

HOW TSL IS  
WORKING TO  
SUPPORT THE  
SECTOR THROUGH  
CURRENT  
FINANCIAL  
CHALLENGES

**AN UPDATE FROM KIM GROVES;  
INDEPENDENT CHAIR OF TSL**

November 2023

## CONTEXT

On 23 October, TSL shared feedback from a meeting with the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council at which they set out the significant financial challenge the Council faces. All of our public sector partners are in the position of having to reduce their expenditure, including reviewing the funding of third sector organisations, through both grants and contracts.

## THE ROLE OF TSL

There are no easy answers to our shared financial challenges. However, TSL is committed to constructive engagement and dialogue between the Third Sector and our public sector partners, to ensure that we take a partnership approach to decision making. We believe that in many cases, restructuring provision in a way that draws on the strengths of the third sector will help to lessen the impact on communities, particularly those experiencing the greatest health and social inequalities.

## THE ACTION TSL HAS TAKEN AND PLANS TO TAKE IN THE COMING WEEKS

Since the Council updated partners on its financial challenges, we have written to the Leader and Chief Executive of the Council reaffirming the sector's commitment to partnership working. In this TSL has re-stated the case that the sector plays a vital role in supporting and enabling communities, and that third sector provision helps to mitigate against increased reliance on higher cost statutory services for crisis and/or emergency care.

On 14 November, a wide group of third sector leaders met with senior colleagues from the Council including; Cllr Harland (Executive Member for Communities), Tom Riordan (Chief Executive), James Rogers (Director of Communities, Housing and the Environment) and Mariana Pexton (Director of Strategy and Resources). The meeting explored ways of working together (as part of a new series of regular breakfast meetings).

TSL used this opportunity to highlight the findings the *State of the Third Sector in Leeds 2022* report and to explore how we can mitigate the challenges the sector faces, through the city's *Third Sector* and *Volunteering Strategies*. The debate was grounded in the priorities set out in the *Best City Ambition* and the Team Leeds commitment to partnership working.

At the 14 November meeting, colleagues provided reassurance that they Council knows the importance of the third sector in enabling and supporting communities. Whilst colleagues acknowledged that there may be some reductions in the Council's funding of the sector, they were clear that much of the Council's third sector expenditure is outside of the scope of the work the Council is doing to reduce its deficit.

Some of the key discussions points included:

- there is a clear commitment to working together through the third sectors forums and networks to meet the challenge
- the Council is committed to the principles set out in *The Compact for Leeds* and the *Commissioning Code of Practice*
  - colleagues acknowledged that at this time it may not, in every case, be possible to fully meet the Compact principles (e.g. around notice periods) but it is committed to full engagement with effected organisations at the earliest opportunity
- where there are specific proposals for reductions that will be considered by Executive Board in December, the Council will ensure that relevant organisations are engaged before papers go public on the 5th December.

## NEXT STEPS

TSL is working closely with the sector's infrastructure organisations, Forum Central and Voluntary Action Leeds, to enable difficult conversations and to ensure that there is an open dialogue that may help to reshape services.

Forum Central and Voluntary Action Leeds are particularly focused on maximising available support and resources to help organisations, particularly smaller organisations, at this challenging time. This support will include a focus on effective workforce and Trustee practice.

In the coming weeks TSL plans to meet with public sector colleagues through Third Sector Partnership (the body that brings together the third and public sectors) to recommit to an open conversation and a process for service review that is inclusive for all. There will be a further update on the likely overall impact on the third sector at the next scheduled Third Sector Partnership meeting on 27 November.

We will engage in constructive dialogue with commissioners across key departments to explore the practical actions we can take to achieve the best possible outcomes for communities and for the sector.

## OUR COMMITMENT

- Through this process TSL will seek to hear the views of the third sector and to bring your views to the attention of decision makers.
- TSL, Forum Central and VAL will engage in constructive dialogue with commissioners with the view to reshaping provision and protecting vital community and preventative services wherever possible
- TSL will make the case that the third sector is uniquely well placed to meet the needs of communities - particularly those most marginalised and facing the greatest inequalities - who are also likely to be disproportionately high users of costlier crisis services
- TSL will work through Forum Central and Voluntary Action Leeds to undertake whatever practical action is possible to help the right conversations to happen
- TSL will provide feedback on the work we are undertaking
- TSL will explore ways in which we can bring the sector together to influence the central government funding decisions which are having a negative on the communities of our city

Should you have any queries or comments on this update please contact [\*\*megan.russell@val.org.uk\*\*](mailto:megan.russell@val.org.uk)