

Learning from COVID-19

Communities in control

Charities, social enterprises and community organisations are a fundamental part of our city's social fabric, providing vital services for communities and the most vulnerable in our society in good times and in bad.

Nationally it is clear that the way Civil Society, Local Authorities, NHS and businesses have worked together to respond to COVID-19 is unprecedented in peace time. In Leeds we are working in a solutions focussed way, where organisations are working together to support people and communities across the city. TSL is determined to build upon this impressive record of positive partnerships and collective action.

Our role

As the strategic forum for the third sector in Leeds, TSL intends to:

- gather and share intelligence about how the sector is developing new relationships
- articulate priorities for collective action that responds to the needs of communities
- bring third sector partners together to identify lead organisations to take work forward

In doing so we will build on our existing relationships, working alongside a wide range of statutory, business and other partners. Our focus will be on solutions and action rather than formalised structures.

Our track record

Prior to COVID-19 the third sector in Leeds was at the forefront of work to develop more community-centred approaches, including:

- the development of Local Care Partnerships across the city
- working with the Local Enterprise Partnership to explore the idea of an inclusive economy
- leading on personalised holistic approaches including Asset-Based Community Development, Better Conversations and Restorative Practice

Our response to COVID-19

The citywide response to COVID-19 has seen the third sector work closely with partners to respond rapidly and flexibly to support people and communities in various ways:

- the Community Care Volunteering programme has brought together public sector and local third sector organisations to deliver critical new welfare services
- Third sector organisations working with specific communities and more marginalised groups have come together to gather intelligence, share information and respond to critical challenges for these communities of shared interest
- Leeds' food distribution network has brought together a complex web of public sector and third sector partners to get food relief where it is most needed
- across the city, groups and organisations have partnered with each other in different ways to address immediate needs and ensure communities are connected.

If we can capture this flexibility and innovation now and take the best of these approaches into our future work, we can make a real difference for people and communities, particularly those who are most disadvantaged.

Our priorities

There are a number of critical areas where concerted action by all partners to build new relationships could make a significant difference for communities. TSL calls on all partners to consider how collaborative working could be maximised in these priority areas.

- **Neighbourhoods** – build on the learning from Community Hubs to develop an enhanced network of community infrastructure
- **Health** – further the development of Local Care Partnerships and third sector leadership capacity to increase focus and investment in the tackling the wider determinants of health
- **Environment** – continue the development of community-led approaches to climate action and ensure that these partnerships influence strategic priorities

- **Communities of Interest** – build on the new structures that have emerged and galvanise the local relationships that have enabled resilience in these communities
- **Volunteering** – take concerted action to re-energise volunteering and capture the attitudes to social action generated during COVID-19 across the city
- **Business and enterprise** – develop relationships between the third sector and private sector and build recognition of the third sector as a distinctive business sector and key contributor to the development of an inclusive economy.

In the coming weeks we will publish an action plan that captures the progress made and recommends continuing action to deliver over the short, medium and longer term.

Our vision

To guide this work, TSL believes that research undertaken by Locality UK neatly describes how we should develop a new strategic relationship with our public sector partners. The six-step roadmap aims to shift power to people, build local capacity and ownership, and put neighbourhoods in the lead.

1. Co-create the vision for localism with communities
2. Match the ambition with internal organisational change
3. Map community assets and governance capacity
4. Invest directly in community infrastructure
5. Embed the power partnership in community engagement and local governance
6. Provide flexible funding for local social action.

A note on sector resilience

As a city, Leeds has risen to the challenge of COVID-19 and the third sector had been a key partner in this response. As this paper outlines, TSL believes that as we move into the ‘new normal’ there is an unprecedented opportunity to capture the best of what we have achieved and build a better city for our communities. However, the recent sector resilience survey shows that many parts of our sector are under strain as a result of COVID-19 and resources will be needed in order to sustain services and new ways of working.

In order to take our vision forward, we need to ensure that we maintain the diversity of the third sector, as its greatest strength. Our short to medium response around sector resilience will be to:

- work with partners to gain and share intelligence about sector resilience
- lead action to galvanise the third sector in offering mutual aid to organisations under strain
- Advocate for the sector to be given access to the same level of resilience support as other sectors
- co-ordinate the distribution of resilience information and advice for the third sector