THird sector COST OF LIVING MEETING

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| Date: | MONDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2023 |
| Time: | 10:00AM |
| Place: | TEAMS AND GATEWAY OFFICE |
| Attending: | ALAN DAVIDSON, ALAN MCCLOSKEY, ALISON WRIGHT, ANN PIKE, HELEN DAVIS, JOHN MCCLAY, KAREN NAILEN,  MARIA THORP, RAYMOND BRANTON, ROBYN OSWALD, SILENCE CHIHURI, ALAN CUNNINGHAM, TRACI MACKAY AND DICKSON |
| Apologies: | ANN EDWARDS, DAVID MACDONALD, TRACY MURDOCH, TRACY KERR, LAURA KEARNEY |
| Next Meeting | **Wednesday 29 March 2pm**  Gateway Office and online  [Click here to join the meeting](https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_MDk1MDM4YjItYTZhNS00ZDFhLWJmZjQtYmY2YTVmYWU3N2U3%40thread.v2/0?context=%7b%22Tid%22%3a%22be050862-75a4-4dfd-be60-e3f75dea411c%22%2c%22Oid%22%3a%22cdd264c5-2bed-4ac8-a0ea-026b3eaea67c%22%7d)  Meeting ID: 384 737 777 177  Passcode: 74iFDt |

Alan McCloskey welcomed everyone to today’s meeting.

**2. minutes from the last meeting / accuracy and actions – Wednesday 11 January 2023**

Minutes from the last meeting were checked – there were no issues raised. Minutes approved.

Actions from the last meeting:

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| **ACTIONS** | | |
| Issue out an email regarding the free tickets from the regal in Bathgate | Alan McCloskey | Email was issued out to the group with the relevant information. |
| Issue out an email regarding the additional £20k funding | Alan McCloskey | Email was issued out to the group with the relevant information. |
| Collate groups names and what their organisations can do and put into a spreadsheet | Tracy Kerr | Alan to have a chat with Tracy to make sure the action is followed through. |
| Look into getting information into the west Lothian bulletin | Alan McCloskey | Alan has raised this with Nahid – the VSG group can get information published into the Bulletin. |
| Survey to be issued out to the group | Karen Nailen | Survey issued out – had some responses which will be discussed at today’s meeting. |
| Collate the survey results and issue out | Robyn Oswald | Robyn collated results and sent to Karen to issue out to the group. |

**3. update on the cost of living survey**

Karen issued the survey monkey out to the group just after the last meeting in January. There were a few people that missed the email as it was reissued. So far there has been 16 responses. The link will be kept open for another week or so – give everyone enough time to respond.

The results to this survey can then be taken to Board of Directors to get conversations started on how to help staff during the cost of living crisis.

There is a financial challenge to this as the third sector don’t have an endless supply of money – the biggest concern is going forward, how organisations will be able to retain staff with limited budgets and the sustainability of extra payments given so far (which are mentioned in the results from the survey).

Karen mentioned that, as this survey is a snapshot of here and now, it would be useful to see what everyone’s thoughts are for the future – this is where we will start to see the real struggle due to rising costs.

It was agreed that a question will be added to the survey about the next financial year. Robyn and Karen will amend this week and issue out to everyone.

Alan M stated that there are opportunities for the group to provide this information – In terms of influencing the PDSP’s aa a number of people attending this working group are sitting on. This information will show the challenges the sector is, and will be facing.

The question of how this information could be shared in the sector was raised – Karen mentioned that the information has only been circulated between this working group, but there is an intention to share out with the working group. Alan stated that, once the results are in, the VSG would be more than happy to share on their social media platforms and website. This information might lead to the public taking interest and local politicians.

Some organisations may not be able to afford the financial increase side, but other things can be done to help staff – staff wellbeing. Help staff get motivated and help with their mental health.

Ann asked if any health and wellbeing/councillor services offer group costs that would reduce costs for individual organisations in sector? – Alan M stated that the group will look into this and report back.

**4. Partners update / issues**

The Larder:

There are 350 people per week with 3 meals per person. The Larder has managed to gain some extra funding recently, but still nowhere near the level needed to help with the increase in people using the service. One of the immediate issues is, the larder has had to stop taking people on for the meal service – there is now a waiting list, and some of these people are in real crisis. There is also the issue of giving 100 free meals isn’t sustainable. This year the larder will be looking onto hoe to redesign the service. The Larder visited a organisation in Chester called “Well Fed”. They are a food social enterprise and they have a 12 week programme; for the first 4 weeks someone is referred, they get 20 free meals per week (4 person family), for the 2nd set of 4 weeks clients have to pay £10.00 for the 20 meals , for the 3rd set of 4 weeks they have to pay £15.00 and after that clients will be paying the full costs of the meals (£2.00 for a hot ready meal). This is something that the larder will be looking in to.

Fair Justice System Scotland:

Silence asked the group whether they have scoped out all the cost of living crisis where West Lothian is concerned – other than what’s already been looked at. Other than that, can we say these are the main focus areas? Or scope to include other aspects of the cost of living challenges. There are a lot of other things that are coming into the mix when we talk of cost of living challenges that people are facing (e.g. there is the energy crisis, hoe people are coping with abuse and in term of cost of living for staff, it’s just looking at extra pay or other things that can be done to help. Silence stated that things need to be clarified on what is the scope. What are we looking at? What are we taking about when we say cost of living crisis?

The bulk of the communities FJSS normally work with are still going through the process of settling into the UK – they have immigration issues to deal with. That also further complicates their economic and welfare situations because the amount of money involved in getting visa’s. some of the people FJSS are dealing with are also students

Being a small organisation, FJSS count on volunteers, they do the bulk of the work – particularly out in the community. They would not be able to deliver the service without the help of the volunteers. There has been a lot of discussions on the cost of living issues with staff but what about the volunteers? Silence wanted to make sure this forum also addresses some of the challenges that we face as an organisation. Our main call is to ensure that societies and communities are all catered for.

Alan stated that these are really good points to make. On the wider policy position, it’s under the bracket of cost of living – its social care, poverty. We want to make those opportunities where we can that it’s not just about fuel and the rising costs, it’s about how people are treated and what support can be provided to them.

Karen agrees that it’s not just staff but also volunteers – this is a different challenge for us in the sector. There was a report done recently with volunteer Scotland, and they spoke about the challenges of volunteering during the cost of living crisis – that included people not having the motivation to do volunteering, the travel costs and people’s mental health. All contributing factors as to why people might struggle to commit to volunteering.

Karen agreed with Silence – a lot of the organisations in the third sector will have employees, but a lot of them are volunteers as well. In the survey, we did ask the question what are you are doing for your volunteers, and people are probably focusing more on employees, but let’s not forget the volunteers and what support can be provided to the volunteers. Quite often our volunteers are the backbone of the service provided.

Karen stated that she doesn’t necessarily think this working group will have all the answers in relation to all the strategy etc, but sees this group as a support mechanism for the sector in west Lothian, and that the group are able to have these honest conversations, make sure they’re fed into the right forums and support each other, learn and share and do in an informal helpful way, then we can feed into the formal groups. This group will be an ongoing issue for us going forward as a sector. The challenges wont just ne this year, it will be the years ahead as well.

First Step:

Maria mentioned that, at first step, in terms of volunteers, they’ve not experienced a decrease in interest. After talking to their volunteers, the main hooks to drawing people in, and staying, is regarding the isolation people faced during covid. With the cost of living crisis, a lot of people can’t afford to do social activities, so having a sense of purpose, feeling valued and building a sense of belonging has been really critical to drawing people in and retaining them. First Step have seen an increase in volunteers.

The other thing they’ve seen through the cost of living crisis over the last year is an impact on relationships – due to the increase in living, people are not able to afford to leave.

Silence mentioned that they set up a mental health and counselling service for volunteers – it proved to be very useful. Opened it up to the wider BME community and it was easy for us to develop the programme because some if the volunteers themselves became part of the team using their own experience now that was very useful.

Alison asked about the council’s cost of living group – is this forum still existing? Alan mentioned that their next meeting is on 8 March. Alan will feed back discussions from these meetings into their forum.

Youth Action Project:

Helen mentioned that, in terms of relationships and families – particularly with young adults, there’s this constant pressure that young people feel they’re putting their parents under as they can’t afford to move out – especially when they get into their 20’s. noticed quite a few young people getting depressed regarding this. Helen also mentioned that they are also starting to see a high number of young people considering whether they would go onto further education/university. If this cost of living crisis continues, we could have an impact of reduced opportunities for people because people are scared to take the risk.

There is also the opposite side of pressure of already split families and shared responsibilities of looking after children – it’s putting more pressure on one of the parents as they may not have any money so can’t take the kids.

VSG

Tracy wanted to ask the group a question regarding pressure on staff – they have noticed a high number of absences due to illness (cold/flu etc.) with staff. Is this time of year normal for high number of absences? Or does the group think it’s worse due to the cost of living?

A member of the group stated that they brought in full sick pay for staff – there was a debate on whether there would be an increase in absences. it did increase their absence levels slightly. But this time of year, is normal for people getting sick and taking time off.

Carers of West Lothian:

Alison stated that, in regards to reporting this back to the Council in terms of what’s happening and what we’re noticing in the third sector – both on the impact of service users, but also on organisations. There have been discussion of organisations getting to the point of not being able to provide the services. After the discussion on reporting this through the annual report, Alison wonders if this is such an important issue that is might get lost in the annual report, and could the group to be doing something separate in regards to the cost of living in west Lothian? And the impact on organisations if the services provided are really vital, and will become more vital as the

Council cuts start – organisations need to be raising concerns on the impacts on us, on staff and volunteers going forward.

**5. Sub Group**

Karen suggested that some people from this group could get together to discuss further, and consider what that report would look like.

Members who would like to join;

Karen Nailen

Ann Pike

Alison Wright

Silence Chihuri

Raymond Branton

Maria Thorp

Robyn to organise a meeting for the sub group to meet.

**6. Case Studies**

Just a reminder that the cost of living hub has a facility on their website where they are looking for case studies. These case studies are the opportunity to influence and tell our story. Alan asked the group to think about the opportunity to right a case study for the May annual report – the stronger our voice the better opportunity we have at raising the challenges that we face and the communities face.

There were 15-16 case studies submitted last year and were very powerful. The next report will be issued out in May, so this is the groups opportunity to get our message across.

Alan will also look into getting the survey results included in the report.

**7. AOCB**

Nothing else to raise.

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| **ACTIONS** | | |
| **ACTION** | **WHO IS RESPONSIBLE** | **ACTION PROGRESS** |
| Add question to survey regarding the future and re issue | Karen |  |
| any health and wellbeing/councillor services offer group costs that would reduce costs for individual organisations in sector? | Alan |  |
| Survey results in the annual report | Alan |  |
| Sub Group to meet to discuss pulling together separate report to annual report group | Robyn to arrange meeting for:  Karen Nailen  Ann Pike  Alison Wright  Silence Chihuri  Raymond Branton  Maria Thorp |  |