

Local Compact Survey results: briefing 2 - independence

July 2013

For the voluntary and community sector (VCS), independence can be defined as not only having freedom from undue control and influence, but also as having a positive freedom to set priorities and values and challenge policies and programmes. In other words, independence is the ability organisations have to:

- Agree values based on their own experience and vision, and represent the views of members and constituents without external pressures
- Carry out work that delivers the aims of the organisation
- Challenge others and engage in public debate

These freedoms are essential for voluntary sector organisations to decide how best they can further their mission and support their members and/or beneficiaries.

A deeper level of understanding is needed, in both sectors the VCS and public sectors, about the importance and benefits of independence and how independence can be threatened. Increasing mutual understanding will promote strong working relationships and strengthen the independence of the VCS.

What Compact Voice says

The first undertaking of the national Compact commits government to “respect and uphold the independence of civil society organisations to deliver their mission, including their right to campaign, regardless of any relationship, financial or otherwise, which may exist.”

Voluntary sector organisations can deliver effective and responsive services or help to shape them through influencing policy and service design, but to do so they need to have enough freedom to use their distinctive experience and expertise. This requires them to be independent from the state. Just as the voluntary sector is an essential component of a healthy democratic society, so independence is an essential component of an effective voluntary sector.

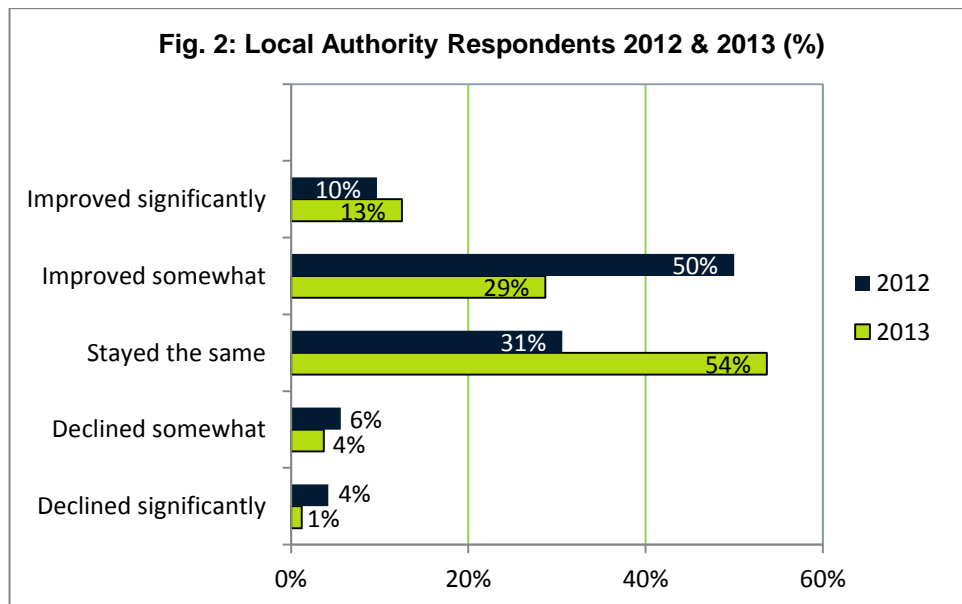
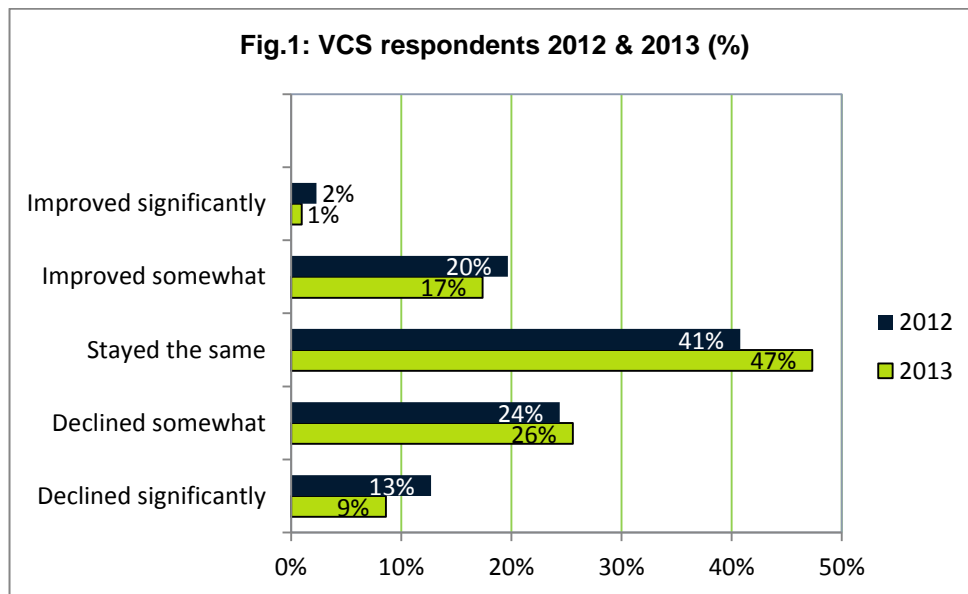
Compact Voice has been made aware of a number of potential threats to this independence, particularly locally, where voluntary sector organisations have described being afraid to challenge breaches of their local Compact because of concerns this may jeopardise financial relationship. Some organisations have told us that in the current financial climate anything which might damage on-going relationships with potential funders is being avoided.

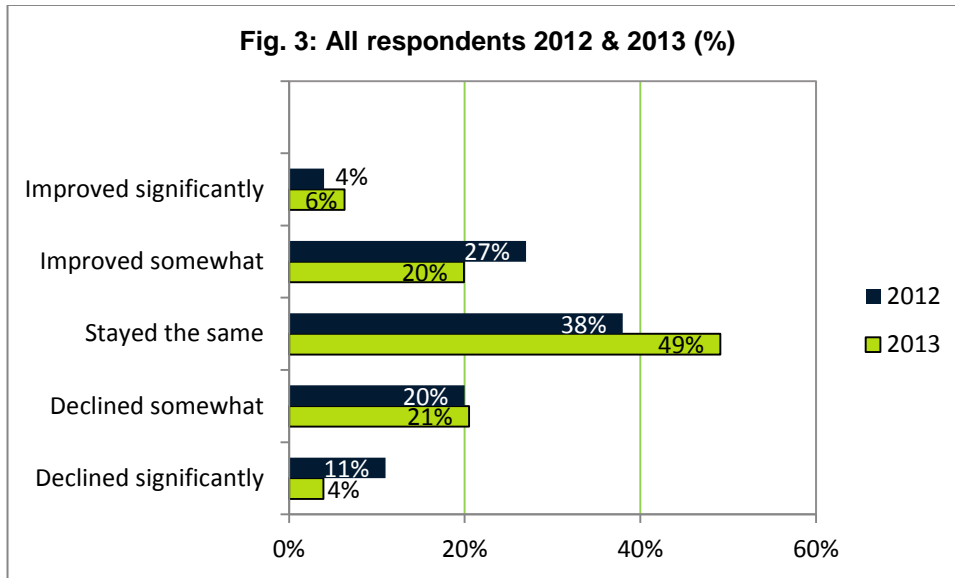
Recently, Compact Voice submitted evidence to the Baring Foundation’s [Panel on Independence](#), making recommendations that greater transparency between the sectors – particularly in relation to funding – may help improve the way independence is perceived and supported.

What our survey showed

Our findings show that respondents from the VCS and the public sector have different opinions on the extent to which respect for the independence of the VCS amongst the public sector has improved or declined over the past year. This mirrors the findings from last year's survey.

Figure 1 (below) compares the results from VCS respondents for 2012 and 2013. Figure 2 compares the results from Local Authority respondents for 2012 and 2013. Figure 3 compares results from all respondents over the last 2 years.





Over the last 12 months only 1% of VCS respondents feel respect for independence has improved significantly, whereas 13% of local authority respondents believe it has. Also where only 1% of local authority respondents believe respect for independence has declined significantly over the last 12 months, 9% of VCS respondents think it has. Still, the fact that 18% of VCS respondents think that respect for independence has improved shows that despite the difficult circumstances trusting partnerships have developed.

However over a third (35%) of VCS respondents think respect to independence has declined since 2012, compared to just 5% of local authority respondents. This is a small decrease from last year for both sectors, as the charts show. One of the most interesting findings from this year's survey is the decrease in local authority respondents who believe respect for independence has improved.

Figure 2 shows us that in 2013 42% of local authority respondents thought that respect to the VCS had improved; a drop of almost 20% from 2012.

Figure 3 shows us that the combined response indicating that the majority view from both sectors is that over the last 12 months respect for independence has remained the same. Results from 2013 show us that while fewer respondents believe respect for independence is getting worse, fewer believe it is improving.

Next steps

Previous reports from the Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector are available [here](#). The panel will issue their third report towards the end of the year. Compact Voice's briefing on using local Compacts to safeguard the independence of local Healthwatch groups is available [here](#).

If there are instances where a voluntary sector organisation feels that their independence is being threatened then Compact Voice would like to hear from you. Please contact compact@compactvoice.org.uk or call 020 7520 2451.

This is one of a series of documents looking at the results of Compact Voice's third annual survey of local Compacts. The full report with all the results will be published in August 2013 and will be available on the Compact Voice website: www.compactvoice.org.uk.