

# Defining Community and Third Sector Needs from Digital Transformation

Following cross sector consultation, Leeds is developing a city digital strategy. This paper summarises what Forum Central, Voluntary Action Leeds and Third Sector Leeds, as key advocates for the sector, feel are the third sector's needs around digital transformation, in line with what the sector has fed into the strategy to date.

**July 2022**



## What is the paper about?

Following cross sector consultation, Leeds is developing a city digital strategy. This paper summarises what Forum Central, Voluntary Action Leeds and Third Sector Leeds, as key advocates for the sector, feel are the third sector's needs around digital transformation, in line with what the sector has fed into the strategy to date.

The paper focuses on the following elements of digital transformation:

- Provision and translation of core activities (digital/hybrid service provision)
- Digital integration (data infrastructure & business intelligence)
- Data sharing (organisational & service data; person/patient data)
- Digital inclusion/capability (third sector, communities & patients/citizens)

## Who is this paper for?

The paper is for anyone working in the third sector in Leeds, but may also offer insight relevant to partners working in other sectors.

## Why has it been written?

This paper seeks to broaden the conversation around digital transformation within the third sector, by setting out four priority areas of development. We want to hear your views on these priorities. Are they the right ones? Is there anything missing? Would you/your organisation be willing to support a call for action based around these priorities?

## Context

We know that digital exclusion is disproportionately encountered by groups and communities that experience broader social inequalities. As digital plays an increasingly prominent role in service and support delivery, third sector organisations engaged with communities experiencing inequalities face additional challenges and demands on resources, to enable underserved communities access to mainstream services and support. However, if we can ensure that all communities have access to digital technology and skills, then the new opportunities from digital transformation could help reduce inequalities.

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and shown how critical digital transformation is for the future of our society. The third sector adapted quickly to the pandemic, taking many services and support activities online; but progress in other areas of digital has been slower.

Findings from the [Third Sector Resilience Survey](#), published in December 2020, highlighted risks around the digital capabilities of third sector organisations and their staff, with particular reference to the challenges the sector faces with regards to colleagues keeping their skills up to date and the capacity to invest in digital technologies. The pandemic has also been a catalyst for greater debate around the role of digital within the third sector, not only regarding service delivery/support, and digital inclusion but also, digital integration

with system partners; compliance with information governance protocols and development of the digital infrastructure to support joined-up working.

The third sector has been represented throughout the consultation and development process for the city digital strategy, however we know that many organisations are thinking about their digital future and may need to understand a little more about the city-wide conversation, before having their say. This paper seeks to broaden out the conversation beyond the third sector representatives involved to date.

### Priority 1: Provision and translation of core activities

Across the pandemic, third sector organisations within Leeds have adapted their support offer in tune with guidance and good practice. The benefits and challenges for the sector were explored in [‘The New Different’](#) project delivered by Forum Central.

This adjustment in methods and means of service and support delivery has provided opportunities and challenges for organisations and the communities they serve. It has also had immediate and ongoing implications for organisations in terms of development of digital infrastructure (e.g., devices, broadband provision), but also staff training to support the growth in skills, confidence, and trust in digital provision.

**Case Study: ALaDDIN**

The Autism & Learning Disability Digital Inclusion Network (ALaDDIN) have produced a [short film](#) in celebration of the Good Things Foundation’s #getonlineweek, showcasing how members have responded to the pandemic by supporting their members to get online. The film illustrates how the third sector dynamically translated face to face service provision to digital platforms at the early stages of the pandemic, something which organisations continue to embrace, in line with the needs of the communities they work with.

**We believe** the third sector could provide services and support more effectively, if there was additional investment in:

- Support for training existing colleagues and volunteers
- Enabling access to digital development expertise
- Building better hardware and software systems to give parity to the sector

## Priority 2: Digital integration

While the third sector's great strength is its diversity - different organisations meet the needs of different client groups or design services in different ways – our diversity also creates challenges:

- Community members and the practitioners that support them can find it difficult to navigate the breadth of services and support available to them, and find the right support to fit the individual.
- Third sector partners do not have access to information which enables them to understand the depth and breadth of support available through the third sector, restricting signposting and referrals into and within the sector.
- Policy makers, funders and commissioners find it difficult to map services (both in terms of client group and geography) – investing significant resource in repeated exercises, missing areas of need, and limiting the visibility of the diverse third sector.

**We believe** that these challenges could be significantly reduced if there was a shared, accessible, and reliable resource which held and presented the third sector offer.

- This resource could be promoted to third (and public) sector partners as a city-wide solution to giving their provision visibility.

### Case Study: LOOP (Leeds Open Online Platform)

Over recent years partners have invested considerable resources in developing Loop, an open-source data platform to create a centralised data store of service information. The code to enable the database has been completed, but the front-end integration with key directories has not been designed, and organisations have not yet been asked to commit to using the Loop platform.

With consistent focus and a widely shared strategy to promote Loop as the city's preferred solution to sharing service information, it holds the potential to significantly improve community access.

## Priority 3: Data sharing

In our mixed economy of service and support delivery, the third sector plays an increasingly critical role in meeting the needs of citizens. Often the third sector is a recipient of referrals from public sector organisations, because it is able to tailor and target its offer to people's life experience. However, third sector organisations rarely have access to essential information that is routinely available to public sector partners.

Furthermore, the current mechanisms do not enable a two-way flow of information as part of conversation with third sector organisations, which can improve the whole system offer to citizens. This lack of information leads to significant risks and challenges for service providers seeking to deliver joined-up, person-centred care, reducing the efficiency of all service providers, and crucially resulting in fragmented provision for citizens.

*“The less I have to repeat myself to professionals when I am unwell the better – I’d like the info to be shared to help people talk to me better and create an accurate picture of my mental health needs too.”*

**Current or past user of mental health services in Leeds**

*“Several times when I visited our client, her health was so bad, that I insisted on contacting her GP for them to carry out a home visit. Our client was becoming increasingly frail and underweight. When I tried to gain any information from her GP about who was involved in her care, I was told again due to data protection that the information was limited.”*

**Third Sector Provider**

*“We have often been concerned that our lone worker may walk into a Safeguarding situation that could have been avoided had we had access to vital risk information.”*

**Third Sector Provider**

**Case Study - Forward Leeds:** ‘We have multiple examples where clients have been discharged from the ward, where discharge information has not been received in time to support continuation of treatment, equally where service users have claimed admissions hoping for us to reduce their medication pickups or hoping to access other medications they report were prescribed on the wards.

Access to [a shared patient record] would allow us to have a more definitive and accurate picture of the situation and support clinical decision making with treatment planning. On balance this also increases the resource on the wards, where staff would be ordinarily asked to provide this information, as identified above, they often face their own pressures and information does not always get to us in a timely manner.

Clinical staff will be able to work with patients to make the best decisions for their care, access to test results will reduce duplication of tests, it will support better coordination of care, supporting the teams in spending more time on safer care and less paperwork.’

**We believe** that our city can improve the sharing of information by:

- Identifying key data systems that need to be shared and enabling the participation of the third sector in them; for instance, by building on pilot work to extend the Leeds Care Record into the third sector.
- Identifying and addressing challenges experienced by the sector, such as demonstrating information governance compliance, and completion of the [Data](#)

[Security Protection Toolkit](#), that limits the third sector’s access to information systems.

## Priority 4: Digital inclusion

In 2020 [Healthwatch Leeds](#), and the [People’s Voices Partnership \(PVP\)](#) the [Digitising Leeds](#) report and updated this in October, with the [Digital Inclusion in Leeds: How Does It Feel For Me?](#) report. Collating information captured through a range of different methods and sources, the reports highlighted the experiences of the people of Leeds throughout the move to digitised health and care support and provision during Covid-19. Findings from the reports illustrate the need to take a nuanced approach to digital, which recognises inequalities within communities, the barriers faced and the accessibility requirements of different people and groups in Leeds - *“Digital is not a “one-size fits all””*.

The third sector plays an important ‘bridging’ role to communities, providing a key means of upskilling digitally excluded citizens and promoting the use of digital services. During the pandemic the third sector has worked closely with the [100% Digital Leeds](#) team, on a range of tailored programmes aiming to address digital exclusion within some of our least served communities.

### Case Study: Beeston & Middleton Local Care Partnership (LCP) Digital Health Hub

Innovations such as Digital Health Hubs enable citizens to understand the kind of support available to them, and where they might find it. The model was developed with Beeston and Middleton LCP, tested with York Road LCP and will be rolled out across the city over the next 18+ months. Over £200,000 of Health Inequalities funding has been secured to support the work. The funding will be used to build the digital inclusion capacity and resilience of third sector organisations, focussing on the development of Digital Health Hubs in the 10% most deprived areas within the LCPs.

**Support with digital: Beeston and Middleton Local Care Partnership**

Digital Health Hubs are local community spaces with friendly people ready to help people build digital skills and confidence, get online, and use the tools that can make it easier for them to manage their health and wellbeing and engage with the NHS in the way that works best for them.

**100% Digital Leeds**  
July 2022

Help using digital health tools such as:

- NHS App
- NHS website
- Leeds Hospitals Patient Hub
- eConsult
- Zoom & Teams
- myCOPD
- myHeart
- Mindwell-leeds.org
- My Pregnancy Notes

Help to make the most of the internet to do things like:

- Booking appointments
- Managing prescriptions
- Video consultations
- Mental health support
- Symptom checking
- Managing your conditions

Have you got the NHS App? Simplify your life. Download the NHS App

Map locations: Holbeck Together, Holbeck Community Centre, Beeston Hub, Beeston Village Community Centre, MHA South Leeds, Middleton Family Centre, Middleton Elderly Aid, Dewsbury Road Hub, Hamara, Watsonia, St George's Centre, Middleton Elderly Aid, Tenants Hall, Belle Isle Senior Action, BITMO, Cranmore and Raylands, Hunslet Hub.



**We believe** that further investment in digital inclusion is needed, and we welcome the opportunity to explore how 100% Digital and third sector infrastructure organisations working together, might establish partnerships that can attract further investment.

## Recommendations

Linked to the priorities referenced above, we are suggesting four lines of action.

**Priority 1:** Continue to support third sector organisations to translate current and future activities to digital/hybrid platforms in line with the needs of communities served; through investment in inclusive infrastructure, roles, and training.

**Priority 2:** Improve access to, and quality of information about third sector provision for system partners and citizens through investment in shared digital information infrastructure.

**Priority 3:** Enable relevant third sector organisations to access and share information about citizens of Leeds, in support of joined up, person-centred delivery; through investment in shared information governance roles.

**Priority 4:** Continue to extend the role that the third sector plays in providing personalised support to the people in Leeds who are most vulnerable to digital exclusion, through work with 100% Digital Leeds.

## What next?

Increasingly, the third sector is a key partner in the delivery of core services for people in Leeds. The shift to digital by default and the growth in digital technologies stimulated by the pandemic has provided positive progress for the sector, but also some challenges for people and third sector organisations. There is an inherent risk within this development, should the sector not gain investment in resources which enable organisations involved in system transformation to keep pace with the growth in digital. You can find further reading on some of the digital work we have covered in this paper on [Digital Enablement of the Third Sector in Leeds](#).

We expect that a digital strategy for the city will be published in the near future, with opportunities for ongoing conversations with the sector to follow. We plan to build on the work that Forum Central, Third Sector Leeds, Voluntary Action Leeds and many others have been doing around digital transformation, continuing to make the case for investment in the third sector. We will commit to keeping members involved through regular updates and sharing opportunities to influence the work moving forward.