

# VSGWL 5-Year Strategic Plan 2025-2030

## Introduction

Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian (VSGWL) is the Third Sector Interface (TSI) operating in West Lothian. Our primary purpose is to promote, develop and support West Lothian's Third Sector. We are a membership organisation of locally based charities, social enterprises and volunteer-led community organisations. We aim to strengthen the third sector and social enterprises and strengthen partnerships that deliver real change by connecting people, ideas and resources.



We look to help the third sector and social enterprises in West Lothian in the following ways:

- Building Capacity
- Source of Knowledge
- Connecting partners
- Voice of the Sector



## Context

Without doubt the last few years have been some of the most challenging times that many of us can ever remember for the voluntary and community sector, for volunteering and for social enterprises. We've had over 14 years of austerity whilst the pandemic has changed many lives and communities irrevocably. And now, we face significant cost-of living challenges which profoundly affect community groups and charities on the front line. We know the value of these amazing, often small and very community-led groups: how they change and save lives; how they make their local areas better; how they practically help people who have suffered more than most of us can ever imagine.

Charities and community groups stand with people who face structural inequality and daily discrimination, providing emergency assistance to people facing destitution. Across Scotland and at a local level in West Lothian, the third sector plays a pivotal role in addressing societal challenges and fostering community well-being. The sector is instrumental in helping to tackle the impacts of poverty and inequality, which are a huge drain on economic and societal well-being, or in the aspirational development of a well-being economy.

Despite its multifaceted contributions, the economic significance of the third sector is often overlooked and missing in economic strategies and business support programmes. The economic contribution of the third sector in Scotland—its substantial impact on employment, purchasing, and commercial activities—cannot be underestimated.

The third sector—which includes charities, community and voluntary groups, and other non-profit distributing organisations—primarily provides services that are important in reducing inequality and disadvantage and improving health, well-being, housing, and community cohesion. Third sector organisations can help to reduce public expenditure, either by providing services in health, social care, or education, which the state would otherwise have to provide, or by reducing the need to use public services.

Crucially, the third sector needs recognition in national and local economic strategies and more parity with government policy and departments. The sector should be valued in the same way that the public and private sectors are and receive appropriate support. The local and national economic and political landscape is increasingly complex, challenging, and uncertain and is shaped by several key factors.

A social enterprise is a business that trades for a social and/or environmental purpose. It will have a clear sense of its social aim—what difference it is trying to make, who it aims to help, and how it plans to do it. Unlike a traditional business, which focuses on making profits for its shareholders, a social enterprise uses business practices to achieve socially positive goals.

## Economic

### 1. Funding Challenges:

- Despite economic growth locally, third sector organisations and social enterprises face funding challenges. Sustaining services and expanding capacity requires continuous efforts to secure diverse funding sources, including grants, donations, and social enterprise models.



## 2. Impact of the cost-of-living crisis:

- Inflation may have finally hit the Bank of England's target rate, but only after three years of rising costs. The crisis is impacting on everyone – individuals, communities, and businesses. The impact is greatest on those who are already vulnerable and disadvantaged – the crisis will only worsen already entrenched inequalities. There are real concerns that the critical support and services provided by the sector to those most disadvantaged in local communities will be cut back or simply not be there in the future. Furthermore, many of the staff and volunteers in the sector are themselves, directly impacted by the crisis.



## 3. Impact of COVID-19:

- The pandemic has had a profound impact on the local economy, increasing demand for third sector services, particularly in areas such as mental health and food security. The sector has shown resilience but continues to navigate the long-term effects of the pandemic.



## Political

### 1. Local and National Policies:

- The Scottish Government's and West Lothian Council's policies on community empowerment, community wealth building and social justice provide a supportive framework for third sector activities.



### 2. Advocacy and Representation:

- The Third Sector and Social Enterprise play a crucial role in representing the voice and interests of those we look to support within West Lothian Council, Community Planning Partnership (CPP) and Integration Joint Board structures. We help to shape policy, influence decision making and bring about positive change and better outcomes for local people and communities.



## Demographic

- The latest population statistics for West Lothian (National Records Scotland), indicates the area's population stood at 185,580 in June 2021, the 5th highest population in Scotland. In the 10 years previous, the population in the local area had grown 19.5%, the second highest increase of all the local authorities in Scotland and two and a half times that of the Scottish average (7.6%).
- Further increases in the local population are also projected, with a 5.9% increase predicted by 2028, three times the increase of the national average. By 2043, West Lothian's population is expected to increase to 203,320.
- West Lothian also faces a growing and ageing population. The numbers of people in West Lothian aged 65 to 74 is expected to increase by 19% by 2028 with those aged over 75 increasing by 39%. This will only further increase pressures on third sector services against the backdrop of financial uncertainty and budget cuts. This will only further increase pressures on third sector services against the backdrop of financial uncertainty and budget cuts.



## 5 Year strategic Plan 2025- 2030

VSGWL is proud to present our 5-year strategic plan 2025-2030, a comprehensive approach designed to strengthen and support the vibrant third sector and social enterprise community within West Lothian.

This plan outlines our vision, mission, and strategic priorities for the next five years, reflecting our commitment to fostering a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable third sector.

Over the next five years, VSGWL will focus on enhancing collaboration, building capacity, and driving innovation across the sector. Our strategic plan is informed by consultation with our key internal and external stakeholders, including our staff and trustee teams, West Lothian Council, Integration Joint Board (IJB) and local charities, social enterprises and community groups that we strive to support and strengthen.

Key to our strategy is the recognition of the critical role that the third sector and social enterprises plays in improving the quality of life for people across all local communities. By supporting and empowering our third sector partners, we aim to create a more connected, empowered, and thriving community.

We invite you to join us on this journey as we work together to achieve our shared ambition and make a lasting impact on the lives of those we serve.

## Vision and Mission

**Vision:** Stronger communities through a thriving third sector.

**Mission:** To support West Lothian's third sector and social enterprises by fostering collaboration, resilience and innovation to address community needs.



## Our Values

**Inclusivity:** We embrace diversity and strive to create an environment where everyone feels welcomed, valued and respected.

**Integrity:** We are committed to transparency, accountability, and ethical practices in all our actions.

**Solution Focussed:** We are committed to providing the best customer experience to all those that use our services.

## Strategic Goals and Objectives

