

GOOD JOBS, BETTER HEALTH, FAIRER FUTURES LISTENING EXERCISE IMPACT SUMMARY



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Introduction

This summary provides an overview of the impact that participation in the Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures (GJBH) Listening Exercise and subsequent partnership activity has had on community anchor organisations, city anchor institutions, and local communities in Leeds. It draws on follow-up interviews with three community anchors involved in the exercise, as well as wider reflections on relationships, learning, and changes in practice that have developed as a result of this work.

The Listening Exercise methodology was originally developed by the Leeds Community Anchor Network (LCAN) as a structured approach to surface insight from lived experience, identify community priorities, and shape collective action. In this project, it was piloted in partnership with city anchor institutions to explore barriers to accessing good jobs, particularly for people in communities facing complex and intersecting inequalities, and to test how collaboration between community and city anchors might lead to more inclusive and effective solutions. This summary reflects on what has changed since the exercise, and the extent to which it has influenced local action, organisational practice, and strategic thinking.

Who took part?

Leeds Inclusive Anchor Network

The Leeds Inclusive Anchors Network has provided a vital platform for collaboration between the city's largest public sector employers - including NHS trusts, universities, colleges, and utilities.

Established to drive inclusive growth, the network harnesses the collective influence of its members to benefit local communities through local procurement, targeted employment pathways, community engagement, and a shared commitment to equity and representation.

Different Inclusive Anchor Network members (city anchors) engage with Inclusive Anchor Network programmes in ways that reflect their specific priorities and areas of focus. For the GJBH project, the key city anchors involved were Leeds City Council, Luminate Education Group, and the Leeds Health and Care Academy - a partnership between local NHS trusts, the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB), and Leeds City Council.

Leeds Community Anchor Network

Leeds Community Anchor Network (LCAN) is a network of locally-rooted organisations covering all 33 wards in Leeds. These organisations act as a 'gateway' in their community, connecting and facilitating collaboration between smaller and grassroots organisations in the area, to effectively support their local communities.

The Listening Exercise is an approach designed by LCAN. The primary purpose of the exercise is to ensure that LCAN's activities, and those of its member organisations, reflect the real and evolving priorities of the communities they serve. By gathering and analysing community perspectives in a consistent and structured way, LCAN aims to track trends, surface insight from lived experience, and create a mandate for advocacy and action at city level. This approach is rooted in the belief that sustainable change is best shaped by those closest to the challenges. Three community anchor organisations took part in the GJBH pilot of the listening exercise:

New Wortley Community Association (NWCA) - Representing Armley Community Anchor Network, NWCA is a well-established anchor in west Leeds. It provides a wide range of services and activities including wellbeing support, English language and digital skills classes, youth and family activities, and volunteering and employment programmes.

Give a Gift - Based in Harehills, Give a Gift supports refugee and asylum-seeking families, particularly from Muslim and South Asian backgrounds, and other disadvantaged communities. Their work includes food and hardship support, casework, employability training, volunteering, and projects aimed at tackling digital exclusion and supporting community cohesion.

LS14 Trust - LS14 Trust is an organisation based in East Leeds, delivering a wide range of support and activities for residents, including youth work, wellbeing services, and community development initiatives. As part of this work, they also convene and coordinate We Are Seacroft – the local anchor network in Seacroft, which brings together a range of statutory and third-sector partners working collectively to improve outcomes in the area.

Project overview

The Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures (GJBH) listening exercise project was designed to explore how the skills and potential of local communities could be better recognised and supported through collaboration between community and city anchor organisations.

- **Listening exercise** - Community anchors at New Wortley Community Centre, Give a Gift, and LS14 Trust each spoke with up to 20 local residents using a short, 5-minute "postcard chat" format. Guided by an asset-based approach, participants were asked about their skills, how they could be better used, and the difference this would make in their lives. Those interested were then invited to join a follow-up focus group.

- **In-Depth Focus Groups** – These focus groups allowed residents to speak more openly about the barriers they face to meaningful employment. City anchor representatives were invited to listen directly to community perspectives and begin building relationships rooted in shared understanding.
- **Follow-Up Activity** – Following the initial engagement, several community anchors began working more closely with city anchors to co-develop new or improved local employment support offers, shaped by what they had heard.

Methodology

This report provides a descriptive summary of the impact of the Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures (GJBH) Listening Exercise and related partnership work. It is not intended as a formal evaluation, but instead captures self-reported reflections from participants to inform future collaboration between community and city anchor organisations in Leeds.

Data for this report was gathered through two main methods:

- **Semi-structured interviews with community anchors** – Key staff from New Wortley Community Association, Give a Gift, and LS14 Trust took part in informal, one-hour interviews. These explored their involvement in the Listening Exercise, partnership activity, and any observed shifts in practice or community outcomes. Interviews were informal, held online or in person, and transcribed where recorded.
- **Online survey of city anchors** – An online survey was shared with participating city anchor institutions to gather feedback on their engagement, any changes in approach, and reflections on impact and learning.

- Leeds Beckett University
- Leeds City Council (100% Digital Leeds and Employment and Skills teams)
- Luminate Education Group
- Northern Gas Networks
- University of Leeds

Data collected through both methods was analysed by the Research and Evaluation team at Voluntary Action Leeds. The findings presented in this report focus on capturing descriptive insight into what has changed, what has been learned, and how relationships have evolved since the Listening Exercise.

Survey responses

This survey gathered feedback from 9 respondents across city anchor institutions.

Engagement with the Listening Exercise

- 100% of respondents had read the Listening Exercise report.
- 44% were directly involved in a focus group, with others noting indirect involvement through colleagues.

Emerging Impacts

Although the project had a short timescale, several respondents identified early, tangible signs of impact, both relational and practical:

- *“The project has already demonstrated early success... placing individuals in volunteer positions... growing caseload for the dedicated LCC Advisor...”* Leeds City Council

- *“The attendee now has a permanent contract with the NHS... the volunteer now has a digital badge confirming they have attended the training.”* Leeds City Council – Employment and Skills
- *“Employment and Skills and Give a Gift are now working together... I will be running some practical sessions at Give a Gift around employability.”* Leeds City Council – Employment and Skills

Key learning and insights

There was consistent recognition of the importance of relational, place-based, and flexible working. Many highlighted that trust and shared values were essential to progress:

- *“I learnt that what may seem simple to myself as an English speaker, may be harder for someone who is new to the country to understand.”* Leeds City Council – Employment and Skills
- *“Providing more insight into the barriers people face, particularly with digital exclusion and how that impacts on who we recruit...”* Leeds Beckett University

There was also acknowledgment of structural challenges:

- *“Just reinforced need for closer ties but capacity to do it all is challenging.”* Luminate Education Group
- *“The contributions from people emphasised the systemic disadvantages that cause so much digital exclusion. That's why we work with so many partners supporting communities in priority neighbourhoods.”* 100% Digital Leeds, Leeds City Council

Looking ahead: Priorities for future phases

Respondents were clear about where the work should go next. Three main themes emerged:

Practical, community-facing action

Organisations highlighted the importance of creating clear, accessible pathways into work and providing direct support to communities:

- Leeds Beckett University suggested *“practical steps that can prepare people for work, through work experience, volunteering, courses or workshops to improve digital skills.”*
- LCC Employment and Skills emphasised partnerships with local businesses to create opportunities, including *“internships or apprenticeships to provide hands-on experience.”*

Understand and evaluate what already exists

Some organisations reflected on the need to better assess the reach and impact of current anchor activity:

- University of Leeds noted that many recommendations are already embedded in their work, but questioned whether these were reaching the right communities: *“What I don't know is how effective these interventions are seen from a community perspective... It may be that our activities are targeting other groups/areas.”* They proposed *“some testing of what anchor institutions are currently doing”* to explore what works and where improvement is needed.
- Leeds City Council – Employment and Skills said it would be useful to *“see how the organisations implement this feedback into their recruitment processes.”*

Sustained collaboration and coordination

A strong theme was the desire to continue the collaborative momentum built through the Listening Exercise:

- Leeds City Council Employment & Skills highlighted the importance of *“continu[ing] to build on the relationships that have been developed through this project.”*

- Luminate Education Group called for stronger communication and links with the voluntary, community, and faith sector: *"Increase links with VCF member organisations to maximise communication... this helps capacity and enables more consistent communication."*
- Northern Gas Networks suggested that this agenda should be integrated at a strategic level: *"It should be a regular topic for discussion at the Leeds Anchors Exec meeting, and also brought into discussion as part of the LAN benchmarking work."*

Summary of activity

Armley (with New Wortley Community Association)

Listening exercise

The listening exercise highlighted a significant barrier to employment for culturally diverse communities in New Wortley; whilst many individuals could speak English conversationally, they lacked the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills needed to complete job applications and succeed in recruitment processes.

"Diverse communities can speak English very well, but can't necessarily write it or read it as well. So when it comes to applying for a job they don't really know where to start. They don't necessarily have the digital tools... but even if you give them the digital tools they don't know how to use them." New Wortley Community Association

These findings were vital in evidencing local need and guiding subsequent activity.

Focus group

NWCA hosted a focus group to explore local barriers to employment in more depth. They invited colleagues from Leeds City Council's Employment and Skills team, and 100% Digital Leeds to attend, creating space for direct dialogue between service providers and residents. Participants were recruited through NWCA's local networks, and they were also able to build on new connections made through a separate LCAN project that had supported relationship-building with grassroots groups.

One of these grassroots groups played a key role in supporting residents to attend, many of whom had never engaged with NWCA before. This proved to be a turning point, as several of these women are now active members of the Conversation Club and continue to participate in other activities at the centre.

"He brought like a lot of people we'd never met before... That kind of all clicked into place for us."

"It was the women that came to that focus group that still come to that [Conversation Club]." New Wortley Community Association

The focus group not only helped deepen understanding of the practical and emotional challenges residents face when looking for work, but also directly informed the design of follow-on activity.

Follow-up activity

A range of interlinked activities emerged following the listening exercise and focus group. Some were developed directly by NWCA in response to the needs identified, while others were the result of opportunities brought by external partners, including anchor institutions, whose approaches, although not explicitly linked to the Good Jobs, Better Health project, aligned closely with NWCA's plans for local support. Together, these activities now form a cohesive and responsive offer:

- **Conversation Club**

Initiated by NWCA as a direct response to the listening exercise and focus group, the Conversation Club provides a safe, women-only space for people to practice English. It has since grown to include two levels, beginner and intermediate, and is now a valued, long-running part of NWCA's weekly programme.

- **Progression support**

NWCA adapted an existing role into a diverse communities support worker post, enabling one-to-one support with job searches, CV writing, training opportunities and volunteering. This flexible model ensures that people are supported at their own pace.

- **Digital IT suite**

With funding secured through 100% Digital Leeds, an existing partner who attended the focus group, NWCA refurbished its IT suite and acquired laptops and tablets. This aligned well with their goal of improving digital access for local residents.

"We got £9,700... to revamp our IT suite and we got laptops and tablets for the Conversation Club." New Wortley Community Association

- **Weekly jobs advice drop-in**

Leeds City Council's Employment and Skills team now delivers a regular Monday drop-in, having scaled up from a previously underused monthly service. This increase in provision followed the success of early engagement and recognition of local demand.

"Due to the success of NWCC Employment drop in we are starting to deliver weekly sessions at Little Community Centre from 2/3/05 and hopefully at Denis Healy Centre shortly." Leeds City Council, Employment & Skills

- **Centre for Warmth**

NWCA was approached by Northern Gas Networks to host a Centre for Warmth in Leeds. Although this opportunity developed independently of the GJBH project, the support it offers around cost of living and energy advice dovetailed with NWCA's existing aims.

"When this came along, it fit really well with what we do around breakfast clubs, pop up events... it's about removing barriers" New Wortley Community Association

What was good about the project

The project created a valuable platform for engaging residents who had not previously connected with NWCA. It helped surface specific needs around employment, skills, and inclusion, and provided the foundation for a responsive and sustainable programme of support.

"It has led to some changes at the centre... it's led to increased membership... and social excursions... the networks that they form as a result of being in the project." New Wortley Community Association

Working in partnership with the council and 100% Digital Leeds was key, and NWCA's approach, rooted in relationships and flexibility, has enabled real, lasting impact.

Several partners described the project as a catalyst for closer collaboration and more joined-up service delivery. For example, Leeds City Council's Employment and Skills team reported that integrating employment support with digital access had enabled more holistic and effective provision.

"Working together has fostered a collaborative environment... and helped deliver wraparound support." Leeds City Council, Employment & Skills

Opportunities to develop

- **Joined-up working**

The experience highlighted the potential for more structured collaboration between anchor institutions and community partners. Some of the most successful partnerships, such as those with Northern Gas Networks and Leeds City Council, emerged organically, outside of formal processes, reflecting the relational nature of this work. These informal connections often bring real value, rooted relationships and shared understanding. However, to ensure broader and more equitable access to opportunities and partnerships, there is also a clear case for more consistent coordination and shared frameworks, utilising the networks that already exist.

"A more effective way of doing it... could have been getting the buy-in from everyone to say, if we are looking to do a piece of work in communities, we would like to pitch that through LCAN." New Wortley Community Association

- **Recognising and resourcing existing momentum**

Both community and city partners reflected that many of the outcomes associated with this project were already in motion and may have happened regardless of GJBH. In this context, the project's value was in reinforcing, accelerating, or bringing coherence to work that was already being driven locally. Future programmes could focus on identifying and resourcing this kind of existing momentum, rather than assuming change must be initiated from scratch.

"I do think a lot of what the outcome was was driven by us and the council... it happened organically." New Wortley Community Association

Harehills (with Give a Gift)

Listening exercise

The listening exercise run by Give a Gift revealed complex and layered barriers to employment for many of the families they support, particularly migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. A consistent theme was that many individuals already possess qualifications and professional experience from their countries of origin, but struggle to translate these into opportunities in the UK job market. Systemic barriers, such as childcare costs, lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, language barriers, and digital exclusion, frequently prevent them from pursuing further training or employment.

"People are qualified nurses, engineers, teachers... but they end up doing low-paid jobs, or nothing at all. Not because they can't work, but because the system isn't set up to let them in." Give a Gift

These findings strengthened existing evidence around local need and catalysed a proactive response from Give a Gift.

Focus group

Give a Gift hosted a focus group involving both service users and major anchor institutions, including NHS, Leeds City Council, and local colleges. This event provided a direct channel for clients to speak with employers and service providers, many of whom were struck by the extent of barriers described, particularly around inaccessible recruitment processes and exclusionary training requirements.

"They were taken aback. It was eye-opening. These people don't want handouts—they want to contribute." Give a Gift

City anchors that attended the session also reflected on the learning: *"what may seem simple to myself as an English speaker, may be harder for someone who is new to the country to understand."* Leeds City Council, Employment & Skills

Follow-up activity

Following the listening exercise and focus group, Give a Gift took forward a series of targeted actions to support local people facing barriers to employment and training:

- **Individual support and advocacy**

Give a Gift offered tailored, one-to-one support to individuals at risk of falling through the gaps. In one case, a young woman was forced to abandon her Level 3 hairdressing course due to funding issues, despite already completing Levels 1 and 2. Give a Gift negotiated with the college and raised the remaining costs so she could complete the course.

“She rang me in tears saying they’re saying I have to stop... So I spoke to the tutor and said, would they be willing to pay half of it? I will find the other half. And they did in the end. We fundraised the other half.” Give a Gift

- **Digital inclusion and training**

With funding from 100% Digital Leeds, Give a Gift established a pop-up IT suite and distributed digital devices to clients. New sessions are being developed to support digital literacy, including how to use basic programmes, email, and search for volunteering and training opportunities. These efforts were shaped directly by insights from the listening exercise, which highlighted affordability, access and confidence as key digital barriers.

“We’re doing some digital inclusion courses... training people how to use a laptop, what apps to use, Excel, Word, Office... A lot of them couldn’t afford Wi-Fi or their own laptop – it’s a necessity, but so is food.” Give a Gift

- **Volunteering programme development**

Give a Gift is building a volunteering programme focused on progression. This includes supporting former peer researchers, who helped lead previous listening work, to develop leadership skills and confidence, with the goal of supporting others and eventually moving into paid roles.

"If we can develop them, empower them with confidence, give them the skills... you're encouraging people to then move on and go into employment opportunities as well." Give a Gift

- **Pathways CIC**

A new community interest company, Pathways for Change, has been set up to support individuals, particularly women, with skills such as food preparation, tailoring, and crafts to explore self-employment and business creation. The project, developed in partnership with York St John University and its business school, offers support on governance, finance, and how to set up a small enterprise in the UK.

"We said, they've got a talent or a gift... they can set up a social enterprise from home. We're in the process of setting that up at the moment." Give a Gift

- **Health & Care Academy bootcamp**

Give a Gift became aware of an 11-week NHS bootcamp through its involvement in the Good Jobs, Better Health work. The programme prioritised applicants without degrees and offered supported entry into NHS roles. As a result of the listening exercise findings, the interview questions were sent in advance, which was a change for this programme. One Give a Gift volunteer successfully completed the training and was offered a full-time role.

"They gave her the interview questions up front. We did a dummy interview with her... she got the job. They were blown away. She just needed the opportunity." Give a Gift

What was good about the project

The project offered Give a Gift an important opportunity for reflection and learning, despite their deep and ongoing work with marginalised communities. Engaging directly with service users through the listening exercise surfaced new perspectives and reinforced the importance of flexible, culturally competent support.

“I hold my hands up – I’m not an expert. I’m still learning. But because I’m working with these communities day in and day out, I’m learning from them.” Give a Gift

It also created space for major employers, including NHS and Leeds City Council, to hear directly from marginalised communities about the barriers they face, and the emotional toll those barriers take on individuals and their families.

New relationships also emerged through the process. For example, Give a Gift’s engagement with 100% Digital Leeds, initiated through the Good Jobs, Better Health focus group, led to successful funding bids for digital devices and a pop-up IT suite, enhancing their ability to offer practical, immediate support to residents.

“The relationship with Ian [from 100% Digital] came out of this. That wouldn’t have happened otherwise.” Give a Gift

Overall, the project helped validate Give a Gift’s community-led approach whilst unlocking new partnerships, resources, and avenues for influence. It laid a foundation for more coordinated, inclusive responses to employment and skills barriers in Leeds.

Opportunities for development

Give a Gift took proactive steps to implement learning from the listening exercise, developing new offers and partnerships in response to what they heard. They expressed a desire for future work to include more formal mechanisms for shared reflection and follow-up across organisations, so that insights gathered through listening can consistently lead to coordinated, long-term action.

“We’ve done a lot of listening. Now it’s time for doing. It would be great to see more follow-up from the city anchors too.” Give a Gift

Give a Gift felt that a different approach was needed to ensure recruitment of asylum seekers and newer migrants was not only inclusive in principle, but accessible in practice. For example, they proposed ideas around alternatives to traditional apprenticeship schemes, specifically designed for adults from migrant or marginalised backgrounds, who may be highly skilled and qualified but without formal UK qualifications. These structured, paid entry points into large employers would allow people to gain the qualifications they need whilst working on the job, supporting both workforce diversity and social mobility.

Seacroft (with LS14 Trust)

Listening exercise

The initial listening exercise led by LS14 Trust uncovered significant but sometimes hidden barriers to employment for local residents – particularly younger people and those in low-paid or insecure work. Despite many having strong skills and a desire to contribute, participants described a lack of accessible opportunities, limited routes into meaningful work, and the pressure to make quick money through informal or risky means. Childcare costs and past history (such as criminal records) also emerged as key barriers to progression.

“There are really able people in our community, working two or three jobs, with good skills... but they’re still not getting in. The system doesn’t recognise what they bring.” LS14 Trust

Younger participants in particular highlighted the lack of visible role models and viable alternatives to informal work, underscoring a broader issue around aspiration and representation in the area.

“If you’ve got a mate with a blingy car making money in the grey economy, where’s the incentive to take the long route?” LS14 Trust

The process itself proved as valuable as the findings. It reinvigorated LS14 Trust’s commitment to deep, community-rooted listening and surfaced new voices, ideas, and leadership potential.

“We say we listen well, but this jolted us... Look who we found, look at the ideas. It underlined my belief in the community having the answers.” LS14 Trust

Focus group and city engagement

LS14 Trust used the learning from the listening exercise to shape subsequent focus groups and influence city-wide discussions. While a follow-up anchor dialogue session was planned, it was ultimately postponed due to timing and capacity constraints. Nevertheless, the listening activity prompted wider engagement with the city, including representation of the work in national forums and ongoing involvement in strategic partnerships through LCAN.

“It became a bit of a catalyst. It gave us the evidence to go and talk to funders, to push further, and to start new conversations.” LS14 Trust

Follow-up activity

The listening exercise served as a steer for existing and emerging work at LS14 Trust and across the We Are Seacroft partnership. Rather than creating entirely new projects, it helped sharpen the focus of what was already underway and reaffirm the importance of community-led approaches.

- **Imagination Station and mentoring**

The Imagination Station, a creative and community-led hub, was already in development when the listening exercise took place. The feedback gathered helped shape a dedicated strand of work focused on mentoring and role modelling, particularly for young people approaching working age. This strand is now embedded within the Imagination Station's wider programme, reflecting the priorities expressed by residents during the listening phase.

“Young people talked about needing role models – that really stayed with us. So now we’re building a mentoring offer that’s grounded in what we heard.” LS14 Trust

- **Listening as methodology and practice**

The project played a central role in embedding listening as both a philosophy and a practical method for LS14 Trust and the wider LCN network. Staff and volunteers developed skills in structured listening techniques, and the organisation recommitted to asset-based community development as its core approach.

“We say we listen well – but this challenged us to ask if we’re really listening. It jolted us in a good way.” LS14 Trust

- **Developing relationships with Leeds Trinity University**

The listening work opened the door to a new relationship with Leeds Trinity University. While a planned collaboration, where students would pitch to support community projects, didn't go ahead due to timescale pressures, the initial engagement laid the groundwork for future partnership.

"It didn't quite fit this time, but it was a valuable step – we've now got a relationship with the university we can build on." LS14 Trust

What was good about the project

One of the most valuable outcomes of the project was the way it brought local partners together through a shared purpose. For LS14 Trust, it helped strengthen the wider We Are Seacroft partnership by creating space for organisations to collaborate more intentionally, share insights, and align their approaches.

"I'm very happy to say that as the direct impact of that pilot and us growing from the learning of that pilot [...] that the ecosystem [We are Seacroft] is totally stronger now" LS14 Trust

At a broader level, the process also helped to build new relationships with key people at Leeds City Council and other strategic partners. These connections are seen as significant for the future, with the potential to support more coordinated action across the city.

"We're in the room more now. There's trust and recognition – that matters. We think more will come from those connections." LS14 Trust

Opportunities for development

While the listening process strengthened relationships and strategy, LS14 Trust reflected that translating those insights into long-term, concrete change takes time and consistent shared effort. They emphasised the importance of aligning timelines, building realistic expectations, and prioritising depth over speed.

“If we’re not set up the right way, if we rush it, it doesn’t work. We’ve got to be honest about capacity.” LS14 Trust

They also noted that continued collaboration with city anchors will benefit from more structured opportunities for shared reflection and planning. This was reflected by some of the city anchors involved, who felt *“this should be a regular topic for discussion at the Leeds Anchors Exec meeting, and also brought into discussion as part of the LAN benchmarking work.”* (Northern Gas Networks) Building on the relationships already formed, there is potential to create clearer pathways for follow-up – so that promising conversations can more easily lead to joint action.

Impacts on city and community anchor organisations

- The project enabled community anchors to **surface detailed community insight**, which helped them shape both new and existing activity. For example, learning from the listening exercise led Give a Gift to develop targeted one-to-one support, while LS14 Trust focused their Imagination Station project around mentoring for young people.

- It led to **increased engagement from a wider group of residents**, particularly people who had not previously accessed support through community anchors, such as women from culturally diverse communities in Armley and Harehills.
- The project **brought new resources into community anchor organisations**, including digital devices and training support through 100% Digital Leeds, and energy and cost-of-living support through Northern Gas Networks' Centre for Warmth at NWCA.
- It helped to **develop and strengthen local partnerships**, including through the Leeds Community Anchor Network (LCAN), which has now embedded the listening exercise as a core methodology across its work.
- Staff and volunteers across multiple community anchor organisations were **upskilled in listening techniques and community-led approaches**, which are now being used to shape wider programmes of work beyond this project.
- The project helped **build trust between residents and city anchor services**, creating new opportunities for people to engage with existing support.
- Some city anchors developed **closer working relationships with trusted community partners**, which in turn led to more coordinated activity, such as scaling up employment drop-ins or adapting recruitment practices in response to feedback.
- Despite limitations and some perceptions of missed opportunities for alignment, city and community anchors described the project as a **useful catalyst**, not necessarily the sole driver of change, but a timely opportunity to organise, align, and amplify community-led work.

Impact on community members

Most participants, including both community and city anchors, felt it was too soon to evidence significant impact at the community level, particularly in terms of employment outcomes. However, there were early signs of increased engagement, progression toward opportunities, and improved relationships between local people and support providers.

"No, not employment. We've got some that have got to interview stage... and we've got a lot where we've enrolled them on different things." New Wortley Community Association

"We collect case studies from our delivery partners that show the positive impact of digital inclusion for individuals and communities, and we publish them on our [100% Digital Leeds website](#)." 100% Digital Leeds (Leeds City Council)

There was recognition that deeper impact would take time, and that many of the conditions for that impact (e.g. trust, access, tailored support) were still being developed.

Wider learning and reflections

Understanding cultural and local context is essential

A key reflection from the project was that designing inclusive services requires more than simply making them "available to all." Several partners acknowledged that prior to the listening exercise, they had underestimated

the extent to which cultural norms, gender expectations, and language barriers shape how, and whether people engage with employment support.

For example, the creation of a women-only space at NWCA wasn't just a practical decision, it was fundamental to participation. For many women, attending was only possible with the permission of partners or family members, and that permission depended on the space being female-only. When a male employment advisor was due to attend a session, this had to be clearly communicated in advance so that women could choose not to come if they preferred.

"Some of the women weren't allowed to come unless it was women-only. That made the difference." New Wortley Community Association

Employment support exists - but it's not always accessed

There was a clear acknowledgement that a wide range of support services already exist across the city. However, these are often underused by the very communities they are intended to reach, either because people don't know about them, don't trust them, or find them difficult to access.

"As I read the report, I see many recommendations that the University has already adopted... What I don't know is how effective these interventions are seen from a community perspective." University of Leeds

Give a Gift's experience with the Health & Care Academy highlighted this gap: although the bootcamp was already running, they were unaware of it until it came up during the listening phase. Once engaged, the academy was open to adapting its approach, sharing interview questions in advance and Give a Gift was able to provide intensive one-to-one support, leading to a successful outcome.

"They gave her the questions up front... We did a dummy interview with her. She got the job." Give a Gift

This raised wider questions about how well current offers are being communicated, and the importance of these being designed with community realities in mind. There is also potential to make better use of existing structures and networks to share information and promote employment support opportunities more widely across Leeds.

Aligning around a shared approach

Several participants reflected that sustainable change depends on all partners committing to a shared way of working, rather than operating in parallel or pursuing isolated interventions. The value of community listening was widely recognised, but its potential impact depends on whether institutions are willing to align with and act on what they hear. At LS14 Trust, the team reflected on the challenge of sustaining collaborative energy:

“You start these conversations... If those conversations stop there, then we're not actually doing anything. It's actually about building that infrastructure, that network, that ecosystem” LS14 Trust

New Wortley Community Association suggested that future community-based projects could benefit from a more structured and transparent approach to partnership-building, utilising both the Inclusive Anchor Network and Community Anchor Network. They described a model where city anchors and businesses clearly communicate their goals, for example, around corporate social responsibility, and are supported to connect with community organisations already active in relevant areas. Crucially, they emphasised the importance of these conversations happening openly and collaboratively, rather than behind closed doors. A neutral coordinating body could help broker these relationships in a way that is visible, inclusive, and grounded in local knowledge.

“You want to work in Armley, well let's contact who works in Armley, and who does a lot of work around cost of living... that way you'd find a really good match.” New Wortley Community Association

Conclusion

The Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures listening exercise and subsequent work created space for community and city anchors to explore barriers to employment in a grounded, community-led way. It helped surface lived experience, inform new and existing activity, and foster deeper relationships between some partners. In several neighbourhoods, the process strengthened community infrastructure and enabled more inclusive, culturally relevant support.

Although new services, partnerships and changes in practice have emerged since the release of the listening exercise report, we are not able to attribute all of this activity directly to the findings and impact of the project.

Many city and community anchors described the project as a catalyst for change, an initiative that helped to spark new thinking and connections, rather than drive immediate transformation. Whilst some noted missed opportunities where greater alignment could have amplified the impact, the project nonetheless demonstrated what is possible through even modest, time-limited collaboration. The learning and momentum generated point to significant potential, and surfaced some genuinely valuable developments, new relationships, access to resources, and important shared learning for both community and city anchors. With more resource and a more coordinated approach, building on the existing strengths of city and community anchor networks, this model could be scaled to deliver deeper, system-wide change.

APPENDICES

- [Appendix A: Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures: Leeds Community Anchor Network Listening Exercise – report and key findings’ \(June 2023\)](#)
- [Appendix B: Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures summary interview questions](#)
- [Appendix C: Good Jobs, Better Health, Fairer Futures summary survey questions](#)

[Click here](#) to watch a video about the HOPE project with New Wortley Community Association, as part of this programme of work

