

The Small and Mighty!

Infrastructure needs of the smallest voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations in Oxfordshire:

Research Report – Easy read version

March 2025



The highlights:



What we studied

We looked at small community groups and charities in Oxfordshire. These are groups that:

- Have less than £100,000 per year to spend
- Help their local communities
- Are often run by volunteers
- May not be registered as official charities



Why this matters

Small community groups do very important work in Oxfordshire. They:

- Help people who need support
- Run community activities
- Run community buildings
- Bring people together
- Support people's health and wellbeing

But these groups face many challenges. They need help to keep doing their good work.



What we found

How Many Groups Are There?

- There are about 6,484 community groups and charities in Oxfordshire
- Most of these (75%) are very small groups
- They have over 80,200 volunteers helping them
- They do work worth millions of pounds each year

Main Challenges

1. Finding and Keeping Volunteers

- Many groups struggle to find enough volunteers
- Their current volunteers are getting older
- It's hard to find younger people to help
- Groups need help managing their volunteers

2. Money Problems

- Groups find it hard to get enough money
- Bills are getting more expensive
- It's difficult to get long-term funding
- Many groups worry about their future

The highlights:

3. Getting their voice heard

- Small groups often feel ignored
- They want to help make decisions about their communities
- They need help to speak up about what matters
- Rural groups feel especially left out

4. Working together

- Groups want to work with others but find it difficult
- They don't have time to build partnerships
- They need help to find other groups to work with
- It's harder for rural groups to connect



What help is available?

There are organisations that help small community groups:

- Community First Oxfordshire
- OCVA (Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action)
- Other specialist support organisations

But these support organisations:

- Don't have enough money to help everyone
- Can't reach all groups that need help
- Need more resources to do their work



What needs to change?

1. Better support for volunteers

- Help groups find new volunteers
- Provide training for volunteers
- Support groups to keep their volunteers
- Help with volunteer management

2. More money and resources

- Make it easier to get funding
- Help with grant applications
- Support groups with basic costs
- Give longer-term funding

3. Stronger voice for small groups

- Help groups speak up about what matters
- Make sure they are included in decisions
- Support rural groups to be heard
- Listen to different communities

The highlights:

4. Help groups work together

- Create more opportunities to meet
- Help groups share resources
- Support partnerships
- Connect rural groups



Why this matters for the future

If small community groups don't get the help they need:

- Important services will be lost
- Communities will have less support
- Volunteers will get tired and stop helping
- Rural areas will have fewer services
- Some communities won't get the help they need



What happens next?

This research shows that small community groups need better support to:

- Keep helping their communities
- Find and keep volunteers
- Get enough money to continue
- Have their voice heard
- Work together with others

We need to make sure support organisations have enough resources to help these small groups continue their important work in Oxfordshire's communities.



Want to know more?

For the full report, please contact: info@communityfirstoxon.org