Bristol Impact Fund 2

Final Programme Evaluation Report

JEM Associates, May 2026



Image courtesy of Bristol Somali Youth Voice

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Contents

About this report 3

Executive Summary 5

1. Bristol's population 14

2. Methodology & Evidence 20

3. Progress over 4 years 25

4. Impact on the VCSE ecosystem 28

5. Impact on community organisations: medium & large grants.....33

- 5.1 Stronger organisations 34
- 5.2 The BIF learning and support programme 35
- 5.3 Existing Partnerships 40
- 5.4 Future Directions 42
- 5.5 BIF3 Funding 43

6. Impact on communities 44

- 6.1 Impact in numbers 45
- 6.2 Building Social Capital 48
- 6.3 Access 49
- 6.4 Skills 50
- 6.5 Connectedness 51
- 6.6 Wellbeing 52
- 6.7 Agency 53
- 6.8 Representation 54
- 6.9 The Small Grants Programme 55

7. Findings: strengths and opportunities..... 57

8. Conclusion & recommendations 66

Appendices 71

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About This Report

This report

The goal of the second round of Bristol Impact Fund (BIF2) was to grow the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality. In 2017, BIF1 brought together 8 council grant funds for a new funding programme. The BIF2 programme was launched in 2021 having evolved from the learning from BIF1 and with different priorities. BIF2 provided 4-year grant funding totalling £6.4m for large and medium grants and two rounds of smaller grants for, 18 months, to encourage more diverse communities. The fund has a strategic framework which includes intended impacts for communities, 5 thematic priorities for funding and 24 generic outcomes.

JEM Associates was commissioned in 2022 to deliver the evaluation of the BIF2 programme and provide evaluation learning support for the cohort of small, medium and large grant holders.

This report shares the learning across the four years of BIF2 delivery. It draws from large, medium and small grant funded project reports, interviews, workshops, discussions with grant holders and the Bristol City Council team to analyse the overall difference the programme is making in the City through empowering communities experiencing the greatest inequality.

The report contains the following sections:

- **An executive summary** providing an overview of the key findings and recommendations
- **Section 1** – an introduction to the Bristol population and quality of life across the city
- **Section 2** – an outline of the evaluation methodology and delivery
- **Section 3** – a summary of overall progress over the 4 year grant period
- **Sections 4,5 and 6** – the key findings at sector, organisational and community levels
- **Section 7** – the critical success factors and the challenges for projects and the wider programme
- **Section 8** – conclusions and recommendations for the future programme
- **Appendices** covering additional information.

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Executive Summary



Image courtesy of 1625 independent People

Executive Summary

Summary

The context

This is the final full report for BIF2 , covering the 4-year grant funding programme, using evidence gained by Simpact for year 1 and JEM Associates for years 2, 3 and 4. Our report focuses on the impact of the grant funded activity and the programme's learning structure at project, organisation, community and sector levels.

How the BIF Fund was distributed

Bristol City Council invests in grant funding to fulfil its strategic priorities for the people of Bristol. The goal of the second round of BIF was to 'Grow the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality.' Building on the learning and achievements of BIF1, BIF2 delivered a 4-year grant funding programme totalling £6.4m. It also provided two rounds of smaller grants for 18 months to encourage more diverse communities.

With an asset-based approach, the fund has a strategic framework which includes intended impacts for communities, 5 thematic priorities including, mental health and wellbeing, digital inclusion, hate crime work, economic inclusion, community-identified priorities, 24 generic community outcomes, and 7 priority 'ways of working' for communities and the VCSE sector in Bristol.

BIF2 funds were spread widely across Bristol, mostly in areas of highest deprivation. The programme focussed on communities that experience the greatest inequalities. Funding decisions were made with an intentionality to support organisations 'of' their communities, notably Black, Asian and Minoritised ethnic-led and Disabled people-led groups, including equalities organisations with limited funding track records.

24 voluntary, community and social enterprise sector (VCSE) projects received 4-year grant funding totalling £5,844,000.

11 smaller, 18-month grants were awarded in 2021 and a further 13 in 2023 totalling £300,000, to encourage community building in currently underserved wards and equalities communities.

A commitment to four-year funding for medium and large grants has proven crucial to the sector.

> ***"Vibrant, cohesive and inclusive communities are our most important asset."***
>
> Christina Gray,
>
> Director for Communities and Public Health, Bristol City Council

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The Story of Change

BIF Story of Change – Growing the Power

JEM Associates were commissioned to evaluate the programme and support learning across the cohort of grant holders. Early on the JEM team co-created a **programme level Story of Change** with the Council, which shows the link between monitoring, learning and evaluation activity, and the difference the BIF2 programme is trying to make. This facilitates a better understanding of the added value generated by the BIF programme including the impact of the learning support programme and the 4 anticipated Impacts for communities: 1) Access trusted, empowering support; 2) Self-organise and pursue collective priorities; 3) Collaborate and bring about meaningful change and; 4) Build strong organisations taking forward community priorities.

A **project level Story of Change** was also created to explore the difference the projects make to individuals and communities. It outlines the activities and intended outcomes. Impact on people is defined by 24 short term outcomes which fall into 6 categories: Access, Connectivity, Wellbeing, Agency and Empowerment, Representation and Influence, Skills and Knowledge.

Figure 1 illustrates the chain of events from short-term outcomes to longer-term organisational impact which in turn delivers the longer-term community vision of 'creating a fairer, healthier and more sustainable city which is people-centred and has a resilient economy that supports diverse, inclusive and equitable communities.

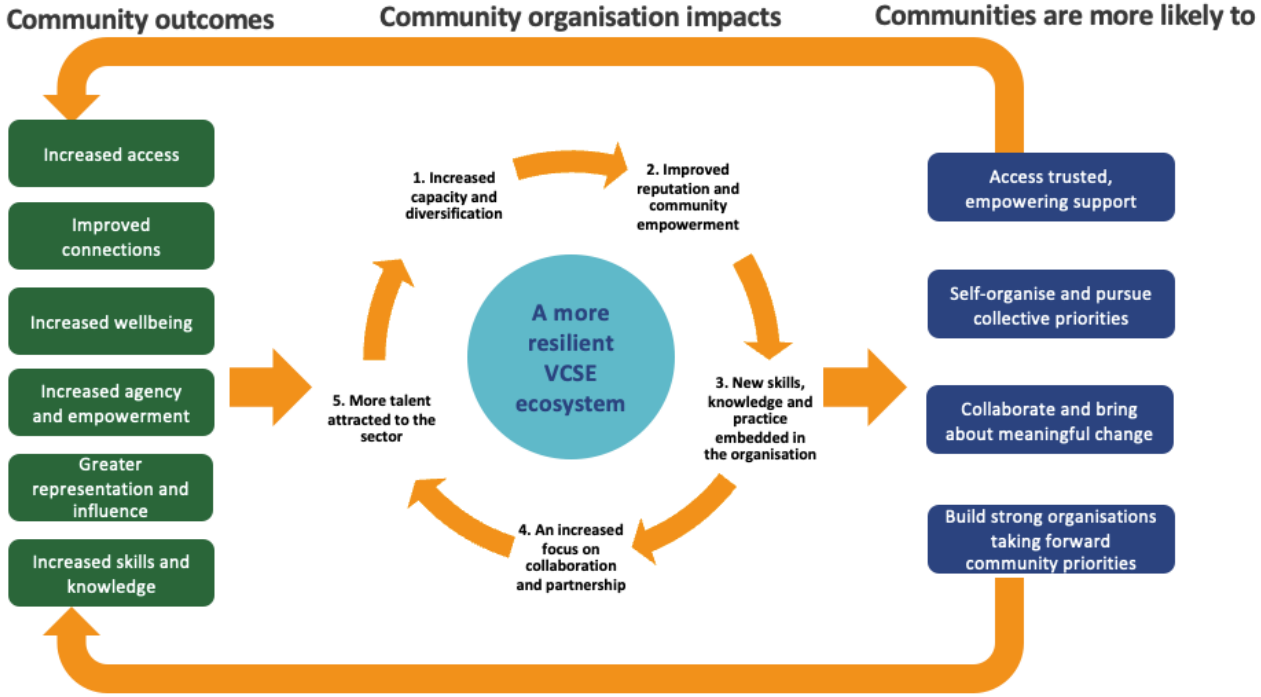


Figure 1: Growing the Power – the circular chain of outcomes from individual, to community to organisational and sector wide impacts.

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Findings: Outcomes for communities, community organisations and the VCSE sector

The BIF2 programme demonstrates strong and consistent impact across all six outcome themes: Access, Skills, Connectedness, Wellbeing, Agency and Representation, with particularly significant outcomes in Skills, Wellbeing and Connectedness. Together, these outcomes combine to grow the power of communities by building stronger more connected and more confident communities. Multi year funding has been crucial in strengthening relationship building, collaboration and sustainability.

The programme's outcomes are interconnected, cumulative and mutually reinforcing, creating the conditions for sustained, community-led change and the continued growth of social capital across the city.

At the heart of the programme is a relational, community-led approach that enables people to build trust, confidence and connections over time. Access to activities, support and equipment acts as both an entry point and an enabler, helping individuals make initial connections, understand their rights and entitlements, and engage more independently with opportunities and services. Trusted support has been central to enabling people to progress.

Skills development, especially digital skills, has delivered benefits far beyond technical learning. Participants report increased confidence, self-belief and employability, with many progressing into greater community participation, peer support and leadership roles. Skills and confidence together provide a critical foundation for wider individual and community change.

The programme has also strengthened connectedness within communities. Participants move from initial engagement with organisations towards deeper relationships, stronger feelings of belonging and more active participation in community life. This progression highlights the importance of sustained, inclusive and relational approaches that meet people at different stages of their lives and circumstances.

Wellbeing improvements are consistently evident across the programme, including reduced isolation, improved mental health, increased confidence and stronger feelings of belonging. Wellbeing functions both as a key outcome and as a foundation that enables people to participate, connect and contribute more fully within their communities.

As these outcomes combine, participants demonstrate increased agency: greater confidence to act independently, engage with services, assert their rights and take on leadership roles. Representation has also strengthened, with organisations becoming more reflective of the communities they serve and communities themselves gaining greater voice and influence in local decision-making and wider civic activity. Further capacity building in this area is required to strengthen strategic voice and influence.

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Findings: The strengths of the programme

- **Intentional, multi year, equitable funding**

BIF2's ability to fund organisations over four years, with deep community legitimacy, even where formal structures were limited, has strengthened trust and enabled investment in groups that would otherwise be overlooked.

- **Council-wide influence**

Learning from BIF2 has shaped wider Council funding practice and provided the evidence base for continued investment through BIF3.

- **Collaboration between Community Resources and Community Development teams**

Close partnership working has improved coordination, strengthened relationships with the VCSE sector and influenced best practice across Council grant-making.

- **Supporting sustainability and flexibility**

Tailored, values-driven facilitation and guidance has helped organisations stabilise, adapt and grow, meeting diverse needs across size, maturity and focus.

- **Learning, collaboration and leadership**

The learning and support programme has fostered shared practice, stronger outcomes reporting and a cohort of leaders contributing to wider city agendas.

- **Growth of community-led and asset-based practice**

BIF2 has embedded asset-based approaches, shifting organisations from doing *to* communities to working *with* them, particularly in historically underserved areas.

- **Transformational impact on organisations and places**

Targeted investment has enabled significant organisational growth and catalysed place-based change in areas such as Stockwood and Hartcliffe.

- **Co-creation and responsiveness to the sector**

The programme's adaptive design, including changes to reporting, EDI data, learning support and governance structures, reflects a relational approach that strengthens both organisations and systems.

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Findings: Opportunities for development

- **Organisational capacity**

Grant holders demonstrated strong resilience in the face of rising demand for services and staff turnover, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen capacity and workforce stability to enable long term sustainability.

- **Collaboration**

There has been an increasing appetite for collaboration across grant holders, highlighting the need to explicitly resource and commit to peer learning, sharing and collaboration.

- **Engagement with learning support**

There were a wide variety of skills and confidence across grant holder organisations, part of the strength of a learning cohort. Differentiated facilitation for organisations, including 121 guidance will continue to be crucial.

- **Data-gathering and reporting**

Continuing to co-create an effective and proportionate reporting process including EDI monitoring requirements, will address accessibility and relevance and create more useful documents for all partners.

- **Succession planning**

The sector has many strong leaders, teams and volunteers with deep knowledge, skills and experience. There is a crucial opportunity to embed succession and leadership development plans to build organisation resilience and knowledge retention.

- **Programme team capacity**

Currently the team outperforms its resourcing. Increased investment is likely to have a multiplier effect on their impact and support them to work more proactively to address needs.

- **Cross-Council coordination**

Some organisations in Bristol receive funding through multiple Bristol City Council funding streams highlighting opportunities to share intelligence, algin decision making and grant processes and build on learning already shared from BIF2.

- **Technical and administrative systems**

A grant wide management system, would improve the grant making experience for applicants and staff.

- **Empowering diverse organisations**

This grant attracts organisations in the early stages of development. Shared intelligence across Bristol City Council teams will help to identify and build appropriate support for smaller, more diverse organisations.

- **Tackling historical exclusion**

The programme highlighted the ongoing structural inequalities affecting smaller and minority-led organisations and the importance of more differentiated and equitable approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

- **Reach across priority communities**

Patterns in applications suggest an opportunity to deepen engagement and outreach in underrepresented areas, supporting stronger local infrastructure and more equitable access to funding.

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Executive Summary

Our conclusions

The findings of this report show that the Bristol Impact Fund is a critical driver for the city's community infrastructure, enabling local organisations to empower communities facing the greatest inequalities where they need it most. BIF2 has strengthened the voluntary and community sector across its diversity, building more resilient and representative organisations, expanding community capacity and connectivity, and generating significant wider social value through increased access and engagement, skills, agency, empowerment and wellbeing, and generating local employment, volunteer mobilisation and over £9.3 million additional funding over four years.

The programme has played a stabilising role during successive crises, from COVID-19 to the continuing cost-of-living crisis, demonstrating that sustained investment in community organisations is essential for the city's ability to respond, adapt and recover.

Grant holders have made substantial progress over the four years of BIF2, with organisations becoming more skilled, representative and impactful. Evaluation practice has strengthened significantly, particularly among those engaging in the BIF learning support offer, leading to clearer articulation of impact. Organisations have improved their Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion monitoring, supported by clearer guidance and the establishment of an EDI Working Group, and the sector is now more representative of the communities it serves with 71% of funded organisations having Boards that reflect at least 75% of their target communities. Audience engagement has broadened, with steady increases in participation from young people, older adults, Disabled people, LGBTQIA+ communities and people with diverse gender identities, driven by improved accessibility and inclusion practice.

There is strong evidence of impact across all six outcome themes Access, Skills, Connectedness, Wellbeing, Agency and Representation. Together, these shifts show a sector that is not only delivering frontline work but building long-term social capital and community power.

Partnership working remains central to this impact. Grant holders increasingly articulate what makes collaboration effective, and where poorly designed partnerships create risk, signalling a maturing sector that values collaboration but needs better structures and resourcing to sustain it. The programme has elevated the voice and visibility of a wider and more diverse set of organisations, many of whom would not have survived without BIF support.

But the sector continues to operate on a knife-edge, facing rising demand, reduced statutory provision, and a challenging socio-political climate marked by increased hate crime and far right activity. There is also a continued need for training and skills development for resilience and success.

The evidence is clear, multi-year, whole-organisation investment is transformational, and continued Council commitment is both ethically right and strategically necessary. BIF2 has laid the foundations that BIF3 can now consolidate and grow.

> ***"The Bristol Impact Fund is a really powerful demonstration of Bristol City Council's commitment to supporting community organisations in the City. It provides a platform from which those organisations can grow to provide services and facilities for people across the city."***
>
> Hartcliffe City Farm

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Executive Summary

Our recommendations

Our findings point to a set of conditions that can be addressed to ensure future programmes deliver their full potential.

Bristol City Council should:

- **Continue to build on cross-Council coordination**

Establish shared processes, data systems and communication channels across different funding strands to strengthen coherence and facilitate joint decision-making; introduce mechanisms for knowledge retention to mitigate for staff turnover.

- **Strengthen infrastructure and capacity**

Resource grant management proportionately to programme scale; support more joined-up working across community teams; work towards systems enabling cross-programme visibility and shared decision making.

The Community Resources Team should:

- **Continue to enable collaboration and learning**

Facilitate light-touch, resourced collaboration spaces; support all forms of collaboration and knowledge sharing; embed evaluation and learning support in all future programmes; continue partnership work with Black South West* Network and VOSCUR** to build sector connectivity and resilience.

** Black South West Network is a Black-led racial justice organisation based in Bristol that supports the development of dynamic, independent, and strong Black and Minoritised communities, businesses, and organisations*

***Voscur is the local support and development agency for Bristol's Voluntary, Community & Social Enterprise sector.*

- **Continue to focus on equity and reach**

Develop structured early-intervention enabling support for organisations needing additional help; continue targeted outreach in underrepresented areas; replicate successful place-based approaches to move communities from not applying to 'funding-ready'.

- **Prioritise core stability and organisational infrastructure**

Assess leadership stability early; enable leadership continuity; guide organisations to consolidate before expanding; encourage sustainable income models; maintain flexibility and adaptive delivery through co-created systems and responsive project monitoring.

- **Strengthen partnership structures and shared accountability**

Promote partnership frameworks that balance authority and accountability, encouraging equitable collaboration and stronger trusting relationships.

- **Continue to share best practice**

Share practice on youth boards, lived experience leadership, trustee roles and paid leadership pathways; continue modelling expectations for co-production and community-led governance.

- **Encourage digital inclusion and communication systems**

To help with streamlined data collection and accessible communication; continue to promote shared digital resources across partnerships and the wider cohort.

- **Continue to build on work in BIF2 to strengthen community anchors and place-based infrastructure**

To bolster local ecosystems; recognise community anchors as essential civic infrastructure.

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Collated highlights Years 1 – 4 : 2021-2025

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

BIF 2 Funding

£6.4 million over 4 years

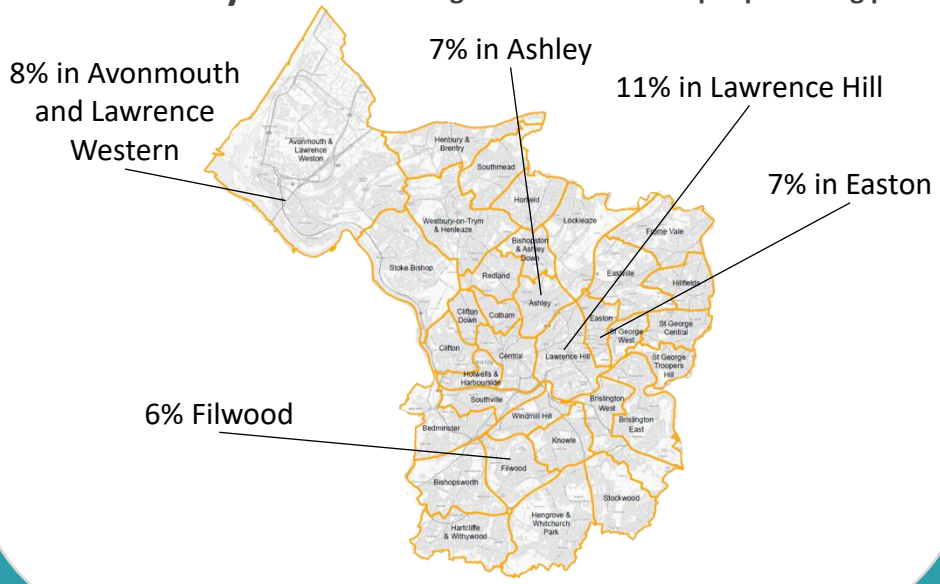
grant funding for small and large grants

Reach

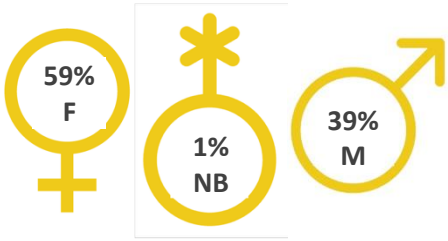
106245
people engaged across all wards in Bristol

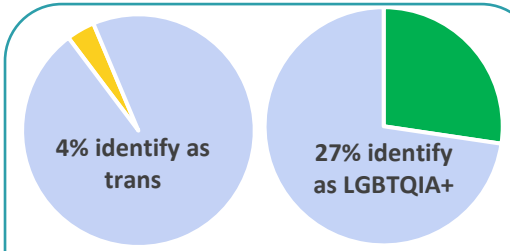
42%
of funded organisations are Black or Minoritised Ethnic-led

Ward Activity: The areas with greatest number of people taking part



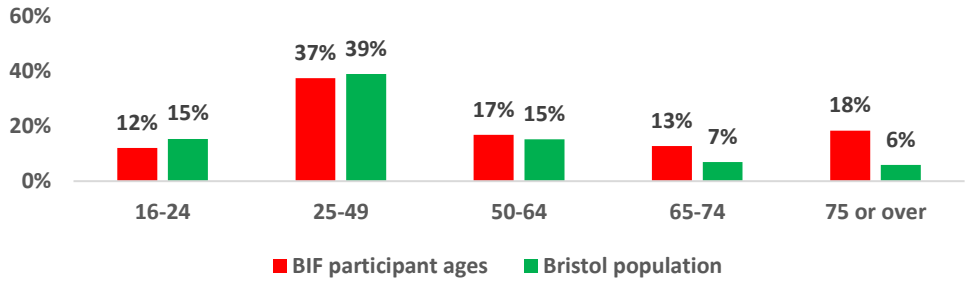
Addressing inequality: The people participating in BIF funded projects

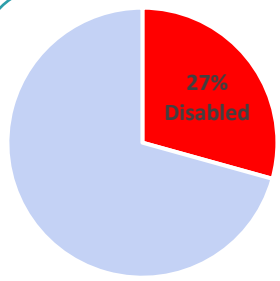




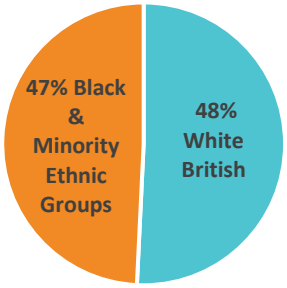
Bristol average 0.8% trans (2021 census)

Bristol average 6% LGBTQIA+ (2021 census)

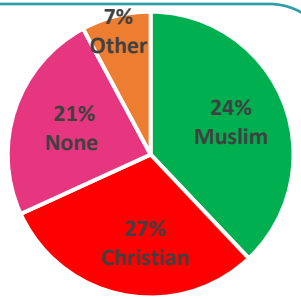




Bristol average 17.2% (25-26 GSNA)



Bristol average 18.9% Black & Minority Ethnic (2021 census)



Bristol average 6.7% Muslim (2021 census)

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Collated highlights Years 1 – 4 : 2021-2025

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

Community outcomes

Over £9.3 million

additional funding leveraged into the city over 4 years

Over 5598

Volunteers, providing over 713728.5 hours, worth **£9.8 million**

Connectedness

Connecting participants with others, communities and agencies

Wellbeing

Measuring wellbeing and have seen improvements for participants

Agency

Participants are empowered and enable to have more control of their lives

Organisational outcomes

- Increased overall capacity
- Improved reputation & community empowerment
- New organisational skills & knowledge
- Increased collaboration & partnerships
- More talent attracted to the sector

Growing the power

of communities experiencing the greatest inequality

*Based on hourly valuation of £13.70 from 2019 report, Assessing the value of volunteers in community businesses, Power to Change

1. Bristol's population



Image courtesy of Bristol Refugee Festival

1.1 Bristol's population

A baseline review: infrastructure participation, ethnicity, and connectivity

The population of Bristol is estimated to be 479,000 people and is continuing to grow. At just short of half a million, it is one of 11 UK Core Cities, the 8th largest city in England and Wales outside London.

There are now more than 287 different ethnic groups in the city, more than 185 countries of birth represented, at least 45 religions and more than 90 languages spoken. (Source: https://www.Bristol.gov.uk)

Infrastructure

Bristol performs well for employment levels at 83% employment (5/63 cities) and is relatively well-qualified. In 2025 97.2% of residents had access to the internet at home, the fifth year-on-year increase in a row. Bristolians experience 24 days a year of poor air quality (4/63). (Source: https://www.centreforcities.org/city/bristol)

Participation

Voter turnout can be useful indication of a sense of agency of communities. In the general election in 2024, Bristol wards were above averagely engaged, except for Bristol South, home to Hartcliffe and Withywood, which had a record low turnout of 14% in the latest local elections (Electoral Commission and Bristol City Council).

Ethnicity

18.9% of the population belong to a Black, Asian or Minoritised Ethnic group - similar to the national average of 18.3%. The largest ethnic minority group is **Somali** 9,167 (2%) – the 4th largest Somali population after Birmingham, Brent and Ealing. Next largest groups are **Pakistani** 9,103 (2%) and **Indian** 8,371 (1.8%).

The Office of National Statistics indicates that 6% of households in Bristol have no one in the household who has English as a main language, compared with an England and Wales average of 4%.

Stronger, more connected communities

Levels of deprivation can also be an indicator of the strength of a community where inequality creates stress on individuals and the connections between them. Where the 1st out of 317 Local Authorities is the most highly deprived in England (Blackpool), Bristol is ranked 82/317, with 16% of its area being in the 10% most deprived and compared with Manchester (2), Leicester (22), Nottingham (10) and Bath and NE Somerset (274). White Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities experience the greatest inequalities across all areas.

Life expectancy is nearly 10 years less for men living in more deprived areas; 7 years less for women. Issues like race and gender relate to civic status and trust - and can create vicious circles of deprivation, or alternatively virtuous cycles of success (Spirit Level 2009).

The Public Health areas of most concern for Bristol generally are self-harm, alcohol related conditions and violent crime. Bristol has a very poor ranking for crime (8/317) and is in the worst third for health (85), housing (87) and living environment (96). It is in the middle third for income, employment and skills (113, 137, 122).

For a more detailed analysis of population statistics please go to the Appendices.

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1.2 Bristol has a strategic approach

With reduced income and escalating needs, Bristol is working with partners as One City to create a more equal and sustainable city

BIF2 is part of a wider Bristol City Council approach that is encapsulated by the following strategic documents:

- **The Power of Us: One City, Many Communities. Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023[1]**
- **Bristol City Council Corporate Strategy 2022-27[2]**

These documents recognise Bristol's assets – it's people, land, culture and universities, but show that inequality is a long-standing challenge.

The economic growth that preceded the COVID-19 pandemic is still unstable and Council funding much reduced. The Council sees itself leading a One City place-making approach with inclusion as the forefront and values of respect, collaboration and ownership.

The approach builds on ABCD (Asset Based Community Development) focusing on *'what's strong not what's wrong'.* This means developing social capital and working with partners towards citizen leadership and co-production. The Marmot Review[3] (2010) refers to *'effective participatory decision-making at local level' with people 'informed, engaged and able to act'.*

Bristol's 'One City, Many Communities' defines a key role for the VCSE sector in building community power and ownership, which Bristol will leverage by aligning resources.

The strategy places these ambitions in the global context, referring to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Where can we make a difference?

Building social capital and healthy place-making leads to wellbeing via social connectivity, enabling support and cooperation.

Community and the VCSE

For neighbourhoods to be flourishing, people need to be able to access opportunities, benefits, and amenities where they live. 'One City' means working with the VCSE on health, wellbeing and support services to co-create with citizens. From Bristol City Council's perspective, one measure of success is that citizens are more satisfied with the way we run things, find it easier to access services, and experience consistently good customer service. This is measured through Bristol's Quality of Life Survey– there is more about the Quality of Life survey on pages 18-19.

[1] https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s90214/BD16068%20Public%20Health%20Report%202023%20Power%20of%20Us%2023-11-23.pdf

[2] https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s67457/Appendix%20Ai%20-%20Draft%20Corporate%20Strategy%202022-27%20-%20Full%20Council%20Version.pdf

[3] https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review-strategic-review-of-health-inequalities-in-england-post-2010

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1.3 People – where we can make a difference

Outcomes data from the Bristol Quality of Life survey

Quality of Life is an extensive annual resident's survey for Bristol. It provides key indicators including measures of inequality and is a core source of performance metrics for the Bristol City Council.

Overall, results from the 2024/25 survey (carried out in Sept-Oct 2024) show a worse picture than five years ago. Only 12 indicators were significantly better in 2024 – with the positive changes in the Themes: Health & Wellbeing , Transport, Community & Living and Education & Skills. However, 62 indicators were significantly worse in 2024 – with most negative changes in the Themes: Health & Wellbeing, Sustainability & Environment, Community & Living and Crime & Safety. Figure 2 shows a comparison between core indicators from the 2019 and 2024 Quality of Life surveys – most relevant to BIF we see decreasing overall population life and local area satisfaction, and increasing mental health issues, concerns about financial stability and fear of crime and harassment.

Inequality in Bristol

As previously mentioned, Bristol is home to some of the most deprived areas as well as some of the least deprived areas in the country. The stark difference in how people across Bristol experience day to day life is highlighted by the "Net Better" score. For each ward or group, the percentage of indicators that are significantly worse than the Bristol average is subtracted from the percentage of indicators that are significantly better than the Bristol average.

Disabled people have the lowest "Net Better" score, which implies they have the poorest quality of life of any group in the city. Four of the next lowest Net Better scores are held by council tenants, people living in the most deprived areas, full-time carers, and people with non-degree qualifications Three groups have the next lowest Net Better scores, namely housing association tenants, Muslim people and people with no qualifications.

Three of the remaining demographic groups with significant negative Net Better scores are single parents, trans people, and Black/Black British ethnic groups.

In contrast, and unsurprisingly, people with degree qualifications and owner occupiers have the highest Net Better scores, which are associated with a higher quality of life. People who share parenting duties of dependent children also have a higher Net Better score.

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Quality of Life Survey

Issues pertinent to BIF2



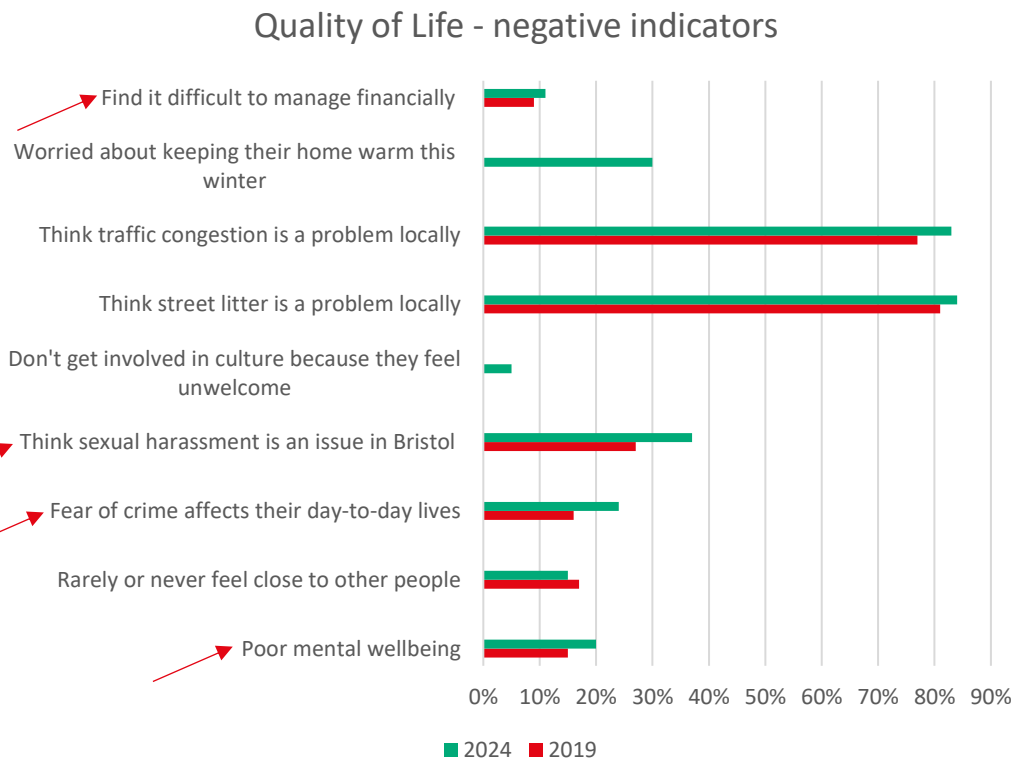


Figure 2: Comparison of 'Quality of Life' population data between 2019 and 2024. Red arrows show areas of continuing challenges, green shows areas of progress.

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1.4 Bristol Impact Fund

Context

In 2017 Bristol City Council planned to better tackle inequality by combining 8 grant funds into Bristol Impact Fund (BIF). BIF2 is the second iteration of this fund, building on the learning and achievements of the BIF1 programme.

In October 2021 BIF2 funded a total of **39 organisations** through:

- 24 projects for 4 years plus a 6 month extension – **a total of £5,844,000**
- 11 smaller grants in 2021 and a further 13 in 2023, for 18 months, to encourage new involvement and diversity – **a total of £300,000**

(see Appendix for a list of all 39 funded organisations)

The goal was to **grow the power of communities** that experience the greatest inequality across the City.

Bristol Impact fund's focus

Of the larger partners, the majority operate across Bristol (with some being regional and one national) but focusing on sub-groups of the population, namely people who are: **women, young, older, Disabled people, of African/Caribbean/Somali heritage or refugee and asylum seekers**.

Three projects are for **Knowle West**, two projects are for **East Central Bristol** (Easton, Lawrence Hill, St Pauls, Ashely ward), two are for **Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston**, one each are for **Southmead, Bedminster and Barton Hill**. (Source: partner websites)

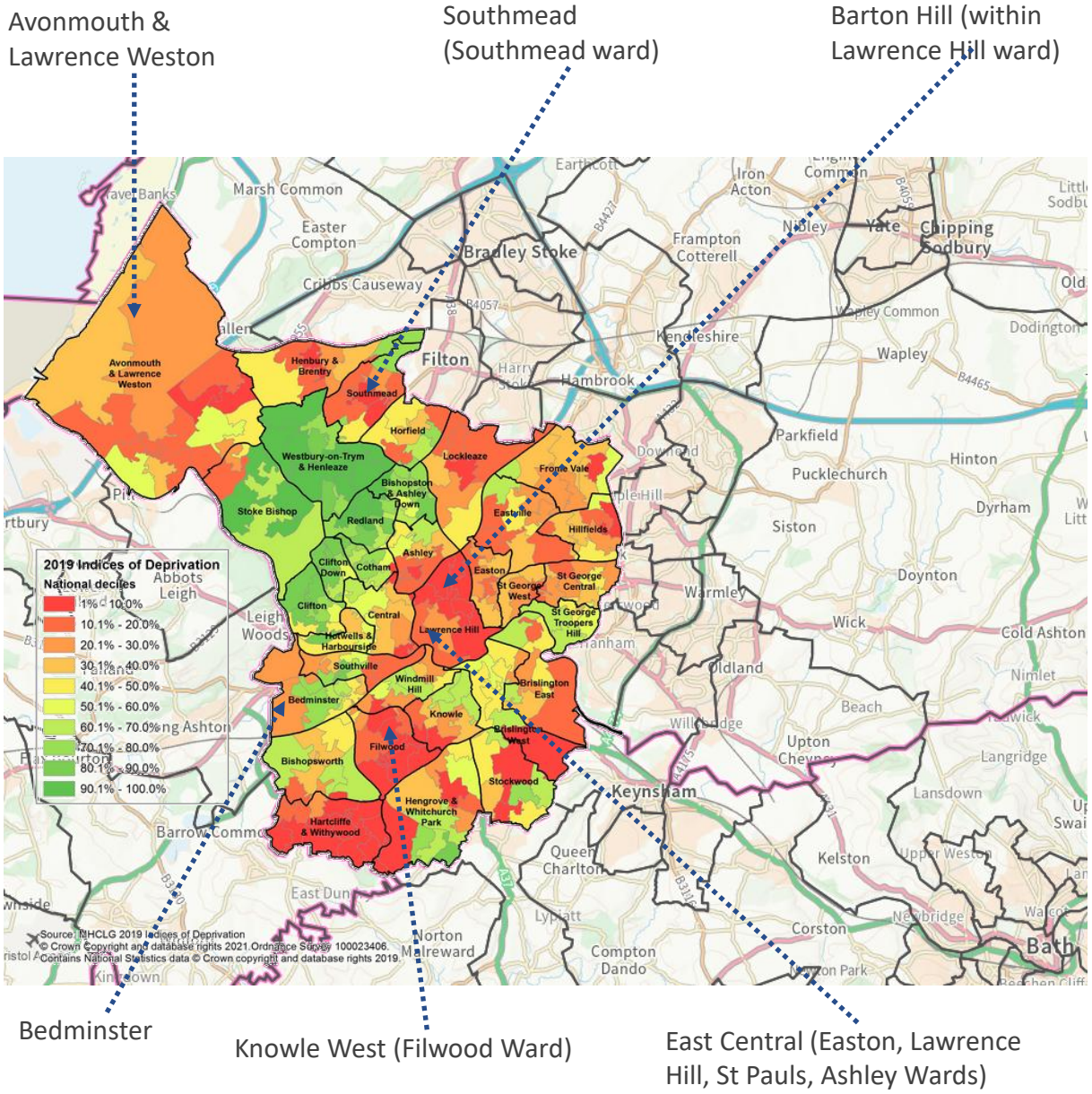


Figure 3: Map of Bristol with the Index of Deprivation overlaid

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2. Methodology & evidence

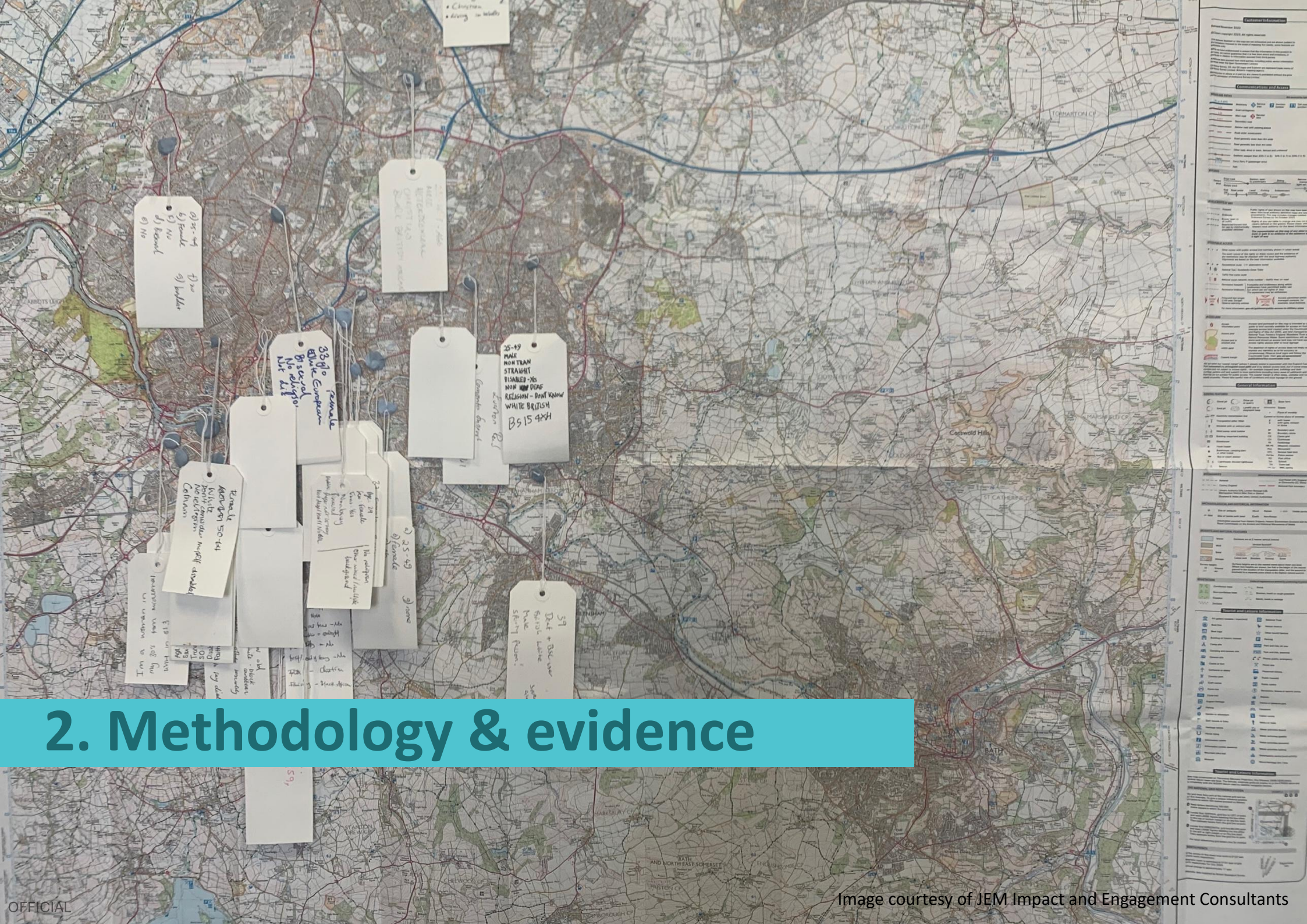


Image courtesy of JEM Impact and Engagement Consultants

2.1 Evidence

Understanding how, and with what data, we have drawn analysis and conclusions

JEM Associates were commissioned in 2022 to deliver an independent evaluation of the BIF2 programme and co-deliver the learning strand. This report outlines our findings across 4 years. It draws from a range of quantitative and qualitative data sources.

Our methods

JEM Associates led a series of online drop-ins, regular in person workshops and 1:1 support, for individual organisations focusing on measuring and managing impact.

Data was gathered from participating organisations, the Bristol City Council teams and sector development agencies and includes:

- End of Year grant holder reports from small, medium and large grant holders from 2022-2025.
- Participant surveys and observations from in-person workshops between January 2023 and April 2025
- Feedback from medium and large grant holders following engagement with 1:1 and drop-in opportunities
- Notes from team meetings between JEM and the Community Resources team from 2022.
- The Community Resources Team Reflection Log completed between September 2023 and April 2025
- Notes and analysis of 2 Value of Change workshops with the Bristol City Council team
- Notes and analysis of 1 Value of Change workshop with the BIF2 steering group community organisations
- Interviews with 6 grant-holding organisations
- Interviews with Natalie Sherring Regional Capacity Building Manager Black South West Network, Janine Starr Head of Services VOSCUR, and Penny Germon, Head of Service: Communities, Bristol City Council
- Analysis of local area population data drawn from the Bristol City Council census and statistics pages[4]
- A review of the Director of Public Health annual report The Power of Us[5], and the Voscur and BSWN websites.

We use statistical analysis of numbers alongside thematic analysis of narrative data aligned with the overall project and programme level objectives and outcomes.

[4] https://www.bristol.gov.uk/council-and-mayor/statistics-census-information

[5] https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s90214/BD16068%20Public%20Health%20Report%202023%20Power%20of%20Us%2023-11-23.pdf

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2.2 Programme level Story of Change

Purpose, research questions and evidence

Planning, measuring and understanding the added value of the BIF2 funding and learning and support programme is crucial to this work.

JEM created a new Programme Level Story of Change that shows the link between monitoring, learning and evaluation activity, and the difference the BIF2 programme is trying to make.

The purpose of the overall evaluation and learning support programme was:

- To Grow the Power - empowering individuals and community organisations and inspiring them to do more;
- To help the Community Resources team and wider Bristol City Council understand the impact of BIF2 funding on the VCSE sector and communities in Bristol;
- To help shape future direction of VCSE grant funding criteria and management.

Programme level research questions were agreed with the Community Resources team to provide an overall structure for the evaluation:

- How far has the BIF2 funding empowered local communities that experience the greatest inequalities to: self-organise and pursue collective priorities; access trusted, empowering support; build strong organisations taking forward community priorities; collaborate and bring about meaningful changes?
- What worked well and what was a challenge?
- Did it reach the right people? And how well did people engage?
- Did it make a difference and to whom?
- Which elements made the most difference/created most value?

The Programme Level Story of Change allowed us to identify which programme level activities lead to the programme level outcomes:

1. **Access trusted, empowering support** to develop:
   - new skills and knowledge to facilitate growth
2. **Self-organise and pursue collective priorities** by:
   - widening engagement
   - platforming a greater voice in Bristol
   - supporting more connected, empowered communities
3. **Collaborate and bring about meaningful change** by developing:
   - new and stronger partnerships and networks
4. **Build strong organisations taking forward community priorities** for:
   - a more resilient VCSE sector

The Project Level Story of Change outlines the activities and intended outcomes for individuals and communities across Bristol. Impact on people is defined by 24 outcomes that fall into 6 categories. Outcomes are especially for those experiencing inequality and/or affected by hate crime and discrimination:

1. Access
2. Skills
3. Agency
4. Connection
5. Wellbeing
6. Representation.

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Programme level Story of Change

The difference the programme makes to the sector

4 How?	3 What?	2 Who?	1 Why?	Strategic Goal
Ways of working	**Delivery and participation outputs**	**The people who matter, stakeholders**	**Impacts for communities**	
Equitable Inclusive Asset-based Place-based Relationship-orientated Citizen-led Nurturing the VCSE ecosystem	BIF2 large and small grant funding Cohort learning fund Peer learning programme (whole cohort) Peer sharing platform (shared resources, templates, how to guides) 1:1 facilitation and guidance Drop-ins Planning and Evaluation	VCSE grant holder organisations Communities facing the greatest inequalities Community Resources team Voscur BSWN Bristol City Council	**1. Access trusted, empowering support to develop:** • new skills and knowledge to facilitate growth **2. Self-organise and pursue collective priorities by:** • widening engagement • platforming a greater voice in Bristol • supporting more connected, empowered communities **3. Collaborate and bring about meaningful change by developing:** • new and stronger partnerships and networks **4. Build strong organisations taking forward community priorities that creates:** • a more resilient VCSE sector	Creating a fairer, healthier and sustainable city, one which is people centred and has a resilient economy that supports diverse, inclusive and equitable communities… By… Growing the Power of communities facing greatest inequality.

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2.3 Project level Story of Change

The difference that projects make to people and communities

4 How?	3 What?	2 Who?	1 Why?		Strategic Goal
Ways of working	**Thematic priorities**	**The people who matter, Stakeholders**	**Short term for individuals**	**Impacts**	
Equitable Inclusive Asset-based Place-based Relationship-orientated Citizen-led Nurturing the VCSE ecosystem	Mental health and wellbeing Digital inclusion Hate Crime work Economic Inclusion Community Identified priorities	Communities facing the greatest inequalities in Bristol	1. Access 2. Skills 3. Agency 4. Connection 5. Wellbeing 6. Representation	Self-organise and pursue collective priorities Access trusted, empowering support Build strong organisations taking forward community priorities Collaborate and bring about meaningful change	Growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality.

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3. Progress over 4 years

Image courtesy of Bristol Refugee Festival

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3.1 Progress over 4 years

Developing practice

Individual and Organisational Practice

1. Significant improvements in evaluation practice and articulation of impact in reports. We see this most strongly evidenced in organisations that have regularly attended BIF learning support opportunities (events, 121s and drop ins).
2. Progress in Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) monitoring, and evaluation overall - many more organisations completing their EDI data more effectively and consistently across their activities meaning that the results are more robust. This is likely due to clearer and more consistent programme learning support and guidance over the last year alongside a review of what data is needed and the development of an EDI Working Group in partnership with funded organisations
3. End of year reports show an overall improvement in organisational community representation - 71% of funded organisations now have at least 75% of their Board with the same protected characteristics as the group they are serving. Even more are saying they have nearly reached this target demonstrating focused work in this area over the 4-year period.
4. Numbers of volunteers over years has stayed consistent even within a challenging environment. Lack of data on volunteer demographics means we cannot comment on background or motivations.

Audience Engagement

Increases in participation by some target audience groups - This can be attributed to several factors including; improved organisational accessibility and inclusion practice; an increase in organisational skills and confidence to ask for and gather this evidence;
an increase in confidence of some groups to self identify.

Headline areas of progress:

- A steady increase in the number of young people aged between 16-24 and people aged between 65-74 participating in BIF2 funded activities, most likely due to targeted activities for these age groups.
- A steady increase in the number of people identifying as disabled people
- A slight increase in the number of people identifying as LGBTQIA+
- A slight increase in the number of people identifying as gender fluid or non binary
- A slight increase in the number of people identifying their gender as different from that at birth

Capturing the Change – Outcomes

There is consistent evidence of impact across all six outcome themes: Access, Skills, Connectedness, Wellbeing, Agency and Representation. Together, these interconnected outcomes form a pathway to building social capital, moving from initial engagement and grassroots delivery, towards increased agency, representation and influence. Over the BIF2 period, there has been a clear shift from activity solely focused on immediate delivery and community-level engagement to more strategic outcomes, with individuals and organisations becoming more confident, self-determining and influential. Organisations are more reflective of the communities they serve and better positioned to influence policy and practice with further support.

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3.2 Growing the power: A virtuous circle

Impact chains for individuals to communities to a stronger sector

Over 4 years there are significant positive outcomes for individuals, community organisations and the sector as a whole. These are leading indicators of progress towards the long-term impacts identified for the BIF2 programme and wider aims for growing the power of communities experiencing the greatest inequality. The creation of stronger, more empowered community organisations generates a virtuous circle of impacts. Longer-term community organisational impacts are likely to have more demonstratable evidence beyond the life of BIF2.

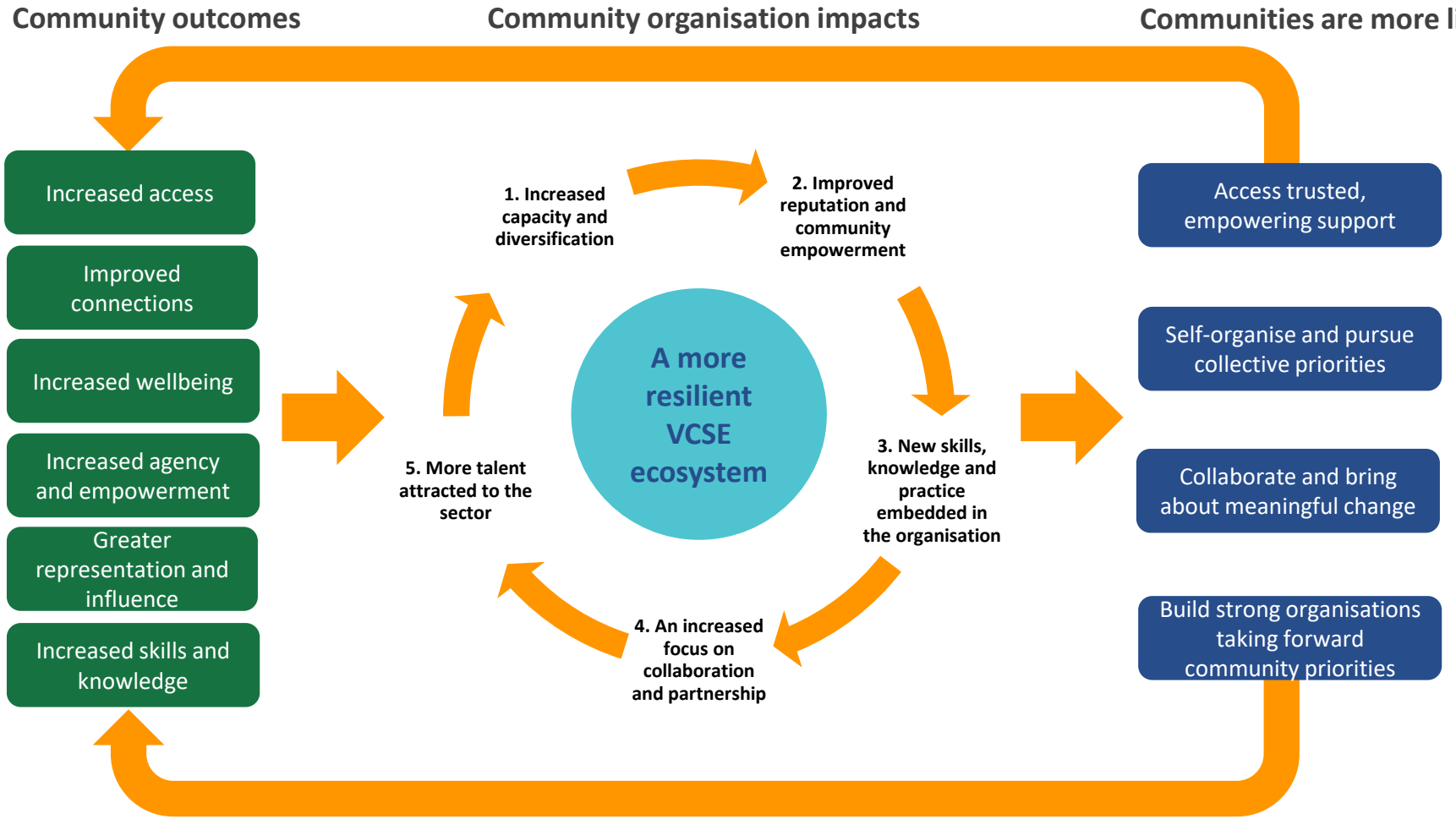


Figure 4: Growing the Power – the circular chain of outcomes from individual, to community to organisational and sector wide impacts.

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4. Impact on the VCSE ecosystem

Image courtesy of 1625 independent People

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4.1 Bristol's VCSE sector

The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector

The VCSE sector is supported by two BIF partners - Voscur and Black South West Network (BSWN), both of whom have worked to enable BIF2 grant holders throughout the BIF2 programme. Both describe how communities and the sector are still recovering from COVID in 2026, further compounded by continuing socio-economic and political fluctuations.

In 2024 activity in the sector included:

- 724 diverse VCSE organisations indexed by Voscur in Bristol
- 500 volunteer and 1,681 paid roles advertised by Voscur and the Can Do Bristol platform

The VCSE Sector Survey aims to collect new comparative data on the number of organisations and volunteers in the sector, however at the time of this there are no up to date figures. The voluntary sector is constantly evolving, data on size, membership and networking is difficult to source which means it is difficult to analyse.

However, there are common themes worth considering for the context of this report and outlined in Designing a New Social Reality[6] research report published by BSWN in 2021.

VCSE context

Designing a New Social Reality sees a VCSE Sector that is: equitable, appropriately funded, enabled to plan long-term, meaningfully included in decision-making, rooted in community, resilient and strongly connected city-wide.

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis the Sector's ability and capacity to plan at all was severely diminished.

Across the country, public funding for charities was cut by 1 billion pounds per annum due to cost-of-living and post pandemic reductions, which is disproportionately impacting society's most vulnerable. In September 2023 it was reported by 94% of VCSE organisations that their grants had been cut (with 39% of these being significantly reduced or not renewed). 69% of local organisations said they will have to either use reserves to pay for staff and delivery costs or will have to pause certain services or products[7]. According to Voscur's 2024 annual impact report 59% of small charities report volunteer recruitment as a *major concern.*[8]

In their 2024 impact report, BSWN point out that the racist riots and the subsequent anti-immigration marches and protests are a stark reminder of how entrenched and easily inflamed deep-seated racial antipathy is in the UK. They are also a reminder of how much work remains to be done to achieve racial justice in policy and practice and in fighting discrimination.

Despite all of this or perhaps because of it, the social enterprise sector in Bristol is large and growing, with 13% more Community Interest Companies in 2024 than in 2023. In Bristol, significant funding has also been leveraged into the sector through the VOSCUR and BSWN supported funding applications, showing their crucial role in this system.

The BIF2 programme has funded organisations throughout this period of significant change, working closely with VOSCUR and BSWN to offer holistic and comprehensive guidance and facilitation for grant holders.

[6] https://www.blacksouthwestnetwork.org/vcse-research

[7] https://www.ncvo.org.uk/news-and-insights/news-index/the-true-cost-of-delivering-public-services/survey-findings/

[8] Voscur. (2024), Annual Impact Report, Voscur. https://www.voscur.org

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4.2 Scales of Collaboration

The voluntary, community and social enterprise sector

The four-year duration of the BIF2 programme has enabled organisations to develop connections, build relationships and form formal and informal collaborations, set to build a more resilient VCSE ecosystem across the City. We see how vital these connections are throughout all the BIF2 project reports.

Collaboration across the cohort

Over the four years, evidence shows a distinct increase in not only how many organisational connections there are across the cohort but also an increase in frequency and type of collaboration.

Organisations have worked together over a spectrum of collaboration. Each element is not exclusive, nor is it chronological, however, we have seen a move through the spectrum as a result of the relationships and trust that has built over time. The multi-year funding is a significant contributor to this working successfully.



Figure 5: Spectrum

Time and resource to invest in relationship building, networking and exploring collaboration are other key factors for success. BIF2 has enabled this space through cohort events and a supportive environment. Page 33 shows just some of the examples of collaboration across this spectrum.

Wider Collaboration

All organisations within the BIF2 cohort collaborate or work within formal and informal partnerships, with each other, other organisations in the community and VSCE sector and other sectors. At the end of Year 4 BIF2 organisations named over 180 partner organisations, which was not a definitive list and is likely even higher. The prevalence of collaboration is evidence that it is not a 'nice to have' but a core and necessary mode of operation for VCSE organisations.

> ***"I highly recommend community organisations include capacity time for networking in their budgets for grants and allocated time for their relevant staff. This is what we do now and it enables us to attend lots more city wide opportunities, meetings and networks that enable us to share learning in and out, explore possible collaborations, not feel pulled in lots of directions and feeling like its 'unfunded' time that's not resourced, and it gives you space and time to develop slow burn work and spot new opportunities to collaborate."***
>
> Community in Partnership Knowle West

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(Scales of Collaboration cont.)

Outside of the BIF2 cohort, collaborations have included (but not limited to):

- Bristol City Council Teams, including Education, Public Health, Parks and Social Care
- Education establishments: schools, colleges and universities
- Local community groups and organisations (including foodbanks, community centres, allotment associations)
- Criminal Justice Service and county constabularies
- Health services (GPs, NHS trusts, Neighbourhood Heath Services)
- Charities (including YourPark)
- Commercial organisations
- Networks (including Climate and Nature Partnership and Bristol Equalities Network)
- Transport companies (First Bus)
- Other local authorities

We can see collaboration at all the different levels is happening throughout the BIF2 programme and is more prevalent in those organisations who have made the most of attending events, drops in and 121 facilitation and guidance sessions. Collaborations range from peer-to-peer ad hoc emotional support to informal skill or idea sharing, to sharing training or joint commissioning, to sharing back-office staff to developing new projects or joint funding applications. We also see evidence of collaborations between organisations where this will increase access and reach into target communities.

It is crucial to recognise that all these forms of collaboration are important in a resilient system. Grant giving programmes like BIF should actively encourage and support all forms through a comprehensive 'learning and support' strand of work.

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4.2.1 Examples of Collaboration

Providing Space
After meeting at a cohort event, Knowle West Health Park now provide space for Black Mothers Matter to hold weekly sessions in Filwood.

Training
Knowle West Media Centre provided training, mentoring and facilitation to cohort organisations on creating case study films.

Delivering events/activities together
Wellspring Settlement and Bristol Law Centre collaborated to deliver a series of workshops to improve people's knowledge and understanding of their rights.



Guidance and advice
Community in Partnership Knowle West received advice from Windmill Farm on recruiting volunteers.

Engaging participants/referrals
Bristol Somali Resource Centre and Autism Independence have developed a referral process to support local Somali families with advice and advocacy around autism.

Joint Funding
Bristol Women's Voice and Bristol Older People's Forum have received joint funding from People's Postcode Lottery to deliver an over 55s Women's Health Discrimination Project.

Figure 6: Spectrum of Collaboration examples

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5. Impact on community organisations: Medium & Large Grants

Image courtesy of Filwood Community Centre

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5.1 Stronger organisations driving community priorities

Reflections on the last year of learning

Across the final year of the Bristol Impact Fund, organisations report a period defined by adaptation, deepened inclusion, strengthened partnerships, and significant internal reflection. Many describe the past 12 months as a time of rapid change, rising complexity, and shifting community needs, requiring them to rethink long-held assumptions and redesign aspects of their practice.

A common reflection is the need for flexibility and responsiveness, a sentiment echoed widely as groups navigated unpredictable external pressures. Several organisations emphasised that progress is rarely linear and that services must remain "relevant, responsive, and person-centred" even as circumstances shift.

Deepening understanding of inclusion, accessibility, and "meeting people where they are" was frequently mentioned in reports. Organisations working with young people, Disabled people, and those facing trauma or discrimination highlighted that meaningful engagement requires time, trust, and tailored approaches. One group noted the continued impacts of COVID on some communities, particularly young people, *"… many are still in 'survival mode',"* while another stressed that *"true inclusion takes time… outcomes are deeper, more sustainable, and genuinely owned by the community."* This has led to changes such as quieter spaces, more flexible participation models, and targeted outreach to underrepresented groups.

Grant holders also reflected on the growing importance and complexity of partnership working, detailed further in the next section. This has included in some cases, working with socially engaged artists, a particularly useful way of breaking down barriers and using creativity as a way into deeper engagement.

> ***"Our learning is that when artists, communities, and organisations co-create at a hyper- local level, they generate shared ownership, shift power, and create work that truly reflects local voices and aspirations. These relationships take time, care, and infrastructure but the outcomes are memorable and transformative."***
>
> Knowle West Media Centre

A significant area of learning relates to internal capacity, systems, and organisational infrastructure. Several organisations recognised the need to strengthen governance, staffing, HR processes, data systems, and communication structures before expanding their work. This includes everything from implementing new CRM systems to revising membership criteria, improving case recording, and simplifying internal processes so they *"work for people rather than the other way around."*

Many organisations noted more individuals presenting with high or complex needs that exceed their remit, prompting changes such as early screening, clearer referral pathways, and more holistic or therapeutic approaches. One organisation described the challenge of navigating cases where people have *"so many different needs,"* while another noted an increase in referrals requiring specialist intervention.

These reports evidence the importance of co-production, empowerment, and community-led design. Whether through youth co-creation, advisory boards, peer mentoring, or user-led campaigns, organisations are increasingly embedding lived experience into decision-making. This shift is captured in reflections such as the need to ask, *"How can I deliver this support in a way that could empower the individual to help others?"*

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5.2 The BIF2 learning and support programme

From skills to organisational development

Final grant holder reports show strong evidence of individual and organisational learning through the BIF programme over the last 4 years. People felt empowered by the training, 1-2-1 support, partnership brokerage, and access to resources and 'How to' guides.

Knowledge and skills

The knowledge and skills developed through the programme have enabled organisations to offer better and broader support to their communities. As BIF2 organisations build capacity, create new roles and expand their activities or audiences, more people can access the local support they need. This diversification has created a chain of outcomes that collectively strengthen the foundations of a more resilient VCSE sector in Bristol.

Grant holders consistently described the programme as providing meaningful ongoing CPD, with regular attendees showing the greatest organisational development. However, many organisations, particularly smaller ones, struggled with the capacity to prioritise and attend sessions amidst competing sector demands.

> ***"I met some new amazing folks today and got to reconnect with some old ones! I'm reminded of the incredible work that happens across Bristol and the real faces behind it. It can feel daunting with the reporting, but it definitely helps to have these sessions..."***
>
> Off the Record



Figure 7: Different elements of the learning and support programme

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(The BIF2 learning and support programme cont.)

Participants valued having protected time and space to explore topics that sit outside their core work but remain important. They also appreciated the creative energy brought to both in-person and online workshops and drop-ins.

> ***"We have so much to learn from one another. BIF facilitated sessions on best practice are invaluable."***
>
> BRASP

> ***"I enjoyed it and appreciated coming together to reflect, bounce ideas off each other and be creative. I appreciate your openness and support towards helping us navigate the challenges we have faced on this journey. It's a learning experience and I have left with some inspiration!***
>
> Off the Record

Growing capacity

New dedicated roles and additional funded staff hours have improved quality, strengthened skills and knowledge, and enhanced organisational practice. These changes have boosted organisational reputation, increased collaboration, and made it more likely that organisations can attract new talent into a more viable VCSE sector. This circular chain of impact has also contributed to the significant funding leveraged into the sector by grant holders – a massive £9.3M.

The learning across the programme reveals a sector that is evolving its systems thinking, increasingly aware of the structural conditions shaping community wellbeing, and committed to approaches that are relational, inclusive, and sustainable whilst recognising the need to advocate and influence at strategic levels to really make change happen. BIF2 has enabled organisations not only to deliver services but to reflect, adapt, and strengthen the foundations needed for long-term impact. These development have highlighted the benefits of systems thinking opening up further opportunities to develop this emerging work in BIF3.



Figure 8: Impacts for community organisations

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"Over the last four years it [BIF2] has enabled Windmill Hill City Farm to partner with local organisations to regenerate Hartcliffe City Farm bringing an additional £1million of investment to the site, transforming it from derelict and disused to being a thriving independent charity that local people are really enjoying using."

Windmill Hill City Farm

"Through the support VOSCUR and the Council has given to applicants and grantees, we have seen organisations flourish, with improvements in buildings and services, making a real difference to staff and communities, whether through additional activities…. Or more welcoming and efficient…spaces."

Janine Starr, VOSCUR

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Case study: Autism Independence

Growing organisational strength, confidence and culturally competent practice through BIF2 , and forward into BIF3

Autism Independence provides direct support for families and consultancy, training and guidance, for professionals to bridge the gap between families and provider

Following a successful small BIF1 grant and over the course of BIF2, the organisation has undergone a profound organisational shift from a small, grassroots group responding to crisis-level need, to a confident, strategically positioned organisation now funded through BIF3 to deliver a citywide, culturally tailored Preparing for Adulthood programme. Their development has been driven by deep community trust, lived-experience leadership, and a model of support that meets young Disabled people and their families 'where they are'.

A defining feature of Autism Independence's organisational growth is the depth and intensity of their individual work. They describe *'never signposting or leaving the Young person and families because we know this will not achieve the best outcome for them.'* Instead, they walk alongside families through every stage of transition supporting with CVs, job applications, interviews, open days, travel training, and navigating complex systems. They note that many families do not speak English, cannot read or write, have witnessed and have lived through severe trauma, requiring a highly relational, culturally competent approach.

BIF2 enabled Autism Independence to strengthen systems and infrastructure, including investing in an iCloud-based CRM system to track demographic information and improve research and policy influence.

The team has expanded to include multilingual health navigators, enabling them to reach Somali, Asian and Eastern European communities more effectively. This has led to increased engagement from groups previously underrepresented in SEND pathways.

Organisational confidence has also grown. Autism Independence now delivers professional training across the city, including 'Cultural Intelligence workshops' and autism awareness sessions in diverse places of worship, strengthening the wider system's ability to enable young people to reach their potential.

By Year 4, they were working directly with 27 young people into work/higher education/work experience/home education/internship and independent living, demonstrating a clear pathway model that BIF3 will now scale. Their new BIF3 project will offer culturally tailored, holistic opportunities to empower young people, improve independence and wellbeing alongside co-designed pathways that reduce isolation and strengthen decision-making at the family level.

Autism Independence's journey through BIF2 shows how sustained, relational funding can transform a grassroots organisation into a leading hub of expertise, one capable of shaping inclusive futures for young Disabled people across Bristol.

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Case study: Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People

Organisational capacity, resilience and long-term community impact through BIF2 and building forward into BIF3

Bristol's Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People aims to create fair access and improve the quality of life for all people with hearing loss, providing opportunities emotional and practical development for all affected by hearing loss.

Over four years of Bristol Impact Fund support, Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People (CfD) has transformed its organisational capacity, systems and community leadership model. This development has enabled the organisation to expand its reach, embed inclusive practice, and strengthen its role as a trusted equalities organisation for Deaf and hard of hearing people in Bristol.

BIF2 enabled CfD to significantly strengthen internal systems, particularly around data, monitoring and evaluation. The organisation reports that in Year 4 it was able to increase the amount of EDI data collected, with 35% of participants completing an EDI form, an increase from Year 1, 2 and 3.

This improvement was driven by deliberate organisational investment, including multi-format EDI tools (text and British Sign Language (BSL), paper-based forms), additional staffing resource to provide 1:1 stakeholder engagement, and plans for data collection training for the organisers and volunteers to embed sustainable skills within the community.

These developments demonstrate CfD's growing organisational maturity and ability to generate reliable insight to shape future strategy.

Accessibility has become a defining organisational strength now being shared across the City. CfD states that *"accessibility is a fundamental aspect of all the work that CfD does"*, and the Centre can now offer out consistent provision of live captions, guidance on working with BSL interpreters and use of a portable induction hearing loop. The Team's proactive approach includes visiting venues prior to their events to ensure they are accessible, strengthening its reputation and influencing wider practice.

A key development has been CfD's shift toward community-led delivery. Supported deaf-led groups and speakers *"reduce the need for interpreters and allow for a natural flow to proceedings."* New BSL Taster Sessions also had *"a big impact on hard of hearing people"*, contributing to an 86% increase in attendance by Hard of Hearing participation, where this group had previously not engaged.

Through BIF2, CfD has developed stronger systems, improved data capability, expanded reach and deeper community leadership structures, enabling it to support an exponential growth in engagement in Year 4. With BIF3 secured, CfD can now extend this organisational strengthening and targeted outreach, ensuring the legacy of BIF2 becomes a platform for long-term impact.

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5.3 Existing Partnerships

How partnerships have impacted success

BIF2 partnership projects have demonstrated significant added value for service users, organisations and wider communities.

There are four partnership projects within the BIF2 cohort:

- Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Service (BHCDS)
- Bristol Refugee and Asylum Seekers Partnership (BRASP)
- Full Circle @ Docklands, Talo and Bristol Youth Horn Concern (BYHC) Partnership
- Eastside Community Trust working with Somali Kitchen and Trinity.

Added Value

Holistic person-centred support

Partnership working has enabled more holistic and person-centred support. Rather than operating in isolation, organisations were able to combine expertise in areas such as mental health, hate crime advocacy, youth work, refugee work, ESOL, wellbeing, and conflict resolution.

Increased Reach

Referrals have increased and are more appropriate as organisations can cross-refer based on individual needs and with trust in services. Working collaboratively has also enabled organisations to reach new communities, including young LGBTQ+ people, refugees and asylum seekers, women, families, and culturally diverse communities who may not have accessed services without the right approach.

Stronger organisational capacity

Partnership working has enabled organisations to refine internal processes, respond more effectively to emerging needs, and build resilience. Learning from one another, for example, adapting support models for young people, has led to quicker and more effective improvements.

Improved efficiency

In successful partnerships, a coordinated approach transformed previously isolated services into connected networks of support, improving efficiency and accountability, as well as offering peer support emotionally and professionally during challenging times.

> ***"Overall, these partnerships are transformative. They enrich the support we provide, build organisational capacity, and ensure that our service users benefit from a connected, informed, and highly responsive network of expertise. Working together enables us to achieve far more than we could individually, ensuring meaningful impact for everyone we support."***
>
> Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI), Lead Partner for the Hate Crime Partnership

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(Existing Partnerships cont.)

Not all partnership experiences were equally strong. Some described genuinely collaborative relationships, while others experienced more mixed outcomes, highlighting the importance of alignment, clarity of roles, and active engagement.

Key Success Factors

Shared Vision and Values

Having a strong shared value base is a key success factor. Partnerships are made up of organisations of different size, development and type with different needs and delivery models. A shared strategic vision ensures they are working towards the same goal and not vying to establish individual objectives.

Democratic and inclusive culture

When a partnership culture is democratic and inclusive and organisations of different sizes feel heard and valued, partnerships are stronger, more robust and can have greater impact.

Complementary Expertise

When each partner brings unique strengths, this creates cohesive work that is "more than the sum of its parts." The exchange of expertise leads to innovation, such as developing holistic support models or adapting delivery formats for different groups.

Organisational Resilience

Successful partnerships fostered shared responsibility and professional support between organisations. This was particularly valuable in contexts of rising hate crime and anti-refugee rhetoric, where collective response strengthened safeguarding and strategic impact.

Structured Time

A schedule of regular meetings for the partnership with a clear focus enables all organisations to stay true to the shared vision and keeps the work moving forward.

> ***"Working collaboratively allows us to make the best use of limited resources, reduce duplication, and provide joined-up, holistic support for people seeking sanctuary in Bristol."***
>
> BRASP

Challenges

Strength of Partnerships

In some cases, the partnership working was weaker, particularly where relationships were more operational than strategic. While connections existed, the level of integration, engagement and alignment, varied across some partners. Those with a strong strategic vision faired well, whereas others where leadership had changed or there was a lack of transparency in the role of the partnership were less successful, with some organisations not engaging with the partnership work.

Operational Pressures

Successful partnership working requires time and resource to nurture the relationships, to develop ideas and adhere to a strategic vision. For some partnerships operational demands have crowded out time for reflection and the opportunity for collective long-term planning. To enable successful partnerships that operate at a strategic level, sufficient and ringfenced budget allocation needs to be provided.

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5.4 Future Directions

Across the final reports we see organisations articulate greater commitment to community (including youth) leadership, strengthened infrastructure, deeper collaboration, community empowerment and a push for long-term systemic change. Reports reveal organisations that collectively are ambitious, reflective, and increasingly aware of the structural conditions shaping community resilience, inclusion, empowerment and life satisfaction across Bristol.

A common theme in reports is the intention to formalise youth and lived experience leadership. Several organisations plan to embed community members and young people directly into governance structures, and several report on the creation of youth boards to shape services. This signals a shift from participation to shared power, with lived experience increasingly recognised as essential to decision-making.

Grant holders emphasise the need to strengthen internal capacity and infrastructure before expanding. African Voices Forum highlights the importance of staff capacity, data support and volunteer training, while Bristol Disability Equality Forum states that their *"core pillars of work"* must be secured before taking on new projects. Others are developing sustainable income streams, such as People's Voice launching an Easy Read business. This reflects a sector seeking stability after years of crisis response, with a strong message that core funding is foundational to impact and innovation.

Organisations emphasise the importance of place making through investment in local spaces, neighbourhood identity and community-led activity, from KWMC's commitment to safe places in neighbourhoods where people can come together to Southmead Development Trust's plans for celebrations reflecting the area's diversity.

Windmill Hill City Farm reinforces that *"community anchors… are for the long term",* highlighting the civic importance of community assets.

Equity, representation and cultural relevance also continue to shape projects. For example, Ujima Radio describes a vision where "*Afrikan Heritage voices lead shaping the cultural, social and political narratives",* while African Voices Forum and Full Circle/BHYC emphasise culturally rooted, community-led approaches.

Grant holders frequently highlight the rising complexity of need and the importance of holistic, person-centred work. Autism Independence describes navigating complex family dynamics and systemic barriers, while Off the Record and Changes Bristol emphasise preventative work, mental health awareness and relational support models. Whilst these are posed as challenges to an already thinly spread sector we also see BIF2 organisations understanding the need for deeper, longer-term engagement with communities facing multiple disadvantages.

As organisations build towards systems change, it's clear that BIF 3 must continue to report on collective outcomes that show impact at this level.

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5.5 BIF 3 Funding

The BIF2 Programme closed in March 2026, and was followed by the launch of BIF3 in April 2026 which funds 27 projects for four years to meet the overall BIF3 goals by:

- Prioritising communities working in the most deprived parts of the city and communities who face systemic inequity.
- supporting the development of community infrastructure
- prioritising community cohesion, addressing hate crime and discrimination.

This new programme has been built on the learning during BIF1 and BIF2. It will enable the long-term work needed to build capacity at community level and nurture a shared set of values and resources to achieve a common goal, also known as 'social capital'.

The BIF3 funding is key to realising Bristol City Councils corporate objectives, reaching into communities and creating the conditions for communities thrive:

BIF 3 Corporate Strategy alignment

1. Emphasis on the importance of early intervention and prevention to address ongoing effects of inequality in our city following COVID-19 and the cost of living crisis and further challenges posed by the climate crisis, public sector financial pressures and increasing demand on services, loneliness and social isolation.
2. Community building activities which enable social connection, self organisation, access to enabling support and being part of decision-making are a crucial building block for city resilience and our ability as citizens, communities and anchor organisations to meet these challenges.
3. The need to work with citizens and communities to transform services.
4. The need to build resilience in response to ongoing threats.
5. To encourage and nurture active citizenship and democratic engagement.

A total of 139 applications were received for BIF3 funding, worth over £36m, including many high-quality applications that could not be supported with the funds available. Those who were unsuccessful were signposted to Voscur and BSWN for guidance with applying for other funding or collaborate with others. The sheer scale of applications to this fund highlights its crucial role in helping community organisations step up.

Of the original 48 projects (24 M/L grants and 24 Small grants) receiving funding through BIF2 small, medium and large grants, 21 have successfully applied for BIF3 grant funding to develop their crucial work further. Of those, 3 were originally funded through small grants funding demonstrating considerable organisational development through that grant.

Some of the organisations funded through BIF2 have developed to the extent that they no longer need this funding. Ambition Lawrence Western is a great example, where we see an established organisation, a sustainable business model, and strong local support, no longer needing what the BIF programme can offer.

For others, applying for different more targeted funding to work with specific audiences or on specific health issues, is the way forward.

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6. Impact on communities

Image courtesy of Bristol Somali Youth Voice

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6.1 Impact in numbers

Highlights across the 4 years

Collated results from across the BIF2 grant holder cohort show levels of engagement across the City with 106,245 people attending events, workshops, courses, training and socialising opportunities. The greatest level of activity is shown in the Lawrence Hill area and often in those areas that are most disadvantaged.

The funded work is reaching more diverse participants than are seen in the general Bristol population, including those identifying as Black and other minority groups, older people, disabled people, and those identifying as trans and LGBTQIA+.

As a result of the BIF2 funding grant holders have generated an additional £9.3 million from other Trusts, Funds and grant giving foundations. It's likely that the true amount is even greater than this, accounting for support in-kind.

What is particularly striking, with both positive and negative aspects, is the contribution made to the sector by volunteers. Regular and one-off volunteers for BIF2 organisations total over 5,598, contributing an estimated 713,728 hours, worth over £9.8 million (based on the national hourly valuation for volunteer hours). Whilst organisations across the UK continue to struggle to diversify and grow their volunteers, BIF2 organisations have recruited and retained theirs.

There are further opportunities for exploring new volunteering models to diversify the local pool of volunteers. This could include reviewing ways to reimburse volunteers and fees for non taxable costs, ensuring volunteering is cost free, and offering more flexible opportunities.

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Collated highlights Years 1 – 4 : 2021-2025

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

BIF 2 Funding

£6.4 million over 4 years

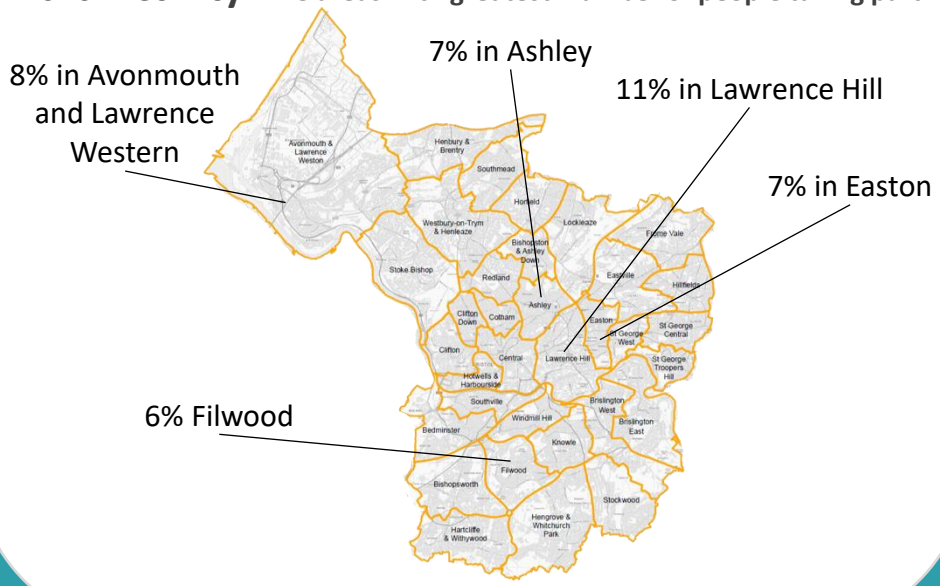
grant funding for small and large grants

Reach

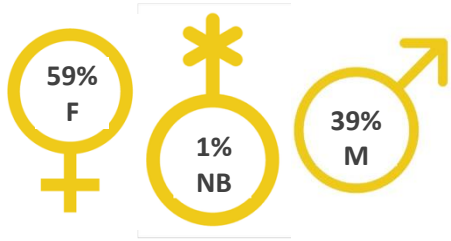
106245
people engaged across all wards in Bristol

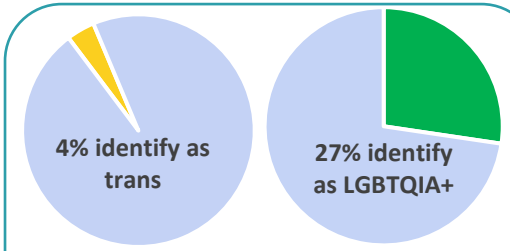
42%
of funded organisations are Black or Minoritised Ethnic-led

Ward Activity: The areas with greatest number of people taking part



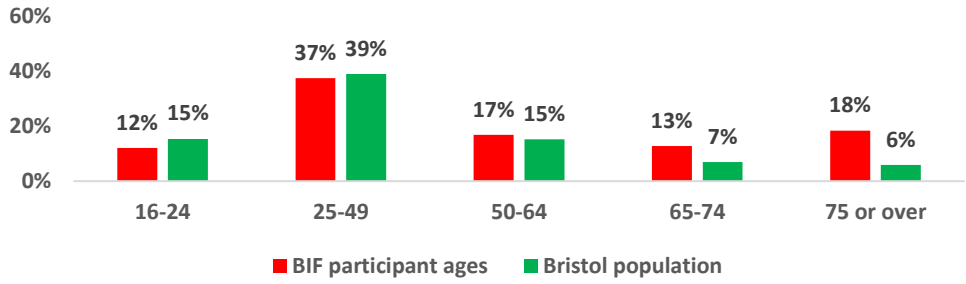
Addressing inequality: The people participating in BIF funded projects

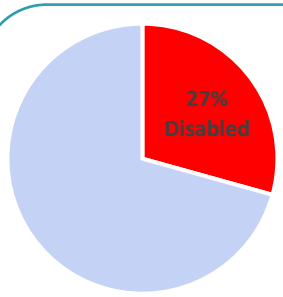




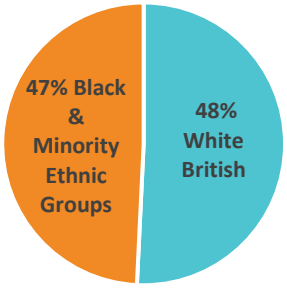
Bristol average 0.8% trans (2021 census)

Bristol average 6% LGBTQIA+ (2021 census)

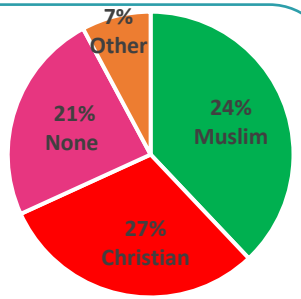




Bristol average 17.2% (25-26 GSNA)



Bristol average 18.9% Black & Minority Ethnic (2021 census)



Bristol average 6.7% Muslim (2021 census)

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Collated highlights Years 1 – 4 : 2021-2025

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

Community outcomes

Over £9.3 million

additional funding leveraged into the city over 4 years

Over 5598

Volunteers, providing over 713728.5 hours, worth **£9.8 million**

Connectedness

Connecting participants with others, communities and agencies

Wellbeing

Measuring wellbeing and have seen improvements for participants

Agency

Participants are empowered and enable to have more control of their lives

Organisational outcomes

- Increased overall capacity
- Improved reputation & community empowerment
- New organisational skills & knowledge
- Increased collaboration & partnerships
- More talent attracted to the sector

Growing the power

of communities experiencing the greatest inequality

*Based on hourly valuation of £13.70 from 2019 report, Assessing the value of volunteers in community businesses, Power to Change

6.2 Building Social Capital

Access, skills, connectivity, agency, representation, wellbeing

The BIF2 Outcomes Framework consists of twenty-four outcomes, which sit within six outcome themes: Representation, Access, Wellbeing, Agency, Connectedness and Skills. The full list of all outcomes can be found in the Appendices.

At the end of Year 4 the BIF2 cohort report strong evidence across all six themes, but most prevalent are Skills, Wellbeing and Connectedness.

Improvements across these three outcomes has happened despite the City-wide trend for decreases in wellbeing and sense of connectivity shown in the Quality of Life surveys.

Fundamentally, these outcomes form the foundations of a pathway to building Social Capital across the city.

The outcome themes are explored individually over the next pages, with some examples of the work across the BIF2 grant holders. No outcome exists in a silo, they lead to and from each other, are cross pollinating and fluid, something we see ample evidence of in reports. Nearly all BIF2 organisations have delivered much wider impacts than they are required to report on, showing the ripple effect that targeted work can have on an individual's life.

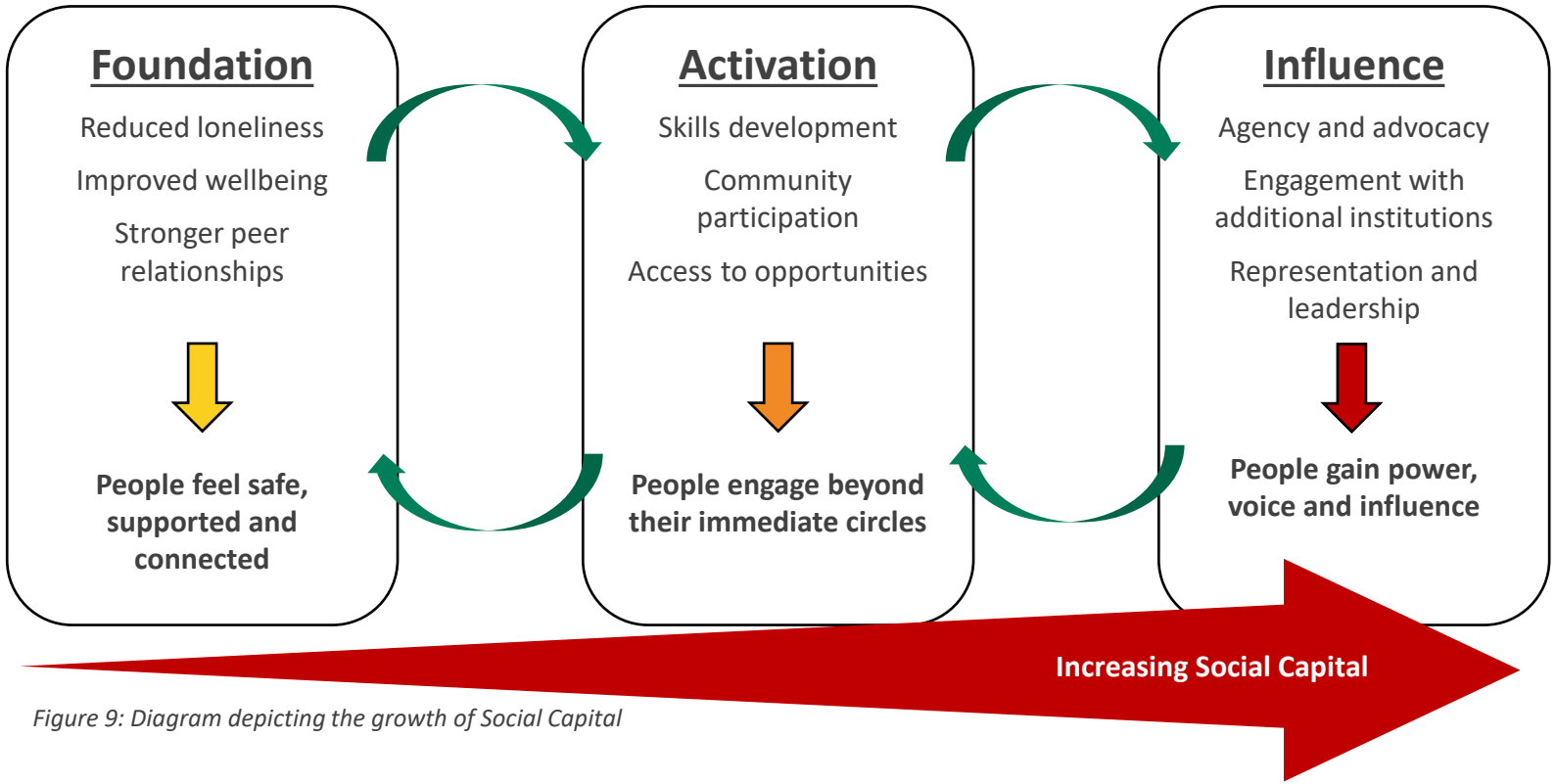


Figure 9: Diagram depicting the growth of Social Capital

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6.3 Access

Outcome theme: Access

Access within the BIF2 cohort has been two-fold. Firstly, the provision of spaces, activity, and equipment that enables people to make a first engagement, that leads to other things. Secondly, empowering people to increase their own access, through a better understanding of rights, and possible progression pathways.

Creating Opportunity

Some BIF2 organisations were funded specifically to break down barriers to digital inclusion. At the start of the programme digital connectivity was low when compared to similar cities, at 76% and ranked 54/63 by the Centre for Cities. Over the period of BIF2 there has been year-on-year increase in digital connectivity. However, digital inclusion does not stop with the means to connect, as highlighted in Centre for Cities, '*How cities can make the most out of digital connections*' report, "…**a better way for cities to improve digital connectivity is to focus efforts on building up the skills and confidence of local people**." Organisations have been doing exactly this as explored further in Skills.

Knowledge of Rights

A significant barrier for many people being able to live full and thriving lives is a lack of knowledge of their rights. Fundamentally, people do not know who to ask for this knowledge or even that they can ask for it. Numerous BIF2 organisations have helped people with to understand their entitlements and how to access the correct offer or benefit. Autism Independence work directly with families to support young people with autism, often these families have other challenges and complexities, include refugee families, or where parents are themselves are living with disabilities or mental health challenges.

The team have more recently broadened activities to include workshops and talks that reach even more widely into communities.

> ***"Workshops on topics like power of attorney and legal frameworks have been delivered in partnership with specialist solicitors, equipping families with vital knowledge."***

Autism Independence

The Bristol Hate Crime and Discrimination Service (BHCDS) work with different facets of the population to tackle hate crime in all guises. They offer opportunities for people to understand and report their experiences.

> ***"The advice set out what laws had been breached and supported my feelings that I had been discriminated against and poorly treated."***

Bristol Law Centre client

At surface level, supporting people to know their rights is about providing information, but the real difference is made through a trusted support system provided by organisations. Being listened to, heard, believed and competently supported builds trust, confidence and wellbeing and enables people to move on and progress.

> ***"I only came in for help with debt, but you helped me with everything – thank you, your help has been 10/10"***

Wellspring Settlement participant

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6.4 Skills

Outcome theme: Skills

The BIF2 outcomes refer specifically to Digital Skills and Organisational resilience, but the reality is wider reaching. All funded organisations, regardless of their allocated outcomes, report on skills development with their participants and their teams, and the ripple effect this has had.

Digital Skills

African Voices and Knowle West Media Centre have both run successful and intentional sessions with their participants to increase digital skills. For African Voices, and the young people they work with, the impact has reached beyond building technical skills and boosted young people's confidence and employability.

> ***"By bridging the digital divide, our project is helping young people become more digitally literate, more employable, and more empowered to thrive in a digital-first world."***
>
> African Voices

At Knowle West Media Centre, their long-standing Creative Cuppa sessions have seen over 230 participants gain digital and creative skills. Almost all participants began with no digital knowledge or skills and have now progressed in skill and confidence, some feeling empowered enough to teach their skills to others. For some, gaining new skills that has led to employment and/or career progression and ultimately to improvements to wellbeing, self worth and confidence in their own abilities.

Confidence

One of the most vital impacts that BIF project report on is the confidence that developing a new skill generates, and in turn where that leads people next. Whether intentionally through specific skills-based sessions, or less intentionally (but no less valid) as a result being supported and encouraged, organisations across the cohort report participants and staff increasing their skills base and inevitably their confidence grows.

Increased confidence is shown to result in improved wellbeing, and progression socially as people increase their peer network, or share their new skills with someone else, become more involved in their community or even take on leadership roles. The foundations of skills and confidence are the bedrock of much wider impacts.

> ***"Through participatory projects and leadership opportunities, young people have developed key skills such as teamwork, communication, budgeting and problem-solving…The skills and self-belief have enabled young people to participate more fully in community and civic life. They are better equipped to advocate for themselves, take advantage of new opportunities, and make informed decisions about their futures."***
>
> 1625 Independent People

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6.5 Connectedness

Outcome theme: Connectedness

Across the programme, grant-holder reports show clear evidence of a ladder of connectivity (see Figure 10) - a spectrum of ways people build relationships and belonging. Activity is visible at every level, with people progressing between levels over time.

The Connectedness outcome explores how relationships form and strengthen *between* BIF funded organisations, *within* their communities, and *among* individuals. It reflects the journey people take from initial access and engagement to make a first connection, through to feeling part of their community, and ultimately taking active roles in shaping community life.

This ladder is not a hierarchy; each level is equally important, and people may enter or re-enter at different points. Individuals move between these stages depending on their needs, confidence and circumstances.

BIF's impact is strongest because funded organisations are offering a range of connection opportunities. Projects provide different types of support and can signpost across the ecosystem, ensuring people access the right level of connection when they need it. This reinforces a wider system message: the ladder only works when organisations can collaborate, share insight and coordinate support, requiring dedicated time, and resourcing for partnership working, as explored in section 3.1.

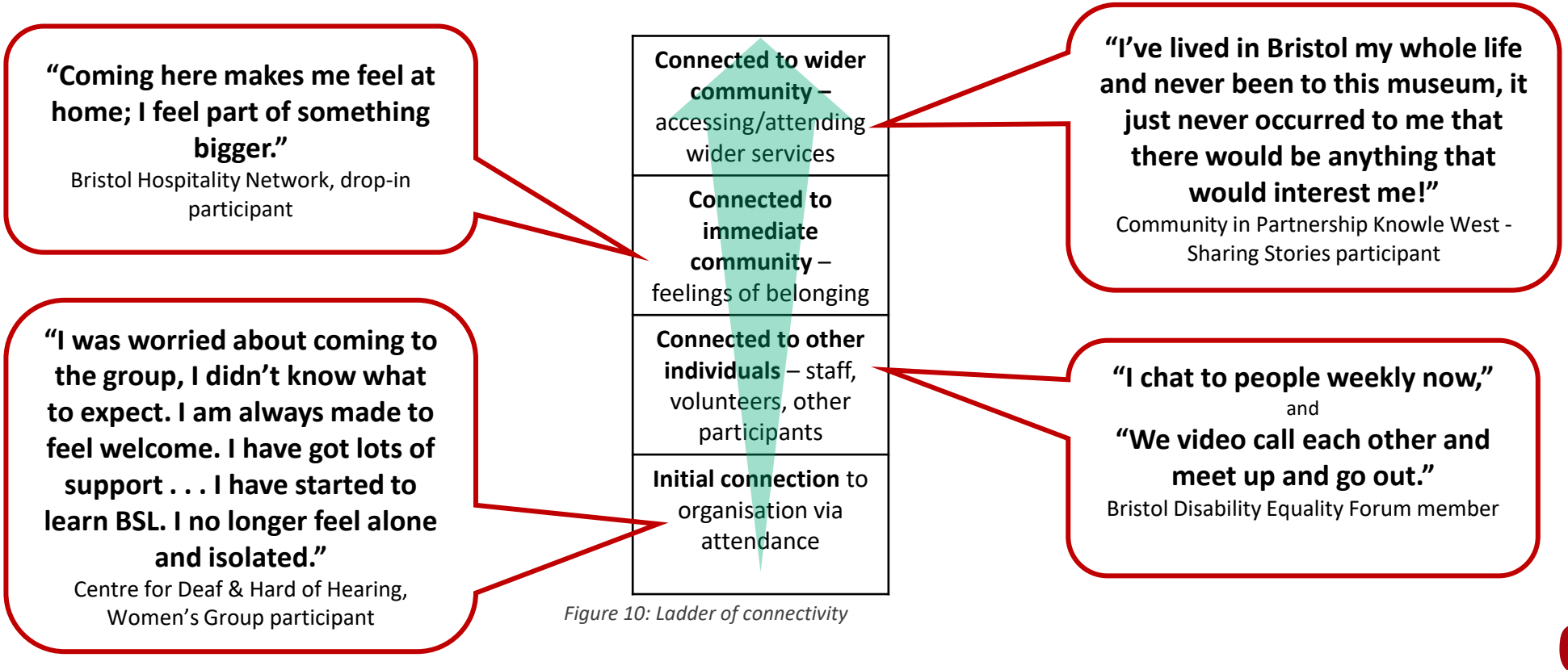


Figure 10: Ladder of connectivity

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6.6 Wellbeing

Outcome theme: Wellbeing

All BIF2 funded organisations have demonstrated a contribution to improving participant wellbeing, at individual, group, and community levels – this is intrinsic to the way that the VCSE sector works, and it underpins the development of stronger and more resilient communities.

'Wellbeing' is consistently referenced throughout end-of-grant reports, not only in relation to targeted activities but also as an embedded, everyday practice shaping how organisations engage with their communities. This reflects a wider and well-evidenced understanding that wellbeing is both an outcome and a driver of sustainable social change[9].

Some BIF2 partners were funded to deliver explicitly defined wellbeing interventions. For example, Bristol Somali Resource Centre provided one-to-one and group-based sessions focused on wellbeing, with participants reporting reduced stress, decreased isolation, and improved overall mental health. Similarly, Bristol Mind, as part of Bristol's Hate Crime and Discrimination Service (BHCDS), adopts a holistic approach, supporting individuals' mental health and wellbeing in the aftermath of hate crime, recognising the complex relationship between trauma, recovery, and social inclusion.

However, the impact on wellbeing extends far beyond those organisations with an explicit wellbeing remit. Across the programme, all funded organisations report meaningful improvements in participants' confidence, sense of belonging, and connection to others. Increased trust, in both people and institutions, alongside participants feeling heard, valued, and respected, are consistent themes. These outcomes align with broader research highlighting the role of social connection and participation in strengthening community resilience[10].

Within BIF2, wellbeing functions as both a starting point and an outcome. For some individuals, improved wellbeing is a necessary precondition for participation, enabling people to engage in community life, build confidence, and exercise their voice. For others, wellbeing emerges through the process of participation itself, through being listened to, contributing to collective activity, and recognising their own value within a community.

> ***" I also want to express my gratitude for your kind words about my well-being. Although this process has been stressful, I am focusing on my recovery and appreciate the reassurance that I am not facing this alone."***
>
> Bristol Mind client

[9] https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/insight-and-analysis/long-reads/communities-and-health

[10] https://www.neighbourhoodscommission.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/ICON-Social-Infrastructure-and-Social-Capital-report-FINAL.pdf

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6.7 Agency

Outcome theme: Agency

For an individual to have agency they must have the power and autonomy to make their own decisions, take action and ultimately feel they are in control of their own lives. Across the BIF2 cohort, the grant outcomes that align with 'having agency' include:

- More people feel confident to report hate incidents.
- People are confident and able to deal with agencies independently.
- People feel more economically empowered.
- More people who experience the greatest inequality take on leadership roles within their community.
- People who experience the greatest inequality are better equipped to self-organise to act on issues that are important to them.
- People from under-represented groups (or people experiencing the greatest inequality) have increased voice and influence in their community.

Over the four years of BIF2 funding, there has been a marked shift to organisations more frequently reporting increased agency in participants. This has been enabled through the foundations of Access, Skills, Connectedness and Wellbeing.

BIF2 organisations report participants stepping into their own power in different ways, through informal and formal leadership roles including organising activities, events and new groups within their communities, and engaging with other services and agencies independently. As a result of BIF2 funding more people are aware of their rights and have the confidence to act to secure them.

People's Voice: Case Study

People's Voice is a disabled led programme delivered by WECIL and with an aim to grow the understanding and awareness of the challenges faced by people with learning disabilities.

Leadership by people with lived experience is central to People's Voice. All paid project workers identify as having a learning disability or neurodivergence, and they lead every aspect of delivery including planning meetings, chairing sessions, presenting at events and representing the project in external networks. In 2025, project workers have taken on clearer lead roles, such as Outreach Lead, Campaign Lead and Youth Engagement Lead, supported through coaching and peer mentoring.

Through this structure, participants have built skills in facilitation, teamwork, and communication, while learning to manage responsibility and boundaries. Molly's progression from project worker to Youth Outreach Lead demonstrates the impact: her growing confidence has enabled her to start designing and running her own networking event for young people with Learning Disabilities, inspiring peers and showing what is possible.

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6.8 Representation

Outcome theme: Representation

At a systems level BIF2 aimed to increase representation of all Bristol's communities within the VCSE sector and at policy and strategy level through increased voice and influence.

At the outset of the BIF2 programme, few of the funded organisations prioritised 'representation' as an outcome. However, over the four-years of funding reports show greater evidence that this has increased.

By the end of Year 4, 71% of BIF2 funded organisations have at least 75% of board or committee members with the same protected characteristics as the group they are serving, with more organisations being very close to 75%. Representation is critical for ensuring services are relevant, trusted and effective. In turn, they are more likely to engage with people who may otherwise remain disconnected. This governance structure also provides accountability between leadership and participants. Organisations that are governed by people with lived-experience of the challenges they are trying to solve, result in more culturally appropriate and effective services.

Over the programme period, BIF2 organisations are also reporting higher levels of work with communities to elevate their voice and influence and gain access to decision-makers in the city. This demonstrates recognition of the need to shift thinking and practice at the highest levels to implement real change.

Throughout the BIF programme, this has been a core function of some organisations including 1625 Independent People, Bristol Older People's Forum, Bristol Women's Voice and more recently Bristol Disability Equality Forum and People's Voice. These examples are only a snapshot of the work being done to influence decisions at a city-wide level, driven by those experiencing the highest inequality.

> ***"I joined … so that I could have my voice heard. I love that I can use my voice to help other people that might have the same problems and circumstances as me."***

Participant at 1625 Independent People

> ***"I am a member of the BOPF Housing Action Group. We are trying to work with the Council to improve all areas of housing, and in my case on fire safety ... It's not plain sailing … but we are beginning to work more closely with Bristol CIty Council housing services, including councillors."***

Member of Bristol Older People's Forum

Bristol Women's Voice: Case Study

Bristol Women's Voice is dedicated to making women's equality a reality. The organisation has led the co-development of city-wide initiatives including the, 'Caring Economy Alliance,' the 'We are here,' campaign, raising awareness of appropriate responses and support after sexual violence. They have also raised awareness of gendered inequality at the Cost-of-Living Coordination Group, Community Cohesion Strategy Group, SARI's community Cohesion group and led on the gender strand of the Public Transport Safety and Equality group.

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6.9 Small Grants Programme

Summary of Impact of Small Grants

The BIF2 Small Grants programme (with project funding under £15,000) demonstrated the significant value of light-touch, community-led funding in enabling inclusive, locally rooted change. 27 projects were funded over two rounds, with a total investment over two rounds of £320,000. Despite the small grant sizes, the programme delivered valuable, meaningful and wide-ranging impacts with several now successfully funded through the BIF3 fund to scale up their work. The findings reinforce the role of smaller community organisations in building community power and the VCSE ecosystem.

At an individual and community level, small grants projects strengthened connection, confidence, and wellbeing, particularly among groups experiencing inequality. Participants most often reported reduced isolation, increased access to local activities and greater opportunities for self-expression and participation. Many initiatives created safe, culturally relevant spaces for underrepresented communities, including refugees, women, LGBTQ+ communities, and people with learning disabilities. These relational, trust-based approaches were central to building community cohesion and fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

The grants also enabled communities to self-organise around shared priorities. Activities were often co-designed and responsive, blending immediate support (e.g. wellbeing sessions, peer groups, creative programmes) with longer-term groundwork for sustained community development such as neighbourhood planning, asset mapping, and activating under-used community spaces.

For these organisations, the small grants acted as a critical catalyst for growth and development. Many groups expanded their capacity, strengthened governance, and improved their ability to plan, evaluate, and articulate impact. Several transitioned from informal or grassroots initiatives into more structured organisations, while others leveraged the funding to secure additional income or in-kind support. The programme also strengthened partnerships and local networks, enabling collaboration, shared learning, and increased reach into underserved communities.

Importantly, the programme delivered strong value for money. As with the large grant funding, alongside direct outcomes, the small grants programme unlocked significant additional value through volunteering, partnership working, and follow-on funding. In many cases, small investments enabled disproportionately large impacts, highlighting the effectiveness of flexible, accessible funding models for smaller and emerging organisations.

Challenges remain, particularly around organisational capacity, sustainability, and monitoring and evaluation. Some groups found it difficult to collect equalities data or fully evidence impact, reflecting the realities of delivering work in low resource or emergent settings. While many organisations progressed beyond the life of the grant, others, particularly volunteer-led groups, face ongoing sustainability pressures, pointing to the need for continued, proportionate opportunities.

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6.10 Impact on Communities

What do the outcomes mean for communities?

Across the BIF2 programme, there is strong and consistent evidence of impact across all six outcome themes: Access, Skills, Connectedness, Wellbeing, Agency and Representation, with the most prevalent outcomes seen in Skills, Wellbeing and Connectedness. Collectively, these outcomes contribute to the growth of social capital across communities, forming a pathway from initial engagement through to increased voice, influence and leadership.

Access has functioned as both an entry point and an enabler. Through the provision of activity, support and equipment, people are supported to make first connections, while increased knowledge of rights and entitlements empowers individuals to navigate systems and access opportunities independently. This is not simply transactional; trusted, relational work builds confidence, trust and wellbeing, enabling people to progress.

Skills development, particularly digital skills, has had wide-reaching impacts beyond its defined outcomes. Participants not only gain technical abilities, but also confidence, employability and self-belief. This increase in confidence is consistently identified as a catalyst for further progression, including greater community participation, sharing skills with others and stepping into leadership roles. Skills and confidence together form a critical foundation for wider individual and community change.

Connectedness outcomes demonstrate a clear progression from initial engagement to deeper community participation. Individuals move from first contact with organisations, to building relationships, to feeling a sense of belonging, and ultimately to engaging more actively in their communities.

The “ladder of connection” highlights the importance of sustained, relational support and a spectrum of opportunities that reflect people’s differing needs at stages in life.

Wellbeing is both a core outcome and an embedded practice across funded projects. Improvements in mental health, reduced isolation, increased confidence and a stronger sense of belonging are consistently reported. Wellbeing acts as both a foundation for participation and a result of it, underpinning individuals’ ability to engage, connect and contribute. It is intrinsic to the relational, inclusive approaches that characterise BIF2 delivery and is central to building resilient communities.

Agency has increased markedly over the life of the programme, enabled by the combined foundations of Access, Skills, Connectedness and Wellbeing. Participants are more confident to act independently, understand and assert their rights, engage with services, and take on leadership roles. This reflects a shift towards people having greater control over their lives and the ability to influence their circumstances and communities.

Representation has also strengthened significantly. Organisations have become more reflective of the communities they serve, improving trust, relevance and accountability. Alongside this, there is increased evidence of communities, particularly those experiencing the greatest inequality, having greater voice and influence, including engagement with decision-makers and contribution to city-wide initiatives.

Overall, the impact of BIF2 on communities is the development of stronger, more connected and more confident communities, with increased participation, voice and influence. Outcomes do not exist in isolation; they are interconnected, cumulative and mutually reinforcing.

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7. Findings: strengths & opportunities

Image courtesy of Hartcliffe City Farm

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7.1 The strengths of the programme

Programme reflections 2024-2026

Across the final two years of BIF2, the delivery team identified a wide range of successes that demonstrate the programme's distinctive contribution to Bristol's VCSE sector, its communities, and the Council's own ways of working.

Intentional, equitable funding

A core strength of the BIF2 programme has been the commitment to intentional and equitable funding. The programme has funding organisations with strong community legitimacy and delivery track records, even where formal financial histories were limited. This has been possible because of the Community Development Team's deep knowledge of neighbourhoods, relationships with grassroots groups, and understanding of local dynamics. Their insight has provided the confidence needed to invest in organisations that might otherwise be overlooked.

This trust-based approach has strengthened the Council's direct relationship with the VCSE sector. The communication channels and networks established have continued to enable more grounded, responsive decision-making throughout BIF2.

Council-wide influence

The established BIF 'Ways of Working' are now influencing wider Council team's practice. BIF2 has also provided the platform and evidence base for the continuation of the programme into BIF3, demonstrating the value of sustained investment in community-led approaches.

The programme has contributed to improvements in Council systems and processes, with learning from BIF1 and BIF2 shaping wider funding practice, including within the Council's Grant Makers Group.

And an external audit has recognised the Community Resources Team as demonstrating best practice.

Collaboration between BIF and Community Development teams

The Community Development Team's on-the-ground insight, monitoring visits and relationships have complemented the BIF team's strategic oversight. This cross-team partnership has enabled more coordinated action, better information-sharing, and stronger relationships between the Council and the VCSE sector.

Supporting sustainability and flexibility

Through targeted, intensive work, the BIF2 programme has helped some organisations move towards greater sustainability. The team's flexibility in responding to a wide range of organisational needs across size, maturity, and focus has been a key success factor. This adaptability has allowed the programme to support established organisations as well as emerging groups.

> ***"The team has an amazing combination, a very values driven service ethos, and we take very seriously our shared values around equity, community development and doing the right thing by people, recognising being alongside people rather than doing to people."***
>
> Penny Germon, Head of Service: Communities, Bristol City Council

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(The strengths of the programme cont.)

Learning, collaboration and leadership

The BIF Learning and Support programme has fostered genuine collaboration and shared learning among grant holders. Events, drop-ins, and peer spaces have enabled organisations to exchange ideas, reflect on challenges, and strengthen their practice. The quality of End of Year monitoring reports has improved significantly, demonstrating clearer outcomes, outputs and richer 'Stories of Change'.

Leadership learning emerging from BIF2 is now connecting into wider city agendas, including *One City, Many Communities*. The programme has helped cultivate a cohort of organisations and leaders who are confident in asset-based, community-led approaches and who are contributing to broader strategic priorities.

Growth of community-led and asset-based practice

BIF2 has played a role in embedding asset-based community development (ABCD) principles across funded organisations.
The programme has encouraged a shift from *doing for* communities to working *with* and *by* them, empowering residents to take the lead in shaping local solutions. Pre-application workshops, evaluation sessions, and ongoing facilitation have helped organisations develop new skills, confidence, and approaches aligned with ABCD principles. This shift has been particularly important in contexts where communities have historically been underserved or where crisis conditions have made asset-based work more challenging.

Transformational impact on organisations and places

Several organisations have experienced significant growth and transformation through BIF2. Funding posts at Bristol Centre for Deaf People and Black Mothers Matter increased organisational capacity, sustainability, and representation for communities that had previously lacked visibility and support. These organisations have gone from strength to strength, expanding their reach and influence within the City.

Place-based work in some areas has helped shift practice from towards building local capacity and leadership. Small grant funding for Hillfields Community Garden and Bricks has resulted in successful BIF3 applications to provide more opportunities at local community centres. In Hartcliffe, where Council grant applications had historically been low, BIF2 catalysed new networks, community spaces, and a resident-led Community Planning Group. This group undertook a major community survey and is now better positioned to respond to wider opportunities, including government Trailblazer initiatives. These developments would not have occurred without BIF2's targeted support and the Community Development Team's ability to identify and nurture local energy.

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(The strengths of the programme cont.)

Co-creation and responsiveness to sector

The Community Resources Team has a core commitment to developing a service and grants programme that works for all grant holders to support learning, development and accessibility. The Team has worked hard to respond to needs and reflect on existing practice to adapt, with evidence in the following initiatives:

- Development of the Steering Group
- Changes to end of year reporting
- Responsive programming for the Learning and Support Programme
- Development of additional support programmes e.g. mini film skills programme
- Changes to EDI data gathering, following the formation of a small co-creation working group to understand and review the purpose for, principles of, priorities for, and ways that EDI data are gathered.

These pioneering initiatives reflect the intentional design of the programme and the adaptive, relational approach taken by the Community Resources team, something unique and increasingly rare, but crucial for success.

> ***"Most funders let you get on with it and then if your report is weak your potential for getting additional funding is reduced. The [BIF] Team are very supportive accountability in a gentle way to make sure that they achieved their outcomes and learned from the process…."***

Natalie Sherring, BSWN

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7.2 The BIF Ways of Working

Understanding what works for community organisations to deliver on outcomes

The BIF2 'Ways of Working' were established to guide organisations whose approaches would deliver the overall goals and intended impacts of the BIF2 programme. They were developed alongside community organisations and reflect established strong practice.

BIF2 Ways of Working

- Equitable
- Inclusive
- Asset based
- Place based
- Relational
- Citizen-led
- Nurturing the community and voluntary sector eco-system

All seven Ways of Working are considered important by BIF2 grant holders and are fundamental to the way they work. Over the four years, the most prevalent, and those that grant holders feel have contributed most to their success, are **Inclusive**, **Relational** and **Citizen-led**.

Together, these prioritised Ways of Working show that BIF2 organisations see themselves as people-centred, with strong values and trust at their core. Their values-based practice and responsiveness to local need demonstrate social capital building and community empowerment.

The evidence indicates strong confidence in engagement and participation work. However, despite wider evidence demonstrating progress towards 'greater representation and voice' at an organisational level, there is still self reported lack of confidence in influencing systemic change. This points to opportunities for further work to support advocacy and influence work across the BIF3 cohort.

An asset-based approach has long been a pillar of effective community engagement work and is recognised as crucial to community health. During the timeframe of BIF2 we have witnessed that taking an asset-based approach during times of crisis can be challenging, particularly when provision of basic needs have to be prioritised. So, it is particularly important to note that in the final project reports, asset-based approaches have been cited more frequently.

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7.2.1 Ways of Working in Practice

Understanding what works for community organisations to deliver on outcomes

Ways of Working	Example
Equitable	**Bristol Older People's Forum:** "*Our overall aim is to build an 'Age Positive' City. This is framed around tackling ageism, age discrimination and ageist stereotypes. It is also about challenging the idea that the cohort of older people are one homogenised group, are primarily passive recipients of services and are unable to makes decisions about their own lives. 'We are not all wearing one big overcoat'* (BOPF member quote)"
Inclusive	**People's Voice (WECIL):** *"Inclusion is at the heart of all we do. The nature of People's Voice is to ensure Disabled people and specifically those with a learning disability or neurodivergent people can be included in all elements of society. The team are passionate not only around removing barriers but raising awareness through sharing their lived experiences."*
Asset based	**Centre for Deaf**: *"CfD has been working closely with VOSCUR, a relationship established through the BIF2 steering group meetings, to provide a series of accessible training sessions designed to draw on and develop people's skills so that they have the confidence to take on community leadership roles."*
Place based	**Eastside Community, Trinity & Somali Kitchen:** *"We have two physical spaces – Easton Community Centre and Felix Road Adventure Playground – which anchor us in this community. Our outcomes for BIF centre on connection and we are striving for people to form connection with their neighbours in the place where they live. We do this by supporting them to form community groups around common interests and inviting them to participate in activity in these community spaces."*
Relational	**BHCDS (Resolve West):** *"Through all of our work we strive to connect people to people in a safe environment and through skilled and careful facilitation. The work we do is because these vital connections have broken down, and whilst it may not be possible to build them back to a level that would lead to harmonious communities, we work with people to build this to a place where they are more resilient and confident moving forward."*
Citizen led	**Full Circle/Talo/Bristol Horn Youth Concern**: *"We believe that our community is at the centre of shaping its own future. Our role is to support all people, regardless of the common shared characteristics, with the skills, confidence, and knowledge to take action on the issues that matter to them. With this BIF2 funding we have supported residents to engage with Bristol City Council and other residential social landlords on housing concerns and empowered young people and families to take part in local consultations."*
Nurturing the community and voluntary sector eco-system	**BHCDS (SARI):** *"Our work with WeSport, AWP inpatients and secure services, Milestones services, BRASP are also examples of how SARI has nurtured the community and voluntary eco-system encouraging their support and collaboration for dealing with hate and discrimination. Together we have developed protocols and training, publicity and pathways for responding to hate for asylum-seekers, refugees, LGBTQ+ people, people in sports and exercise clubs and mental health and wellbeing services."*

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7.3 Opportunities for grant holder development

Understanding the challenges for grant holders

Grant holders continue to experience common challenges, partly logistic and skills based, partly lack of capacity, and partly financial. These challenges are more likely to be enduring barriers to long-term organisational development, delivery and resilience.

Collaboration

There was a growing appetite for and recognition of the value of shared learning and collaboration among funded organisations. There is a real opportunity to harness this need and commitment through the offer a clear and facilitated BIF3 learning programme early on, The team can also encourage grant holders to explicitly build time and resource into budgets for collaboration as a legitimate activity for peer support, joint initiatives, and collective problem solving.

Engagement with the Learning and Support offer

The wide range of grant holder experience, skills and confidence is part of the strength of the programme. Evaluation skills were naturally variable across the cohort reinforcing the need for continued differentiated guidance including more targeted 1:1 support, resources and potentially buddying opportunities for those with less capacity to be able to attend in person events.

Data gathering and reporting

This year End of Year reports have improved dramatically but are still seen as a challenge for some organisations. Continuing to co-create an effective and a proportionate reporting process including EDI monitoring requirements, will address accessibility and relevance and create more useful documents for all grant holders.

Capacity and succession planning

The sector has many strong leaders, teams and volunteers with deep knowledge, skills and experience. There is a crucial opportunity to embed succession and leadership development plans to build organisation resilience, knowledge retention, consistency of approach to delivery and partnerships and enable staff wellbeing. Working with volunteers is a particular strength in the sector which presents the potential to explore new models to attract a more diverse pool of volunteers.

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7.3.1 Opportunities for programme delivery

Understanding the barriers to development

Across the final two years of BIF2, the delivery team identified a set of recurring and interconnected challenges and opportunities to build into the delivery of BIF3. They reflect internal pressures that can be easily addressed and wider systemic issues that remain a longer term opportunity for development.

Limited capacity

The team has consistently outperformed its level of resource, contributing to extensive social impact across local communities. The scale of the programme matches its success and the team's ambition to achieve the BIF2 goals. The team have reflected on the need to balance the crucial relational aspects of an effective grant management programme with its heavy administrative requirements. As team capacity builds for BIF3, with the introduction of a role focused solely on monitoring, evaluation and learning, there is a real opportunity to proactively address emerging and changing needs and respond more strategically to organisations requiring more attention.

Cross-council coordination

The team already works collaboratively with other teams and emphasised the existing grant making practice and processes that has already been shared across the Council. There is the potential for more joined-up working across Council departments to align funding streams and ensure shared intelligence and decision making regarding the funding and opportunities offered to local organisations.

Technical and administrative systems

The Community Resource team have to date been working with technical and administrative systems that were not designed for a grant portfolio of this size or complexity. There is now the opportunity to build more efficient systems and processes, in particular using MS project management tools to streamline processes and communications. A grant wide management system would improve the grant making experience for all.

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(Opportunities for programme delivery cont.)

Empowering diverse organisations

This grant attracts organisations at all stages of development from emerging micro and volunteer led organisations to larger charities – all critical parts of the wider VCSE sector. Shared intelligence across Bristol City Council teams will early identification of and a coordinated approach to support more smaller and diverse organisations, with less resource, to continue successfully deliver their projects and build their own organisational resilience.

Tackling historical exclusion

The team have built lasting positive relationships with BSWN to work with black led organisations. Together they have been tackling key challenges specific to smaller and minority led organisations. Secondary data[4,5] notes that historical exclusion of black led organisations from over arching sector involvement means they haven't developed in line with majority white-led organisations – resulting in a lag in terms of organisational development, infrastructure, internal cultures and ability to easily fit into council structures. This highlights the importance of more differentiated and equitable approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

Reach across priority communities

The evidence shows progress in reaching marginalised and underrepresented groups. Patterns in BIF3 applications suggest an opportunity to deepen outreach and capacity building in some underrepresented areas such as Hartcliffe, Brislington, and Lawrence Weston using some of the successful models developed in BIF2. This would empower local communities to create the local infrastructure required to access wider funding.

Sector leadership

It is common across all the projects in the BIF2 cohort to see strong leadership leading to success. However, there is often an individual driver, someone that without whom the organisation would not survive. For delivery of BIF3, understanding how to sustain these people and how to support organisational survival that is not reliant on them should be a priority.

[4] https://www.doitnownow.com/reports/beyond-the-cliff-edge-report

[5] https://www.commoncall.fund/news/problems-with-restricted-funding-for-black-led-organisations

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8. Conclusion & recommendations

Image courtesy of Hartcliffe City Farm

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8.1 Conclusions

The crucial role of Bristol Impact Fund

This report demonstrates the crucial role of the Bristol Impact Fund for empowering local communities to self-organise to support themselves and bring about positive meaningful change whilst bolstering the voluntary sector ecosystem across its diversity. There is strong evidence of impact on the quality of life of the individuals that these organisations work with, for whom there are often no other forms of support.

We see the fund building stronger organisations, where there has been ongoing engagement with the programme, whilst bolstering the voluntary sector ecosystem across its diversity. We have seen how vital community and voluntary partners are to weathering of recent crises and challenging events which impacts on all sectors. This report shows how grant investment in the community and voluntary sector produces significant social value in the way organisations spend money, employ local people, grow community skills and capacity, secure additional funding and mobilise volunteers.

Partnership working remains central, but organisations are more explicit about what makes partnerships effective and what undermines them evidencing a maturing sector that values collaboration but is calling for better-designed partnership structures. For some, collaboration has been a source of strength. Others highlighted the risks when partnerships falter, noting that broken partnerships can damage established relationships and create reputational challenges.

> ***"Networking, partnership, and shared learning opportunities are key drivers of change and growth for organisations. It is only by coming together, sharing space, experiences, and ideas, that we begin to recognise how we can collaborate to create new opportunities and achieve greater impact collectively."***
>
> BHCDS Partnership workshop

Partners, grant holders and Bristol City Council staff echo that without this funding many of the organisations listed in this document would not have survived, and as a result would not have been able to support so many individuals within their communities. This pioneering work stands out across a UK Council landscape, where funding cuts have often disproportionately impacted community funding programmes elsewhere.

The BIF2 funding has elevated the voice and visibility of more organisations, which in turn strengthens the sector. BSWN noted an increase in organisations at wider sector meetings and VOSCUR report a more diverse set of successful grant applicants over time.

Whilst this reports advocates the life changing impacts that BIF2 community organisations can have with relatively little funding, this sector is still operating on a knife edge. This follows wave after wave of challenge, from COVID, to the cost-of-living crisis and a reduction in statutory services which the VCSE sector bears the weight of.

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Conclusions

There are other challenging factors that continue to reinforce the urgent need for retaining, developing and growing our community organisations. Hate crime remains a growing concern and is continuing to increase amidst the current turbulent sociopolitical climate. With the widespread increase in far-right activity, nationalistic rhetoric and minority-based violence, comes an increased fear, particularly within LGBTQ+ and minority communities. Increased instances of hate crime and a simultaneous distrust in effective police intervention have meant that reporting such crimes and sharing personal information with services externally is a challenge.

And so, the significance of investing in organisations like this, including those that may not have otherwise received funding, cannot be underestimated. Supporting whole organisational and partnership development, rather than just delivery, over multiple years is proving to be transformational for many of the funded organisations and their communities.

There is a lot of learning for the effective delivery of BIF3, both in terms of managing grants and the monitoring, evaluation and learning support programme. During BIF2 the increased levels of attendance at each grant holder in-person workshop demonstrates an improvement in the trust and relationship that the Community Resources team and the evaluators have with grant holders. There are more opportunities to ensure this programme is inclusive of all organisations.

The enthusiasm by community organisations to take part in local decision making is similarly demonstrated by expressions of interest in and attendance at the BIF Steering Group and to develop the ongoing EDI development group. Supporting this work in the future is critical.

Additional work is needed to create a sustained cohort or community of practice. Effective collaborating, partnering and even networking, all need time, resource and external facilitation, but it is clear there is value in coming together to share skills and experience.

The Team have been praised for their flexible holistic and empathetic support for grant holders and at the same time by internal Bristol CIty Council staff for contributing to internal learning and development, particularly around grant management, EDI and co-creation. The Team has put together a new baseline standard for organisations that is already being shared across wider Council teams and informal advice requests to the BIF team are frequent.

The programme as a whole provides a foundation for the corporate strategy, reaching communities that otherwise the Council could not reach. Without continued investment from the Council and sector development organisations, we would not see the progress demonstrated in this report.

> ***"There was no doubt that BIF 3 was going to be funded even though financially the City Council is in a really tough place. Bristol is an outlier in continuing to invest in community and voluntary sector and this is not just politically ethical, it's a recognition of the impact that the work is having and a sense that investment is in the right place."***
>
> Penny Germon, Head of Service - Communities, Bristol City Council

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8.2 Recommendations

Infrastructure and resourcing the BIF programme

The challenges identified across 2024–2025 point to a set of structural conditions that must be addressed to ensure future programmes can deliver their full potential.

Bristol City Council should:

1. **Continue to build on cross-Council coordination**
   - Establish shared processes, data systems, and communication channels across council funding strands to improve coherence and support joint decision-making.
   - Create internal mechanisms for knowledge retention and handover to mitigate the impact of staff turnover.
2. **Strengthen infrastructure and capacity**
   - Resource grant management proportionate to programme scale, ensuring staff have the time and tools to work proactively.
   - Continue to enable more joined-up working across community teams focusing on targeted support for the VCSE sector.
   - Work towards systems that enable cross-programme visibility and support shared decision making.

The Community Resources Team should:

1. **Continue to enable collaboration and learning**
   - Facilitate light-touch, resourced collaboration spaces for grant holders, designed to reduce organisational workload.
   - Value, encourage and facilitate all forms and scales of collaboration.
   - Continue to embed evaluation and learning support to strengthen organisational capacity and improve programme-level insight.
   - Provide further grant holder training on focused areas including ‘systems change’ and ‘voice and influence’.
   - Continue to work with BSWN and VOSCUR to build sector connectivity, skills and resilience and volunteer engagement.
2. **Continue to focus on equity and reach**
   - Develop a structured support model to identify organisations needing additional early intervention or differentiated reporting requirements.
   - Continue targeted outreach, collaboration and capacity building in underrepresented geographical areas, working with local connectors and infrastructure bodies.
   - Enable VCSE leadership continuity and succession planning.
   - Replicate the approaches used in Stockwood and Hartcliffe in other underrepresented areas, supporting communities to move from ‘not applying’ to ‘funding-ready’.

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Recommendations

Effective delivery of the BIF3 programme

Project reports and team reflections highlight the need to focus organisational empowerment to achieve the best results.

The Community Resources Team should:

1. **Prioritise core stability and organisational infrastructure**
   - Assess leadership role stability and reliance in early monitoring meetings to build effective support.
   - Encourage organisations to consolidate before expanding.
   - Encourage sustainable income models (e.g., social enterprise, earned income).
2. **Continue to embed flexibility and adaptive delivery.**
   - Continue to co-create the most effective systems for application, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
   - Continue to build flexibility into funding monitoring processes.
   - Encourage reflective practice, adaptation time and contingency budgets.
3. **Strengthen partnership structures and shared accountability**
   - Encourage grant holders to use partnership frameworks that balance authority and accountability.
4. **Continue to share best practice**

   Moving progressively toward shared power and community-led decision-making.
   - Share practice between grant holders around youth boards, lived experience leadership, trustee roles and paid leadership pathways.
   - Continue to highlight and model expectations for co-production and community governance.
5. **Encourage digital inclusion and communication systems**
   - Encourage CRM upgrades, streamlined data collection and accessible communication models.
   - Encourage shared digital resources across partnerships and the grant holder cohort.
6. **Continue to build on the work in BIF2 to strengthen community anchors and place-based infrastructure**
   - Encourage and facilitate place-based planning to bolster local ecosystems.
   - Recognise and advocate for community anchors as essential long-term civic infrastructure.

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Appendices

Image courtesy of Ibi Feher

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Key summary points: Presentation Slide

1. BIF is a crucial programme for **supporting and empowering local communities.**
2. BIF is unique in **investing in organisations that may not have otherwise received funding.**
3. Positive impacts on **quality of life** - **mental health and wellbeing**, **agency** and **connectedness.**
4. Significant Improvements in sector **practice, outcomes and organisational resilience.**
5. Improved sector and external **partnership working and informal and formal collaborations.**
6. Top 3 BIF 'Ways of Working' - **Inclusive, relational and citizen-led**
7. Challenges - **external socio-economic and political challenges,** and most recently **far right politics.**
8. We know the impacts and ripple effects are much greater…. Let's continue to **tell the story well!**

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BIF 2 Funded organisations

Small, medium and large grant holders

Small Grants Round 1	
Small grant S1	Bangladesh Association
Small grant S2	Black Mothers Matter
Small grant S3	Bristol Somali Youth Voice
Small grant S4	Filwood Hope Advice Centre
Small grant S5	Grassroots Communities
Small grant S6	Hartcliffe Club for Young People
Small grant S7	Job Network Bristol
Small grant S8	Malcom X community Centre
Small grant S9	Opoka
Small grant S10	Southmead Somali association
Small grant S11	The Misfits Theatre Company
Small Grants Round 2	
Small grant S1	Black Mothers Matter
Small grant S2	Bricks
Small grant S3	Bristol Polish Women's Group
Small grant S4	Bristol Queer People of Colour Socials
Small grant S5	Bristol Refugee Festival
Small grant S6	Bristol Women's Voice
Small grant S7	Friends of Hillfields Library
Small grant S8	Hillfields Community Garden
Small grant S9	Greater Stockwood Alliance
Small grant S10	One Green Kitchen
Small grant S11	The Misfits Theatre Company
Small grant S12	Working Young (Hartcliffe Bikes)
Small grant S13	Friends of the Park (Oldbury Court/Vassalls Park)

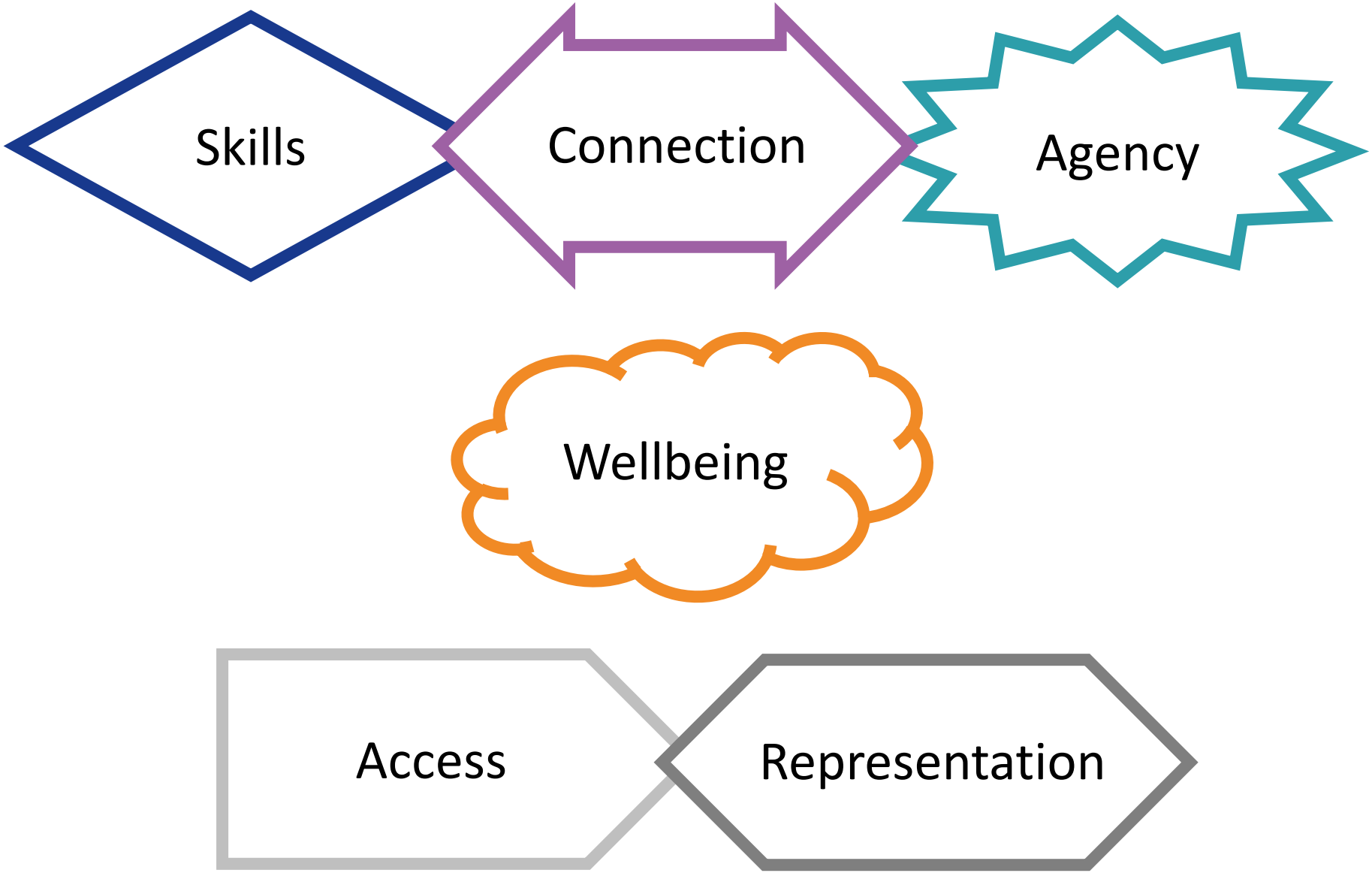
Medium to Large Grants	
M/L grant 1	1625 Independent People
M/L grant 2	African Voices Forum
M/L grant 3	Ambition Lawrence Weston
M/L grant 4	Autism Independence
M/L grant 5	BHC&DC Bristol Hate Crime & Discrimination Service (BHC&DS) x 6 below
	Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI) Lead partner
	BHC&DC Brandon Trust
	BHC&DC Bristol Law Centre
	BHC&DC Bristol Mind
	BHC&DC Off the Record (Bristol)
	BHC&DC Resolve West Ltd
M/L grant 6	WECIL
M/L grant 7	Bristol Disability Equality Forum
M/L grant 8	Bristol Older People's Forum
M/L grant 9	BRASP Bristol Refugee & Asylum Seeker Partnership (BRASP) x 4 below
	Bristol Refugee Rights with Refugee Women of Bristol
	Borderlands
	Bristol Hospitality Network
	Project MAMA (Maternity Action for Migrants and Asylum seekers)

Medium to Large Grants	
M/L grant 10	Bristol Somali Resource Centre
M/L grant 11	Bristol Women's Voice
M/L grant 12	Centre for Deaf and Hard of Hearing People
M/L grant 13	Changes Bristol
M/L grant 14	Community in Partnership Knowle West
M/L grant 15	Eastside Community, Trinity & Somali Kitchen
M/L grant 16	Full Circle/Talo/Bristol Horn/Vocalise: building equity and capacity of BME communities in Central and Inner East Bristol
M/L grant 17	Knowle West Health Park
M/L grant 18	Knowle West Media Centre
M/L grant 19	Lawrence Weston Community Farm
M/L grant 20	Southmead Development trust: community building and recovery in Southmead
M/L grant 21	Step Together Volunteering
M/L grant 22	Ujima Radio
M/L grant 23	Wellspring Settlement (with Talking Money and CHAS)
M/L grant 24	Windmill Hill City Farm

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Impact on people is defined by 24 outcomes

Outcomes are especially for those experiencing the greatest inequality – they fall into six types



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The 24 outcomes

1-14 are about individuals, 15-17 are about communities and 18-24 are about a more resilient VCSE sector

Key: wellbeing; agency; access and active and progress; skills, knowledge, capability; connect/community; representation

	Summary	Full outcome	Theme
1	Loneliness	People feel less isolated / lonely	Wellbeing
2	Know rights	People experiencing the greatest inequality have improved knowledge of their rights and services available to them	Access and active progress
3	Digital access	More people are able to access digital resources and support	Access and active progress
4	Digital skills	People gain digital / IT skills	Skills
5	Report hate	More people feel confident to report hate incidents	Agency
6	Feel safer	People affected by hate crime & discrimination feel safer	Wellbeing
7	Engage with agencies	People are confident to/able to deal with agencies independently	Agency
8	Engage with employment	People experiencing the greatest inequality are better able to/better equipped to access employment or self-employment	Access and active progress
9	Economic empowerment	People feel more economically empowered	Agency
10	Economic progression	More people experiencing the greatest inequality take up opportunities for economic progression (e.g. taking up new roles, back to work, setting up own business, further education, volunteering etc)	Access and active progress
11	Less stress	People experiencing the greatest inequality feel less stressed	Wellbeing
12	Wellbeing	People's mental health and wellbeing improves	Wellbeing
13	Able to manage discrimination	People affected by hate crime/discrimination are better able to manage	Agency
14	Engage with wellbeing	More people engage in wellbeing activities	Access and active progress
15	Supported to connect	People feel supported to make connections	Connect/community
16	Connected to community	People feel more connected to their community	Connect/community
17	Engage in community	People participate more in community life	Connect/community
18	VCSE more representative	My VCSE organisation becomes more representative of the community it serves	Representation
19	Policy better informed	Local policy or strategic decisions are informed by diverse and marginalised views and experiences	Representation
20	Leadership roles	More people who experience the greatest inequality take on leadership roles within their community	Agency
21	Self-organise	People who experience the greatest inequality (people from under-represented groups) are better equipped to self-organise to take action on issues that are important to them	Agency
22	Voice	People from under-represented groups (or people experiencing the greatest inequality) have increased voice and influence in their community	Agency
23	Access decision-makers	People from under-represented groups (or people experiencing the greatest inequality) have better access to decision-makers in the City	Representation
24	Organisation resilience	Increased resilience of VCSE organisations / My VCSE organisation (or VCSE organisations supported) have increased resilience and ability to respond to external challenges	Skills

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Outcomes match to the Quality of Life survey

Bristol's Quality of Life survey asks many questions that are relevant and can be used with the BIF outcomes

	Summary	Full outcome	Thematic priorities
1	Loneliness	% who rarely or never feel close to other people	Mental health & wellbeing
2	Know rights	% who lack the information to get involved in their community	Community identified
3	Digital access	% whose lack of accessible communications and processes prevent them from accessing the internet	Digital inclusion
4	Digital skills	% comfortable using digital services	Digital inclusion
5	Report hate	% victim of age/disability/religious/sexual orientation/racial/sex discrimination or harassment in the last year	Hate crime
6	Feel safer	% whose fear of crime affects their day-to-day lives	Mental health & wellbeing
7	Engage with agencies	% satisfied with the way Bristol City Council runs things	Community identified
8	Engage with employment	% who know where to get information, advice and guidance about employment and training	Economic inclusion
9	Economic empowerment	% whose money problems stop them from getting involved in their community	Economic inclusion
10	Economic progression	% who have taken part in learning or training in the last year	Economic inclusion
11	Less stress	% whose emotional / mental ill health prevents them from leaving their home when they want to	Mental health & wellbeing
12	Wellbeing	% satisfied with life % who do enough regular exercise each week	Mental health & wellbeing
13	Able to manage discrimination	No relevant question	Hate crime
14	Engage with wellbeing	% who participate in cultural activities at least once a month % who visit Bristol's parks and green spaces at least once a week	Mental health & wellbeing
15	Supported to connect	% for whom transport issues stop them from getting involved in their community	Stronger more connected communities
16	Connected to community	% who help out their neighbours	Stronger more connected communities
17	Engage in community	% who volunteer or help out in their community at least 3 times a year	Stronger more connected communities
18	VCSE more representative	No relevant question	More resilient VCSE sector
19	Policy better informed	No relevant question	More resilient VCSE sector
20	Leadership roles	No relevant question	More resilient VCSE sector
21	Self-organise	No relevant question	More resilient VCSE sector
22	Voice	No relevant question	More resilient VCSE sector
23	Access decision-makers	% satisfied with the way Bristol CIty Council asks for their views before it makes changes that affect them	More resilient VCSE sector
24	Organisation resilience	No relevant question	More resilient VCSE sector

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The BIF2 Ways of Working

7 principles and approaches that facilitate effective community work

The ways of working:

Way of working	Examples
Equitable	Demonstrate positive action to redress inequity (level up) Build and strengthen equalities-led groups (which often work city wide)
Inclusive	Be proactive and intentional about inclusion Remove physical, attitudinal, cultural, environmental and economic barriers Find respectful, creative ways to empower people and communities who are routinely excluded from community and city life
Asset* based	Take the time to discover, then build on the assets that are already in the community *Assets are people – our interests, time, experience, skills, networks, community and voluntary groups. Assets are also money, buildings, land, the local corner shop, nursery, sheltered housing, businesses and services.
Place based	Continue to build strong, connected communities where people come together, self-organise and shape the future of their communities Encourage many more people to connect and expand the opportunities in their local area
Relational/ Relationship-oriented	Connect people to people, people to power and organisations to each other
Citizen-led	Encourage and nurture citizen action - by and for the people Encourage and enable community-led activity – people with shared experience or interest coming together to find solutions Grow collective skills, knowledge, confidence, curiosity and self-determination
Nurturing the community and voluntary sector eco-system	Strengthen organisations which can help tackle the structural inequality Encourage larger organisations to share their assets (by which we mean people, skills, experience as well as potentially buildings and other physical resources) with smaller organisations & informal networks to build community connection and collaboration Encourage organisations to have deep roots into communities Foster cultures of learning and co-creation

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Context & baseline - people

Using data from Bristol's Open Data, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and Public Health England

Ethnicity

There are more than 287 ethnic groups in the city, 185 countries of birth represented, at least 45 religions and more than 90 languages spoken. (Bristol.gov.uk).

19% of the population belong to a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic groups (similar to the national average of 18%). The largest group is Somali; the 4th largest community after Birmingham, Brent and Ealing (9,167 - 2%). The next largest groups is Pakistani 9,103 (1.9%) and Indian 8,371 (1.8%).

The ONS indicates that 6% of households in Bristol have no-one who has English as a main language, compared with 4% nationally.

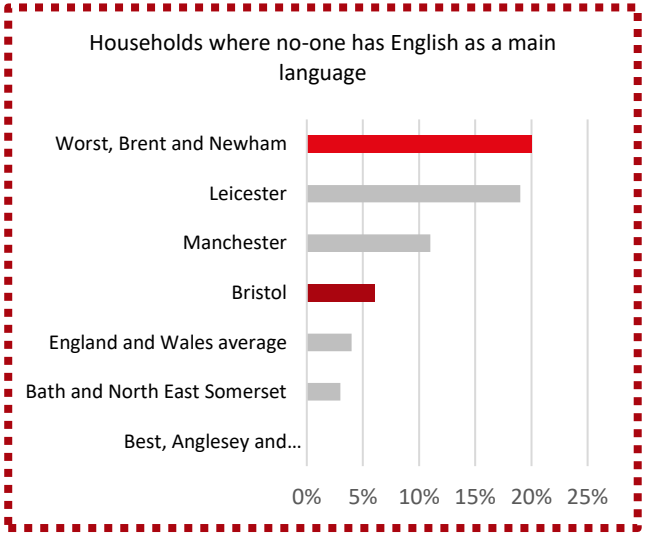
Wellbeing

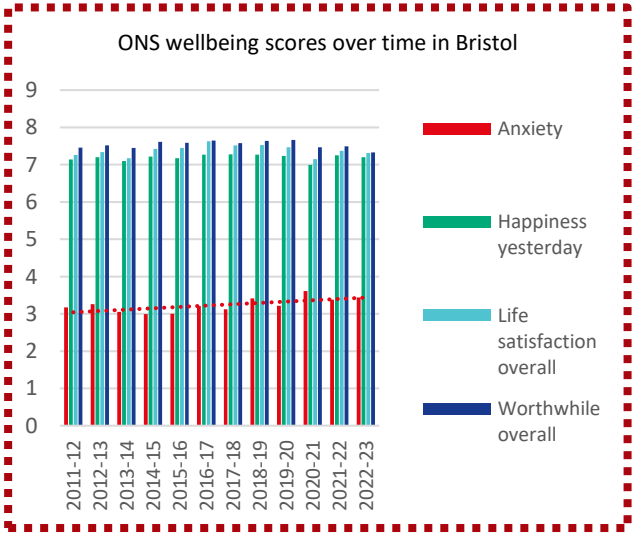
More than 81,000 people in Bristol have physical or mental health conditions (similar to England & Wales at 17%). Higher disability rates are found in the Black or Black British Caribbean population (23%), White Irish (21%) and the White British populations (19%).

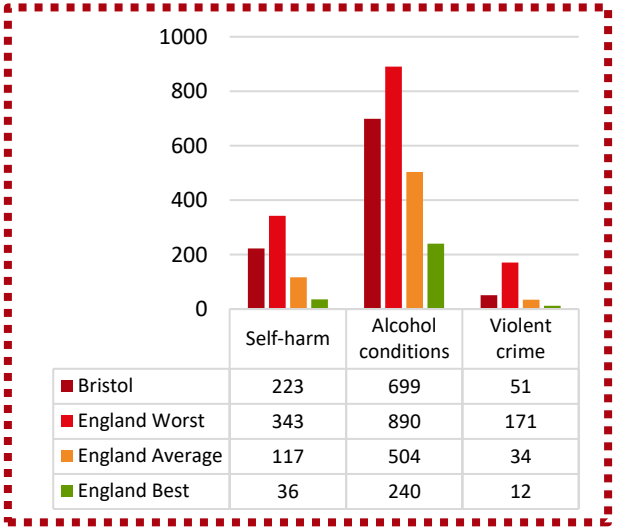
Wellbeing is slightly worse than the UK average, for example life satisfaction is at 7.3 in Bristol in 23/23, and at 7.5 in the UK. Whilst the last 12 years have seen wellbeing stay the same in Bristol (happiness, life satisfaction and feeling worthwhile), the trend for anxiety is upwards.

Public Health England uses the number of fast food outlets per 100,000 population as a health predictor. Bristol has 128, near the average of 115 and compared with the best of 39 (Wokingham) and the worst of 417 (Camden). The Public Health areas of most concern for Bristol generally are self-harm, alcohol conditions and violent crime.

One of the worst off communities is White Gypsy and Irish Traveller. More than a quarter (27%) have mental health issues or disability despite being younger (average age of 28 to Bristol's 34) and 1 in 20 are providing unpaid care.







	Self-harm	Alcohol conditions	Violent crime
Bristol	223	699	51
England Worst	343	890	171
England Average	117	504	34
England Best	36	240	12

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Context & baseline – infrastructure & economy

Using data from the Centre for Cities, RSA and Electoral Commission.

The City and infrastructure

The population of Bristol is around 479,000. At just short of half a million, it is one of 11 UK Core Cities, the 8th largest in England and Wales outside London and the second fastest growing after Manchester 2012 to 2022.

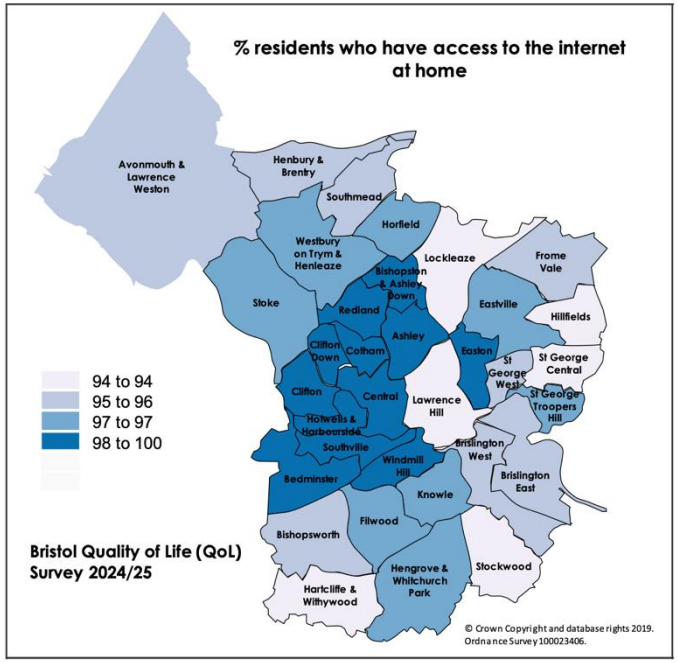
It has rich assets in terms of heritage, ranking 65 out of 316 English areas on the RSA's heritage index (where 1 is best performing), stronger than cities like Manchester (151) or Leicester (233).

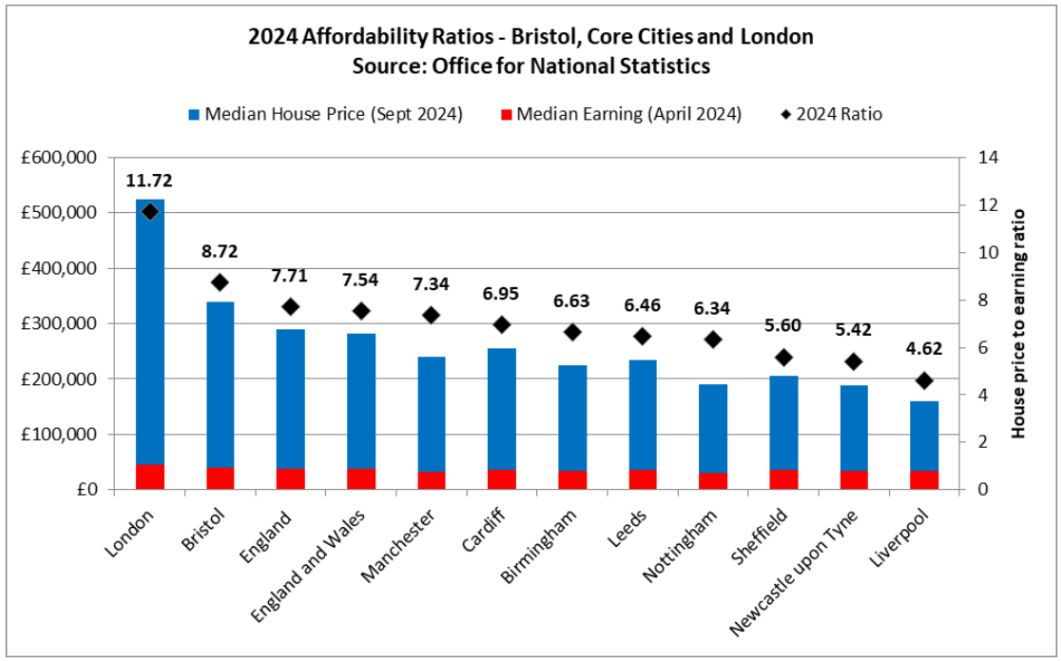
In 2025 97.2% of residents had access to the internet at home, the fifth year-on-year increase in a row. There is a deprivation gap of 2.8% between the Bristol average and those residents living in the 10% most deprived areas (94.4%). Bristolians experience 24 days a year of poor air quality (4/63).

Economic inclusion and political participation

Voter turnout can be useful indication of a sense of agency of communities. In the general election Bristol wards were above averagely engaged (69%, 61%, 60% and 65% turnout compared with 60% UK average), except for Bristol South (65%), home to Hartcliffe and Withywood, which had a record low turnout of 14% in the latest local elections (Electoral Commission and Bristol City Council).

Bristol is 8th biggest of the 63 cities described by Centre for Cities. Rankings show it performs well for employment levels at 83% (5/63) and on average it is relatively well qualified. The big issue is inequality. Almost 2 in 5 disabled people have no qualifications (39%) as do a third of Somalis (33%) compared with the Bristol average of 15%. It has relatively unaffordable housing with a housing affordability ratio of 10.4 (8/63). Most Somalis (85%) live in socially rented accommodation - four times higher than the Bristol average (19%). In Bristol 5.1% of households live in overcrowded accommodation, with more than a fifth of those located in St Philips (25.6%), St Paul Grosvernor Road (23.7%), Easton Road (20.8%) and Cabot Circus (20.2%).





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Quality of Life in Bristol – Trends

Citywide summary of priority indicators and how they have developed over the last five years

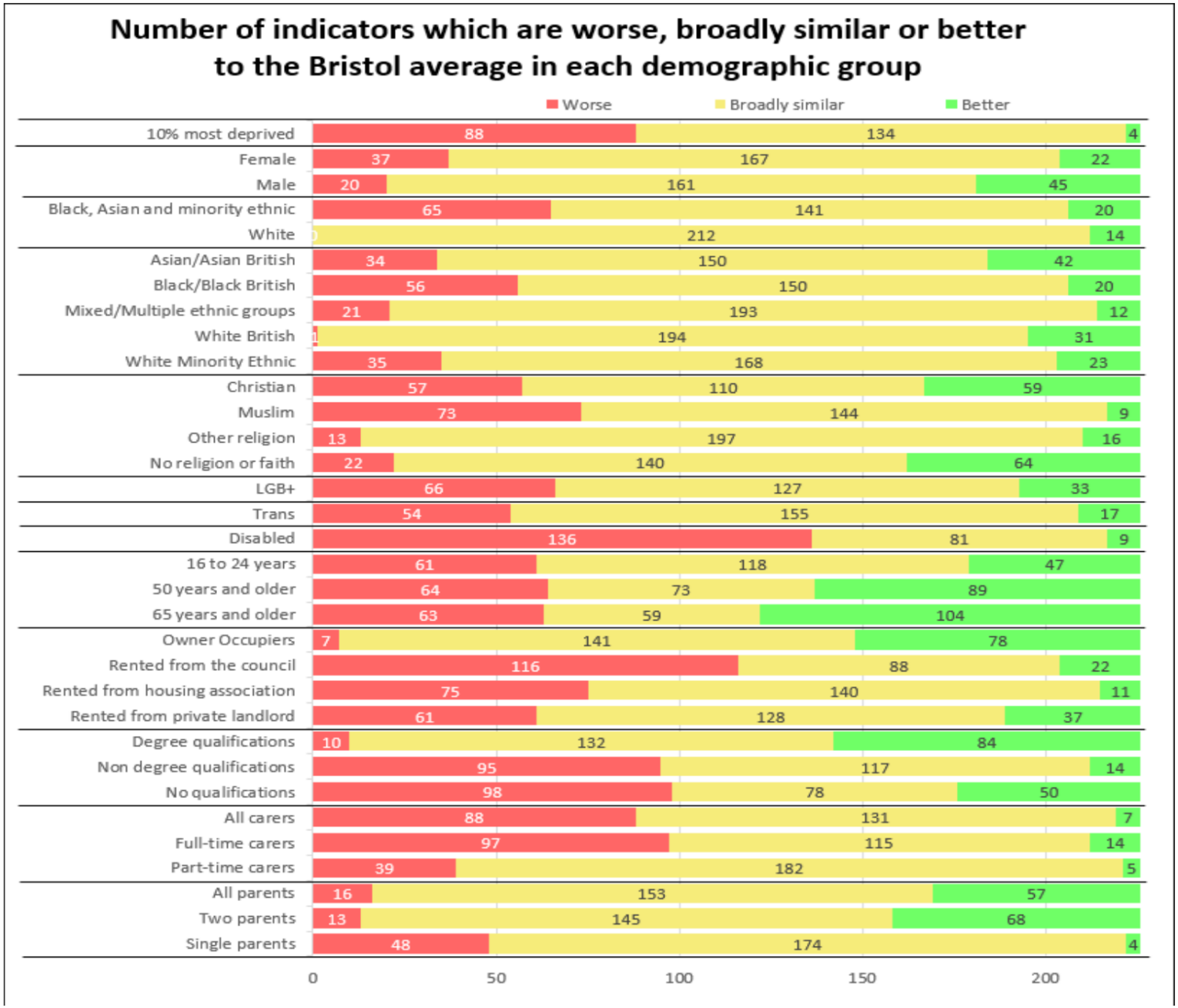
Priority indicators	2019	2024	Change
Community and Living			
% satisfied with their local area	79%	72%	-7%
% who volunteer or help out in their community at least 3 times a year	48%	46%	-2%
% who feel they belong to their neighbourhood	62%	65%	3%
Health and Wellbeing			
% satisfied with life	75%	64%	-11%
% who do enough regular exercise each week	71%	67%	-4%
% poor mental wellbeing	15%	20%	5%
% who rarely or never feel close to other people	17%	15%	-2%
Crime and Safety			
% whose fear of crime affects their day-to-day lives	16%	24%	8%
% who think sexual harassment is an issue in Bristol	27%	37%	10%
Education and Skills			
% who know where to get information, advice and guidance about employment and training	61%	66%	5%
% who have taken part in learning or training in the last year	N/A	55%	
Sustainability and Environment			
% who visit Bristol's parks and green spaces at least once a week	53%	53%	0%
% satisfied with the quality of parks and green spaces	72%	70%	-2%
% who think street litter is a problem locally	81%	84%	3%
Culture and Leisure			
% who participate in cultural activities at least once a month	43%	36%	-7%
% who don't get involved in cultural activities because they don't feel welcome	N/A	5%	
Transport			
% who think traffic congestion is a problem locally	77%	83%	6%
Housing			
% satisfied with the cost of their rent or mortgage	59%	42%	-17%
% extremely or moderately worried about keeping their home warm this winter	N/A	30%	
Economy			
% who find it difficult to manage financially	9%	11%	2%
Council and Democracy			
% satisfied with the way Bristol CIty Council runs things	43%	32%	-11%
% satisfied with the way Bristol CIty Council ask for their views before it makes changes that affect them	N/A	30%	
% who feel Bristol City Council provides value for money	28%	21%	-7%

Statistically significantly worse
Worse
Better
Statistically significantly better

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Quality of Life in Bristol – Trends

Outcomes data from the Bristol Quality of Life survey



Index of Deprivation

Key

Ward boundaries

Bristol Unitary Authority boundary

Context

The strength of communities can be partially indicated by levels of deprivation. England's Index of Deprivation (IoD) ranks 317 Local Authorities with 1 being the most highly deprived in England (Blackpool). Bristol is ranked 123/296, with 11% of its residents (53,100 people) live in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in England. This compares with other city rankings: Manchester (2), Leicester (6), Nottingham (18) and Bath and NE Somerset (216).

It has especially poor rankings for crime (50/296) and living environment (54/296).

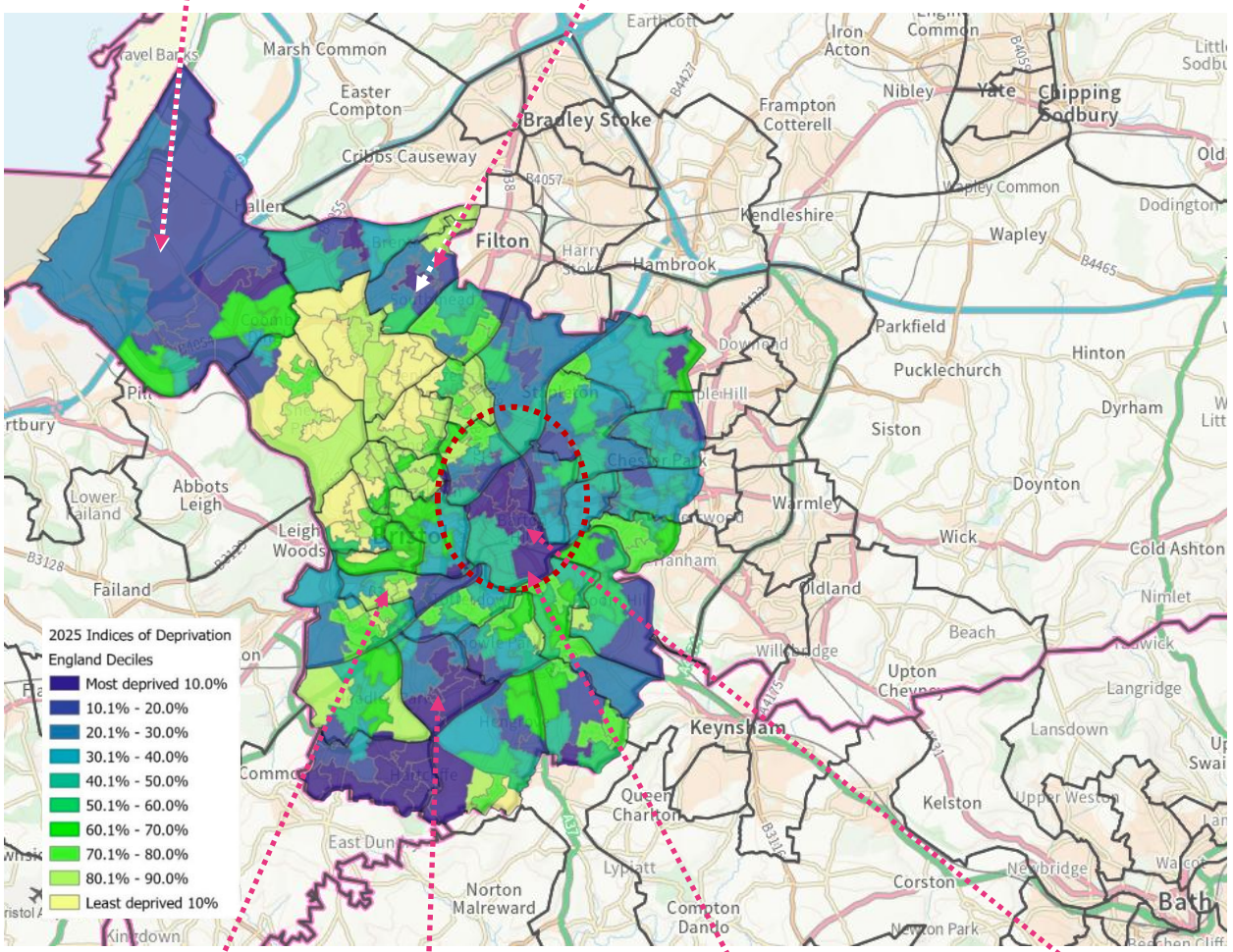
It is in the worst third for health (94), in the middle third for income, employment and skills (138, 160, 125) and in the upper third for housing (261). Income Deprivation Affecting Older People ranks 77/296.

Bristol has 30 LSOAs in the most deprived 10% in England for Multiple Deprivation in 2025 (41 LSOAs in 2019), including 2 LSOAs in Hartcliffe in the most deprived 1% in England. Despite the improvement (relative to other parts of the country), the Indices of Deprivation 2025 reinforce previously identified patterns of deprivation across the city. Bristol continues to have deprivation 'hot spots' that are amongst some of the most deprived areas in the country yet are adjacent to some of the least deprived areas in the country.

An interactive dashboard is shown in Figure XXXX, which identifies the key rankings.

Lawrence Weston (In Avonmouth and Lawrence Weston – use LSOAs)

Southmead (Southmead ward)



Bedminster (LSOAs in Bedminster & Southville)

Knowle West (Mostly Filwood ward)

East Central (Easton, Lawrence Hill, Ashley wards)

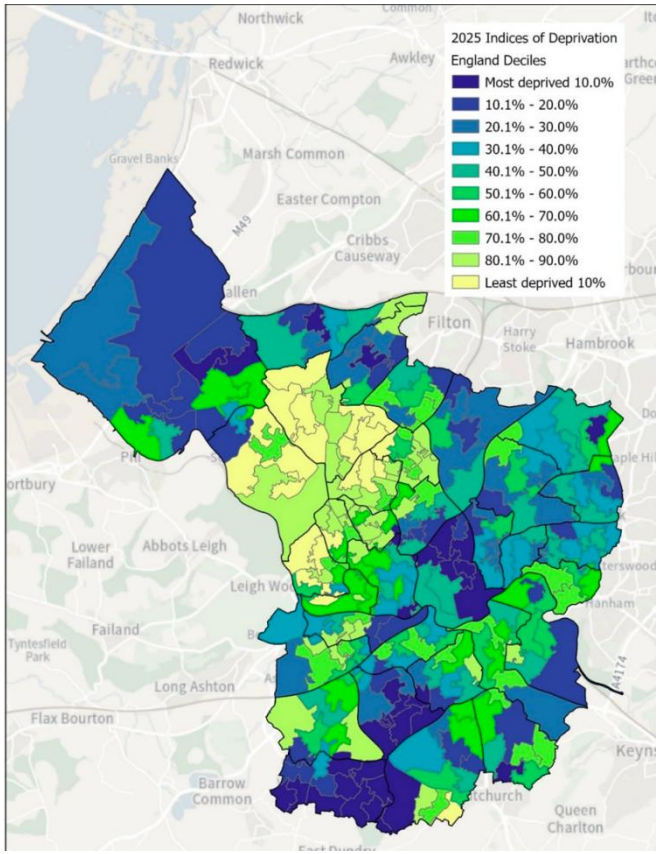
Barton Hill (Within Lawrence Hill ward – use LSOAs)

Index of Deprivation dashboard

The interactive dashboard shows Bristol overall, and the ranking of each Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) in an Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

LSOA code (2021)	LSOA name (2021)	Local Authority District code (202	Local Authority District name (2024)	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Rar	Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) Decile
E01014566	Bristol 029B	E06000023	Bristol City o	9804	3
E01014567	Bristol 029C	E06000023	Bristol City o	13380	4
E01014568	Bristol 057A	E06000023	Bristol City o	5111	2
E01014569	Bristol 057B	E06000023	Bristol City o	9794	3
E01014570	Bristol 057C	E06000023	Bristol City o	17281	6
E01014571	Bristol 012A	E06000023	Bristol City o	11624	4
E01014572	Bristol 019A	E06000023	Bristol City o	9949	3
E01014573	Bristol 019B	E06000023	Bristol City o	19443	6
E01014574	Bristol 057D	E06000023	Bristol City o	5150	2
E01014575	Bristol 019C	E06000023	Bristol City o	8205	3
E01014576	Bristol 019D	E06000023	Bristol City o	15898	5
E01014577	Bristol 012B	E06000023	Bristol City o	23634	8
E01014578	Bristol 044A	E06000023	Bristol City o	8295	3
E01014579	Bristol 045A	E06000023	Bristol City o	9714	3
E01014580	Bristol 045B	E06000023	Bristol City o	765	1
E01014581	Bristol 045C	E06000023	Bristol City o	573	1
E01014582	Bristol 045D	E06000023	Bristol City o	3203	1
E01014583	Bristol 044B	E06000023	Bristol City o	3284	1
E01014584	Bristol 045E	E06000023	Bristol City o	2619	1
E01014585	Bristol 044C	E06000023	Bristol City o	953	1
E01014586	Bristol 012C	E06000023	Bristol City o	16096	5
E01014587	Bristol 012D	E06000023	Bristol City o	13062	4
E01014588	Bristol 013A	E06000023	Bristol City o	12481	4
E01014589	Bristol 013B	E06000023	Bristol City o	1933	1
E01014590	Bristol 013C	E06000023	Bristol City o	14013	5
E01014591	Bristol 013D	E06000023	Bristol City o	23065	7
E01014592	Bristol 013E	E06000023	Bristol City o	16914	6
E01014593	Bristol 051A	E06000023	Bristol City o	377	1
E01014594	Bristol 048A	E06000023	Bristol City o	554	1
E01014595	Bristol 051B	E06000023	Bristol City o	5209	2
E01014596	Bristol 051C	E06000023	Bristol City o	2731	1
E01014597	Bristol 051D	E06000023	Bristol City o	1484	1
E01014598	Bristol 048B	E06000023	Bristol City o	28716	9
E01014599	Bristol 048C	E06000023	Bristol City o	23177	7

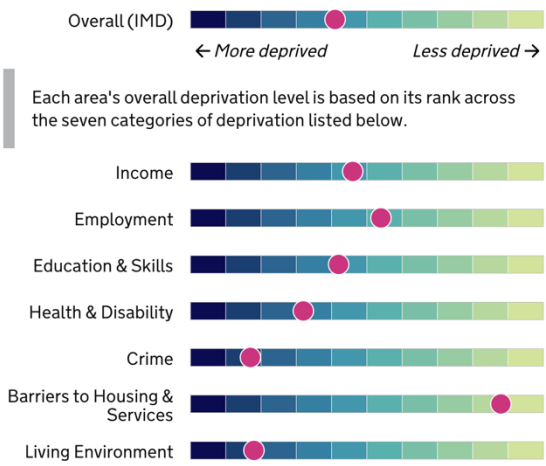
The English Indices of Deprivation (IoD25) measure relative levels of deprivation at local authority district level as well as in 33,755 small areas or neighbourhoods, called Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), in England.



Deprivation Domains

137
Income Rank
159
Employment Rank
124
Education, Skills and Training Rank
93
Health Deprivation and Disability Rank
49
Crime Rank
260
Barriers to Housing and Services Rank
53
Living Environment Rank

IMD Decile Bristol



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Highlights Year 2: 2022-2023

The difference BIF2 is making, where and to whom

BIF 2 Funding

£1.3 million

grant funding for small and large grants

Reach

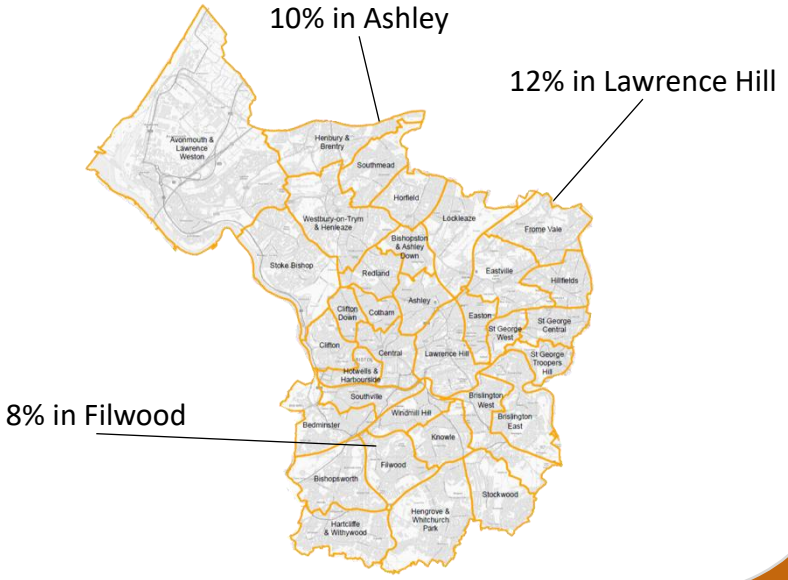
32,030

people engaged across all wards in Bristol

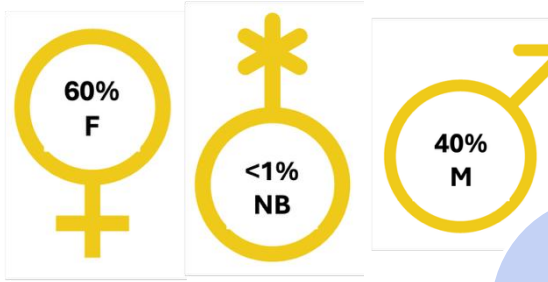
42%

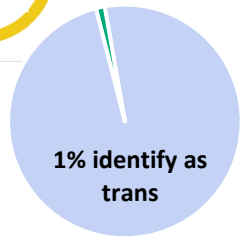
of funded organisations are Black and minoritised Ethnic-led

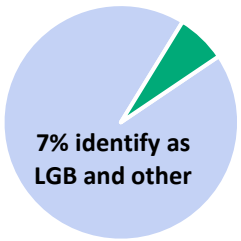
Ward Activity: The areas with greatest number of people taking part

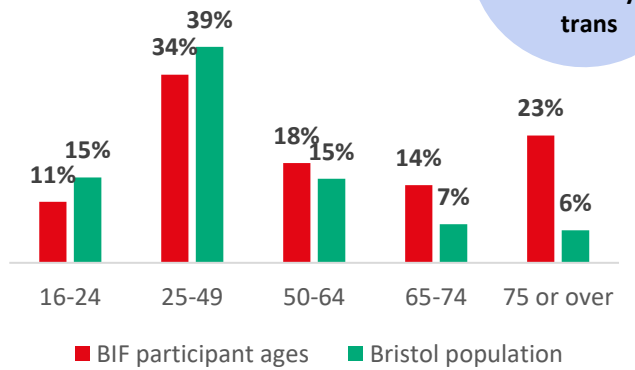


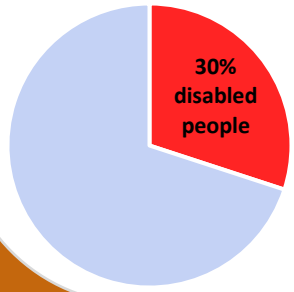
Addressing inequality: The people participating in BIF funded projects

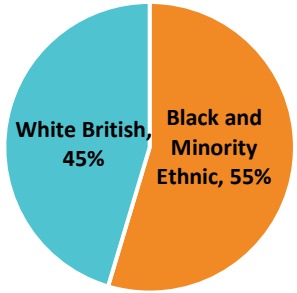


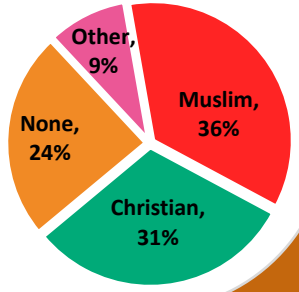












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Highlights Year 2: 2022-2023

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

Community outcomes

Over £3.8 million

additional funding leveraged into the city in 2022-2023

Over 1600

Volunteers, providing over **250,000 hours**, worth **£3.5million***

Connectedness

Three times as many participants connected with others than targets for the year.

Access

Nearly twice as many people given opportunities to change their communities than planned.

Knowledge & Skills

Nearly 3,000 gained knowledge, and skills leading to greater confidence.

Growing the power

of communities experiencing the greatest inequality

*Based on hourly valuation of £13.70 from 2019 report, Assessing the value of volunteers in community businesses, Power to Change

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Highlights Year 3: 2023-2024

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

BIF 2 Funding

£1.6 million

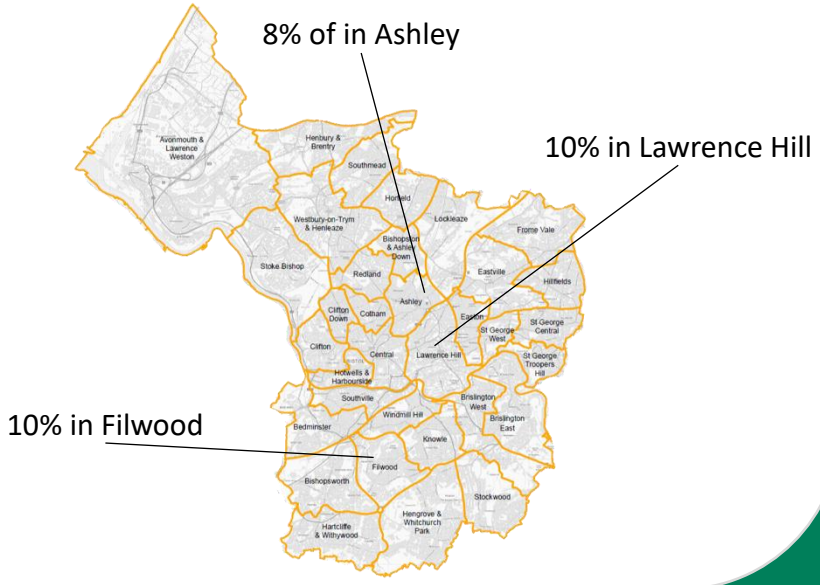
grant funding for small and large grants

Reach

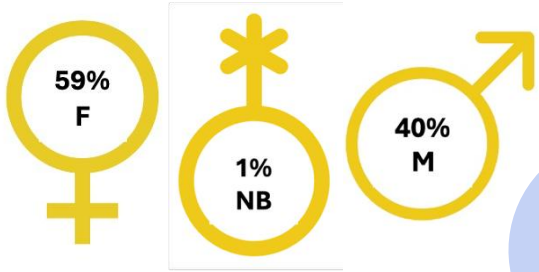
30,669
people engaged across all wards in Bristol

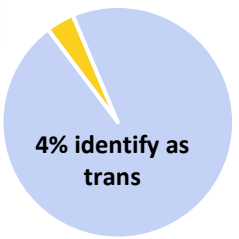
42%
of funded organisations are Black and Minoritised Ethnic-led

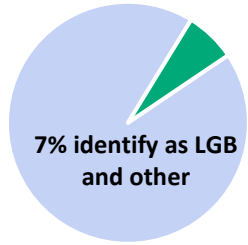
Ward Activity: The areas with greatest number of people taking part

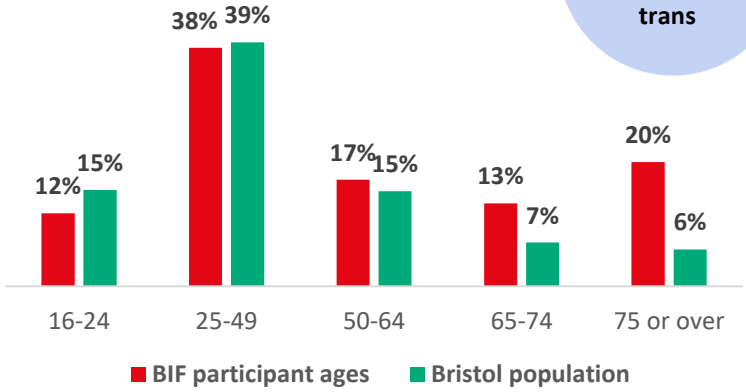


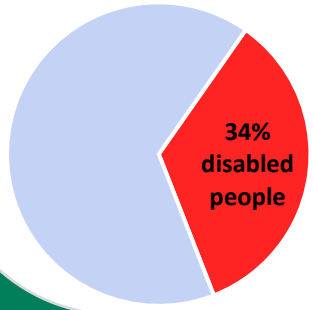
Addressing inequality: The people participating in BIF funded projects

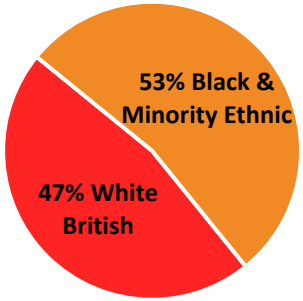


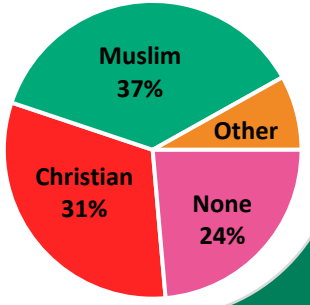












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Highlights Year 3: 2023-2024

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to who

Community outcomes

Over £1.4 million

additional funding leveraged into the city in 2023-2024

Over 1500

Volunteers, providing over **850,000 hours**, worth **£11.7million***

Connectedness

Connecting participants with others, communities and agencies

Wellbeing

50% of organisations are measuring wellbeing and have seen improvements for participants

Knowledge & Rights

Increased understanding of knowledge and rights leads to further outcomes

Organisational outcomes

- Increased overall capacity
- Improved reputation & community empowerment
- New organisational skills & knowledge
- Increased collaboration & partnerships
- More talent attracted to the sector

Growing the power

of communities experiencing the greatest inequality

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*Based on hourly valuation of £13.70 from 2019 report, Assessing the value of volunteers in community businesses, Power to Change

Highlights Year 4: 2024-2025

The difference BIF2 is making, where and to whom

BIF 2 Funding

£1.3 million

grant funding for small and large grants

Reach

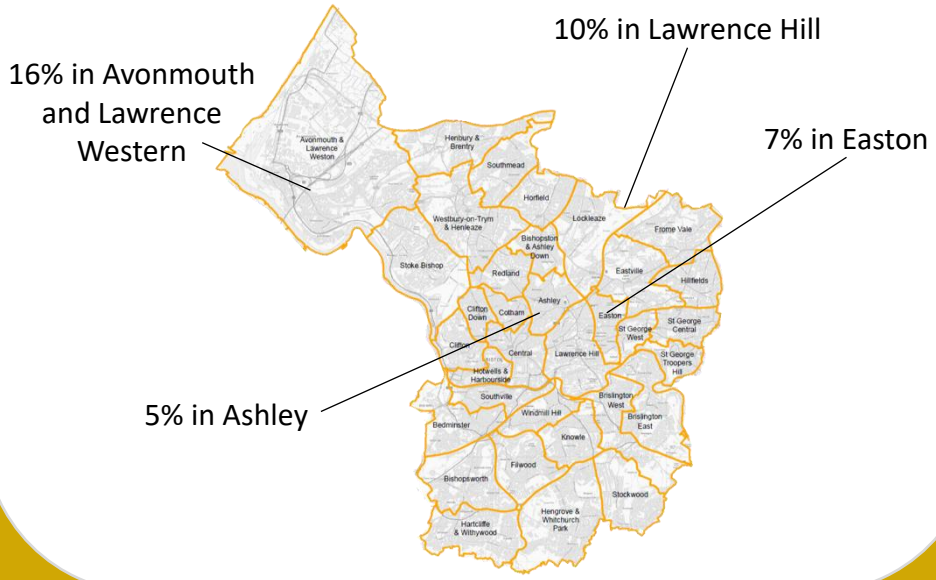
23157

people engaged across all wards in Bristol

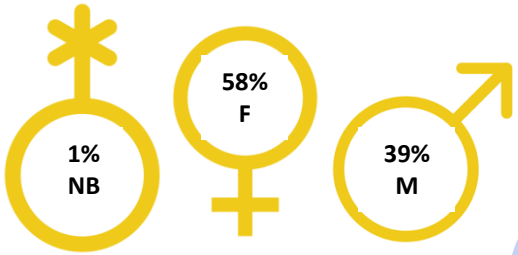
71%

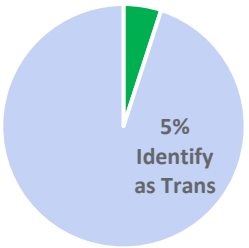
of funded organisations are Black and Minoritised Ethnic-led

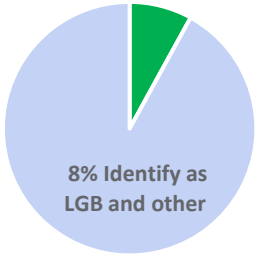
Ward Activity: The areas with greatest number of people taking part



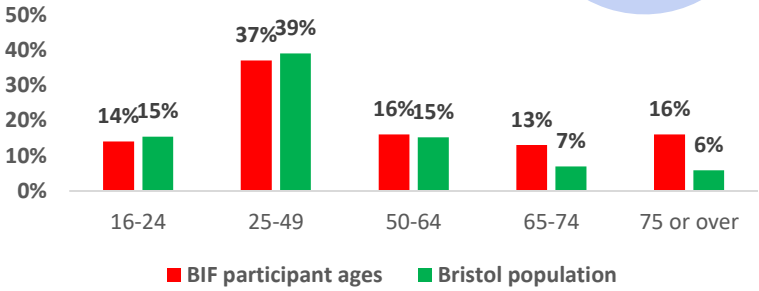
Addressing inequality: The people participating in BIF funded projects



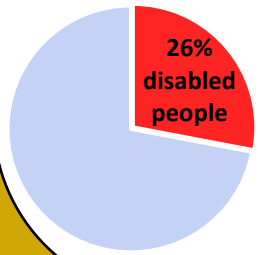


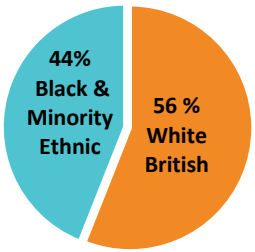


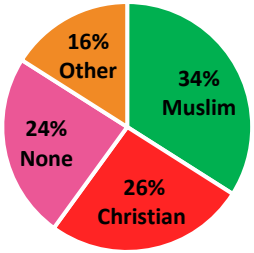
Participant Ages

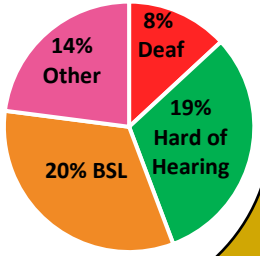


Percentage within deaf community









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Highlights Year 4: 2024-2025

The difference BIF 2 is making, where and to whom

Community outcomes

Over £1.9 million

additional funding leveraged into the city in 2024-2025

Over 5598

Volunteers, providing over 713728.5 hours, worth **£9.8 million**

Connectedness

Connecting participants with others, communities and agencies

Wellbeing

Measuring wellbeing and have seen improvements for participants

Agency

Participants are empowered and enable to have more control of their lives

Organisational outcomes

- Increased overall capacity
- Improved reputation & community empowerment
- New organisational skills & knowledge
- Increased collaboration & partnerships
- More talent attracted to the sector

Growing the power

of communities experiencing the greatest inequality

*Based on hourly valuation of £13.70 from 2019 report, Assessing the value of volunteers in community businesses, Power to Change

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Figure List

Figure No.	Description	Page
1 and 4	Growing the Power – the circular chain of outcomes from individual, to community to organisational and sector wide impacts.	6/14
2	Comparison of 'Quality of Life' population data between 2019 and 2024. Red arrows show areas of continuing challenges, green shows areas of progress.	19
3	Map of Bristol with the Index of Deprivation overlaid	20
5	Spectrum of Collaboration	31
6	Examples of Collaboration	33
7	Different elements off the learning and support programme	36
8	Impacts for community organisations	37
9	Diagram depicting the growth of Social Capital	49
10	Diagram of increasing 'connectedness'	52

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