Third Sector Reference Group

Purpose:

This Reference Group exists to provide a strategic space to offer third sector viewpoints, information and insights to city partners to inform policy development, influence partnerships and shape investment. Its work has the greatest impact on the most vulnerable people in the city. It is a valued, trusted and respected forum. It represents a hugely diverse collection of organisations that come from the thousands of third sector organisations across the city.

The third sector in Edinburgh delivers value through:

a) models of inclusion at local and city level;
b) investment approaches which leverage relationships and local intelligence; and
c) an impact approach which delivers direct, indirect, temporary and permanent impacts for community and public benefit.

The TSRG is an open and transparent group, however it can provide a confidential space where members and partners can discuss important issues and collate appropriate feedback. It is not the only mechanism by which partners can engage with the sector and vice versa.

Priorities:

1. ***Inform Governance****:* Currently, city governance structures around the Edinburgh Partnership Board, EIJB, Community Planning Partnerships and Region Deal have a third sector 'seat' at their decision-making tables. These board positions carry influence. However, the third sector seat is a single voice in a group of primarily public sector decision makers and elected members. To support these key decision making roles, the third sector Reference Group will provide briefings and support to ensure the voice of the sector as a whole is represented, to inform decisions and support actions to strengthen sector resilience. [See Annex 1]. These board representatives will be supported by a flow of information from city boards to the third sector, and a flow of insights from the third sector to city boards [See Annex 2]
2. ***Gathering and Presenting Evidence****:* Provide oversight to data collation on current challenges to inform sector decisions. Promote impact evaluation approaches beyond single public sector funds and methods of measurement, supported by briefings and research, where possible, on the wider value of the sector to inform city policy and influence city decision makers.
3. ***Support Change****:* Reflecting and improving on ways of working models where the sector has organised collaboratively to meet current challenges; and targeting key external decision makers on co-design through strategic partnerships.
   The TSRG will provide a sounding board for innovations and source of new ideas to address the systemic issues and challenges in the city that require change and new ways of working.
4. ***Shape Investment****:* One of the vulnerabilities the third sector has is multiple public sector funding streams which can be isolated, reduced or removed by those partners. The Reference Group will review options for integrated funding models, supported by

foundational policy, map funding opportunities for short term resilience and assert investment propositions. The third sector will engage with and support public sector partners in the co-design and co-production of innovative solutions that can address the challenges that the third sector is a key partner in delivering sustainable solutions.

5. ***Establish Short Life Working Groups****:* The TSRG may create specific working groups to go deeper into specific project areas for defined periods or towards achieving outcomes. These groups would operate in the same transparent and open way as the TSRG, publish records of meetings and progress being made.

Membership:

The TSRG would not be able to function effectively if every third sector organisation was on the group. However, the Reference Group will meet in full with the sector at least two times a year in conference style , with monthly meetings being held of the smaller group . It therefore needs to create a selection process whereby willing, able and competent people can be involved in this group at a strategic level and commit to active participation in working for the benefit of the sector.

The membership for the TSRG will sit around 12 people, made up of Third Sector Leaders and Chairs of Third Sector forums who will work on behalf of the city within a strategic and joined up approach. In addition to the 12 members, the TSI CEOs (of ESEN, EVOC and VE) would be permanent member as well as the manager of ECHF. In addition, there will be a governance group of chair, vice chair , TSI leads and secretarial support.

A separate paper describes the selection process for members to be recruited for appointment to the TSRG.

In addition to Members, the TSRG may invite other individuals to attend meetings on an ad-hoc basis to provide specific insight or information on a relevant subject.

The **Chair and Vice Chair** of the TSRG shall be agreed by the Group, and rotate every 12 months to ensure fairness and representativeness.

EVOC role:

EVOC will act as secretariat, help the TSRG agree a workplan, and communicate outcomes to the sector. The person acting on behalf of the TSI on City boards will be a member of the TSRG for the duration of their time in that role, to ensure continuity and representation both ways. EVOC will help gather data and progress evaluations, acting as an intelligence hub for the sector.

Scope:
The TSRG will focus on matters affecting the third sector and people whom those organisations serve. This will include horizon-scanning for potential risks and opportunities for the sector. but recommendations will have broader applications for other areas of third sector activity in Edinburgh with a particular focus on joined up policy, practice and investment at neighbourhood level and city wide approaches and communities of interest. The TSRG seeks to represent all communities and people with lived experience but will not hold seats for people to represent any specific group or interest (where topics arise that require deeper knowledge or

experience of particular issues the group will be free to include individuals with such experience to share their expertise).

Roles and Responsibilities:

- *Chair:* Provide strategic leadership to the TSRG, ensure focus on key objectives, and represent the TSRG to stakeholders.
- *Secretariat (EVOC):* Organise meetings, prepare agendas and sharing minutes, support coordination of activities.
- *Members:* Contribute time and expertise, participate in meetings and discussions, share information and evidence, contribute to reports and briefings and support the development of recommendations.

Governance:

- *Decision-Making:* Decisions will be made by consensus where possible. Where consensus cannot be reached, a simple majority vote of members present will be used. There would not be a casting vote for the chair.
- *Reporting:* The TSRG will publish notes from meetings online via the TSI website to ensure openness and transparency. It will share reports with public sector and other partners on behalf of the sector.
- *Accountability:* The TSRG is principally accountable to its members but also more broadly to the third sector in Edinburgh.
- *Operations:* If fewer than 5 members the group will cease to operate

All members are expected to listen actively to others' viewpoints and engage in discussions with openness and respect. Differing opinions are valued as they contribute to richer understanding and better decision-making. Members should communicate thoughtfully, avoid personal criticism, and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute in a supportive and inclusive environment.

Meetings:

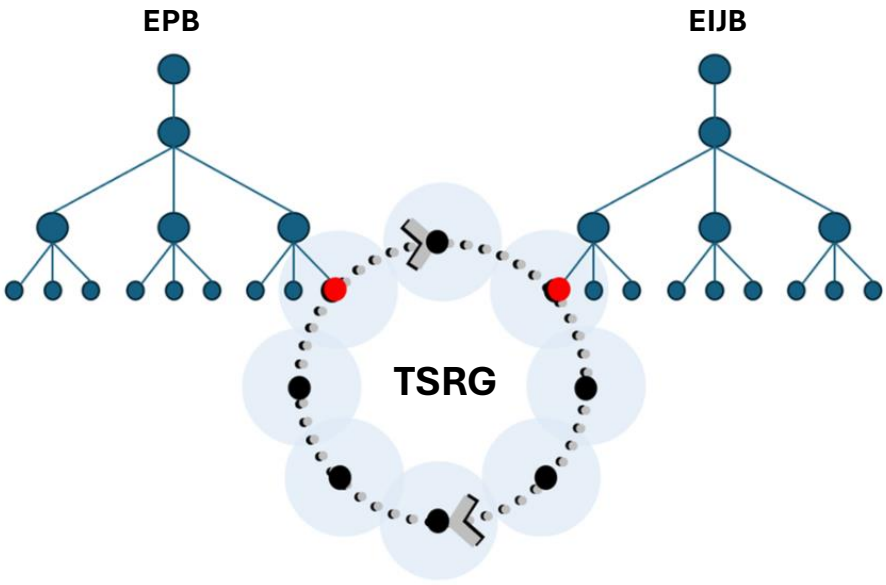
- **Frequency**: Meetings will be held monthly or as required, with additional sessions as needed to progress specific deliverables.
- **Location**: Meetings will be held in person or online to ensure accessibility.
- **Quorum**: A quorum will be set at one-third of the membership

Amendments:

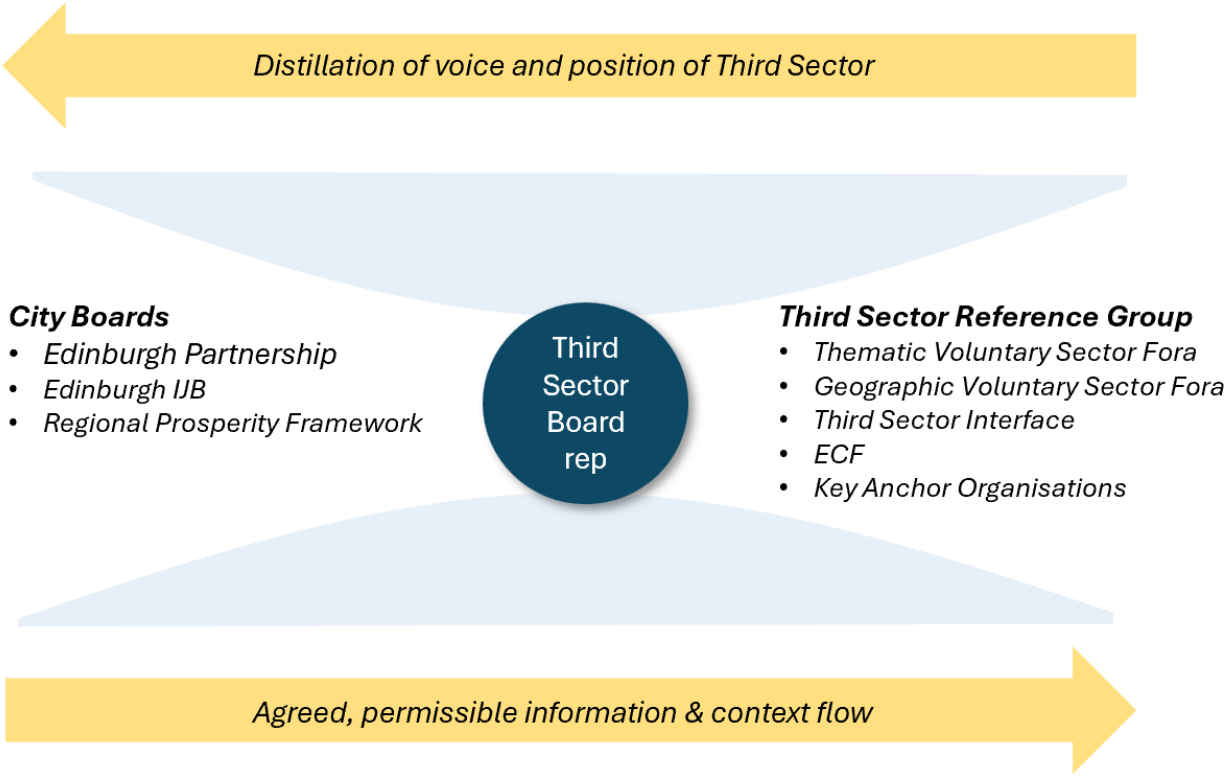
This Terms of Reference may be amended with the agreement of the chair and a majority of TSRG members to reflect emerging needs or changes in context.

ANNEX 1: Influencing City Governance in Edinburgh

The diagram below is intended to show how the third sector representative is engaged with and connected to city wide boards such as Edinburgh Partnership Board (EPB) and Edinburgh Integration Joint Board (EIJB).



ANNEX 2: Supporting Third Sector reps on City Boards



VERSION CONTROL: Third Sector Reference Group: ToR
Version 3 – DL. 15/10/2024V4 drafted SAH&BC. 2/10/2025. V4.1 incorporates TSRG comments of 8/10/25.
V4.2 includes written feedback and TSRG mtg from Dec 2025. V4.3 cleaned and set for publication on TSI website March 2026