



Consultation Response

Pre-Budget Scrutiny – Finance and Public Administration

August 2022



About Us

Volunteer Scotland is Scotland's National Centre for Volunteering. We believe that volunteering should be an enjoyable, rewarding and fulfilling experience for the volunteer; that volunteers have the right to be safe and protected in delivering their volunteering roles; and that to derive health and well-being benefits from volunteering requires regular and meaningful contributions of time.

Should any queries arise from our response, please contact our Policy Officer by emailing **sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk**

Introduction

It is vital that the Scottish Government considers the important role of volunteering when considering priorities for the upcoming budget. The pandemic has shone a light on the important contribution of Scotland's volunteers to society and highlighted just how much our communities depend on the kindness of individuals to thrive.

In our response to the Finance and Public Administration Committee, we will demonstrate the need to recognise the role of volunteering in delivering health and social care priorities, and in responding to the cost of living crisis. We will also reinforce the importance of ensuring that volunteers do not replace paid roles when looking at public service efficiencies. Finally, we will explore the impact of Spending Review priorities on the delivery of national outcomes in the National Performance Framework.

Policy Context

The Scottish Government have acknowledged on many occasions that volunteering has an important role in the successful delivery of many policy priorities. In 2019 Aileen Campbell MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Communities, stated that:

“volunteering is key to us achieving our shared ambition of a fairer and more prosperous country with equality of opportunity for all – a country where everyone has the chance to participate and make a difference.”¹

Similarly, in the 2020-21 Programme for Government, it is stated that:

“[The Scottish Government’s] role must be to create the best conditions for the third sector and volunteering to thrive and contribute to a recovering economy and society.”²

Despite this rhetoric, volunteering remains fairly elusive in wider relevant policy areas. This was reflected in the recent Resource Spending Review where volunteering is not mentioned, and where it is stated that funding for the third sector is due to be reduced in 2023-24.

Scotland's national Volunteering Action Plan was launched by the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland and partners in June 2022³ and builds upon outcomes identified in the Volunteering for All framework published in 2019.⁴ Both acknowledge the vital role of volunteering in Scotland and create a clear blueprint for improving volunteer participation in Scotland with a particular focus on addressing inequality. The Volunteering for All framework is mapped to four of the outcomes in

¹ [‘Volunteering for All: National Framework’](#), 2019, Scottish Government,

² [‘Protecting Scotland, Renewing Scotland: The Government’s Programme for Scotland 2020-2021’](#), 2020, Scottish Government

³ [‘Volunteering Action Plan’](#), 2022, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland

⁴ [‘Volunteering for All: National Framework’](#), 2019, Scottish Government

the national performance framework, specifically those related to education, health, communities, and inequality.

Given the commitment to volunteering from the Scottish Government, and their commitment to the Volunteering Action Plan, we believe that the role of volunteers should have been better reflected in the Spending Review, and would ask for it to be better acknowledged in the budget.

Q1 Response: Funding Priorities

In response to question 1, we agree that health and social care should be a key priority in the budget and that funding for social security is vital for tackling inequality. However, we believe that the vital role of the voluntary sector and volunteers in both of these key priority areas needs to be reflected in spending plans.

The role of volunteering in supporting health and social care is two-fold. Firstly, volunteers make a key contribution in the delivery of services, a contribution which is often underrepresented in policy. Secondly, participating in volunteering is proven to improve personal health and wellbeing outcomes for those who participate, particularly those from disadvantaged groups, thus improving health outcomes more generally.

In the Scottish Household survey for 2018, 17% of Scotland's 1.2 million formal volunteers supported organisations with an explicit health, disability or wellbeing remit.⁵ A further 15% supported organisations focussed on physical activity, sport and exercise, and 7% helped at organisations supporting older people. All of this activity is likely to have had a direct or indirect focus on health and/or social care. In particular, volunteering has a key role in tackling social isolation and loneliness.

This is recognised explicitly in 'A Connected Scotland' strategy, which gives particular focus to the role of befriending and mentoring.⁶ This type of activity is undertaken by 9% of formal volunteers, which equates to over 106,000 people.⁷ Befrienders provide regular social and emotional support for individuals experiencing social isolation, which in turn improves their mental wellbeing and can help to prevent onset of more severe health issues.

Evidence also suggests that participating in voluntary activity can have significant personal impacts on health and wellbeing. In a report published by Volunteer Scotland in December 2018 we found that regular volunteering can alleviate depression, anxiety and stress, and reduce loneliness and social isolation.⁸

⁵ ['Adult Volunteering Participation in 2020'](#), 2021, Volunteer Scotland

⁶ ['A Connected Scotland'](#), 2018, Scottish Government

⁷ This figure relates only to volunteers who give their time 'formally' on behalf of an organisation, and doesn't account for the many thousands of 'informal' volunteers who befriend people directly, often in their local communities.

⁸ ['Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing'](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland

Volunteering can also have a significant impact on physical health by promoting healthy behaviours, helping to maintain a level of physical activity that promotes independence and improves volunteers' ability to cope with illness.⁹

Despite these significant benefits, volunteer involving organisations are struggling to sustain volunteering activity due to current resource levels. Whilst volunteers are unpaid, they are not free. The effective and inclusive engagement of volunteers requires dedicated resource, usually in the form of paid coordinators and budget to cover recruitment, training, ongoing support and recognition costs. In a survey conducted by the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland in 2021, funding was the number one support issue identified by volunteer involving organisations, with nearly half of all respondents (48%) identifying funding as a priority for their immediate and longer-term recovery.¹⁰

As such, the Scottish Government must acknowledge the vital role of volunteers in supporting health and wellbeing services within its policy and allocate sufficient funding to sustain this.

Social security is also a key issue for addressing inequality in Scotland, particularly given the current cost of living crisis. Whilst volunteering does not have an explicit role within the direct provision of social security, the benefits of volunteering for those in receipt of benefits are well established. As stated previously, volunteering has significant benefits for people's health and wellbeing which is obviously of particular benefit for those in receipt of benefits, particularly those related to disability or ill-health. However, volunteering also has clear benefits for those people seeking employment.

In their guidance for people on benefits who are considering volunteering, the Department for Work and Pensions states that 'Volunteering can help you to develop new skills and try something new. It can help you prepare for paid work by increasing your confidence and experience.'¹¹ In addition, our 2019 research exploring the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering stated that 'We know from analysis of the relationship between volunteering and employment that volunteering can play an important role in supporting the transition of unemployed people into work'.¹²

With the Scottish Government assuming responsibility for a wider range of benefits this year, particularly those related to disability, it is vital that the administration of benefits does not present unnecessary barriers to people wishing to volunteer. For example, there is ongoing concern that volunteering activity will be used as evidence by the DWP in Work Capability Assessments, thus acting as a barrier to people in receipt of disability related benefits. Volunteer Glasgow recently completed a survey of individuals in receipt of disability related benefits, exploring reactions to a DWP policy statement on this issue.¹³ 70% of respondents said that the statement left them 'unsure' or 'afraid' that their benefits would be affected by volunteering.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ ['Scottish Third Sector Perspectives On Volunteering During Covid-19: Survey Report'](#), 2021, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland

¹¹ ['Volunteering and Claiming Benefits'](#), 2019, Department for Work and Pensions

¹² ['Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing'](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland

¹³ 'Will Volunteering Affect my benefits?', 2022, Maxwell et al, Volunteer Glasgow

It is vital that resource is identified in the budget to tackle existing barriers to volunteering participation for people in receipt of benefits when the Scottish Government assumes more responsibility for Social Security.

Q3 Response: Cost of Living Crisis

Volunteers are at the frontline in the response to the cost-of-living crisis, providing help and practical support to struggling families in communities across the country. This includes packing up food parcels, providing transport to medical appointments and providing a listening ear to those whose mental health is impacted.

We know from research during the pandemic that some volunteers are starting to experience burnout, and there is a concern that the sustained demand for help from volunteers as a result of the current cost of living crisis might cause people to stop helping.¹⁴ 47% of Volunteer Involving Organisations surveyed in May 2021 by the Scottish Government thought that 'Volunteers experiencing fatigue/burnout or other wellbeing issues' was providing 'major/some challenge'.¹⁵ Given the current context with the cost of living crisis and the response to the situation in Ukraine, it is safe to assume that this remains a significant and ongoing challenge.

Volunteers from more deprived communities and individuals on lower incomes are less likely to volunteer – for formal volunteering the difference in participation rates between our least deprived and most deprived communities is 10% in 2018 and 15% in 2020.¹⁶ The cost of living crisis and the resulting strain on individuals could cause more people to consider leaving volunteering, particularly if they need to work more hours to make ends meet, can't afford to pay for childcare to allow participation in volunteering or if they are experiencing stress/anxiety.

On a practical level, the rise in fuel costs is particularly challenging for people who use their cars to volunteer. Twelve percent of formal Scottish volunteers gave help to transport people or things in 2018.¹⁷ This is the equivalent of 140,763 Scottish Adults giving 12.5 million hours of help in 2018 with an economic value of £187.8 million.¹⁸

We have heard from several organisations that volunteers who use their own cars to transport people or things are finding it more difficult to continue in their roles whilst the mileage rate remains the same. We're currently involved in a campaign, led by the Community Transport Association for the UK Government to raise the Approved Mileage Allowance Payment rate from 45p per mile.¹⁹ This rate has not been raised in 10 years.

¹⁴ ['Road to Recovery'](#), 2021, Volunteer Scotland

¹⁵ ['Scottish Third Sector Perspectives On Volunteering During Covid-19: Survey Report'](#), 2021, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland

¹⁶ Comparative analysis of SHS 2018 and 2020 data, 2021, Volunteer Scotland

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ ['Charities call on chancellor to tackle fuel costs crisis'](#), 2022, Community Transport Association

Whilst individuals from the most deprived communities in Scotland experience the most significant barriers to volunteering, they also have the highest need in terms of the adverse impact of the cost of living crisis. Recent research by Citizens Advice Scotland found a 23% increase in advice need for charitable support such as fuel bank referrals, and a 31% increase in advice need for foodbanks.²⁰ Foodbanks, fuel banks and Citizens Advice Bureaux all have an existential reliance on volunteers to provide services.

This highlights the vital importance of investing in volunteering programmes which promote inclusion, particularly within those communities at the sharpest end of the cost of living crisis.

Cost of living increases are also affecting the balance sheet of many voluntary and community organisations. Demand for services is increasing, as are operating costs, yet the money available is staying the same or decreasing. This is a growing problem as it is expected that many people will have less disposable income to donate to charities.

As such, the Scottish Government commitment to sustainable multi-year funding for the third sector is vital for organisations to support efforts to address the cost of living crisis.

Q4 Response: Areas of Reform

With regards to the areas of reform identified in the Spending Review, the vision for digital inclusion and connectivity is important for volunteer participation.

In 2018, Citizens Advice Scotland conducted a survey with individuals who had sought advice from them about digital access and found that 18% of respondents had difficulty using a computer and 16% cannot use one at all.²¹ It also found that broadband costs were a barrier for 18% of respondents. During the pandemic charities had to adapt to online delivery models. This also had an impact on volunteer deployment, with 56% of volunteer involving organisations reporting that they moved some or all of their volunteering online.²² Given the Citizens Advice Scotland figures about digital exclusion, many volunteers are likely to have been unable to continue volunteering during the pandemic.

However, we also know from research that disabled volunteers are over-represented in digital volunteering roles. NCVO's Time Well Spent research highlighted that disabled people are more likely to be volunteering online than non-disabled volunteers.²³ The rate of disabled people volunteering exclusively online is more than double the rate of non-disabled volunteers, with rates of 10% and 4% respectively.

²⁰ [‘The Perfect Storm: Living on Universal Credit during the Cost of Living Crisis’](#), 2022, Citizens Advice Scotland

²¹ [‘Disconnected’](#), 2018, Citizens Advice Scotland

²² [‘Scottish Third Sector Perspectives On Volunteering During Covid-19: Survey Report’](#), 2021, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland

²³ ‘Time Well Spent’, 2019, NCVO

As a result, we agree that specific investment in digital inclusion will support wider participation in volunteering.

Q5 Response: Efficiency Savings

Whilst we understand the need for efficiency savings, it is important that this does not result in volunteers – or volunteer-run services - being asked to take on duties previously conducted by paid staff, or expected to plug gaps caused by staff shortages. Research published by NCVO in 2019 found that 19% of volunteers felt that their volunteering ‘was becoming too much like paid work’.²⁴

We also know from our own research that this level of burden can impact on the positive wellbeing benefits of volunteering and can actually lead to declining wellbeing due to excessive volunteer hours, emotionally demanding roles and lack of effective support.²⁵ As such, it is important that volunteers have quality volunteering experiences that do not become over-formalised or become more reminiscent of paid work roles.

Volunteer Scotland and the Scottish Trade Union Council developed a shared Volunteer Charter identifying the key principles for ‘assuring legitimacy and preventing exploitation of workers and volunteers’.²⁶ In particular, the 5th principle states that ‘volunteers should not carry out duties formerly carried out by paid workers nor should they be used to disguise the effects of non-filled vacancies or cuts in services.’

The Scottish Government need to ensure that the principles detailed in the Volunteer Charter are provided to public services facing reduced funding to ensure that volunteers or volunteer-led services are not replacing paid staff.

Q6 Response: National Performance Framework

The development of Scotland’s Volunteering Action Plan helps to ensure that the strategic value of volunteering across all National Outcome areas is acknowledged but this needs to be reinforced with adequate resource. Volunteering was celebrated as the ‘golden thread’ in our communities by Angela Constance, then Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities, in 2016. However, in reality, volunteering often remains the invisible thread because it is not represented in relevant policy. Indeed, the Spending Review did not mention volunteering and indicated a reduction in funding for the third sector.

One area where the strategic significance of volunteering has been realised is in the response to social isolation and loneliness in Scotland. The percentage of adults feeling lonely represents one of the indicators for the Communities National Outcome. ‘A Connected Scotland’, the 2018 strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness, was co-produced by a wide-ranging group of partners and acknowledges

²⁴ ‘Time Well Spent’, 2019, NCVO

²⁵ [‘Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing’](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland

²⁶ [‘The Volunteer Charter’](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland

the key role of volunteering in responding to this issue.²⁷ Indeed, Priority 3 – ‘Create opportunities for people to connect’ – references the importance of befriending in tackling social isolation and loneliness and highlights the value of volunteering in promoting connection and wellbeing.²⁸

To support this strategy, the Scottish Government provided £5.9m to promote digital inclusion for older people, support social isolation and loneliness and to promote equality as part of a £100 million package in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.²⁹ It has also committed a further £10 million over 5 years specifically for social isolation and loneliness.³⁰ These funds were distributed to a number of organisations, many of whom have used the funding for befriending programmes, including Befriending Networks and Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland.

Befriending Networks distributed a proportion of both of these funding streams to befriending organisations, which led to a cumulative total of 745 additional befriending matches, equating to over 20,000 befriending hours.³¹ It is clear, therefore, that the recognition of volunteering’s strategic importance in ‘A Connected Scotland’ has led to significant additional resource and consequent societal benefit.

Representation of volunteering in ‘A Connected Scotland’ is to be celebrated but is only the tip of the iceberg. Our research highlights the considerable impact of volunteering on health and wellbeing, community connection and youth participation, for example, but volunteering remains under-represented in policy and thus in government spending.

As a result, it is vital that the Scottish Government budget reflects the important role of volunteering in contributing to all National Outcome areas, particularly Education, Health, Poverty and Communities.

Conclusion

It is clear from the evidence presented that volunteering has a vital role to play in helping the Scottish Government to achieve its national priorities. Volunteering supports the provision of health and wellbeing services, as well as contributing to the overall wellbeing of those who participate. Volunteers are also at the frontline of the cost of living crisis response, helping to support Scotland’s most vulnerable people in these really challenging times.

However, many barriers to volunteering persist, particularly for those who experience disadvantage. Volunteers in our most deprived communities are significantly affected by the cost of living crisis, as well as experiencing challenges with digital exclusion and the way that many benefits are currently administered.

²⁷ [‘A Connected Scotland’](#), 2018, Scottish Government

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ [‘Winter Support Fund for Families and Children’](#), 2020, Scottish Government

³⁰ [‘£1 million to tackle social isolation and loneliness’](#), 2021, Scottish Government

³¹ ‘Befriending Fund Report’, 2021, and ‘Befriending Fund Report’, 2022, Befriending Networks

In order to address current inequalities and allow volunteers to fulfil their potential, we believe that the Scottish Government budget needs to consider the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that the commitment to volunteering demonstrated in the Volunteering Action Plan is reflected in spending plans.
2. Acknowledge the vital role of volunteers in supporting health and wellbeing services within its policies, particularly regarding preventative/early intervention measures, and allocate sufficient funding to sustain this.
3. Specify resource to tackle existing barriers to participation in volunteering for people in receipt of benefits when the Scottish Government assumes more responsibility for Social Security.
4. Acknowledge the role of volunteers in responding to the cost of living crisis, and commit to investing in inclusive volunteering programmes, particularly within those communities at the sharpest end of the crisis.
5. Invest in digital inclusion to support greater participation in volunteering.
6. Ensure that the principles detailed in the Volunteer Charter are provided to public services facing reduced funding to ensure that volunteers or volunteer-led services are not replacing paid staff.
7. Acknowledge the important role of volunteering in contributing to all National Outcome areas, particularly Education, Health, Poverty and Communities within the budget.



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