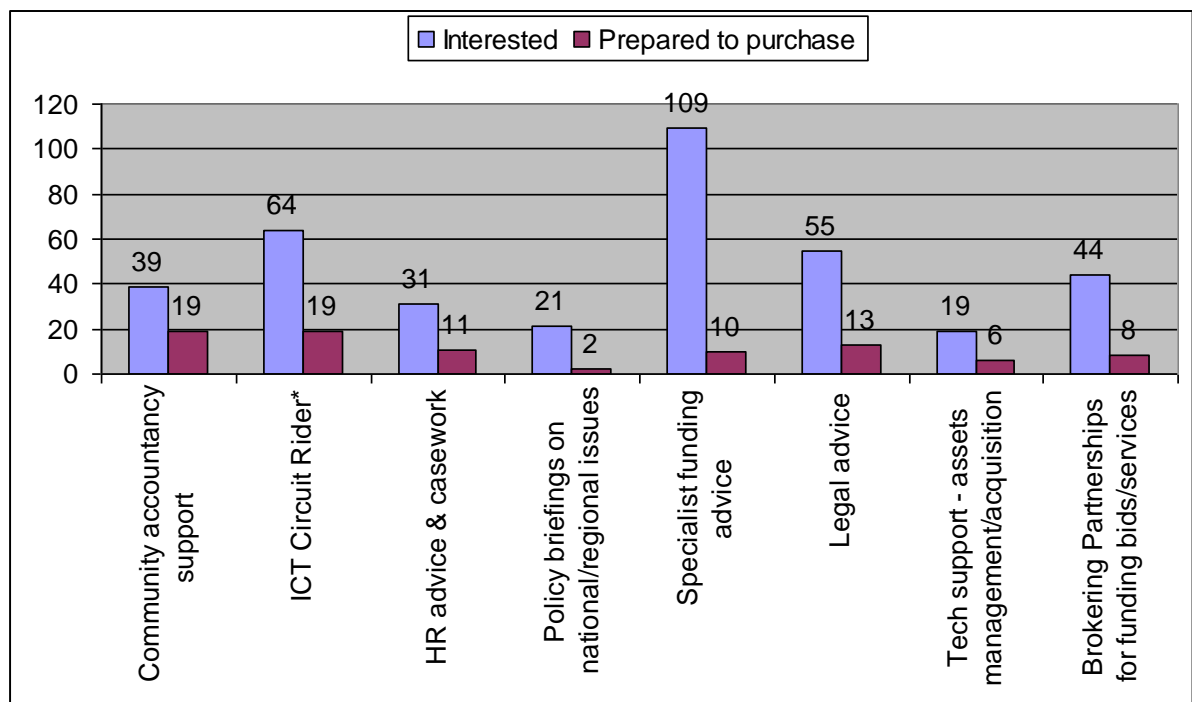
8. Support Needs of the Voluntary and Community Sector

The capacity of organisations is an important element for a thriving voluntary and community sector. Identifying the needs of organisations will help the sector and relevant partners to target resources. The Audit shows that the need for specialist funding advice is by far the highest. Only 10% of the organisations will be prepared to purchase such advice externally; whereas organisations are more prepared to purchase external support with regard to community accountancy, human resources advice and casework and legal advice.

The unwillingness to purchase external advice on specialist funding means that alternative sources of advice have to be identified to meet the needs of the sector. This is particularly critical for smaller organisations. Another related need is 'brokering partnerships for funding bids / services'. A more concerted effort in building relationships and strengthening partnership working will improve the environment for joint working.

Another issue regarding capacity is the relative lack of monitoring of service impact. According to the Audit, two-thirds (68%) of the organisations did not have systematic monitoring in place. This will have significant impact on their capacity to bid for funding or contracts. Section 11 provides recommendations to improve the sector's capacity in monitoring.

Figure 8.1 Unmet Support Needs and Willingness to Purchase



Source: Dorset Community Action 2007 Audit

* Peripatetic support worker

9. Involvement in Local Decision-Making

A thriving voluntary and community sector means that organisations are confident to get involved in local decision-making²⁰. According to the Audit, however, only 10.5% found it very easy or easy to get involved. Almost a quarter found it difficult or very difficult, while worryingly almost a third provided no reply (see Appendix 1, Fig 8). Among the comments made by the organisations, the issues seem to be around several areas:-

(a) Finding their way round the structure for involvement:-

- 'Finding it almost impossible to penetrate Local Authority / Government bureaucracy in spite of the long standing voluntary sector COMPACT in Dorset'
- 'Very few formal structures to do so except in an advisory capacity'

(b) Perception of not being valued:-

- 'Dorset doesn't have a strong voice when it comes to the voluntary sector'
- 'Difficult to convince authorities of the value of our work to the community'

(b) Difference between involvement and influence:-

- 'We are listened to but some decisions seem to ignore the consultation'
- 'Easy to engage, harder to influence'

(c) Capacity and Partnership:-

- 'We don't always have the capacity'
- 'Depends on the quality of partnership and relationships'

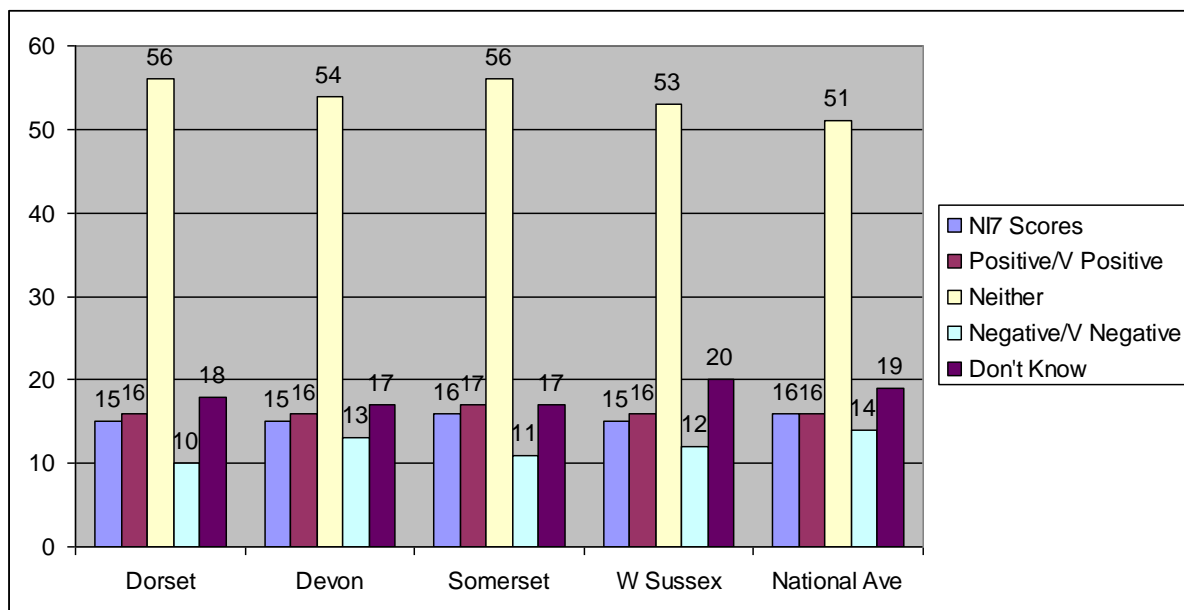
Another worrying sign with regard to local involvement can be gleaned from the National Survey. 36% of the respondents in Dorset to the survey had no direct dealings with local statutory bodies, while 38% had 'not very much' dealings, making the total for these two categories 74%, or three-quarters of the respondents. The national average is 69%. For those with little or no dealings with statutory bodies, it would be very difficult for them to feel that they could get involved and in turn, they will not perceive having support from statutory bodies, which is crucial for measuring a thriving environment for the voluntary and community sector.

10. NI7 Environment for a Thriving Third Sector

With regard to NI7 'environment for a thriving third sector', the National Survey asked respondents 'taking everything into account, how do the statutory bodies in your local area influence your organisation's success'. In Dorset, only 1% cited 'very positive influence' and another 15%, 'positive influence'. 10% felt that they had negative or very negative influence, while more than half (56%) were neutral regarding whether statutory bodies were of help or not.

²⁰ Office of the Third Sector (2007) Briefing for Local Strategic Partnerships NI7: 'Environment for a thriving third sector' and The Local Government White Paper (2006) Stronger and Prosperous Communities

Figure 10.1 Compare NI7 Score with Similar Counties (percentages)



Source: National Survey of Third Sector Organisations 2009

The trend in Dorset is broadly in line with the national picture and with counties sharing similar characteristics eg Devon, Somerset and West Sussex. Similar to Somerset, there is a slightly lower proportion of organisations citing local statutory bodies exerting negative influence on their success and a higher proportion in the neutral category. This implies that with concerted effort, there is scope for Dorset to persuade those that are neutral on the issue to a more positive perception by 2011.

11. Conclusions and Recommendations

The voluntary and community sector in Dorset provides a wide range of services and activities to the local population. They are mainly small in terms of budget and the number of employed staff, and a large proportion of them operate at the neighbourhood or village levels.

The sector brings economic contributions as well as social ones to Dorset. It provides a wide range of services and activities, from arts, culture, sport and leisure to health and social care for its residents. Employment and economy-related services and activities are lower than the national average for the sector but in the context of relatively low unemployment rate and low level of deprivation, the sector still contributes to supporting the economic needs of Dorset. More attention needs to be given to two areas of services: access to services, employment and leisure, and equality and diversity. With a larger proportion of older population, the voluntary and community sector based services in health and social care could be strengthened.

The potential of the sector's contribution to the Dorset Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement lies in the varied nature of its activities and extensive geographical coverage, in particular in the more rural districts in West and North Dorset. With regard to creating a thriving environment for the sector, there are issues to be addressed. To achieve the NI7 target of 19% by 2011, the sector and the statutory bodies will have to work closely together. The measurement of NI7 is based on the percentage of voluntary and community organisations that perceive local statutory bodies are having a positive influence on their success. The following recommendations focus on the support needs

of the sector and the ways in which statutory bodies can help the sector to increase its capacity and fulfil its potential.

Recommendations:

11.1 Capacity of voluntary and community sector organisations

11.1.1 Sectoral capacity

Review support needs and potential for increased capacity for those organisations providing services in the following areas:-

- Access to services, employment and leisure
- Equality and diversity
- Health and social care for older people

11.1.2 Capacity for fund-raising and tendering for contracts

- **Immediate:** Compile existing resources on funding opportunities, how to write funding applications and tender for contracts. Make these resources available on websites (eg Dorset Community Action)
- **Near future:** A series of training sessions tailor made for specific needs
- **Statutory bodies:** All funding regimes and tender briefs to be accompanied by separate guidelines tailor made for smaller organisations that operate at the neighbourhood / village level

11.1.3 Capacity for impact monitoring

- **Immediate:** Compile existing resources on systematic monitoring specifically aiming at small and local organisations. Make these resources available on websites
- **Near future:** A series of training sessions tailor made for specific needs. A manual on monitoring for smaller organisations
- **Statutory bodies:** Recognising the weakness of impact monitoring in the sector, tailor make a simpler system for smaller organisations vis-à-vis monitoring requirements and provide support throughout the funding or contract period

11.2 Engagement in local decision-making

11.2.1 Better understanding of the decision-making process and policy procedures

- **Immediate:** Compile existing resources, such as Urban Forum's Handy Guides or NAVCA's guide to local councils (on planning, local councils, Local Area Agreements), and make such resources available to smaller organisations
- **Near future:** Provide and promote opportunities in a systematic manner for small and local organisations to attend Partnerships and Council meetings when specific decisions are made
- **Statutory bodies:** Disseminate information regarding the decision-making process and how individuals and organisations can participate in the process

11.2.2 Engagement infrastructure

- **Immediate:** Maximise existing infrastructure and improve communication between decision-making bodies and the voluntary and community sector, in particular dissemination of information and decisions
- **Near future:** Review existing infrastructure and conduits for the voluntary and community sector, in particular for small and local organisations
- **Statutory bodies:** Urgent review of engagement policies and infrastructure, tie in with the 'Duty to Involve' agenda. Action plans in place to improve engagement with the sector²¹

²¹ Dorset County Council has the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy (2005) and Action Plan (2007) in place. At the time of writing this report the Action Plan is in the process of being updated in light of the DCA Audit and the National Survey

11.3 Commissioning strategy²²

11.3.1 Statutory bodies

- Designate one officer to liaise with voluntary and community organisations throughout the commissioning process and the period covering the contract
- Review existing voluntary and community sector provision and explore support needs with regards to contracts, in particular full cost recovery
- Review the contract structure and where possible and practical, break it down into smaller contracts more suitable for smaller organisations
- For every tender, tailor make guidelines specifically aim at smaller organisations
- For monitoring requirements, produce specific guidelines and provide support throughout the period of the contract for smaller organisations

²² For further guidance consult Office of the Third Sector, Partnership in Public Services: The Public Services Action Plan One Year On (2007) and Two Years On (2008), and COMPACT Commissioning Implementation Guidance and Funding and Procurement Code