Gateshead Council

HOUSING, ENVIRONMENT & HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES OSC
13 March 2023

TITLE OF REPORT: Health Check of Gateshead's Community Centres

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Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update for the Housing, Environment and Healthier Communities OSC on the current assessed "health" of participating Community Centres further to the Council's Review of Community Centres.

Background and context

2. The Council's Review of Community Centres (phased approach considered and agreed by Cabinet from 2007-2015) saw a wholesale shift in responsibility from a network of buildings/centres previously managed or resourced by the Council towards a current network of 37 community centres/buildings now entirely managed/leased independently. This shift reflects the level of efficiency savings experienced by the Council, numerous building reviews and a consequential and beneficial move towards greater independence for the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

3. Whilst some buildings have been demolished or sold and are no longer providing a community offer (where no other alternative use could be secured, or the building was unviable), new or additional buildings have been established offering community provision. New buildings continuously evolve from local need or opportunity and their offers change or expand.

4. There was, however, still a need and desire to work with and retain an effective network of community buildings across the borough to provide flexible and accessible space for community activities. To achieve this Gateshead's VCS has been supported by the Council's Neighbourhood Management Team (NMT), Gateshead Voluntary Organisation Council (GVOC) and now Connected Voice along with other partner organizations such as Locality (a national membership network supporting local community organisations) to take greater responsibility and sustain the Gateshead network.

5. In line with the Council's Asset Transfer Policy (agreed by Cabinet 2009), buildings were leased on a long-term basis (offering security of tenure for funders) and Management Committee governance was strengthened and/or formalized to equip them to take greater responsibility whilst limiting individuals' liabilities.

6. Initially that support was intensive to ensure organizations had the right structures and resources to be able to take on their added responsibility, it has naturally become more about maintaining ongoing relationships and providing support as and when required (usually at the request of the organizations themselves). This approach has helped build local capacity, unlock external funding investment and in the majority of cases improved the local offer.

7. Our community centres/buildings provided invaluable help for our communities throughout the Pandemic but like everyone else they are facing the same challenges associated with the impact of the Pandemic and the current cost of living and energy crisis. They will no doubt be facing significant challenges in coming years as a result. These challenges are exacerbated

by operating in old buildings that are not energy efficient, attempting to move away from providing food provision, challenges recruiting volunteers (including committee members and trustees), supporting and signposting more people with increased and complex mental health issues, etc. The challenges around recruiting volunteers also directly impact on the longer-term capacity building and sustainability potential for the organisations.

8. These challenges were also highlighted recently through the 118 applications to Connected Voice's VCSE Cost of Living Fund (more information is available at: https://connectedvoice.org.uk/news-and-information/news/vcse-cost-living-crisis-fund

9. This exercise offered those community centre organisations transferred as part of the Community Centre Review, along with a number of other community organisations, the opportunity to participate in a self-informed "health check" assessment to highlight their key challenges and areas for further development and support.

10. The Council's NMT has maintained a supporting role with the whole Gateshead network of Community Centres transferred as part of the Community Centre Review. Between October 2022 – February 2023 the Team approached all centres/organisations identified by the Review along with others that have developed more recently to offer an opportunity for them to undertake a guided "Health Check" by way of a comprehensive questionnaire and face to face support visits.

11. The Health Check questionnaire attempted to gain a light touch "snapshot" of how well each organisation felt they were operating and provided them with an opportunity to identify key areas for development, action and ongoing support. The approach encouraged organisations to discuss such things as organizational governance, volunteering capacity, resources, statutory compliance, health and safety, future viability and sustainability, etc.

12. The Health Check should be viewed as a positive developmental exercise to help the organisation shape those areas for future improvement/action that they identify themselves. It can also be used to identify future funding opportunities and support funding applications. Indeed, five of the organisations are members of the Locality Working in Gateshead project, a jointly funded 3-year initiative with the Lottery Community Fund to support the growth and development of these organisations as community anchors – one feature of which has seen the development of an advice service offer delivered on site by Citizens Advice Gateshead.

13. Unfortunately, not all Centres took up the opportunity citing a number of reasons, for example, having other current priorities, they didn't think it was required or they'd recently undertaken a similar exercise with Connected Voice or another supporting organisation. The NMT has reiterated the offer of ongoing support where required along with the support also available through Connected Voice and Locality. Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of all organisations invited to participate, highlighting those that did.

Health Check findings

14. Appendix 2 provides a detailed findings report from the Health Check exercise carried out with the 20 participating Community Centres.

15. The following key findings reflect aggregated responses. Individual support and guidance can and will be offered based on the individual bespoke responses.

- There was a wide variation in usage levels/footfall as you would expect given the variation in size and geographic locations of the buildings.
- More than half of the participants had no employees and operate with volunteers, with a quarter operating with 3 or fewer part time employees – 60% have no plans to increase staffing levels.

- 70% of participants operate with between 1 to 20 volunteers, with 60% wanting help to increase their level of volunteers.
- Management Committees varied in size, with 20% stating that their Management Committee was only made up of 1-5 people. Positively 90% stated their governing documents were up to date, agreed, adopted and signed.
- Most participants had safeguarding, data protection, equal opportunities and volunteering policies in place, however, fewer had environmental policies and employment and recruitment policies (perhaps reflecting those operating on a voluntary basis).
- Insurance cover for organisations was also a mixed bag reflecting the varied nature of respective building offers. One organisation suggested it had no Public Liability Insurance, despite having building and contents insurance and employer liability insurance. The NMT will clarify/rectify any omissions as soon as possible.
- As you'd expect, organisations varied widely in what licences were in place, reflecting the varied nature of their core activities.
- Generally, organisations had the majority of necessary building compliance and health and safety measures and documentation in place. The NMT will clarify/rectify any omissions as soon as possible.
- 75% of participants had reserves to cover more than 6 months running costs and redundancy liabilities, with 65% having a Reserves Policy documenting their use of reserves.
- In general, accountancy practices were good, however, more than half participants did not have a budget or cashflow forecast in place for the next 12 months
- Participants demonstrated a mix of expected income sources with 70% having received some grant income from the Council, only 40% suggesting they had trading income.
- 85% of participants highlighted that they relied on "Do it Yourself" fundraising.
- Just over half participants had an up-to-date development or business plan.
- 80% didn't have a formal marketing or publicity (although that's not to say they don't market or publicise routinely).
- Over half of participants consulted widely and collaborated with others.
- About half of participants were registered and/or accessing help through Connected Voice and the Council, with 75% registered with OurGateshead (www.ourgateshead.org.uk)
- Organisations utilised social media to varying degrees, but 90% had a Facebook presence.
- Organisations also varied in how they sought feedback from users with questionnaires, one to ones and enquiries being the most common.
- 55% of participants have been involved in offering crisis or emergency support to their communities, rising to 65% that would like to be involved in the future.
- 75% of participants felt they lacked the capacity and skills to prepare tenders and only 10% of participants felt they had a service or product that was commissionable or tradable.
- Only 35% of participants felt they had the necessary capacity and skills
- Only 30% had considered working with other organisations to bid for contracts.

16. The health check assessment recorded a number of positive activities and good practice. Similar examples will be replicated elsewhere across the network. Some highlights include:
    - Chopwell Community Centre has supported their youth workers in gaining level 3 youth work qualifications and taught them how to make funding bids. The youth workers are now independently applying for funding which pays for their salaries and the activities. This has significantly reduced youth disorder in the village.
    - Dunston Activity Centre hosts Brighten the Day events. They use the sports hall with the soft play and an inflatable maze. Brighten the Day provided £1000 funding towards

the inflatable maze. These events are very popular, held 3 days per week during school holidays, hosting 60 children, and are often over-subscribed

- Gateshead Clubhouse works with, and is run by, residents of Gateshead who are 18 years and over who struggle with mental health problems. It has a strong ethos of personal development for all, avoiding putting pressure on people and having a no blame culture. People like to come to the Clubhouse for companionship without having to necessarily attend a group or activity.
- Swalwell Community Centre has hosted knife crime training delivered by the Crime Reduction Unit and funded by the Police & Crime Commissioner. The training which was attended by the chairman of the trustees, 4 volunteers, a local magistrate and a church councillor looked at Community Triggers (Anti-social Behaviour Review) and engaging with local young people.
- During the pandemic, the Whitehills Centre became a focal point for the local community, providing over 110 food parcels per week. Before the pandemic, many of the recipients had attended the meals fellowship, which was held every Thursday lunchtime, when you could get a meal for £2.50. For some people this was the only time they met up with others. The Centre still distributes 50 food parcels per week and would like to get the meals fellowship going again, so, they are working with the NMT to source funding to pay for a cook.

Conclusions and Next steps

17. Generally, whilst most organisations were performing relatively well almost all of them expressed anecdotally that the current financial pressures were now exacerbating the impact of the Pandemic. Many cited utility and other running costs as major challenges.

18. The NM Team, Connected Voice and Locality will continue to work with Gateshead's community centres and other infrastructure to offer help and support where requested.

19. Many of the areas for development will be bespoke to individual organisations and entirely within the gift of those organisations as to whether they wish to develop further and benefit from any available support.

20. There are, however, a number of areas that will be explored further for wider development and promotion across the network, for example:

    - A need to increase levels of volunteering across the network – both generally and on management committees. Gateshead Volunteer Centre will be approached to help support volunteering across the network.
    - A need to ensure health and safety and building compliance. The NM Team will work with organisations to offer support, guidance and referral to ensure organisations are better equipped to meet their compliance expectations. This will be done in collaboration with/advice from the Council's Property Services for those buildings where the Council remains the Corporate Landlord.
    - Some organisations would benefit from more specific financial management and business planning advice that could enhance future sustainability, cash flow, use of reserves and income generation.
    - The benefits of marketing/promotion and user consultation will be reinforced with some of the organisations across the network.
    - Many organisations felt they lacked skills and capacity for funding applications, tendering and contract work. Training and advice in these areas will be explored further to see if organisations across Gateshead could/would wish to develop their capabilities.
    - The NM Team will work with other key services to promote and enhance the network of organisations engaging in crisis and emergency support for their communities.

Recommendations

21. The Housing, Environment and Healthier Communities OSC is asked to:

- Note the content of the report on the current assessed health of participating Community Centres, and that
- Ongoing support will be available through the Council's NM and Locality Teams along with other sector support organisations such as Connected Voice and Locality.

Consultees:

- Connected Voice
- Locality
- Neil Bouch
- Alison Dunn
- Neighbourhood Management and Locality Teams

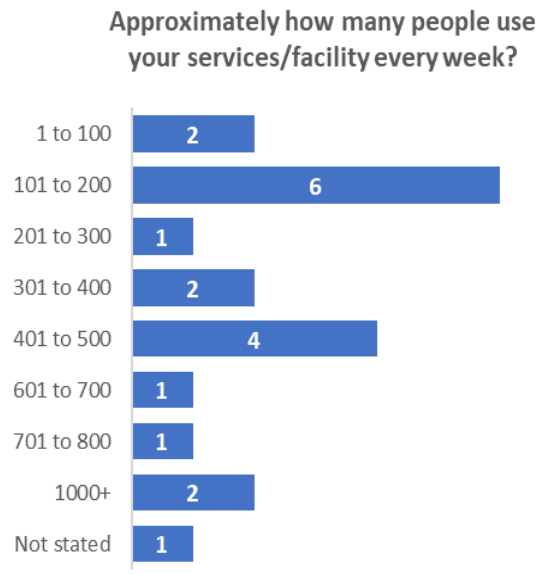
Contact: Gary Carr, x2043, garycarr@gateshead.gov.uk

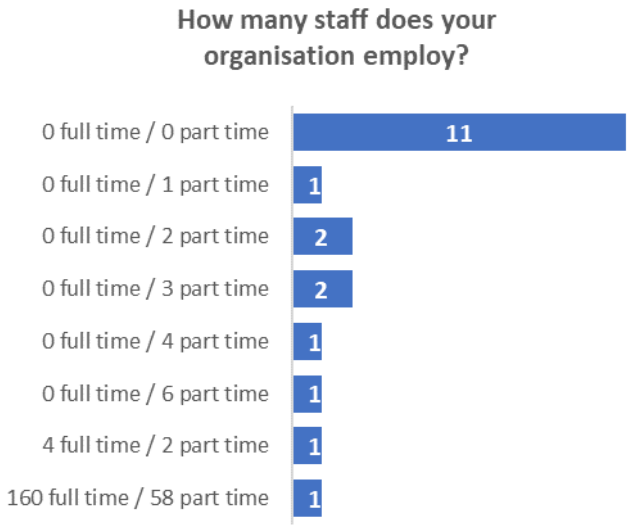
Appendix 1 - Breakdown of all organisations invited to participate, highlighting green those that have so far.

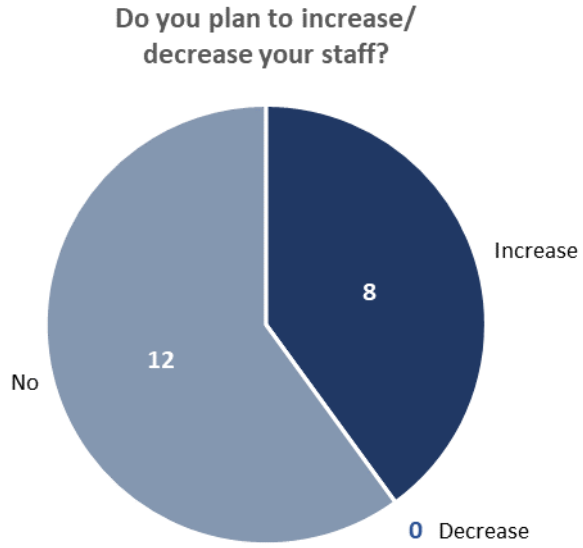
Those buildings within the network of 37 community centres			
Organisation/Building	Health check completed	Health Check progressing	Approached but not started
1. Barley Mow Village Hall			
2. Barmoor Hub			
3. Bensham Grove Community Centre			
4. Birtley Community Centre			
5. Birtley Community Hub			
6. Blackhall Mill Community Centre			
7. Blaydon Youth and Community Centre			
8. Chopwell Community Association (Chopwell CC)			
9. Clara Vale Village Hall Association			
10. Deckham Community Centre			
11. Dunston Community Centre	Completed post results		
12. Dunston Drop In			
13. Dunston Family Church (Dunston Activity Centre)			
14. Dunston Family Church (Teams Life Centre)			
15. Eighton Banks Village Hall			
16. Emma Memorial Hall			
17. Felling Crowhall Towers CC			
18. Greenside and District Community Centre			
19. High Fell Community Gym (Allerdene Community Centre)			
20. Kibblesworth Village Millennium Centre			
21. Leam Lane Community Centre			
22. Groundwork Northeast (Lobley Hill Youth and Community Centre)			
23. Marley Hill Community Centre			
24. Mary Sanders Hall (part of Birtley Hub assessment)			
25. Pelaw Youth Centre			
26. Rowlands Gill and District Community Centre			
27. Ryton Community Centre			
28. Springwell Community Centre (Cumbric)			
29. Stargate and Crookhill Community Centre			
30. Swalwell Community Association CIO (Swalwell Community Centre)			
31. The Mount Community Centre			
32.			
33. The Winlaton Centre			
34. Warriors Community Project (Whitehills Centre)			
35. Whickham Community Centre			
36. Windmill Hills Centre			
37. Winlaton Mill Village Hall Community Association			

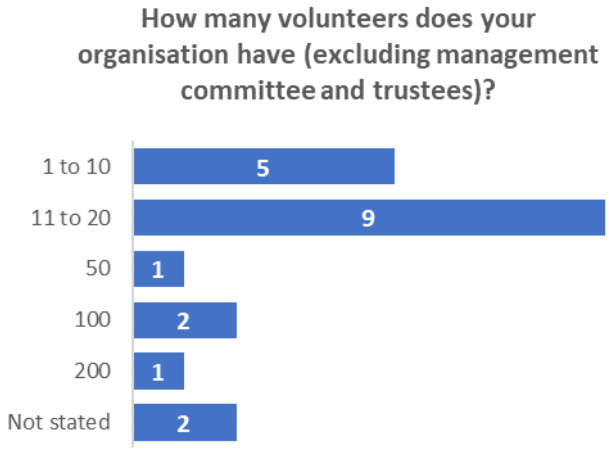
Those buildings offered a health check in addition to the network of 37 buildings			
Organisation/Building	Health check completed	Health Check started	Health check not started/declined
Chopwell Regeneration CIO (The Bank, Chopwell)			
Gateshead Cleveland Hall Community Association			
Gateshead Clubhouse			

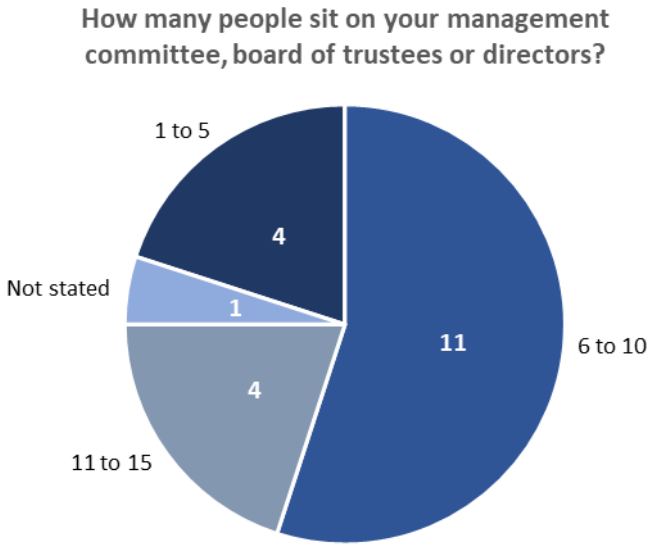
Appendix 2 - Organisational Healthchecks Quantitative Analysis

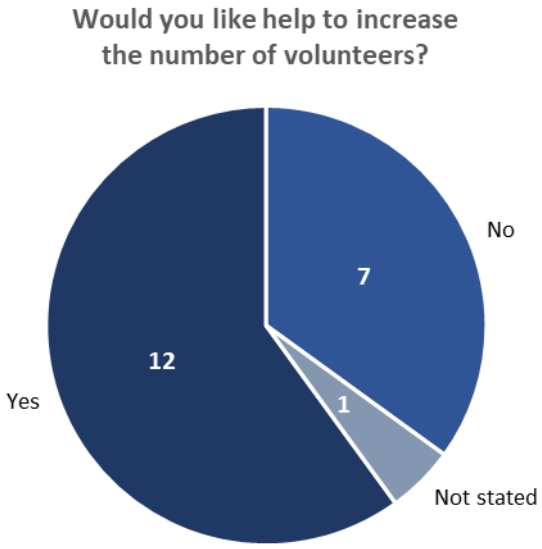




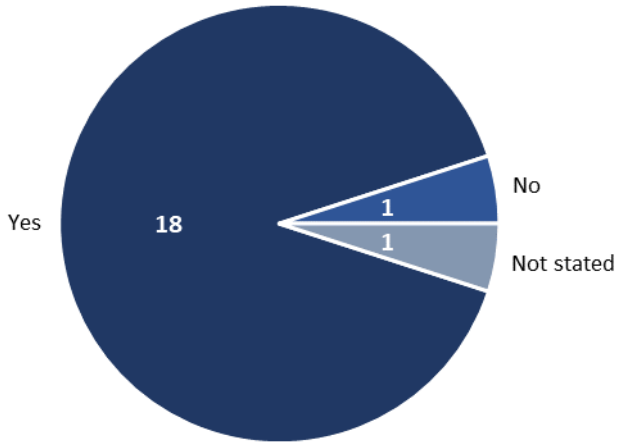




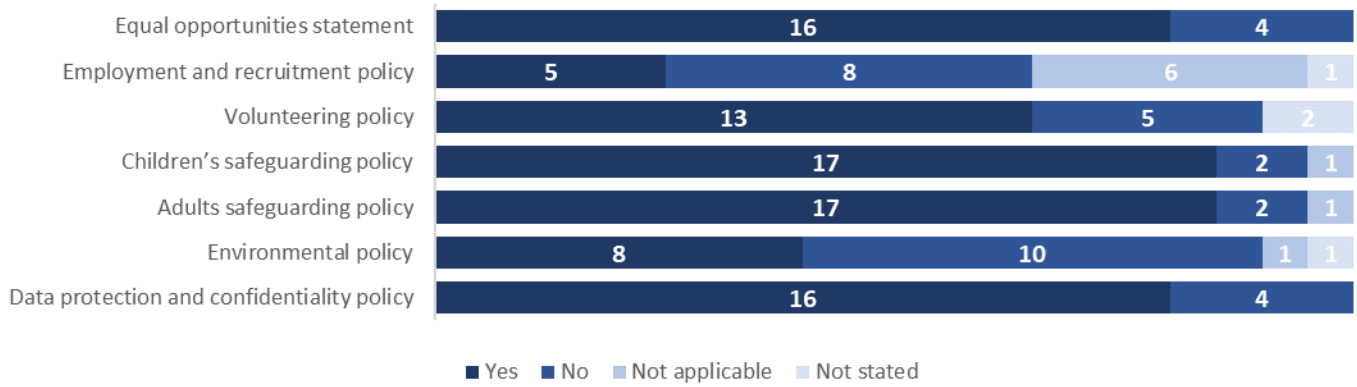




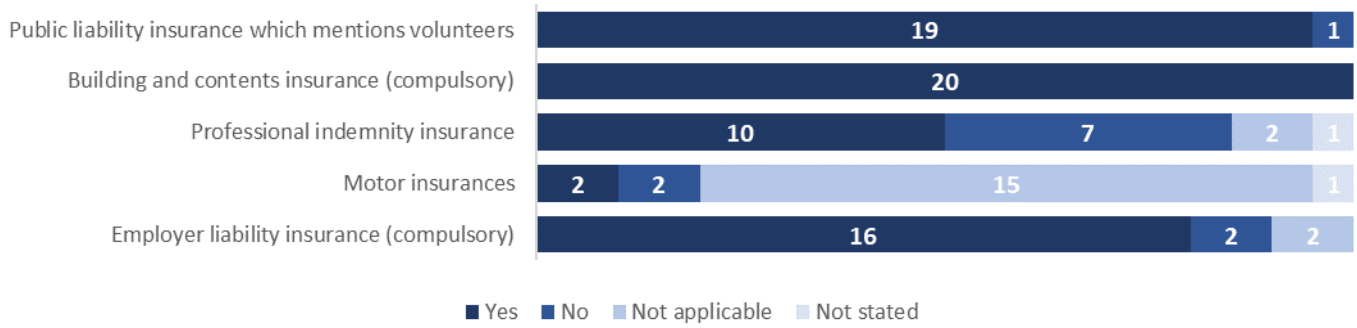
Is your current governing document up to date, agreed, adopted and signed?



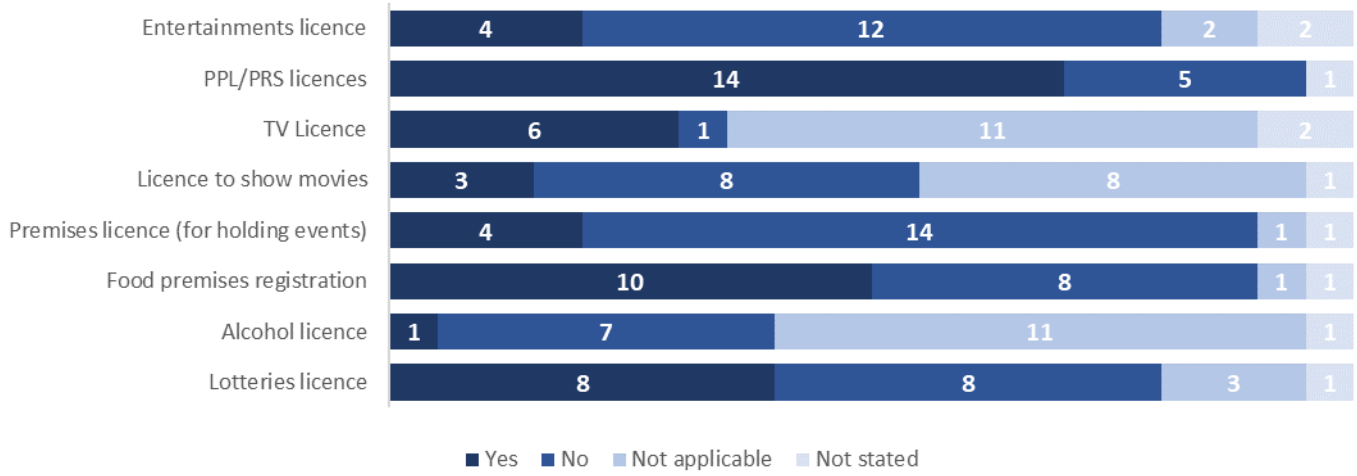
Do you have the following in place?

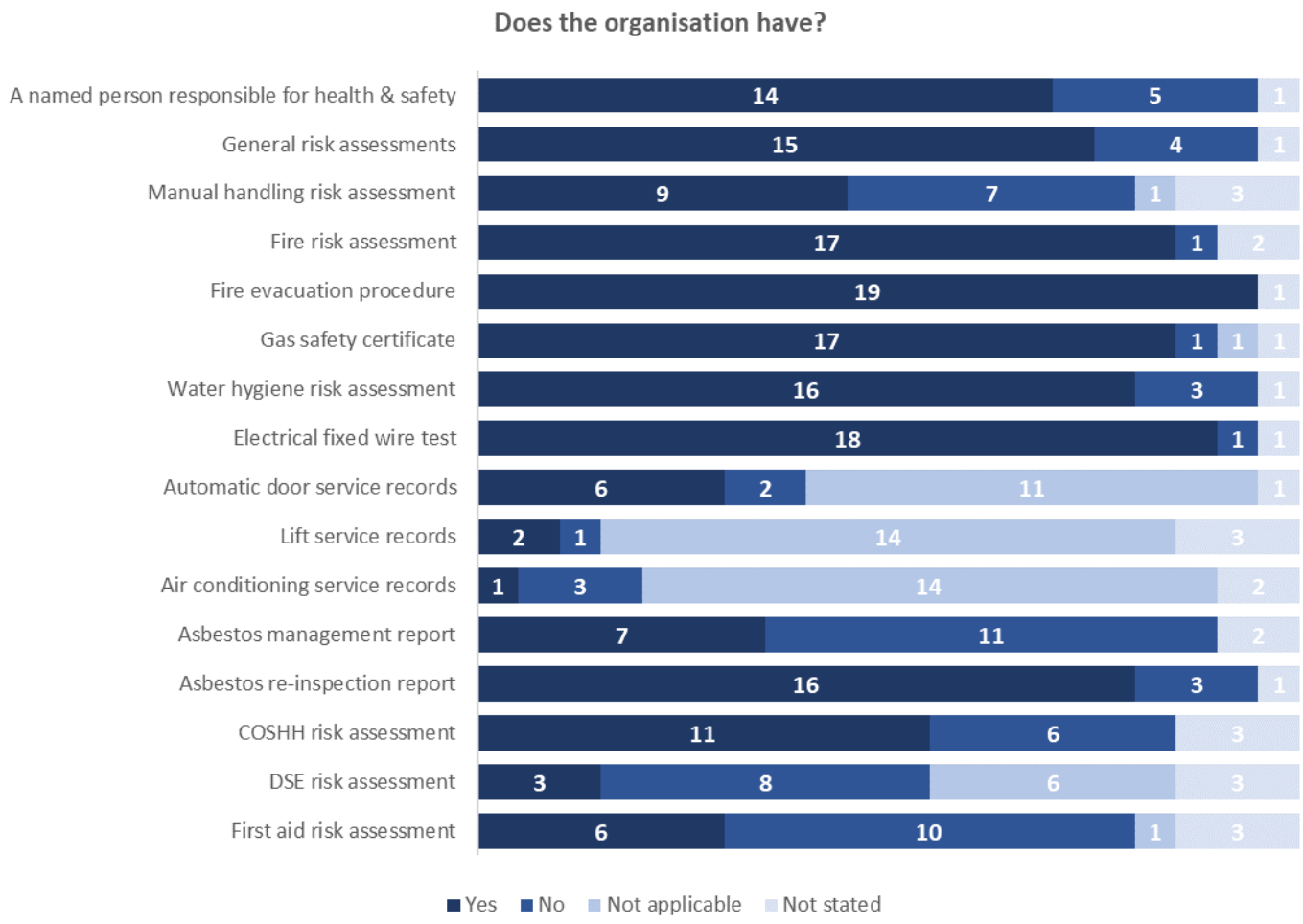


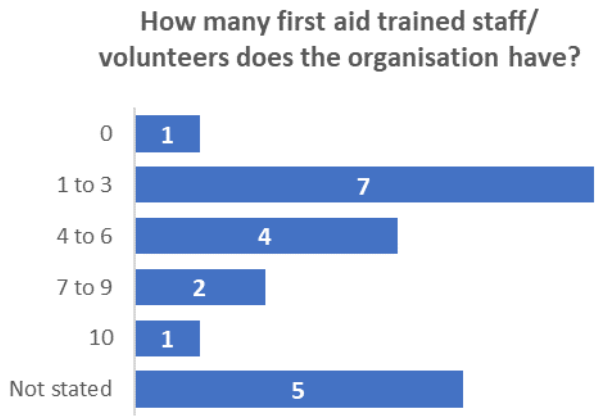
Do you have the following insurance?

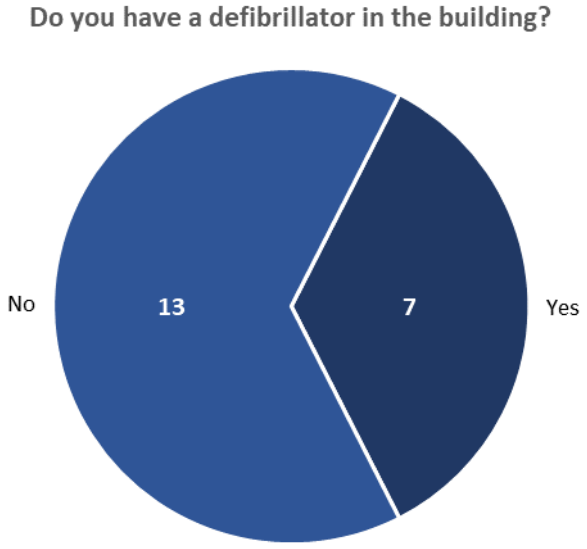


Do you have the following licences and legal permissions?

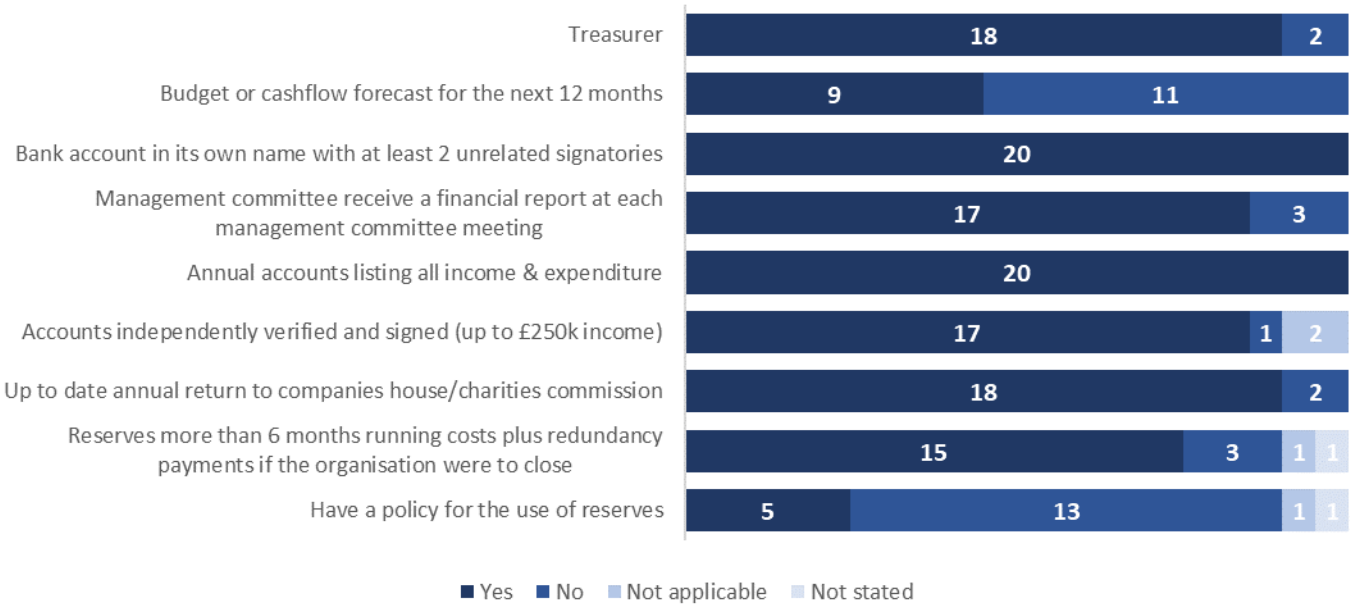



Does the organisation have?
A named person responsible for health & safety
14
5
1
General risk assessments
15
4
1
Manual handling risk assessment
9
7
1
3
Fire risk assessment
17
1
2
Fire evacuation procedure
19
1
Gas safety certificate
17
1
1
1
Water hygiene risk assessment
16
3
1
Electrical fixed wire test
18
1
1
Automatic door service records
6
2
11
1
Lift service records
2
1
14
3
Air conditioning service records
1
3
14
2
Asbestos management report
7
11
2
Asbestos re-inspection report
16
3
1
COSHH risk assessment
11
6
3
DSE risk assessment
3
8
6
3
First aid risk assessment
6
10
1
3
Yes
No
Not applicable
Not stated

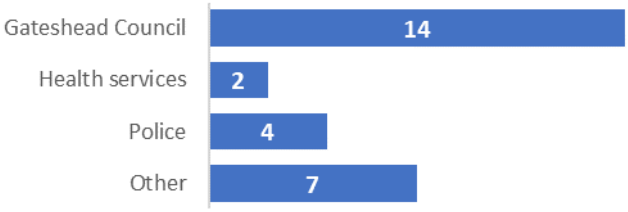

How many first aid trained staff/ volunteers does the organisation have?
0
1
1 to 3
7
4 to 6
4
7 to 9
2
10
1
Not stated
5


Do you have a defibrillator in the building?
No
13
7
Yes

Does the organisation have?

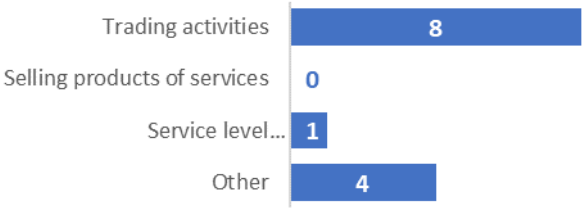


Does your organisation receive any grant income from…?

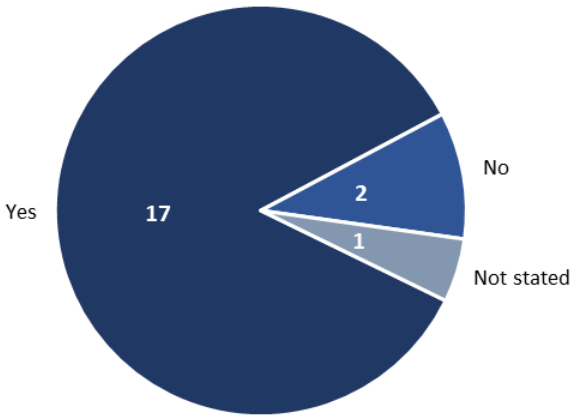


Does your organisation get income from…?

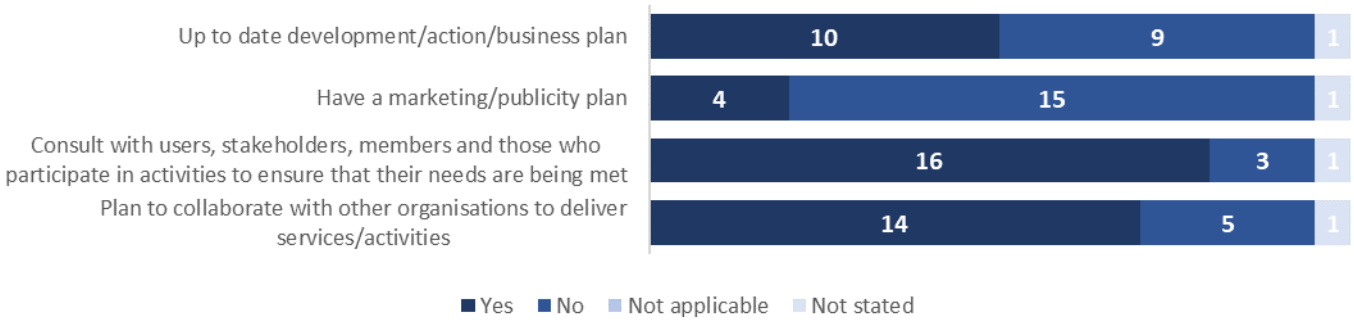
Does your organisation receive any grant income from…?



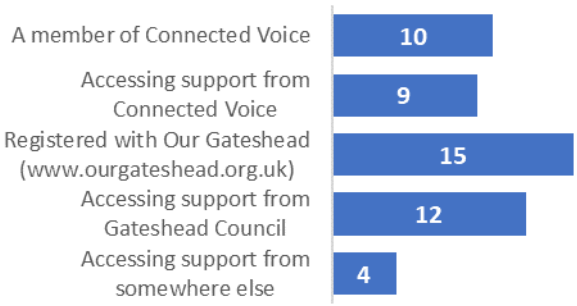
Does your organisation undertake 'do it yourself' fundraising?



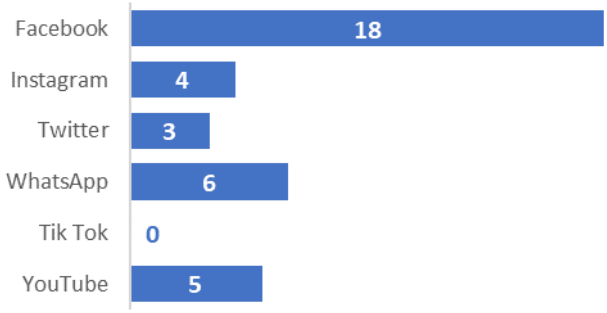
Does your organisation have?



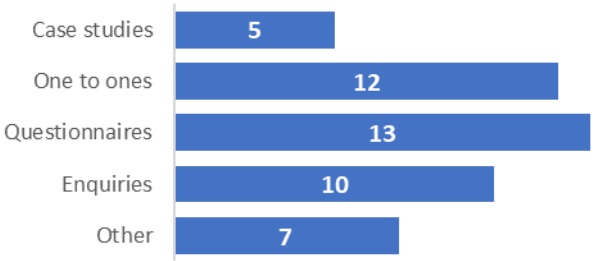
Is your organisation…?



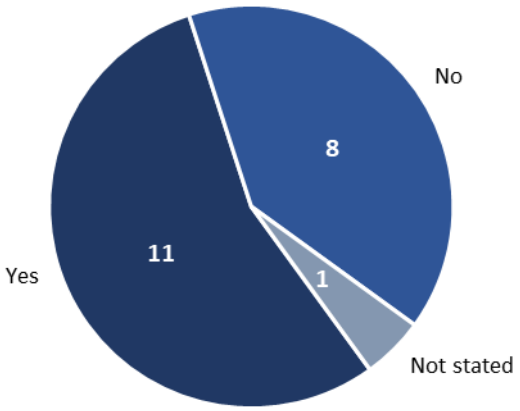
Does your organisation use any of the following digital services to promote your service and/or communicate with service users?



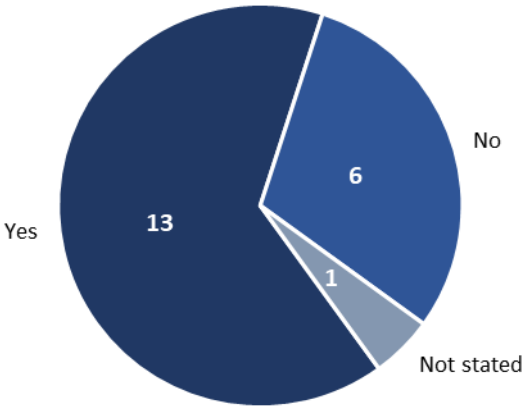
How does your organisation seek feedback from people who participate in its activities?



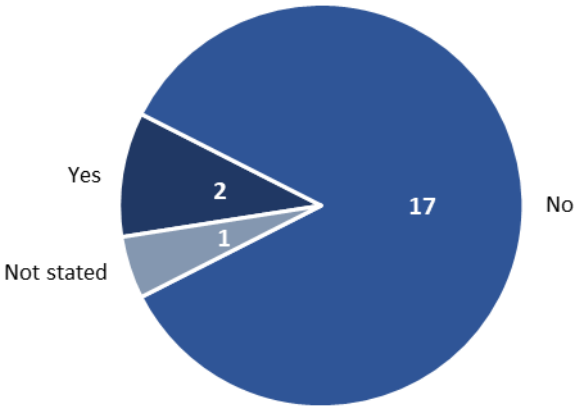
Has your organisation been involved in providing emergency/crisis support to the community?



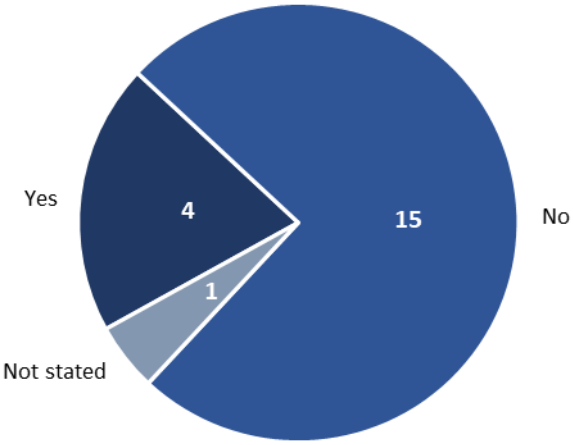
Would your organisation like to be involved in providing emergency/crisis support to the community?



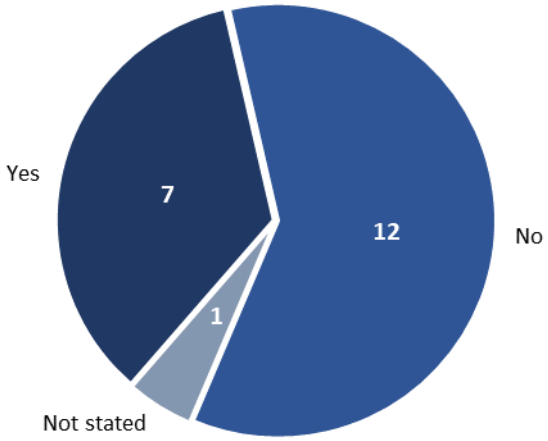
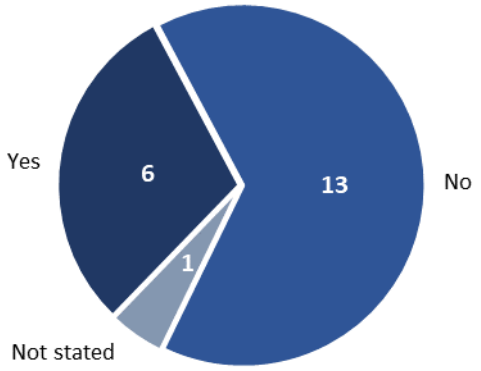
Does your organisation have a service or product that could potentially be commissioned/traded?



Does your organisation have the capacity and skills to prepare tenders?



Does your organisation have the capacity and skills to manage contracts?



Has your organisation considered working with other organisations either through partnership or consortia to bid for contracts?