

AT A GLANCE

COLLABORATING FOR IMPACT: GROWING SOCIAL ECONOMY PARTNERSHIPS

(23rd September 2025, (in-person, Legacy WM, Birmingham))

Please see below the session summary of notes from the September 2025 Social Economy FORUM meeting focused on 'Collaborating for impact: Growing social economy partnerships'

OUR HOSTS | This session opportunity was kindly hosted by [Legacy West Midlands](#), Soho House, Soho Ave, Birmingham B18 5LB.

FACILITATED AND WRITTEN BY | [Jakira Khanam](#), Partnerships Lead, [BSSEC CIC](#)

BACKGROUND & CURRENT LANDSCAPE

Collaboration, consortia, and partnerships are vital for the West Midlands social economy because they address systemic challenges and enable the sector to achieve the region's ambitious goals for inclusive growth. By working together, social economy organisations can deliver public services, leverage collective resources, and engage with public sector bodies to secure more contracts

Collaboration is a key tool for addressing economic disparities at a local and regional scale. At the local level, partnerships help to build community wealth. Initiatives like the Coalition for Impact in East Birmingham show how collaboration can empower residents to map their own economic assets and develop investable propositions that keep wealth circulating within the community.

On a regional scale, collaboration strengthens the social economy's voice and influence. By working together, organisations can better engage with the WMCA and other regional bodies, influencing policy and ensuring that the sector's needs are heard.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM GUEST SPEAKERS

Three guest speakers were invited to share their experiences of working in partnership. We heard from:

- [Ifor Jones](#) (CEO, [Loconomy](#))
- [Aftab Rahman](#) (CEO, [Legacy West Midlands](#))
- [Harvinder Sohal](#) (Development Manager, [Living Well Consortium](#))

Ifor Jones, CEO, Loconomy

Ifor Jones presented the Coalition for Impact (C4I), an action learning and collaborative inquiry programme. The C4I program was delivered in East Birmingham as part of Birmingham City Council and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) Community Pillar (following the previous Ready 2 Level programme). The initiative ran over nine months, from September 2024 to April 2025.

The programme involved nine community hub organisations (COs) working in clusters within three targeted growth quarters:

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Quarter	Focus	Participating Organisations
Sports Quarter	Sports	Saheli Trust, Birmingham City Community Foundation, Dream Chaser
Green Innovation Quarter	Green	Acocks Greener, Hay Mills Foundation Trust, Ashiana Community Project
Knowledge Quarter	Knowledge	Legacy Centre of Excellence, free@last, Initiative for Social Entrepreneurship

Key approaches and activities

- **Community economic mapping:** COs conducted detailed mapping of their social, economic, and neighbourhood geographies through community workshops.
- **Investable propositions:** Each CO developed an investable proposition for growing local assets and capacity. These were presented to a panel of experts.
- **Tailored support:** COs received support from Co-op Futures and commissioned expert providers on business viability, governance, and social finance access.
- **Thematic inquiry:** A women-led economy inquiry was commissioned and led by four COs from the previous year's programme.
- **Collaborative learning:** Activities included four collaborative learning events and study visits.

Key successes and outputs

- **Coherent strategy:** The programme delivered a vision and strategic appraisal of each Quarter's potential for collaboratively fueled inclusive growth.
- **Dialogue and integration:** It helped facilitate a more coherent dialogue between the community organisations, the property/land developers and social investors.
- **Wider engagement:** 18 meetings were held, enabling local stakeholders to guide the mapping process.
- **Organisational growth:** 4 of the participating organisations became members of Loconomy (a Community Benefit Society).
- **Learning platform:** The community economic maps and investable propositions, were all published on the bespoke Learning Platform: coalition4Impact.org.uk

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Primary challenges

- **Time constraints:** The limited timeframe (9 months) for the programme restricted the depth of implementation.
- **Impact measurement:** Difficulty in effectively measuring the long-term impact of partnerships and collaboration that resulted from the programme activities

Aftab Rahman, CEO, Legacy West Midlands

The session also featured insights from Aftab Rahman, CEO of Legacy WM, in their capacity as the Social Economy Cluster Lead for Handsworth, a role supported by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA).

Cluster leadership activities and findings

Legacy WM's role focuses on actively stimulating the local social economy in Handsworth.

- David Lane from DiSE (Development in Social Enterprise) was contracted to map local activity. The research found that despite Handsworth's high level of deprivation, its social economy was underdeveloped with fewer social enterprises than expected.
- To address the low density of social enterprise, Legacy WM held Dragons' Den style events (also known as Pitch and Win £1k events), supported by figures like [Wade Lyn](#), which successfully identified and stimulated early-stage social entrepreneurs and artists.
- Legacy WM's action plan includes the acquisition of a local asset to develop a dedicated hub for social enterprise and economic activity in the area.
- The organisation has focused on developing better working relations with the local Soho Business Improvement District (BID).

Partnership approach: Bring it and share It

Legacy WM operates under the core partnership ethos of **Bring it and share it**, signifying a commitment to using their capacity to uplift smaller organisations.

- **Resource Sharing:** Legacy WM actively shares resources—including dedicated bid writing support and free/reduced-rate access to facilities at their current home, the Soho House Visitor Centre—with local partners.
- **Incubation:** They employ an incubation policy to support nascent organisations in developing their governance and accessing funds, embodying a long-term commitment to capacity building.
- **Diversification:** Partnerships are key to diversifying Legacy WM's own income, evidenced by successful collaborations with the Cultural Action Area, Heritage Lottery, and large cultural projects like the Simmer Down Festival.

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Learn more about Legacy WM's approach to partnership in this blog

[Bring It and Share It: Our Approach to Partnership at Legacy WM | Legacy West Midlands](#)

Harvinder Sohal, Development Manager, Living Well Consortium

LWC is the West Midlands' leading mental health consortium, delivering high-quality, community-based services that focus on prevention, wellness, and recovery, thereby relieving pressure on statutory medical services. Services include psychological therapies, counselling, CBT, and specialist support for young people (11-24) and those with Long-term Conditions (LTC)—an integrated pathway where LWC is the only commissioned provider in the region.

The consortium is made up of over 40 community mental health organisations across Birmingham and Solihull, forming a collaborative service network.

LWC generates income primarily from government contracts (e.g. NHS Talking Therapies). They demonstrate significant growth in service delivery and capacity, triaging over 15,500 clients and seeing nearly 12,750 for one-to-one treatment in 2023/24. Performance metrics exceed national targets, with 93% of clients seen within six weeks (national target is 75%).

Find out more [Free Mental Health Services Solihull | Therapists in Birmingham](#)

Challenges and rewards of consortium working

Aspect	Description
Challenges	Management complexity: Balancing the differing needs and goals of 40+ partners, which can complicate straightforward decision-making.
	Set-up costs: Establishing and managing the consortium structure, governance, and resource-sharing model requires significant initial time, funding, and resources.
	Impact attribution: It is challenging to definitively measure and attribute final service outcomes and growth to the consortium structure itself rather than to individual efforts.
Rewards	Contract access and scale: The ability to access large contracts (like NHS Talking Therapies) which individual, smaller organisations could not secure on their own.
	Collective capacity: The model pools collective knowledge and resource, allowing for efficient, geographically widespread, and culturally sensitive service delivery.
	Innovation and replication: LWC's collaborative model has allowed for the testing and scaling of health innovations.
	Sustainability and workforce: LWC is one of the leading providers of IAPT (Talking Therapies) trainee placements in the West Midlands, strengthening the long-term workforce by guaranteeing jobs within the consortium organisations.

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KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Three guest speakers were invited to share their experiences of working in partnership.

We heard from:

Legacy WM's role focuses on actively stimulating the local social economy in Handsworth.

1. Enabling partnerships with long-term funding

To see the true impact of collaborations on the ground, funding must shift away from short-term, project-based grants:

- Commissioners and public funders should standardise longer-term contracts for partnership/consortium-based delivery. This allows organisations to build trust, invest in shared infrastructure, and demonstrate genuine impact.
- Tie long-term funding to a commitment to robust, shared evaluation methods, ensuring partners can collectively prove the value of their model.

2. Leveraging anchor organisations

Anchor Organisations (Anchors) are large, non-profit, or public institutions (like universities, hospitals, and local government) that are physically rooted in a community and possess significant economic power.

- Mandate Anchors to track and publicly report the percentage of their procurement spend going to local SMEs and social enterprises.
- Facilitate regular events connecting Anchor procurement teams directly with local social economy businesses and workforce development programmes.

3. System-level partnerships and research

To create genuine systemic change, the sector must collaborate.

- Develop a shared regional impact framework that standardises how partnerships measure and articulate their collective social return on investment (SROI).
- Evaluate the net collaborative value of existing partnerships (e.g. Living Well Consortium) to produce data that can be used for advocacy.

4. Shared services models

Access to shared back-office services (HR, Finance, IT, legal) is critical for small organisations to free up time for delivery.

- Research and promote existing shared service models within the region (e.g. one-stop-shops for payroll or bookkeeping).

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Our thanks to all who attended this **ACCESSING BUSINESS SUPPORT: WHAT IS CHANGING?** session, our speakers and for the engaging contribution to this topic.

