



York Community Fund: Learning, impact and future aspirations report

June 2026

Introduction

Community leaders and team members from organisations funded through the York Community Fund came together to celebrate the impact of the fund and reflect on their experiences of participatory grant-making. The event explored the difference the funding has made to organisations and communities, the learning from the process so far, and hopes for the future of York.

At the heart of the York Community Fund are people from York with experience of the issues facing the city. These community members have helped design the programme, shape the guidance and make decisions about where funding is allocated, ensuring people in York have a meaningful voice in directing funding where it is needed most.

Key themes

Four key themes emerged consistently throughout the discussions.

- **Trust**

People valued the trust placed in communities to shape decisions, allocate funding and determine what works best for local people.

- **Collaboration**

Organisations described growing openness, stronger relationships and a greater willingness to share knowledge, resources and opportunities.

- **Flexible funding**

Simple application processes and flexible funding, including support for core costs, enabled organisations to respond to community needs more effectively.

- **Sustainability**

There was a strong call for longer-term investment, including multi-year and operational funding, to help organisations plan, grow and create lasting impact.

Across all discussions, people highlighted the value of community-led decision-making and the importance of ensuring people living in the city continue to have a meaningful voice in shaping the future of York.

1. Learning from the participatory decision-making experience and the funding so far

People involved in the York Community Fund's decision-making processes reflected on the importance of embracing uncertainty, trusting each other and allowing ideas to develop organically. There was a strong sense that meaningful community-led work requires courage, flexibility and a willingness to learn together.

Trust and relationships

Building trust was identified as one of the most important outcomes of the process. People spoke about the importance of trusting networks, communities of practice and local relationships. Honest communication and opportunities to hear different perspectives helped people stay connected to local issues and strengthened confidence in collaborative approaches.

Simplicity and accessibility

Many people found the application process significantly easier and more accessible than other funding programmes they had experienced. Some reflected that the process was also an improvement on previous years.

Short, simple application forms reduced barriers and enabled organisations to focus on their work rather than administration. The straightforward process was seen as an important way of making funding more accessible, particularly for smaller organisations and community groups.

Flexible funding

Core cost funding was repeatedly highlighted as unusual and extremely valuable. People appreciated being trusted to use funding where it was most needed and on approaches they knew would work.

This flexibility enabled organisations to sustain existing activities while also responding to emerging needs and exploring new opportunities. Many reflected that being able to use funding for what was genuinely needed, rather than fitting activities into restrictive funding criteria, made a significant difference.

Persistence and community support

People encouraged others not to give up, highlighting the value of peer support, collaboration and learning together. Strong demand for the fund reinforced that community-led investment is needed and valued across York.

One person summed up the sentiment by sharing:

"Hello Two Ridings, you guys are bloody awesome. Much love, Scott."

2. Changes seen in people and communities

People shared stories of positive change happening within their organisations, communities and the lives of individuals they work alongside, as a result of the work they are doing.

Growing trust and openness

People described seeing more openness, less secrecy and a greater willingness to share learning, resources and opportunities. Organisations reported stronger relationships, increased collaboration and a growing willingness to work collectively to meet local needs.

Stronger connections and collaboration

Improved knowledge of local organisations has led to more effective referrals and greater awareness of available support. Shared connections and networks are strengthening community infrastructure, and people described feeling more connected to each other and the wider network of organisations across the city.

Improved wellbeing and confidence

People reported seeing people's confidence, self-esteem and wellbeing growing as a result of accessing services and activities. Reduced social isolation, increased opportunities for participation and more powerful experiences of purpose and belonging were recurring themes.

Organisational stability

Funding has enabled organisations to maintain services, continue opening hours and ensure support remains accessible. For many, simply being able to continue providing vital services represented a significant achievement in an increasingly challenging funding environment.

People recognised the importance of having stable funding that provides a foundation for supporting communities now and into the future. Having that stability has enabled organisations to focus on delivering meaningful work while planning more confidently for the years ahead.

3. Hopes for the future

People shared ambitious and inspiring hopes for the future of York and its communities.

Community power and ownership

People wanted to see communities play a greater role in shaping decisions that affect the city, with funding and decision-making processes informed by local knowledge and lived experience. There was also a call for national funders to develop a deeper understanding of poverty and local challenges to ensure resources are distributed more fairly.

Collaboration and connection

People hoped for stronger relationships between communities, organisations and services, with collaboration becoming a normal part of how people work together. Better integration, shared learning and opportunities to build meaningful connections were seen as important for creating lasting change.

Sustainable funding

Long-term sustainability was one of the strongest themes discussed. People highlighted the need for multi-year funding, increased operational and core funding, and greater investment in organisational development. There was a clear desire for a funding landscape that supports strategic growth and long-term impact, rather than continual short-term "fire-fighting".

Inclusive communities

People hoped to see more safe and welcoming spaces, stronger connections for isolated individuals and families, opportunities for children and young people, and communities where people feel valued, included and able to contribute. Greater openness, understanding and opportunities to share knowledge were also seen as important.

Growing impact

People wanted organisations and communities to be able to reach and support more people, improve access to opportunities and experiences, and continue building on the progress made in recent years.

Conclusion

The reflections shared during the event demonstrate the value of trusting people to shape decisions that affect their communities. The York Community Fund has enabled organisations to sustain vital services, strengthen relationships and improve outcomes for the people they support.

Looking ahead, people want to see communities continue to play a central role in decision-making, supported by stronger collaboration and long-term investment. The conversations throughout the event reinforced a simple but powerful message: when people are trusted and supported to lead, in the places where they live, communities are better able to create lasting change.

Get in touch with Two Ridings Community Foundation to discuss the York Community Fund in more detail.

Phone: 01904 929500 Email: info@tworidingscf.org.uk

www.tworidingscf.org.uk

