

Please see below the summary of notes from the November 2025 Social Economy ROUNDTABLE meeting focused on Health and Social Care Social Economy Organisations:

Purpose: To inform decision-makers of the challenges, opportunities, and support needs of health and social care social economy organisations in the West Midlands.

Executive Summary

Health and social care social economy organisations in the West Midlands are vital contributors to inclusive growth, community wellbeing, and equitable service delivery. However, they face mounting pressures: unstable funding, workforce shortages, rising demand, fragmented systems, and challenges in scaling innovation.

The Roundtable highlighted the urgent need for ecosystem-level support to strengthen leadership, foster collaboration, and ensure sustainability. Leaders called for long-term investment, infrastructure development, and recognition of the sector's role in shaping integrated care systems.

Current Challenges

1. Financial Pressures

- Reliance on short-term contracts and grants
- Rising inflation, energy, and delivery costs
- Tight margins limiting reinvestment and growth

2. Workforce Challenges

- Recruitment and retention difficulties due to competition with NHS/private providers
- Volunteer burnout and limited training opportunities

3. Growing Demand & Demographic Change

- Ageing population driving demand for adult social care
- Rising prevalence of long-term conditions (dementia, diabetes)
- Persistent health inequalities in disadvantaged communities

4. Integration & Collaboration

- Fragmented systems between NHS, local authorities, and community providers
- Uneven uptake of innovation networks
- Need for shared infrastructure and stronger collaboration

5. Innovation & Digital Transformation

- Resource constraints for smaller organisations
- Digital exclusion among vulnerable groups
- Difficulty scaling successful pilots

6. Social Economy-Specific Pressures

- Over 9,000 organisations employing 100,000 people in the region
- Struggles balancing commercial viability with social mission
- Limited access to investment and resilience-building tools

Sector Experiences

A. Nabila, Director – Ways for Wellbeing UK CIC

- Strengths: Innovative, agile, place-based, strong community links
- Needs:
 - Recruitment and training support
 - Resources to scale pilot projects into sustained delivery
 - Consortium and partnership development
 - Longer-term contracts to reduce grant dependency
- **Solution proposed:** Greater investment in the sector

B. Dave Rogers, CEO – Midland Mencap

- Challenges:
 - Sector stress due to real living wage pressures without uplift in contract values
 - Extraordinary post-COVID demand for services, risking unmet needs
 - Fragmentation of services contracted across multiple agencies
 - Limited strategic support for leaders operating in isolation
- Support Needed from the Ecosystem:
 - Greater understanding that organisations are part of the social/impact economy, aiding strategic planning
 - Management of diverse income streams to ensure sustainability

- Creative commissioning approaches to embed social value and reduce fragmentation
- Infrastructure investment in facilities and premises
- Digital investment to remain competitive and demonstrate impact
- Recruitment support and stronger links with employment and skills systems
- Leadership Needs: Dave Rogers emphasised, *“We believe a sustainable future for this sector depends on collaboration, leadership development, and a long-term commitment to equity and inclusion.”*

Support for Leaders: Key Recommendations

To ensure leaders can guide their organisations effectively, the regional ecosystem must strengthen support mechanisms, peer networks, and cross-sector collaboration. The Roundtable identified ten priority actions:

1. **Leadership Development & Peer Networks** – Establish programmes for shared learning and collaboration.
2. **Shared Learning Platforms** – Create digital/regional spaces to share innovations and success stories.
3. **System Leadership Skills** – Build capacity for partnership working across NHS, local authorities, and community organisations.
4. **Inclusive Leadership Training** – Promote diversity, cultural competence, and equity in leadership roles.
5. **Cross-Sector Collaboration** – Embed social economy partners in local system planning and policy formation.
6. **Access to Data & Insights** – Enable evidence-based decision-making through shared data and open analytics.
7. **Mentoring & Support Networks** – Support new leaders through structured mentorship and peer coaching.
8. **Innovation Hubs** – Invest in regional hubs fostering digital innovation, inclusion, and prevention models.
9. **Place-Based Partnerships** – Empower local leaders within Integrated Care Systems (ICS) to shape neighbourhood-level solutions.
10. **Advocacy & Policy Influence** – Strengthen the collective voice of the sector to influence funding and commissioning policy.

Broader Discussion Highlights

- Examples of successful collaboration were shared, but many remain limited by short-term funding.
- Suggestions included:
 - Leveraging **academic funding** to resource ecosystem interventions
 - Expanding use of the **co-operative model** to support collaborative structures
- Participants were challenged to reflect on how they could personally address these systemic challenges.

Conclusion

Health and social care social economy organisations in the West Midlands are at a critical juncture. They provide innovative, person-centred, and community-driven services, yet face mounting pressures that threaten sustainability.

The Roundtable concluded that **long-term investment, leadership development, and ecosystem collaboration** are essential to secure the sector's future. Policymakers and stakeholders must act decisively to:

- Stabilise funding and commissioning frameworks
- Invest in infrastructure and digital transformation
- Strengthen leadership capacity and peer networks
- Embed social economy organisations in regional planning and policy

By doing so, the West Midlands can ensure equitable, high-quality services for its communities and safeguard the resilience of its social economy.

Many thanks to our speakers and all who attended. It was a great session!