



# THIRD SECTOR LEEDS CONSULTATION RESPONSE:

## WEST YORKSHIRE FAIR WORK CHARTER

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## About [Third Sector Leeds](#)

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

We work closely with large organisations that set the direction for the city, including the Council and the Leeds Clinical Commissioning Group (the NHS) in order to:

- Influence decisions that affect the communities the third sector works with.
- Ensure that as many third sector organisations as possible, particularly the smaller ones, are involved in discussions on city-wide challenges and solutions.
- Ensure third sector organisations can access information and support to help them play their part in changing Leeds for the better.

Our work is shaped by a group of third sector leaders who represent different parts of the sector and by our independent Chair. We hear the voices of the wider third sector through regular events, conversations and written consultation.

## The Fair Work Charter

TSL welcomes the commitment to developing a Fair Work Charter which sets out clear expectations for ensuring that people are properly paid, have security of work conditions and are valued in their workplace.

The third sector's focus is on improving conditions in communities and creating the conditions for fairer work is a critical factor in this aim. In short, the principles of Fair Work set out in the draft Charter align with the third sector's values.

Many third sector organisations have exemplary practice around work, but as a sector we know that our practice is not uniformly excellent and we are not complacent about driving improvement.

We know that in some workplaces there is room for growth around the diversity of our workforce and, in particular, the diversity of people in more senior positions. Whilst, our sector aspires to pay the Real Living Wage and to reduce sessional work sometimes the value of contracts makes this impossible.

We believe that people working in our values driven sector, generally enjoy their work and feel well supported. As a sector, we recognise that we face some challenges in delivering all of the aspirations of the Fair Work Charter and are committed to working closely with our partners to finding solutions that enable us to do so.

## Comments on the specific themes of the Charter

### 1. Opportunity

#### **Inclusive Pathways to Employment and Career Progression**

We strongly support this priority.

At a recent third sector/academic seminar led by [Voluntary Action Leeds](#) and [Leeds ACTS!](#) participants focused on the need for better Information Advice and Guidance throughout people's life course, which engages them in detailed conversation about their work aspirations and their routes towards and through employment. Additionally, participants highlighted the crucial role played by in person informal and community based learning in enabling people to become more ready to seek and sustain employment.

Across West Yorkshire there are an estimated 148,00 volunteers in the third sector giving 10.6 million hours of their time<sup>1</sup>. TSL supports volunteering as inherently valuable for communities and for volunteers. For some volunteers, it also offers a bridge into paid employment, so there is distinct role for recognising the value of volunteering within the Fair Work Charter.

We believe that the third sector, with its strengths in informal education, support for the whole person and in volunteering has a crucial role to play in enabling better pathways.

#### **Inclusive Recruitment Practices**

Third sector organisations have inclusion at their heart, and as such we strongly support this area of focus. In our sector we have some exemplary organisations who have deeply embedded Inclusion, Equality and Diversity into their recruitment and progression practices.

However, as a sector, we recognise that we face challenges. In particular, many of our organisations are smaller employers. Some of these organisations have limited capacity to develop the human resource processes to understand the diversity of their workforce and to implement best practice in recruitment and progression.

Our infrastructure organisations are committed to raising the quality of recruitment practices and would welcome support and guidance on how smaller organisations can respond to this challenge.

#### **Flexible working arrangements**

We strongly support this area of focus and believe that it is a key strength of our sector.

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<sup>1</sup> The Structure, dynamics and impact of the VCSE in West Yorkshire and Harrogate (2021) [Research and reports :: West Yorkshire Health & Care Partnership \(wypartnership.co.uk\)](#)

## **2. Security**

### **Fair Pay for Everyone**

For TSL, achieving the Real Living Wage for all should be a cornerstone of our region's mission to improve lives. As a sector we are committed to the Real Living Wage and have many organisations that achieve this aim.

However, some third sector organisations have reported that the contract values for their work mean that it is not possible to pay the Real Living Wage for all their workers and remain viable. Some organisations in the care sector have reported that contract values do not allow for equivalence of pay with public sector employees doing similar roles. This has important implications for equity, for the affordability of employee living costs and for third sector recruitment.

We would welcome discussions with our partners about how contract values can be raised, or required outputs lowered, enabling us to deliver the fair pay to which we all aspire.

### **Fair Work conditions and guaranteed hours**

We welcome the commitment to a minimum of 16 hours in principle, however we would note that our sector has numbers of sessional workers where this minimum number hours may not currently be feasible.

One organisation report that they have a bank of sessional workers who support short-term projects and provide cover for staff absence. They state that they do not use Zero Hours contracts and sessional workers are not expected to be available for work on demand (they can, and do, turn down work according to their availability and life circumstances). This organisation draws its sessional workers from a wide range of backgrounds and it reports that many employees value the flexibility to deliver work they believe in, in ways that suit their life circumstances.

We would also note that for some people entering the workforce (from volunteering and from other routes) there may be an intermediate step consisting of fewer paid hours which enables them to gain confidence in their new role.

One suggestion has been that third sector organisations could, with support, create a hub for sessional workers on standard contracts that would smooth out variability in work for employees (one example of 'intermittent' sessional work was people employed to deliver holiday play schemes). Whilst the practical challenges to such a scheme should not be underestimated, we would be keen to discuss ways in which we could work with partners to achieve this aim.

### **Inclusive work environments free from bullying, discrimination, harassment and victimisation**

Creating an inclusive work environment is core to the values of the third sector and we believe that the vast majority of third sector workplaces are welcoming places that value all colleagues.

We know that established third sector organisations have effective human resource policies that enable them to achieve an inclusive environment and that some organisations demonstrate exceptional practice.

However, we recognise that some organisations – particularly the smaller ones - would benefit from advice around their human resource policy and practice. Like other sectors, we can face challenges in ensuring that we respond effectively to issues that fall short of formal intervention, but need tackling to ensure that we create inclusive workplaces. Part of TSL's commitment to addressing this need is [our toolkit on addressing microaggressions in the workplace](#).

### **3. Wellbeing**

Third Sector organisations are values driven and are committed to creating a welcoming environment. However, many of our colleagues work in high pressure roles in communities and organisations report that, post covid, there is a high level of stress, anxiety and exhaustion.

Because many of our organisations are smaller, it can be challenging to put in place the formal workplace wellbeing schemes that enable colleagues to address these challenges. TSL would welcome a conversation about ways to extend workplace wellbeing support; perhaps by developing a collective scheme.

### **4. Employee Voice**

We strongly support all elements of the employee voice theme and encourage all third sector organisations to recognise unions, have staff representation on their boards of trustees, develop effective staff consultation mechanisms and to understand the perspectives of colleagues with particular life experiences and backgrounds.

### **5. Fulfilment**

#### **Learning & Development and Performance Management**

We believe that every workplace should offer a range of learning and development opportunities that meet colleagues aspirations and that use an appropriate range of formal and informal continuous professional development. Critical to delivering effective learning and development is a system of regular positive, solution-focused conversations with managers.

As with our observations elsewhere, we note that achieving the range of learning and development support to which we aspire can be challenging for our sector's smaller organisations. Often, our strategic partners are active in enabling the third sector to participate in their learning and development systems (e.g, there are often opportunities for third sector colleagues to participate in Council or NHS run training). We welcome this support, and are keen to continue to closer develop learning and development relationships both within the third sector and with our partners.

### **Opportunities to support civil society**

As a part of civil society we believe that the third sector, can and does, lead the way in mutual aid, in purchasing from our peers and in giving our time to community work. For instance, we know that many of our sector leaders provide informal mentoring to colleagues and that practitioners at all levels offer their [skills on a pro bono basis](#).

Infrastructure organisations like Voluntary Action Leeds already provide an [Employer Supported Volunteering service](#) and independent grant makers like [Leeds Community Foundation](#) provide opportunities for businesses to offer funding support to critical third sector work.

We know that employers across the region are keen to give their time and energy to support civil society and we believe that engagement with civil society enables employees to feel more connected to the places they live and work. However, in Leeds, there is room to grow structured frameworks that enable relationships to form and flourish. We would welcome a conversation about how we can work together to unlock the potential for employers to engage with civil society.