



power to
change

business in
community
hands

WIGAN AND LEIGH COMMUNITY CHARITY PROFILE

EMPOWERING
PLACES

September 2023

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AUTHORS



ABOUT **POWER TO CHANGE**



Power to Change is the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.

ABOUT **RENAISI**

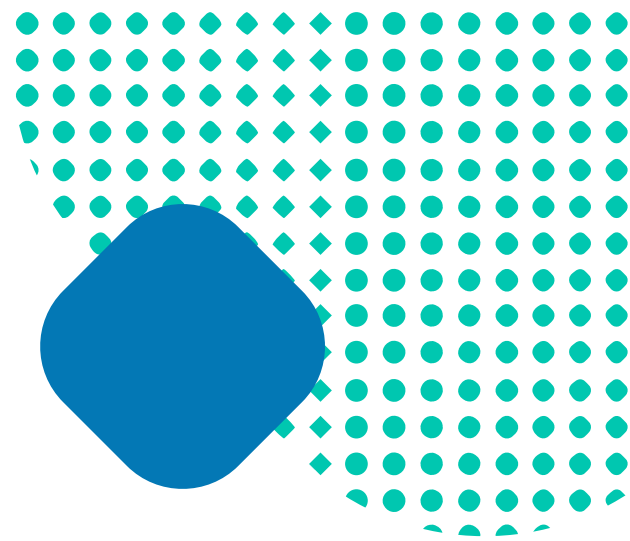


Renaissi is a social enterprise that helps people and places thrive by challenging the root causes of economic and social exclusion across the UK. They do this by empowering people to overcome barriers to employment, enabling social and private sector organisations to tackle socio-economic exclusion, challenging systems that perpetuate exclusion, and embodying approaches that lead to sustainable change.



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INTRODUCTION

Empowering Places was designed by [Power to Change](#) as an experiment to explore what happens when local anchor organisations are supported to catalyse community businesses in deprived communities in England.^{1,2}

The programme took much of what Power to Change knew about supporting the development of community businesses in other programmes. It applied this to a place, considering how the interplay between place, people and community businesses could build more resilient and prosperous communities.

The programme hypothesised that building the capacity of specific, existing local organisations could enable them to catalyse and support the growth of new community businesses. In turn, these community businesses would support and develop the social economy of their communities. The programme provided a blend of funding and capacity-building support to locally rooted 'catalyst' organisations in six areas of high deprivation to test this idea:³

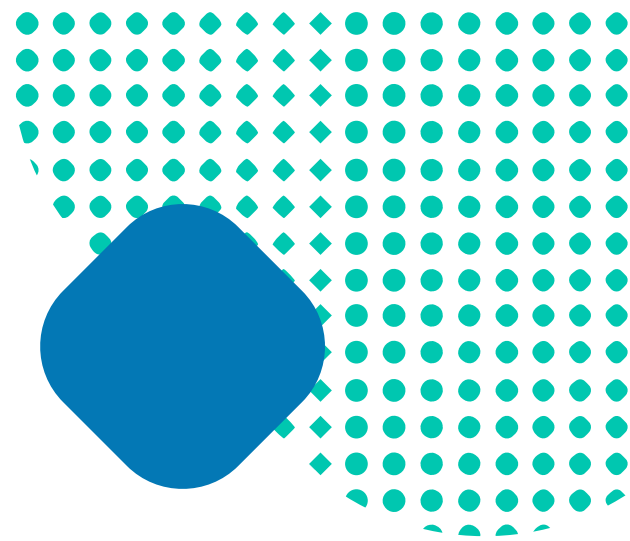
- [B-inspired](#) in Braunstone, Leicester
- [Centre4](#) in Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, Grimsby
- [Made in Manningham](#), incubated by [Participate](#) in Manningham, Bradford⁴
- [Real Ideas](#) in Devonport and Stonehouse, Plymouth
- [The Wharton Trust](#) in Dyke House, Hartlepool
- [Wigan and Leigh Community Charity](#) (WLCC), formally Abram Ward Community Cooperative, in Abram, Wigan

Power to Change's decision to invest in these places was a choice to support and empower local people to shape delivery based on local priorities, meaning the context and the realities of each place play a significant part of how the programme looks and feels in those areas.

This profile for Wigan and Leigh Community Charity is one in a series of six and draws on data and insight from the beginning of the programme (July 2017) to January 2023, including:

- the socio-economic context of Wigan, drawing on publicly available datasets and findings from research on the area
- monitoring data from the programme and feedback from qualitative interviews with Power to Change, delivery partners, catalyst staff and community businesses
- information about the catalyst – Wigan and Leigh Community Charity – and its Empowering Places journey.⁵

This profile tells the story of Empowering Places investment in Wigan and Leigh Community Charity. Together with the other five profiles in the suite, it helps to build a picture of the similarities and differences in context and approaches across the Empowering Places areas.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

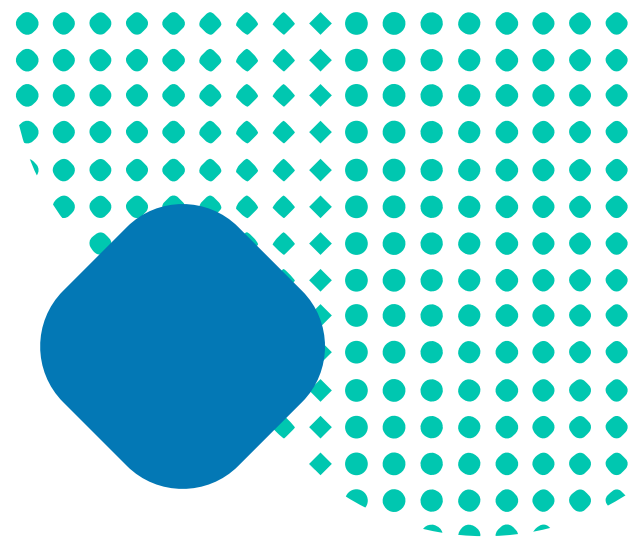


Wigan and Leigh Community Charity (WLCC) supports the development of social enterprises, cooperatives and community businesses across Wigan borough, working collaboratively to promote the role of the social economy in supporting sustainable and innovative communities. Using its strong community connections, WLCC focuses on creating an empowering environment, to enable people to create their own business and to help existing businesses to grow.

This profile explores the social, economic and demographic context of Abram Ward and Wigan; WLCC's approach to delivering Empowering Places and the programme's impact on the catalyst, community businesses and wider community; and how the legacy of Empowering Places has shaped the catalyst's future ambitions.

Key points

- Abram Ward is on the outskirts of Wigan. With most shops closing over the last 20 years, Abram Ward now has no town centre, high street or restaurant. There are few shops and one pub.
- Acting as a community anchor organisation, WLCC aims to build on existing community spirit to coach and incubate emerging community business to benefit the residents of Wigan and Leigh, with a particular focus on Abram Ward.
- While WLCC previously focused on social enterprises, the Empowering Places investment has helped it develop a broader offer to build local wealth and social enterprise, and explore new approaches to scaling up. Part of the investment was ringfenced for its own development, to ensure a sustainable legacy.
- The flexibility to test and pilot ideas has given WLCC confidence to expand its activities borough-wide and resulted in opportunities like becoming a key stakeholder for Local Access funding in Wigan.
- Empowering Places helped WLCC grow its trading arm, Made in Wigan, which is developing education programmes across the area. It also helped develop a neighbourhood plan, which aims to support the growth of the local economy with new spaces and community businesses and a future parks programme.
- WLCC has developed a clear picture of community businesses across the ward and Wigan and Leigh, with more local funding now going to support existing and new social enterprises and community businesses with trading, helping grow a more prosperous and supportive local economy. This has included helping the local authority commission more services from community businesses.



1. GUIDE TO SOURCES OF DATA AND INSIGHT



The English Indices of Deprivation, managed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, provide a comprehensive measure of relative deprivation in small areas or neighbourhoods called lower-layer super output areas (LSOAs) in England. The Index of Multiple Deprivation is based on 39 separate indicators organised across seven domains of deprivation. The domains are combined and weighted to produce an overall measure of multiple deprivation experienced by people living in an area. Every LSOA in England is ranked based on their level of deprivation relative to other areas.⁶

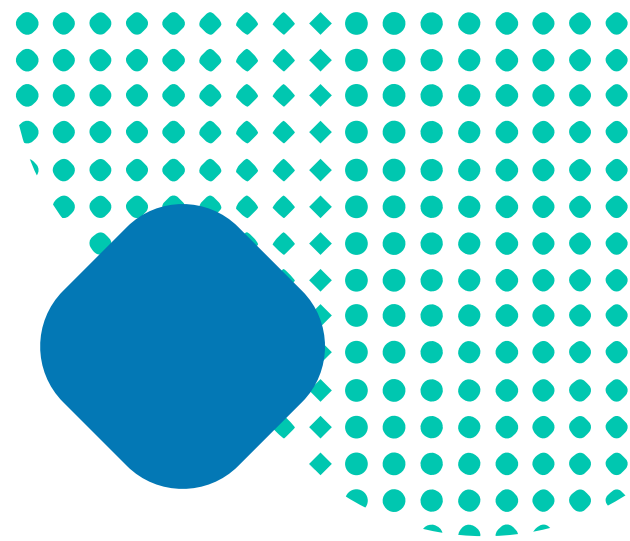
Local Insight is a hub for place-based neighbourhood level data to help decision-makers in organisations working for social good. It is provided by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI), a spin-out consultancy from Oxford University, and holds more than 1,000 neighbourhood level indicators drawing together social, economic and demographic data from more than 50 sources.⁷

The Thriving Places Index draws on a broad range of indicators in public sector datasets measuring key factors that influence wellbeing. The index is managed by the not-for-profit place-based consultancy the Centre for Thriving Places, and provides a comparative 'dashboard' of measures under three broad categories – local conditions, equality and sustainability – with a more detailed breakdown of factors driving the distinctive local experience.⁸

Place Analytics distils thousands of datasets on people, businesses, markets and the environment, providing insight into the performance of places and the levers that fundamentally affect them. It is provided by specialist business advisors Grant Thornton UK to help organisations across all sectors contribute to building a vibrant economy, by creating places where people and businesses can flourish.⁹

UK Social Fabric Index maps community strength in different parts of the UK, and is produced by Onward – a non-profit think tank supported by Power to Change. The index analyses data in four categories – economic value, relationships, positive norms and physical infrastructure – each drawing on several comparative measures of local community experience.¹⁰

The programme evaluation took a realist approach to understanding impact and what has contributed to it, focusing on the experiences of those involved. It drew mainly on interviews and video ethnography with catalysts, community businesses, tech leads and stakeholders in the local areas, and interviews with programme delivery leads at Power to Change and Co-operatives UK. Researchers tracked relevant findings to develop a comprehensive understanding of the development and impact of the programme.



2. ABRAM WARD, WIGAN



2.1 Context

The five villages of Abram Ward are on the outskirts of Wigan town centre, equidistant from Wigan and Leigh. The area includes old coalfields and rural land and features a stretch of the Leeds and Liverpool Canal. Although it used to have shops, these have closed over the last 20 years. There is neither a town centre nor high street, no restaurants, few shops and one pub. It is the only local council ward without a secondary school.

Wigan has an average score rank of 97 in the Index of Multiple Deprivation¹¹ and has at least one neighbourhood in the 10 per cent most deprived areas in the country.

Local Insight ¹²	
Population	15,909
Household income, after housing costs England average: £27,311	£25,251
White British (%) England: 79.8%	95%
Age under 25 (%) England: 31%	33.3%
Age 65+ (%) England: 18.2%	15.2%

Wigan and Leigh Community Charity profile Empowering Places

Thriving Places Index ¹³	Wigan
Health equality e.g. life expectancy at birth	3.65
Mental and physical health e.g. child obesity rate, conceptions in under 18s, illness and disability, prevalence of depression, anxiety and other health indicators	3.86
Education and learning e.g. adults with no qualifications, life-long learning, educational attainment of children, childcare quality and school readiness	4.34
Work and local economy e.g. income deprivation affecting different sections of the population, employment and percentage with low income	4.75
Place and environment local environment, housing, transport and safety, e.g. green land cover, air pollution, journey times to key services, housing affordability ratio and crime severity index	5.59
Subjective happiness Life satisfaction scores from Measures of National Well-being Dashboard: Quality of Life in the UK (ONS)	7.2

Index scores range from 0 to 10. Scores are colour coded to reflect how an area scores compared with others in England, with higher scores indicating that a place is doing better in that domain.

Key: ● Very low (below 3.5) ● Below average (3.5–4.5) ● Medium (4.5–5.5)
● Above average (5.5–6.5) ● Very high (above 6.5)

Place Analytics: Local authority area compared with England average ¹⁴	Wigan
Housing affordability	80–100%
Community assets	80–100%
Employment rate (age 16–64)	Lowest 20%
Business formation	20–40%
Happiness and wellbeing	60–80%

Each category is benchmarked using multiple measures and scored (in percentile form) relative to other catalyst areas. The higher the score, the better the place performed.

Percentile key: ● 80–100% Very high ● 60–80% High ● 40–60% Above average ● 20–40% Average
● 5–20% Low ● <5% Very low

Wigan and Leigh Community Charity profile Empowering Places

UK Social Fabric Index ¹⁵						
Local authority	Social fabric score	Relationship score	Physical infrastructure	Civic institutions	Economic value	Positive social norms
Wigan	0.46	0.33	0.57	0.45	0.53	0.45
Plymouth	0.45	0.30	0.53	0.46	0.49	0.47
Hartlepool	0.37	0.24	0.48	0.38	0.44	0.33
North East Lincolnshire	0.38	0.27	0.50	0.38	0.40	0.36
Leicester	0.42	0.21	0.59	0.49	0.36	0.45
Bradford	0.43	0.28	0.58	0.43	0.43	0.43

Scores are graded from zero to one, with those closer to one indicating the stronger social fabric.

Social fabric score: strength of social fabric across all five threads: relationship, physical infrastructure, civic institutions, economic value and positive social norms

Relationship score: clusters of social groups of people in communities and community-owned assets

Physical infrastructure: physical assets in communities which facilitate, structure and organise people within a community

Civic institutions: health of democracy and governance at both local and national level, considering quality, trust and satisfaction

Economic value: tangible assets which hold a monetary and/or economic value to an individual or family within a community

Positive social norms: personal wellbeing and cultural attitudes of individuals and families in a community, including people's wider habits, behaviours and activities

Key: The colour coding reflects the comparative performance of each place in each category. The highest score for each category is dark green, the lowest is dark red.

Community

Wigan, Manchester, Liverpool and Preston are all within reach of Abram Ward, providing access to jobs, services and opportunities. Wigan borough is rated highly for safety (5.83) by the Thriving Places Index compared with other areas in the region (Manchester 3.14, Bolton 5.33, Preston 4.96).¹⁶

According to a 2020 Power to Change survey, 74.5 per cent of people in Abram Ward speak to neighbours at least once a month (compared with 72 per cent nationally), and 36 per cent per cent speak to neighbours once or twice a week.¹⁷

Challenges

Around a quarter (26 per cent, down from 34 per cent in 2018) of people in Abram Ward think the area has got worse over the last two years, compared with a national average of 22 per cent.¹⁸

One-fifth (20.4%) of people reported feeling very or fairly dissatisfied with where they live in 2020, and satisfaction with 'life as a whole' decreased between 2018 and 2020. The proportion feeling 'often/always' lonely also grew, from 6.4 per cent in 2018 to 11.6 per cent in 2020.¹⁹ It is likely that at least some of these negative changes will have resulted from experiences of the pandemic.

Voluntary and community sector

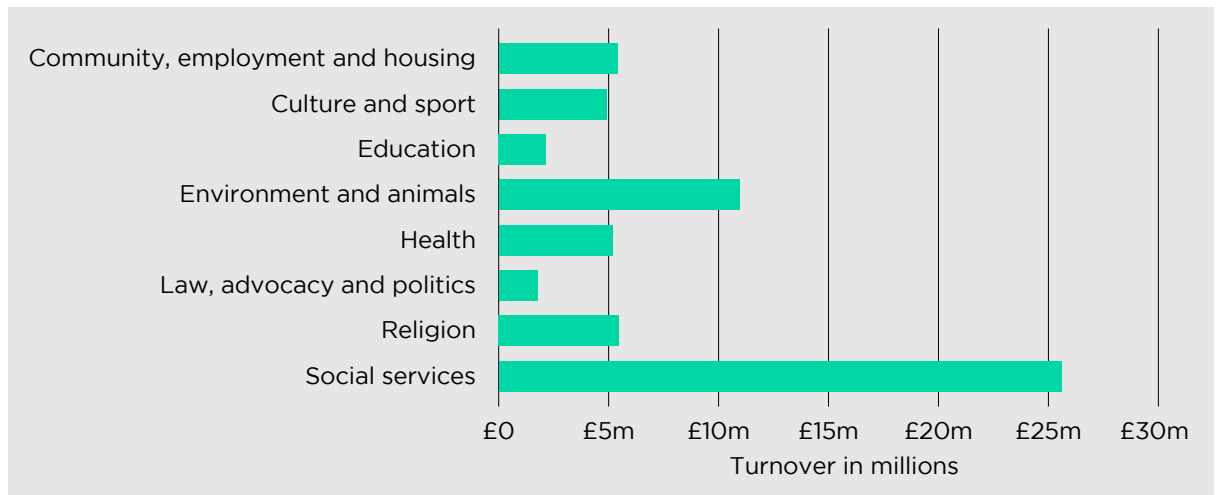
Turnover data is available for 287 voluntary and community sector organisations in Wigan from the 2020/21 financial year, the fullest most recent year – total combined turnover was £62 million.²⁰

Small- to medium-sized organisations with a turnover between £5,000 and £5 million are most relevant to the programme, as these are the organisations that Empowering Places catalyst organisations are most likely to partner with or influence in their local area. Of the total number of organisations for which turnover data is available from 2020/21, 230 were in this category and had a combined turnover of £51.7 million, accounting for 83.3 per cent

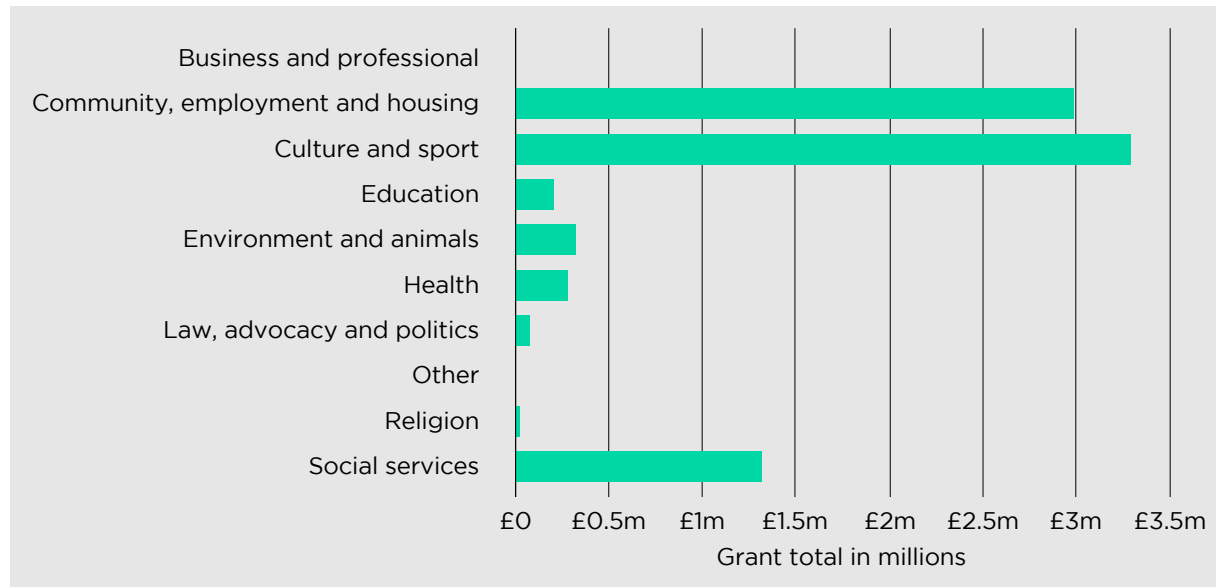
of the total £62 million turnover.²¹

Profitability data for 286 non-profits in Wigan in the 2020/21 financial year demonstrates that 31.8 per cent of organisations experienced a loss. The following chart shows turnover by sector in 2020/21 – social services, with 88 organisations, had the highest turnover at £25 million, followed by environment and animals with 15 organisations and a turnover of £11 million.²²

Turnover by sector in Wigan in 2020/2021²³



Grant funding in Wigan by sector in 2020/21²⁴

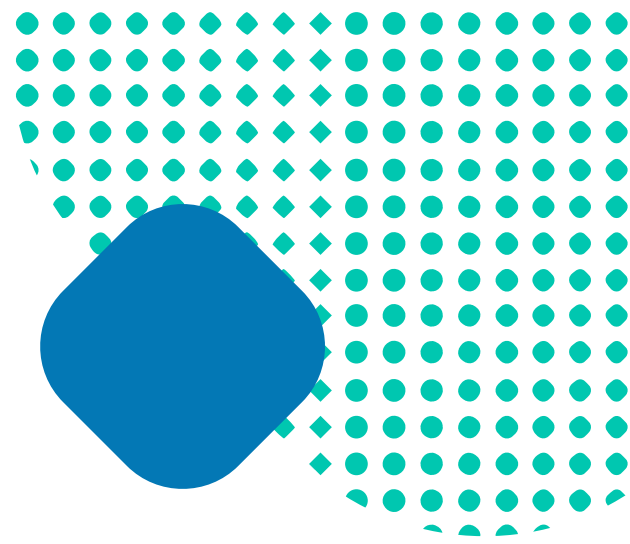


Funding landscape

In 2020/21, Wigan received a total of £8.5 million in grant funding, representing 0.17 per cent of national grant funding provided that year. The above chart depicts grant funding in Wigan by sector in 2020/21, where culture and sport received the most in grants, followed by community, employment and housing.²⁵

The following table gives an overview of the funding landscape in Wigan, based on the available data.

Funding	Wigan ²⁶
Top five significant funders and amounts (2017-2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Lottery Community Fund £7.3 million The National Lottery Heritage Fund £6.2 million Sport England £3.5 million BBC Children in Need £712,000 Esmée Fairbairn Foundation £644,000



3.

EMPOWERING PLACES

CATALYST: WIGAN AND LEIGH COMMUNITY CHARITY



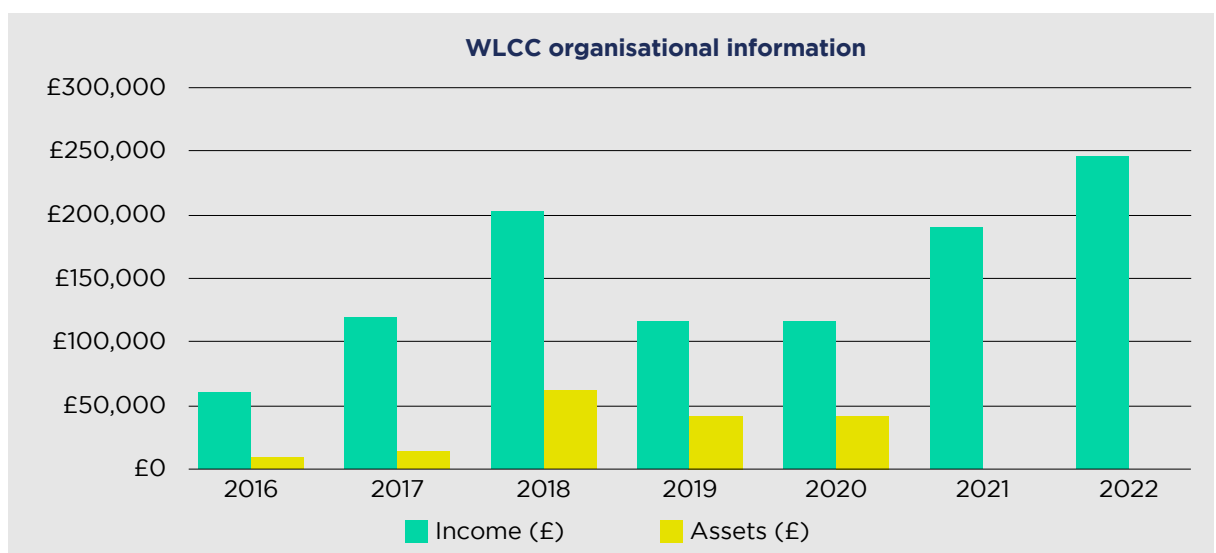
3.1 About the catalyst

Abram Ward Community Cooperative was launched in 2013, and became Wigan and Leigh Community Charity (WLCC) in 2021. It was formed as a collaboration of social enterprises, charities and community groups, working together to create sustainable and innovative communities, with a physical community business hub in Platt Bridge Community Zone.

WLCC is a charity that acts as a community anchor. Its building hosts community businesses and charities that offer a range of services to the local community, including a nursery, café, women's craft group and a support service for disabled people and their families. It has also provided a space for incubating community businesses that have developed through the Empowering Places programme, such as MissPlaces.

In recent years the charity has broadened its focus borough-wide, with a name change to reflect this shift. It aims to promote the development of community businesses, social enterprises and cooperatives across Wigan, and advocate for the role of the social economy in building community wealth.

At the end of the 2021 financial year, WLCC employed three members of staff and had a total income of £245,107, an increase on previous years.²⁷



3.2 Empowering Places delivery

A legacy for the Empowering Places programme

WLCC's vision is that by safeguarding the community hubs and open spaces in the ward, community businesses will continue to emerge, helping make Abram Ward a great place to live, work and visit. It hopes these spaces will continue to support community business trading and development, helping build awareness, reputation and opportunities.

WLCC also hopes that Wigan Council and other anchor institutions will procure more services from community businesses, and that local high streets and shopping spaces in Wigan and Leigh town centres will proactively accommodate more community businesses.

Approach to delivering Empowering Places

WLCC's approach focuses on creating environments that empower people to start their own community businesses, and supporting existing businesses to grow their trade and work alongside the community. It aims to provide the necessary knowledge, skills, networks and platforms to help the social economy across Wigan to thrive.

The Made in Wigan project at WLCC aims to work with public anchor institutions and the private sector to develop a 'line of sight' to the local social economy, so that more local spending can go to existing and new social enterprises and community businesses. This not only encourages people to spend and develop their own community businesses locally, but also engages future entrepreneurs by working with schools to teach youngsters about the benefits and career opportunities arising from the social economy.

The capacity support that WLCC has provided to community businesses has helped them grow, develop strategies, strengthen governance and business planning, and apply for funding.

Through community engagement and leadership, the catalyst has raised awareness of the opportunities in community business, and helped people to develop their own solutions to community needs. For example, it helps schools adjust their curriculum to accommodate the needs of young people with an interest in social entrepreneurship and community business, helping them to showcase their skills and encouraging them to become employers, not just employees. It has also responded to identified community needs with community businesses like Pianos, Pies and Pirouettes 'minis', which uses music and performance arts for children and young people, where such opportunity had previously been lacking.

WLCC has also created mutually beneficial clusters of community businesses that work and trade with each other at Platt Bridge Community Zone, using the building to incubate and train new community businesses.

Although the catalyst focused on social enterprise prior to the programme, Empowering Places investment has also helped it to develop its own services further to support community business development and build local prosperity, and explore and test new approaches to grow its own activities. Part of the Empowering Places remit has been to strengthen WLCC as a community business, ensuring a sustainable legacy for the programme in future.

Relationships and levels of influence

The team at WLCC has strong relationships across the borough and positioned the charity as a strategic player in developing social investment across Wigan. This has led to the catalyst working with Wigan Council and the Borough Community Partnership to shape a social investment strategy for the place, in turn leading to its appointment as the local lead for Wigan in the Greater Manchester Local Access Fund Partnership, Proper Good Investment.

WLCC's enhanced reputation as a key advocate for the social economy has led to funding from Wigan Council to support the development and delivery of its enterprise coaching offer. This has grown from the strong relationships it has at strategic and community levels, and local people now come directly to them for advice and support to start a community business, set up a neighbourhood planning forum or manage a community asset.

“**They are the face of the (social economy) sector on the local level**

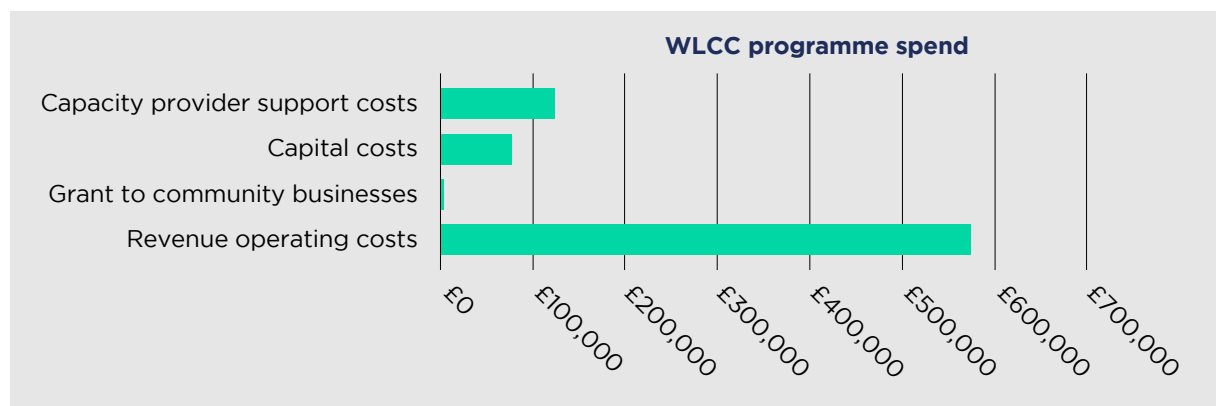
External stakeholder SH7

3.3 Support and funding

The following chart provides a breakdown of WLCC's spend across the programme.²⁸ Operational and staff costs include the cost of freelance support, and internal costs includes office rental, equipment, travel, subsistence, marketing, communications and events.

Impact of capacity support provided by the Empowering Places programme

The most significant capacity support WLCC commissioned from the programme has been to develop the Abram Ward Neighbourhood Plan involving planning, a business site audit, public realm analysis and vision. The plan will provide a legacy for Empowering Places, supporting economic development with local spaces, community business generation and the future parks programme.



WLCC also received support to develop the Made in Wigan brand, helping it develop a community wealth building strategy with Wigan Council. This was initially intended to be a trading arm operating out of a Made in Wigan shop in the town centre, and an e-commerce platform. However, low engagement with both the shop and online platform in the face of the pandemic led WLCC to transform the Made in Wigan brand into a movement to enhance and promote the social economy locally.

WLCC has benefited from multiple tech leads with diverse skill sets during the programme. Its relationship with one from the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), already providing ongoing community wealth building advice to Wigan Council, has helped raise its profile as an even more credible organisation in this sphere. The specialist adviser's deep knowledge of the local context and strategic relationships across Greater Manchester have helped WLCC grow their work from Abram Ward.

While applications for seed funding and feedback from community research suggests more people are aware of Made in Wigan, there is still progress to be made in enabling more local people to set up their own community business.

3.4 Impact of Empowering Places

Impact on the catalyst

Empowering Places has given WLCC the flexibility to test and pilot ideas in a small area, giving them the confidence and insight to expand to a borough-wide level. While it has always been well regarded, evident in the local initiatives it was asked to join in the past, Empowering Places has enabled it to enhance connections and relationships, grow national contacts, and develop new relationships with national stakeholders like Locality and the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities. Its lead role in managing the Local Access funding pot in Wigan, for

example, can be attributed to its evolving reputation for championing community businesses through Empowering Places, and the capacity the programme has given to develop relationships in the social economy and with strategic actors across the borough.



It allowed them ... to move out of a focus on survival and into a strategic space

Tech lead

WLCC is the smallest organisation on the Empowering Places programme in terms of staff, income and assets. It is also the youngest, joining the programme as Abram Ward Community Cooperative (which was founded in 2013). The programme has provided essential support to build WLCC's capacity and resilience, enabling it to have a much greater impact across the social economy in Wigan. Tailored support from the programme has helped business planning, governance and marketing and communication, leaving the catalyst with a strong governance model, engaging website and robust business planning processes. All this has helped it leverage further funding to continue its mentoring and coaching beyond the Empowering Places programme, through the Local Access fund and a service delivery contract from Wigan Council.

The catalyst has learned from others, taking inspiration from the Wharton Trust in Hartlepool and Centre4 in Grimsby to explore community organising, and B-inspired in Leicester and Real Ideas in Plymouth to develop an asset base. WLCC has increasingly been looking to acquire buildings as assets that can provide affordable rental spaces for community businesses, while bringing in a sustainable income. Despite a recent unsuccessful attempt in Abram Ward, purchasing a community building remains a priority and the Neighbourhood Plan Forum has developed a community asset plan to identify future opportunities.

Impact of Empowering Places on the community and wider place
The community businesses supported by the catalyst

Community business	Description
Hub 617	Hub offering a safe space for care-leavers to help them with the transition to adulthood
Betty's Café	Community café operating from a previously vacant facility within Bickershaw Village Community Club
Bickershaw Village Community Club	A community club in the village of Bickershaw with rooms that can be hired out for private functions
Bicky Lads and Lasses	Craft based activity for young people in the Bickershaw Village Community Club, helping reduce social isolation in the local community, meeting weekly and making products for sale
Bom-Ta-Bom	Drumming and music therapy workshops for young people and adults with disabilities, aged 16 and over
Made in Wigan Shop	Shop and community hub in Wigan town centre providing free services and support to help more people to set up and promote their own community businesses across the borough, and a sales platform for the services they provide and products they make.
MissPlaces Ltd	Wellbeing group for women supporting entrepreneurship and developing skills
Pianos, Pies and Pirouettes	Supporting the growth of art and culture in Wigan, from music, dance and performance to food, hosting and devising community theatre events, aiming to build engagement and reduce inequalities
Platt Bridge Community Zone	Community enterprise hub in Platt Bridge, owned and operated by Wigan and Leigh Community Charity
TasteBuds Café	Community café in Platt Bridge Community Zone that cooks with locally grown food and trains local people to cook
Tudor House	Community hub and accommodation facility in Hindley
Wigan Cosmos	Football club offering wide range of inclusive competitive and social sports opportunities, to build skills, fitness and wellbeing, that has taken responsibility for St John's Street Playing Fields in Abram Ward through an asset transfer
Wigan Men's Sheds	Addressing social isolation and men's mental health by providing a range of activities for men of all ages from gardening to woodwork Unfortunately Wigan Men's sheds has now closed down
Abram Community Centre	Volunteer-run community led facility in Abram providing a multi-purpose communal place as a home for wide range of groups, clubs and classes and reinvesting income into community services and support
More Than Words	Community organisation bringing inclusive drama, music, sports and healthy lifestyles to people of all ages and abilities in Wigan and beyond

Impact of Empowering Places on individuals, community business and the wider community

WLCC has supported the development of 11 community businesses throughout Empowering Places with seed funding, advice and capacity building support. It has also distributed seed funding to four new community businesses through participatory budgeting events.

Men's Sheds and MissPlaces were started during the programme to support the wellbeing of men and women respectively, by developing skills and confidence, and supporting entrepreneurship through crafts. At their height the two groups were supporting between 100 and 150 people per week across the borough, providing lots of social value for very little cost. Men's Sheds sadly closed during the pandemic but the council is keen to provide similar social prescribing offers in future, and WLCC is currently working with MissPlaces to develop an asset base.

Pianos, Pies and Pirouettes is a community business that uses classical music and ballet to create accessible avenues to arts and culture for people who would otherwise be unable to enjoy the benefits of participation. While its primary aim is improving health outcomes through ballet, it also offers opportunities to build skills in composing music and designing sets for stage. The team has engaged a local professional rugby club, raising the profile of the business and encouraging more people to get involved. Pianos, Pies and Pirouettes has already raised money to support two local people to get into dance school, and one of its stories was featured in local newspaper [Wigan Today](#). WLCC has been working closely with the business over the past two years, helping it access space for classes and refining its offer for Wigan.

As a result it is helping it launch 'Made in Wigan Minis' which focuses on using music and performance arts to engage young people across the borough. Their collaboration is a key part of the catalyst's vision to engage children, young people and families in the local social economy.

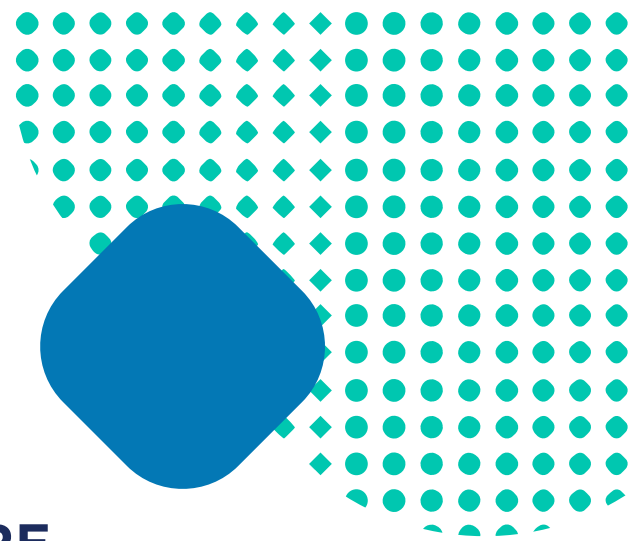
3.5 The COVID-19 pandemic

Impact on the catalyst's delivery of Empowering Places

As a small nimble organisation largely reliant on grant funding, WLCC's income was not as badly affected as other catalyst organisations on the programme during the pandemic. Empowering Places funding contributed towards the salaries of all three members of staff and as a result they have not had to worry about furloughing or redundancies. However, the pandemic came at a time when WLCC was looking to grow its income by hiring out conference facilities and starting to charge rent to those emerging community business that had been operating rent-free from Platt Bridge. The pandemic effectively paused WLCC's endeavours to explore new sources of income and transitioning community business into rent-paying tenants.

Impact on community businesses

During the early stages of the pandemic, the majority of community businesses supported by WLCC were forced to suspend all activity. Although Men's Sheds and MissPlaces had previously applied for funding to support their development, the pandemic set them back and, unfortunately, Men's Sheds has been unable to reopen since. However, both the local clinical commissioning group and council have expressed an interest in commissioning community businesses for social prescribing, so there is hope this will provide some sustainability for business models that focus on health and wellbeing support.



4. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

4.1 Ways of working

Empowering Places has seen WLCC transform, from a nascent community centre which was just finding its feet in developing governance structures and exploring its offer to the local area in Abram Ward, into an established and influential stakeholder for social and economic development of the borough of Wigan. Allowing staff to move away from a focus on fundraising, it has provided the team with the time and headspace to articulate their mission, and build networks at multiple levels of the social economy – the local community, community businesses and voluntary organisations – and with strategic decision makers at a local authority level. This allows WLCC to serve as a bridge between grassroots community businesses and anchor organisations working on the local community wealth building agenda, a position reflected in its role with the Local Assess fund.

“
The most impact has been winning that strategic argument and growing awareness ... He's got the third sector onto Wigan Council's radar
Delivery partner

While not all the community businesses that were started during Empowering Places have developed into sustainable organisations, the programme has helped WLCC develop its offer and built its understanding about what works most effectively in building sustainability.

WLCC will be moving away from the intensive incubator and mentor role it trialled with some community businesses during Empowering Places, to focus on supporting a wider range of community businesses with the coaching, advice and network building they need to prepare for social investment. WLCC will continue to advocate for the social economy, both by engaging local people of all ages and connecting Wigan's local community businesses and social enterprises to public anchor organisations and social investment opportunities.

WLCC's strategy has also identified community organising as a key driver of future development, building understanding of what the community needs and wants, and how to support local people to change things for themselves. This will also inform wider neighbourhood plans.

The catalyst team is also developing and testing an enterprise coaching training package to help community businesses start up and scale up, involving a cooperative of business leaders similar to the Empowering Places capacity pool. WLCC is promoting these opportunities alongside other ways to engage in the social economy through Platt Bridge Community Zone, borough-wide social enterprise and charity forums, and careers fairs at schools across Wigan and Leigh. It has identified three routes to engagement: developing a community business; joining a community business as a member; and buying locally from community businesses.

4.2 Sustainability

WLCC is a very small organisation, with a core group of three or four staff who have been deeply connected to the development of its vision and approach. This is both an asset and a risk for the organisation. When speaking about WLCC, stakeholders often refer to the individual staff members, rather than the organisation as a separate entity. The longevity of catalyst staff and their relational way of working has been critical to the organisation's growing influence and role as the 'face of the sector' in the local community. However, the future of WLCC's role and relationships is vulnerable if current staff move on from the organisation, and it will need to plan for their succession if it is to continue playing a key role in delivering the thriving and sustainable social economy at the heart of its aspirations.

ENDNOTES



- 1 Power to Change describes itself as: 'the independent trust that strengthens communities through community business. We use our experience to bring partners together to fund, grow and back community business to make places thrive. We are curious and rigorous; we do, test, and learn. And we are here to support community business, whatever the challenge.'
- 2 Informed by the 2015 English indices of deprivation (the most recent data available at the time). Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2015>
- 3 Marsh Farm Futures in Luton was the seventh member of the Empowering Places cohort; its involvement with the programme ended in August 2019, shortly after Renaisi joined as evaluators.
- 4 Originally incubated by Action for Business Ltd in Carlisle Business Centre, Manningham.
- 5 An earlier version of this profile (2021) focused on qualitative and quantitative data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 6 English Indices of Deprivation: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation>
- 7 Local Insight: <https://ocsi.uk/local-insight/>
- 8 Thriving Places Index: <https://www.thrivingplacesindex.org/>
- 9 Place Analytics: <https://gt-placeanalytics.co.uk/>
- 10 UK Social Fabric Index: <https://www.ukonward.com/data/social-fabric-index/>
- 11 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2022.
- 12 Local Insight (2022).
- 13 Thriving Places Index (2020).
- 14 Place Analytics, local authority-wide (2019).
- 15 UK Social Fabric Index (2020).
- 16 Thriving Places Index, local authority-wide (2021).
- 17 Hyperlocal booster version of the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's Community Life Survey (2021).

18 *ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 MyCake analysis of Companies House and Charity Commission Data, Office for National Statistics (April 2022).

21 *Ibid.*

22 *ibid.*

23 *ibid.*

24 *ibid.*

25 *ibid.*

26 July 2023 data from 360Giving, a charity that helps organisations to publish open, standardised grants data. For more information, see: [GrantNav](#). This data excludes statutory funding from central government.

27 Power to Change annual grantee survey (2016–2022). The data presented here is self-reported by the catalyst organisation. Missing data points indicate that no data was submitted.

28 Power to Change internal report (December 2022).



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