

## **Letham4All Statement to The Social Justice and Social Security Committee**

**9<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

The onset of covid-19 had implications for Letham4All and our other third sector partners even before the national lockdowns were imposed. The majority of our engagement and service delivery with people is face-to face group work and the COVID 19 virus had an impact on attendances, delivery and engagement and income generation before any kind of additional support was conceived. This coupled with the increased cost of operating due to cleaning, sanitising, and staffing costs going up had a serious impact on the viability of many organisations service delivery. Staff absence due to the need to self-isolate also cut the volume of activities that could be done and consequently impacted on income generation and costs to cover absences.

Once lockdown happened what little of our service activity remained stopped and Letham4All had to respond to this by where possible reshaping service delivery for non-contact online, staff had to be furloughed if possible, whilst at the same time developing new responses to contribute to the local response to the pandemic. Often this work had to be co-ordinated by a small(er) number of people due to the remaining staff being on furlough. Volunteer pools changed due to the impact of covid on differing age groups. Older people shielded or restricted activity, while younger and middle-aged people were more inclined to volunteer (often for the first time) as a means of keeping busy.

Funding was widely available however keeping abreast of what support was available to organisations and individuals became a task in itself.

Grassroot community organisations turned up very well in terms of supporting their communities through the pandemic and by the time we got to the second national lockdown, the resilience and community connections that had been made meant that people were helping each other and the organisations were no longer playing a key role in facilitating that support.

What it did highlight, for those organisations working with food, as we were, was that food poverty is a very real problem across our communities. The sheer volume of people for whom low level food support is a game changer is distressing in a modern society. This coupled with the food waste that we as an organisation have been able to divert from landfill into alternate use shows that we have an imbalance in the value of food as a life changing asset.

The partnerships that have flourished as a result of covid are a particularly positive outcome from the pandemic. Organisations recognised early on that they did not have to do it all on their own and that the most effective means of providing support was a co-ordinated system of locality based support. The extreme effectiveness of this should be something that local and national government bear in mind when looking at service delivery going forward. The 3<sup>rd</sup> sector and community groups operating in each area were able to tailor their own offering to the local needs while

still operating as part of a broader offering without detrimental impact on the whole setup.

In our experience we have had a broadly positive experience in interacting with the local council in our area who after an initial foray into community support quickly moved towards a more effective role as a facilitator – they provided material support, redeployed staff to support community efforts and generally focussed their efforts on how they could assist community groups to do the work on the ground.

Moving forward and in terms of our own organisation the challenge is to maintain the resilience of both staff and volunteers to keep plugging the gap for many people who simply cannot manage to stretch their income to live. The goodwill of people in our society has been immense to donate money, food, and clothing but we believe the time could come where this goodwill will become exhausted as will our staff and volunteers. The dependency on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector to stave off crisis and bridge gaps is not a long-term solution, radical change to a system of support is needed more than ever. Letham4All has taken on the role of a community anchor organisation as result of the pandemic and as result we have been able to access funding and distribute to people and grass root organisations with speed, with sound diligence and governance. Letham4All want to continue to work in this role as it nurtures partnership working focusing on people and place, tackling local issues with little input from the public sector (Council and Health and Social Care Partnerships).

It is our hope that this experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of working with community groups and will lead to a new style of locality-based cooperation.