

## AT A GLANCE

| Finding and accessing new market opportunities  
(26<sup>th</sup> September 2023)

**Welcome:** The first West Midlands Social Economy FORUM was well attended by social entrepreneurs seeking to network, share knowledge, define and influence policy, understand opportunities and support the significant growth of the sector.

**Themes:** **A] Social economy growth.** Why do we need to encourage the social economy to grow? To increase the social value created in the region and support local people. We are looking at a greater level of need in the region and VCSE's are part of the solution. **B] Understanding the market.** There needs to be specific interventions eg. access to procurement programme being delivered by SSE [VCSE Contract Readiness Programme The School for Social Entrepreneurs \(the-sse.org\)](#). The more we can understand about opportunities, the competition and the customer, the more we can position ourselves. Support is needed to help organisations collaborate to win contracts. We are often competing with the private sector which can be costly and there are risks. Can we be supported to take risks? Have had to invest in ISO 9001 to be able to compete. **C] Partnership working.** There are some good examples, past and present, of great partnership working across the region. Support for the sector to form effective partnerships, possibly linked to the new clusters would be very valuable. How can we be paid properly for the work that we do? How do we market individually? A consortium could help by taking a collective approach. **D] Joining Frameworks.** There were mixed views on Frameworks, the process is complex and lengthy, but it reduces competition. They provide access to both smaller and really huge contracts if you meet the procurement criteria. The impact on your business can be worth it. **E] Barriers to growth.** Meeting the right people, finding ways to promote ourselves, too small to have a dedicated sales person. Need to find customers, find out what they want – maybe this could be done as a collective? Public sector can use us for project design and then not award the contract. **F] Managing expectations from customers.** We are seeking a solution for our clients that is long-term and often goes beyond the life of a contract. Contracts are short and don't allow for development. Eg. technology driven solutions to health. **G] Conflict between grants and contracts.** Have Power to Change but its short term – want longer term. Its' for sales and marketing but need longer than 6 months. **H] Using assets of community value.** Sector assets are poor - this is a real opportunity.

**Wants:** Support for developing consortia to share information, address gaps, share risk, market, collect data, share resources. Opportunities seen for the new clusters, special purpose vehicles to strengthen the sector where smaller organisations are involved. Want to be involved in these. Consortia or clusters could provide managed services, delivery vehicles, sales function and IT. The best sales people are those who run their social business. Education needed for both procurers and seller/supplier to unpick the barriers to winning contracts. The process is often not appropriate to size of the contract and needs reforming!

**Next West Midlands Social Economy FORUM will focus on Procurement and take place on TUESDAY 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023, 1.30pm until 3pm (online). [REGISTER HERE](#)**