



# Strengthening the **heart** of our communities

A manifesto from South Lanarkshire's  
vibrant third sector



# Our message to candidates & political parties

The third sector in South Lanarkshire is a **vital partner** in delivering wellbeing initiatives, reducing poverty, and supporting local people and communities to thrive.

As we approach the May 2026 Scottish Parliament Election, **we are calling for clear, practical commitments** that recognise the role of community organisations, charities, social enterprises, and volunteers as core partners in public service delivery - on a local and national level.

This manifesto is shaped by the shared experiences and expertise of partners and stakeholders across South Lanarkshire. Our key asks represent the collective needs of local organisations and echo wider national priorities for a stronger third sector, improved wellbeing, and reduced poverty.

## Who we are

South Lanarkshire's third sector brings together **trusted, locally rooted organisations** that are **built around prevention**. Every day, they make a real difference, supporting people across health and social care, community development, employability and many other areas.

However, the sector is operating under sustained financial and workforce pressures at the same time that **demand is increasing**.

Our partners report:

rising demand linked to poverty, inequality & complex needs

increasing pressure on staff & volunteers

short-term & fragmented funding

growing expectations to deliver statutory-like services without statutory security

**Without action, there is a real risk of service reduction, loss of community capacity and increased pressure on public services.**

# Our asks for the next Scottish Parliament

## 1 Fair funding that enables prevention

Short-term, competitive funding undermines workforce stability, planning, and service continuity. Multi-year, fair funding enables prevention, innovation, and better outcomes for communities.

We are calling for:

- a national commitment to multi-year funding (minimum three years) for third sector delivery
- inflation-aware uplifts built into grants and contracts
- full cost recovery to be the standard expectation
- reduced administrative burden and proportionate monitoring

## 2 Prevention as the default approach

Third sector organisations are often the first point of support. Investing earlier reduces crisis demand on statutory services and improves long-term outcomes.

We are calling for:

- prevention to be embedded in national and local investment decisions
- earlier intervention funding streams that third sector organisations can realistically access
- stronger links between community planning, health, and social care, and the third sector

## 3 Recognition of the third sector as an equal partner

The third sector brings lived experience, community trust, and flexibility. Policy and service design are stronger when this expertise is embedded from the start.

We are calling for:

- meaningful third sector representation in local and national decision-making
- co-production to be the expected approach in service design
- fair commissioning that values community impact, not just lowest cost

## 4 Investment in the workforce & volunteers

Staff and volunteers are the sector's greatest asset. Recruitment, retention, and wellbeing are emerging risks that require national attention.

We are calling for:

- investment in the third sector workforce, including fair pay expectations in funded services
- continued support for volunteering infrastructure and participation
- proportionate regulation that does not deter volunteer involvement

## 5 Tackling poverty & inequality through community action

Community organisations are often best placed to reach people facing the greatest barriers. Strengthening local capacity strengthens national impact.

We are calling for:

- sustained investment in community-based anti-poverty work
- recognition of the role of local organisations in reaching priority groups
- policy alignment between national anti-poverty ambitions and local delivery capacity

## 6 Collaborative efforts to improve health & wellbeing

Community-based support reduces pressure on GP services, hospitals, and crisis mental health provision. Sustained investment in preventative wellbeing services improves population health, tackles loneliness, and delivers better value for the public purse.

We are calling for:

- longer term funding for community wellbeing and mental health support;
- third sector involvement in health and care planning and evaluation;
- practical pathways for collaboration with primary care, social care, and public health

## 7 Climate action and a just transition

The transition to net zero must not deepen poverty or disadvantage. Community organisations are key to delivering local climate solutions, supporting behaviour change and building resilience, but they require targeted investment to do so fairly and effectively.

We are calling for:

- funding for community led climate action;
- support to decarbonise third sector buildings without cutting frontline services;
- a just transition that protects people on low incomes and strengthens local resilience

## 8 Connecting communities through transport & digital inclusion

Transport and digital exclusion are now major drivers of inequality. Without action, people cannot access services, employment, education, or social connection. Inclusive design ensures no community is left behind as services increasingly move online.

We are calling for:

- place based investment in community transport, including rural connectivity;
- digital inclusion support that covers skills, data access and ongoing local help;
- services designed to be accessible both online and offline

# What would success look like?

By the end of the next Parliament we want to see:

- more organisations on stable, multi-year funding
- prevention investment increasing year on year
- improved workforce stability across the sector
- the third sector routinely involved in service design
- stronger community capacity across South Lanarkshire

## Our ask of candidates

We ask all candidates standing in the 2026 Scottish Parliament election to;

1. **commit** to fair funding and prevention focused services
2. **recognise** the third sector as a strategic partner
3. **work with us** to build a fairer, healthier and more resilient South Lanarkshire

## Our offer as the Third Sector in South Lanarkshire

Working through Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire (VASLan) and local networks, we will continue to:

amplify lived experience and community voices

strengthen locality based collaboration across South Lanarkshire

support partnership working, shared learning and joint delivery

publish an annual report of third sector impact and contribution



**Together, we can deliver  
change that lasts.**



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