

Cross-Party Group on Volunteering

Thursday 20th March 2025, 1.00 – 2.00 pm

Minute

Apologies

Jeremy Balfour MSP
Miles Briggs MSP
Kiera Russell, Rowan Alba
Scott Coyne, Epilepsy Connections
Tracey Brown, Marie Curie
Chris Ringland, Evangelical Alliance

Present

MSPs

Foyso Choudhury MSP
Paul O’Kane MSP

Invited guests

Jason Henderson, SCVO
Glenn Liddall, People Know How
Lesley Hinds, Former Lord Provost of Edinburgh
Gemma Campbell, Scottish Government
Ruth Hutton, Scottish Government

Non-MSP Group Members

Sarah Latto, Volunteer Scotland
Bethany Sikes, Volunteer Scotland
Abi Clarke, TSI Moray
Bev Read, First-Hand Lothian
David Maxwell, Volunteer Glasgow
Diane Wilson, Impact Funding Partners
Elizabeth Wigelsworth, CHSS
Emma Bellu, Aberdeen Cyrenians
Fiona Harvey, CHAS
Georgia Artus, Vintage Vibes
Helen Fleming, Prostate Scotland
Jill Hepburn, RNLI
Karen Garrott-Russell, Stroke Association

Kelsa McDonald, VoiceAbility
Kirstin White, Victim Support Scotland
Kirstin Worsley, Breastfeeding Network
Liz Green, YouthLink Scotland
Lorraine Moir, EDVA
Louise Henderson, Girlguiding Scotland
Martha Rodger, Machan Trust
Mike Melvin, ACVO
Parveen Ishaq, ELREC
Rebecca McDonald, Edinburgh Children's Hospital Charity
Ron Strachan, Aberdeen Cyrenians
Sarah Cleary, Volunteer Edinburgh
Sarah Murray, Royal Voluntary Service
Sue Bowen, Dyslexia Scotland
Susan Hunter, Befriending Networks
Valerie Ewan, NHS Tayside
Wendy Diack, Cruse Scotland

Agenda item 1: Welcome and Introduction

Foyso Choudhury MSP (FC), Co-convenor, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone to the Cross-Party Group on Volunteering. He then invited SL to provide an update on PVG fees.

Agenda item 2: PVG Fees Update

Sarah Latto (SL) shared that, since the last meeting, the Government had announced their decision not to proceed with a proposed introduction of a discounted PVG fee for volunteers in Qualifying Voluntary Organisations, opting to maintain the current fee waiver.

She also shared that the co-convenors of the CPG had written to the Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise following the announcement, expressing relief at the decision and asking for reassurance that a PVG fee for volunteers in QVOs will not be revisited for the foreseeable future.

The Minister, in her response, stated that:

“I am grateful to organisations which responded to the recent consultation and who met with me personally. I can give assurance that Scottish Ministers will continue with the fee waiver for volunteers for the foreseeable future.”

Action: SL agreed to share the response with CPG members along with the draft minute.

Agenda item 3: Minutes of previous Meeting

FC asked attendees if there were any issues or matters arising from the draft minute of the CPG meeting on the 23rd January. There were no comments.

Minutes were approved by Abi Clarke and seconded by Helen Fleming.

Agenda item 4: Sustainable Funding for Volunteering

FC invited SL to introduce the speakers. SL introduced Jason Henderson (JH) from SCVO.

Jason Henderson:

- Explained that he was going to talk about SCVOs Fair Funding principles.
- Fair Funding principles have been developed over a number of years on the back of extensive engagement across the sector, and engagement and refinement has not stopped.
- Fair Funding principles are an array of policy asks and principles aimed at the Scottish Government
- JH highlighted that most of the asks do not require additional resourcing.
- The asks are:
 - Multiyear funding
 - Sustainable funding
 - Flexible funding
 - Accessible funding
- Current data produced by SCVO through the 3rd Sector Tracker shows that the current circumstances for large parts of the voluntary sector are unsustainable.
- There has been commitment from the Scottish Government to introduce what they call Fairer funding by 2026 as a response to SCVO fair funding calls, although the name can sometimes cause a bit of confusion between the two.
- SCVO's aim is to try and use the time between now and 2026 to influence the Scottish Government so that as much of that Fairer Funding commitment as possible reflects Fair Funding principles.
- the Scottish Government has announced a pilot of two year funding grants to 45 organisations selected based on government policy objectives.
- some progress has been made on improving issues around timely notifications, and that's something SCVO are going to be monitoring over the next couple of months
- SCVO have been appreciative of the work undertaken by others in the sector supporting those calls. There's a growing list of organisations who are echoing our fair funding calls and prioritising it in their own work.
- JH invited attendees to visit the Fair Funding section of the SCVO website.

- Scottish Labour has picked up on the fair funding principles and used them as the basis for their pledge for a new deal for the third sector ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections.
- The Social Justice and Social Security committee's pre-budget scrutiny focused on 3rd sector funding principles, and the committee's report makes a number of recommendations that SCVO support, particularly as they mirror a number of fair funding asks.
- SCVO are intending to work with the wider sector in the months ahead to reframe the Fair Funding asks in relation to key priority areas like poverty, health, climate.

FC thanked JH for his input, and SL welcomed Glenn Liddall (GL) from People Know How (PKH) to share his insights.

Glenn Liddall:

- PKH was founded in 2013 using a social innovation model, delivering services to address root causes of issues including digital inclusion and school transitions.
- GL shared a graph showing that their expenditure was projected to increase whilst their income was projected to decline, and they weren't going to have several sources of funding confirmed until March/April 2025 for the 25/26 financial year.
- This would have been too late – by then PKH would have run out of money and become insolvent.
- The board took the decision to take proactive steps to close the organisation and avoid insolvency, therefore allowing for more of a planned closure and focus on a lasting legacy.
- Winding up a charitable organisation is quite complex – dealing with OSCR and dispensing of assets.
- Deciding to close the charity and stay in control, stay solvent, meant we can have a 'soft landing'. We can run our legacy projects. We can ensure that enduring impact.
- We've done a lot of work in the sector for the last 10-12 years. We've had over 70 staff involved, we've had hundreds and hundreds of different volunteers, and I think there's a lot to be proud of.
- Volunteers experienced loss, alongside paid staff and service users
- Volunteers supported operation of the canal boat, child befriending, school group work, digital inclusion during Covid, citizen research and as trustees.
- Volunteers at PKH had a real sense of purpose and fulfilment. Many volunteers reported boosts to their confidence, networks, skills.
- Volunteering is not free – we need to invest in volunteers.
- Currently working with volunteers to share the legacy of their volunteering approach.

- GL invited attendees to reach out to him to discuss further.

SL thanked GL for his input and explained that she was providing the next presentation.

Sarah Latto:

- Current volunteering landscape – significant decline in volunteering participation in 2023 Scottish Household survey, down to 18% from 26% in 2019.
- The biggest decline in volunteering can be found in working age adults, aged 16-34.
- Community and neighbourhood volunteering is the most popular – 28% of volunteers
- There is evidence of barriers to volunteering for particular groups, including disabled people and those from more deprived communities, who are less likely to volunteer but, when they do, contribute considerably more hours.
- We regularly publish bulletins exploring the impact of the cost of living crisis on volunteering and the most recent Bulletin, which looked at autumn 2024, found that volunteer shortages are one of the top three single biggest challenges facing third sector organisations - 79% of third sector organisations are facing issues with volunteer recruitment and 69% facing issues with volunteer retention.
- despite having these issues.
- 27% of third sector organisations who are experiencing challenges have taken no specific action to address it which may well reflect the fact that they don't have the capacity to do something about it.
- Volunteering is not free, it requires sustainable investment for it to flourish, and it's not a coincidence that we're seeing these challenges with volunteer recruitment and retention at a similar time that the third sector are experiencing challenges with their funding.
- we held a consultation event with our Policy Champions Network back in August last year to inform the Social Justice and Social Security Committee consultation, which reflected the following points:
 - volunteering costs can be quite unpredictable.
 - staff instability affects volunteers.
 - third sector organisations and their volunteers are dealing with much more complex situations.
 - Competitive funding environment will drive down standards in a 'race to the bottom'.
- The Volunteer Charter has been relaunched in recent years to reflect this new reality and protect volunteers from unsustainable practices.

- Our inputs to the Social Justice and Social Security Committee inquiry last year focused on Fair Funding and embedding the principles of the Charter in funding arrangements.
- The funding challenges facing volunteer involving organisations are reflected in all of our policy outputs at Volunteer Scotland, and we'll continue to work with organisations through the Policy Champions Network, through the CPG and also working directly with SCVO.
- This will likely be a key message in our influence and advocacy work ahead of the 2026 Election.

FC thanked all attendees for their contribution

Agenda item 5: Questions and Reflections

FC invited all attendees to share any thoughts or questions.

Sarah Murray: it's all very positive and I really like the Fair Funding principles, but the reality is that funds are getting cut right, left and centre. And it's not just a little bit, funds are disappearing completely. So how do we make sure going forward there is money there?

SL: I was at a meeting this morning organised by Voluntary Health Scotland to do with population health and again funding was central to the discussion. I think we need to remember that it's not just about the amount of money, it's about the people making decisions about how money is spent. One of the glimmers of hope this morning was the fact that the population health framework has got a real focus on prevention, where obviously the third sector are really front and centre. So it's not just about influencing fair funding, it's about influencing how we ensure that decisions are made which prioritise the really important work that the third sector are undertaking.

FC: I think what we need to do is pressure on all the parties to have something in their on their manifesto to support 3rd sector organisations. I think we all need to be working together on this.

Lesley Hind: Parties are putting together manifestos now, so now is the time to influence on funding for the sector. Organisations should be influencing all parties.

FC: I'll use the three presentations to draft up an article for the media on this, if speakers send me ideas.

Susan Hunter: It's really important that when organisations close or projects end because of lack of funding that we ensure volunteers do get good endings and it doesn't become an experience that puts them off from volunteering with another organisation in the future. The volunteers are an asset, and I think it's just how do we as organisations rise up and support one another to make sure that there's good

transitions for volunteers when projects end and it doesn't just become an opportunity for people to slip away and lose the habit of volunteering

Mike Melvin: it's a real tragedy that PKH have ended and we're seeing this right across Scotland. It doesn't even make financial sense that they're cutting the work that's being done on prevention, early intervention, which reduces the pressure on health and social care. I think as a CPG we just keep on banging the drum that volunteering is an investment.

David Maxwell: We need to keep in mind that the mix of funding streams are all reducing. We focus a lot on public sector funding, but the budgets available through other major grants programmes are also reducing. The government needs to consider whether there's a rebalancing of the economy that's required in terms of how things are funded and challenge assumptions that if third sector organisations are losing public sector grants, they can make that up from other sources. Other sources are also reducing their budgets or have less money to spend.

FC: Sarah, I think it will be a job for you and the team to keep the pressure on all the political parties and lobby our local MPs, MSPs and our councillors for support.

GL: I want to end on a positive note. We've managed to find new opportunities for many of our volunteers and they are still volunteering for those organisations. I also wanted to just raise about employers National Insurance contributions and the impact that will have on the 3rd sector. Why charities aren't exempt from that, I do not understand. If PKH were still in existence, it would be an additional £30,000 a year.

FC: I think this is a question we can ask.

Agenda item 6: AOB and Close

SL highlighted some new Volunteer Scotland research which shows the social value of volunteer participation and quantifies the financial value of wellbeing benefits from participating in volunteering once a week as £1000 per person per year.

FC shared that the next meeting will be on the 5th June, 1-2pm, in person at the Scottish Parliament. SL will circulate the registration link shortly.

FC shared that all presentations will also be sent out with the minutes.

FC thanked attendees and closed the meeting.