

Third Sector Views on Leeds' Strategy Refresh

October 2021

Third Sector Leeds (TSL) is the leading policy body that advocates for the third sector's values and interests in supporting Leeds' *Best City* ambition.

Context

During October 2021 TSL held two local events focused on gaining member feedback on refresh of Leeds future strategy and one event, which focused on the way our cities' economy needs to change for it to meet the challenges of entrenched inequalities and the climate crisis.

The feedback from these events has been collated and informs this paper, setting out some key aspirations that Third Sector Leeds hopes to see reflected in the revised strategy and delivered in the years to come.

The third sector and its role in the city

Participants at our events consistently referred to the critical role that the third sector plays in creating bridges to inclusion for people in our city who have, as one participant put it, '*fallen through the gaps*' of public services and/or are poorly served by the private sector. This role is reflected in recent research into the third sector across West Yorkshire which shows that the added value created by the sector is in the region of £6.2bn and that nearly 150,000 volunteers give 10.6 million hours of their time to good causes every year.¹

There was a clear focus on how the third sector plays a role in hearing and articulating the aspirations of communities and in campaigning for social change. There was recognition in these discussions that the third sector has particular strengths in seeking change around specific issues, and that all partners have further to travel in representing the views of communities.

Several participants reflected on the need for a more strategic relationship between decision makers and the third sector. One discussion about sharing buildings and other resources highlighted the key role for infrastructure bodies and the sector's networks and forums in enabling conversations with the sector about programmes that will shape the city's future happen at the earliest possible point. One participant suggested that relatively small amounts of 'pump priming' investment would enable local organisations to share resources more effectively.

Some challenges that hold back the third sector from achieving its potential

Many participants reflected on the challenges currently facing the sector, that limit its ability to be a full partner in driving change. One such challenge was the difficulty of meeting rising need and of paying the Real Living Wage across all employees as participants felt that contract values have not kept pace with rising prices.

Some participants felt that, while new funding has been available to the third sector during Covid, it is often made available with little notice, and is too short-term to enable their organisations to develop meaningful programmes that have a lasting impact. There was

¹ [structure dynamics and impact of VCSE.pdf \(wypartnership.co.uk\)](#)

recognition amongst these participants that local statutory partners do not always have control of when and how funding becomes available from central government.

The urgent need to act more quickly, and raise the visibility, of action around the Climate Emergency, the biodiversity crisis and sustainable resource use

At our citywide event Paul Chatterton, Professor of Urban Futures in the School of Geography at the University of Leeds shared work on the 'doughnut economy'. This work shows that in the UK, and around the world, our focus on economic growth has led to us using more material resources than the world can absorb, and that it has stopped us building an economy that is geared to increasing human wellbeing and reducing inequalities.

This analysis sparked a strong debate about how action to address the climate emergency links to inequalities. For instance, the data that underpins the City Ambition shows that life expectancy is much lower in poorer parts of our city. At the same time people that live in poorer parts of the city are more likely to live in higher density, often less well insulated, housing, and in neighbourhoods that are more likely to have high levels of pollution.

At both the citywide and local events there was recognition that the three areas of 'Climate', 'Economy' and 'Health' need to work together in the city plan, and there was a strong sense that climate action needs to take a more central role than it currently has.

Some participants felt that the urgency of the Climate Emergency means that we should not, as a city, talk about 'Inclusive Growth' (as growth means continuing to use more resources) but should instead focus on creating an 'Inclusive Economy' which is geared to sustainable consumption and reducing inequalities.

Many participants felt that, despite a growing citizen movement, the city's work around Climate Emergency is the least well understood and is the most 'distant' from wide public debate.

Specific Points

- **The city needs a comprehensive strategy for community wealth building that sees the third sector as anchor bodies in the neighbourhoods in which they work.**
- **Community wealth building strategies should incorporate action to address the climate emergency**

Several participants reflected on the work of the Community Care Hubs through covid and how the future development of this way of working could become the focus for the delivery of a range of services. Organisations that 'anchor' communities could become the catalysts for localised solutions to challenges that are led by community members. Additionally, 'community anchors' (with the support of citywide third sector infrastructure) could play an important role in 'bridging' to citywide strategic interventions.

These conversations intersected with wider debates about the need for local (neighbourhood based) community wealth strategies that enable community members to shape how the future of the places where they live and drive the shift towards a more environmentally sustainable and equitable economy. In particular, these strategies should seek to direct the energy of citizens (supported by the city) towards economic activity that **reduces** inequalities.

Local wealth building strategies should be developed within a framework that sets boundaries to reduce the use of material resources, limits pollution, supports biodiversity and addresses the climate emergency.

Ideally, each community anchor will - learning from the experience of the community Hubs established by [Climate Action Leeds](#) - take a leading role in catalysing community led climate action and building community understanding of the city's work to address the climate emergency.

Participants recognised that any new approach to 'community anchors' would need to address the potential for displacing valuable activity led by other local organisations and would need to address wealth building in communities of interest that are not geographically based.

Action: Set out an aspiration in the 'Ambition' document to develop a network of 'community anchors' and enable the third sector to take the lead in developing this network

The city should build the development of Asset Based Community Development & activities such as the Climate and Poverty Truth Commissions, to enable communities to have more control over the choices the city makes

For many participants, the scale of the challenges the city faces and the opportunity for Leeds to shape a new course suggested a need to take a new approach to conversations with citizens. Examples of impactful work in Leeds, such as the Climate Commission & Poverty Truth Commission, go beyond consultation, exploring complex issues and bringing a wide range of views to the fore. Often, the third sector, is a key partner in enabling these deeper conversations.

For instance, work on Asset Based Community Development has enabled new ways to hear first-hand from community members, and for those community members to have more control over what happens in the neighbourhoods in which they live.

One participant suggested that Leeds should develop a citizen's charter that describes how it will involve citizens in debate and the minimum service that they should expect from their public bodies.

In a discussion about developing a more sustainable transport policy at one of our local events it was noted that a locally hosted conversation, delivered through the third sector, might generate different solutions. In this conversation, there was a strong view that Leeds still needs a mass transport system and lower cost bus travel. However, it was suggested that investment in community led transport schemes could address some of the city's needs for more flexible public transport whilst making a contribution to addressing the Climate Emergency.

Some participants suggested that Leeds could build on the practice of the best elected members and community committees, further developing their role as 'conveners' who bring together community level social action and actively encourage citizens contribute to debates about the future of the city.

Action: Make improving the quality of ‘community engagement and voice’ a cross-cutting ambition and invest in the third sector as the host of high-quality conversations with communities

The city needs to prioritise businesses that see themselves as corporate citizens of Leeds and re-invest their surpluses in the people of Leeds.

During the events, debates often turned to the role of businesses in making Leeds a healthier, greener and more equitable place. Some participants suggested the city should make investment in not for profits and co-operatives a policy preference as these organisations are committed to re-investing their surpluses for social benefit. Additionally, third sector organisations often place a high value on ‘person centred’ working.

For instance, one conversation focused on the potential for social care co-operatives (informed by a project in York) to provide flexible local employment that places the experience of service users at its heart.

The third sector includes many organisations for whom creating a more environmentally sustainable economy is a key part of their mission to support the move towards a more socially just and less unequal city. The city should see these organisations as key partners in addressing the climate emergency. Additionally, where large scale interventions are planned (e.g. retrofitting housing stock) the city should signal its intentions early and work with the third sector to enable it to achieve the scale to be a delivery partner.

Others discussed the ‘for profit’ sector making a distinction between those organisations that extract wealth from the city and those that see themselves as ‘corporate citizens of Leeds’. There was a strong preference for creating a higher bar around social value for those businesses we welcome to the city (e.g. paying the Real Living Wage).

Action: Set out a city policy preference for working with the not-for-profit sector and invest in social entrepreneurship to meet specific city challenges

Make a robust ‘ask’ of businesses in Leeds to be better Corporate Citizens and build further on existing work to ensure large city institution’s investment delivers greater social value

Enable pathways for businesses that are good Corporate Citizens to work with, and invest in, the third sector