Third Sector Employability Forum

Present: Gareth McKenna (Broxburn United), Adam Brown and Kate Thomson (Street League), Fin Russell (Impact arts), Hayley Gillies (PfP / The Larder), Kathleen McLoughlin and Scot Smith (Routes for work), Helen Davis (WLYAP), Tim Daley (Routes to Grow, Cyrenians), Louise Crozier (CAB), Eunice Simpson (WLAWN)

Apologies: Tracy Murdoch (Kidzeco), Stephen (River Kids), Angela Moohan (The Larder)

1. **Welcome, Apologies and Introductions (Interim Chair):**

Alan opened the meeting as interim chair and explained we were trialling Bluetooth mic then identified that AI had joined the meeting, potentially recording without members consent, and any email record members may receive should be disregarded.

1. **Previous minutes and matters arising**

Last met in October. Meet a week before LEP however LEP date changed so Dec forum was cancelled. Alan reviewed actions which were all completed.

1. **Council update**

George Scott thanked the group for invite and asked members to get in touch with any questions and queries, welcoming feedback about what they would like to hear in future.

* Funding. Voluntary sector community grants open: [**https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/tscsf**](https://www.westlothian.gov.uk/tscsf). Asda foundation (Armadale / Blackridge focus). [**https://asdafoundation.org/our-grants/outdoor-community-spaces-fund/**](https://asdafoundation.org/our-grants/outdoor-community-spaces-fund/)**.**
* Shared prosperity fund (SPF) – 12-month extension on current provision, likelihood opportunities from last year will be available next year although there will be a 40% reduction in funding coming through SPF – no decisions yet about how this will be managed.
* George has holistic oversight for No-one left behind (employability support for any age although predominately young people). Scottish government letter received yesterday – indicative similar budget which would allow opportunity for realistic planning. Parental employment still a priority (child poverty). There will be an expectation for LEP to fund supported employment, which has gone. This has been going through a transition and been managed proactively by George’s team who have also been involved in strategic group - Oasis project which is meeting the needs of young people, lots of activity.
* Council Budget paper, 25th Feb. Papers will be on coins week before. [West Lothian Council Committee Information - Calendar](https://coins.westlothian.gov.uk/coins/calendar.asp) WLC looking for new finance director.

Member fedback that it was useful to hear directly from local authority and helps understand the local environment. Alan thanked George for the positive update and shared his thoughts from The Gathering on Tuesday where John Swinney spoke about the Scottish governments financial position which is better than it had been. In turn, this allows the third sector more opportunities. There is more confidence in next year and even next 3 years. Also spoke positively abut relationship with UK government, the 3-year funding deal will be passed down the chain. This was echoed by Gordon Brown.

* Another key theme was Child poverty. Raymond Branton, Civitas consultancy, was asked by Kathleen Sullivan to pull together a round table meeting, what can be delivered? Reps include Gateway, Food Network, WLYAP, WLC anti-poverty service. This is a positive working step joint.

1. **LEP (Alan)**

Alan is now co-chair of LEP, giving third sector a strategic voice. LEP will be meeting at the Gateway this year. Subgroup are looking at data and the Comms group are looking at how to explain to the public who the LEP are and what they are doing, it’s an opportunity to tell a story. Alan applauded LEP communication developments and transparency which is making a difference to local employability. The group now has momentum and there is a willingness to engage from the LEP. George responded that he has strong aspirations and partnership is key. Important that the sector has a strong voice. **JOB TITLE,** Pegs Bailey has taken forward a lot of Third sector LEP (wider employability forum) issues and the Employability Minister is interested in visiting local employability projects. This is a great opportunity to show some of the great work which gets done. Employability strategic plan is a national forum which is another opportunity to bring people together. There is a national LEP framework however each LEP can be slightly different.

1. **Service Delivery (All)**

* **Broxburn Utd**: Set up employment surgery with support from George. Targeted at young people but anyone from community can come in. Every 2nd Friday. Gareth was on LEP in Perth and Kinross and would be interested being LEP REP.
* **Routes to Work:** Started Mid-Nov, building infrastructure and promoting, will be delivering accredited training for parents in WL inc. food hygiene, first aid. Based in The Gateway on a Thursday, using variety of training centres. Next steps: continue building partnerships and push publicity. Biggest challenge has been referral numbers. [ssmith@routestowork.co.uk](mailto:ssmith@routestowork.co.uk), see attached flyers.
* **Partnership for parents:** Supporting pupil placements for pupils then replicate and duplicate this process: food hygiene and retail. Admin support for CAB and Retail support at Kidzeco. Built firm partnerships, taking people on a journey to meaningful sustainable employment. Will be holding networking event: targeting parents with 3 criteria: recovery from substance, ethnic minority and single parents. George suggested contacting MD from Race forum.
* **Street League –** Currently running 10wk employability programme in WL. Previously had done drop in’s: gym, football and employability. Visiting job centres and anytime fitness Bathgate. Currently based in Xcite Bathgate. Successful start with 12 young people inc Costa’s and KFC Livingston job interviews lined up already. Some unknowns going into new financial year in terms of provision in West Lothian.
* **Cyrenians:** Green skills centre, Routes to grow programme, running for 3 years. First full block of 10 young people, horticulture, construction, outdoor education. Targeted at young people who are not engaging with school and don’t have a clear plan of next steps. Referrals from schools. Looking for placement opportunities. Trainee programme has also started, peer mentoring - someone from this block will likely help in next block. Sessional worker also helping to deliver programme. This block finishes start of April. Open to referrals [timdaly@cyrenians.scot](mailto:timdaly@cyrenians.scot)
* **Impact arts:** Fin has been learning loads and met so many people inc Adult learning team and Domestic and sexual assault team, Wl college in addition to publicity. Met with MD (Race Forum) yesterday and encouraged people to contact MD for a conversation. First block starts Feb 19th every Wednesday 9.30am at Regal Theatre. 2nd: April 23rd – June 18th. If you know any ethnic minority parents who would struggle with a placement, get in touch: [fin.russell@impactarts.co.uk](mailto:fin.russell@impactarts.co.uk) Fin spoke about the positives of networking and mutual support.
* **WL African women’s network:** Create opportunities for women from minority backgrounds who have untapped skills or need training. Launched last May, over 50 women enrolled. In collaboration with college (who provide job shadowing and training). No UK experience can be a big barrier to employment for this community. Not sure on next steps, College does not have capacity. Would like to collaborate with more local organisations. Hoping to have the resources in the future to keep it going. Kathleen suggested linking in with routes to work.
* **WLYAP:** [helen@wlyap.org.uk](mailto:helen@wlyap.org.uk). Tools up project – almost full, 3 high schools. Working in partnership with WL college and The Larder. Longer term volunteering opportunities. 1:1 and also training, cashback project.
* **The Larder**: Cashback for communities connected and power to grow waiting for funding decisions. 14 people in current cohort, they will go onto work experience. Delivering 2 Academies Customer service and Social Care, 12-week programmes in partnership NHS.

Alan picked up on the recurring theme of networking, partnership working mentioned by a few members by mentioning the available support of the Gateway: Service locator, E Bulletin, TSSG meets every 2nd month: [Third Sector Strategy Group - Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian](https://www.voluntarysectorgateway.org/working-together/third-sector-strategy-group/). Food Network are meeting with Jamie Oliver’s Ministry of Food, this could throw up employability opportunities. Victoria added that happy to help connect people having record of everyone’s email – if anyone does not want their email shared or wants to make a particular connection, please let me know.

18 February @ 5:30 pm - 7:00 pm: [**Evening Networking Event**](https://www.voluntarysectorgateway.org/event/evening-networking-event/)

The Gateway 20-22 King Street, Bathgate, West Lothian, United Kingdom

We’re thrilled to invite you to our Evening Networking Event to celebrate 22 incredible years of Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian! 📅 Date: Tuesday, 18th February ⏰ Time: 5:30pm – 7:00pm 📍 Location: The Gateway, 20-22 King Street, Bathgate, EH48 1AX This event offers a wonderful chance to network with colleagues in the sector and reflect on our shared journey and accomplishments. No need to…

1. **AOCB**

Chair of Race Forum, MD Razaur Rahman, can be reached on: [info@wlcrf.org.uk](mailto:info@wlcrf.org.uk)

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| **Forum Meeting** | **LEP Meeting** |
| **06/02/2025 1.30pm** | 13/02/2025 |
| 03/04/2025 1.30pm | 10/04/2025 |
| 29/05/2025 10am | 05/06/2025 |
| 24/07/2025 1.30pm | 31/07/2025 |
| 18/09/2025 1.30pm | 25/09/2025 |
| 13/11/2025 1.30pm | 20/11/2025 |
| 08/01/2026 1.30pm | 15/01/2026 |
| 05/03/2026 1.30pm | 12/03/2026 |

**Actions**

1. If you would like the minister to visit your project – email Alan who can ask Pegs Bailey
2. Gateway happy to publicise any of your events - Victoria