



Consultation Response

Health, Social Care and Sport
Committee Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2023-24

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

Volunteering has an important role in the delivery of health and social care in Scotland. Volunteers form a key part of the ‘workforce’ delivering services related to health and social care – both in statutory and community settings – and participating in volunteering also has demonstrable health and wellbeing benefits.

With this in mind, it is vital that the Scottish Government’s budget acknowledges the role of volunteering in delivering health and social care outcomes. The planned budgetary increase for health and social care is welcome but will only go so far given the ongoing recovery from Covid-19, NHS staffing challenges and ambitious plans for a National Care service. In our response, we will detail the many reasons why investment in volunteering is a sound decision. We will also discuss the importance of ensuring that volunteering is adequately resourced, and the need to ensure that volunteer roles are not used to replace those of paid staff.

Policy Context

The Scottish Government have acknowledged on many occasions that volunteering has an important role in the successful delivery of many policy priorities, including health and social care. 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.” ([‘Volunteering for All: National Framework’](#), 2019, Scottish Government)

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

Despite this commitment, volunteering remains fairly elusive in wider relevant policy areas. This was reflected in the recent Resource Spending Review where volunteering is not mentioned and funding for the third sector is due to be reduced by £1 million in 2023-24 ([‘Resource Spending Review 2022’](#), 2022, Scottish Government).

Scotland’s national Volunteering Action Plan was launched by the Scottish Government ([‘Volunteering Action Plan’](#), 2022, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland), Volunteer Scotland and other partners in June 2022 and builds upon outcomes identified in the Volunteering for All framework published in 2019 ([‘Volunteering for All: National Framework’](#), 2019, Scottish Government). 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.

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.

Volunteering in Health and Social Care

Volunteers provide a major contribution to the delivery of health and social care, with key roles in both the treatment and prevention of ill health. The Scottish Household Survey 2020 showed that 17% of Scotland’s formal adult volunteers supported groups focused on health, disability and wellbeing, which equates to 201,075 people (Analysis of SHS 2020 data, 2021, Volunteer Scotland). However, the actual contribution of volunteers to the delivery of health and social care outcomes is more far reaching than this.

Volunteers undertake a range of activities which support positive health and wellbeing including emergency first aid, sport and physical activity, befriending, and activities to promote community connection. The different types of organisations and groups with a connection to health and social care that volunteers support are detailed in the table below:

Types of organisations or groups for which adults have done formal volunteering in the last 12 months	2020 % of formal volunteers	2020 Number of formal volunteers
Emergency services, first aid and public safety	1%	11,828
Environmental protection	5%	59,140
Groups aimed at supporting older people	5%	59,140
Physical activity, sport and exercise (coaching, organising or otherwise helping out)	12%	141,936
Health, disability and wellbeing	17%	201,075
Local community or neighbourhood	25%	295,699

Scottish Household Survey, 2020

Treatment

Volunteers support the treatment and care of people with health conditions, including long term health conditions and disabilities, in a variety of settings. Many hospital, residential or respite care services in the voluntary and statutory sector engage volunteers to provide person-centred support and ensure beneficiaries have rich social experiences.

For example, Healthcare Improvement Scotland supports the involvement of volunteers in hospital settings. In the period between 1 October 2021 and 31 March 2022 volunteers across NHS Scotland gifted a total of 109,010 hours ([‘NHSScotland Volunteering Programme Annual Report 2021-22’](#), 2022, Healthcare Improvement Scotland). A case study describes a 72 year old patient, registered blind, who was admitted to hospital with multiple medical conditions ([‘Regular visits from volunteers helped reduce the isolation and anxiety felt by an elderly patient in Glasgow’](#), 2018, Healthcare Improvement Scotland). The patient reported that the visits from volunteers were ‘keeping her going’ and described the volunteers as ‘the kindest people’. Staff members reported that the patient was more amiable and less anxious after a visit from a volunteer.

For people who spend an extended period of time in hospital, many volunteer-led services provide support to readjust to life at home. The Royal Voluntary Service provides a ‘Home from Hospital’ service, which begins when the person is still in hospital ([‘Support in Hospitals’ webpage](#), 2022, Royal Voluntary Service). As a result of the plethora of services provided by the Royal Voluntary Service, all volunteer-led, 88% of vulnerable people they supported in 2021 said it helped them feel more able to cope ([‘The Difference we Made’ webpage](#), 2021, Royal Voluntary Service).

Care homes and hospices also regularly engage volunteers to support the health and wellbeing of residents. Children’s Hospices Across Scotland (CHAS) involve 750 volunteers in roles which support families, including triaging families’ needs, music therapy and play therapy ([‘Annual Report and Accounts 2020/21’](#), 2021, CHAS). Similarly, Erskine engage volunteers to support a range of services in their homes, including physiotherapy and speech and language ([‘2021 Annual Review’](#), 2021, Erskine).

Volunteers also support a significant number of voluntary organisations which help people experiencing a range of health and care needs. For example, Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland engage 8500 volunteers in a range of roles which support their work ([‘Impact Report 2020-21’](#), 2021, Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland). Similarly, Headway – the brain injury association – engages volunteers in a number of its local

branches which provide local advice and support ('Volunteer' webpage, 2022, Headway).

Prevention

Volunteering also supports health and social care through prevention and early intervention services. In particular, volunteers have a significant impact on social isolation and loneliness. Research has shown that social isolation and loneliness can be both a cause and consequence of poor health and is linked to increased risk of depression, cognitive decline and dementia, amongst other issues (['Risk to Health'](#), 2022, Campaign to End Loneliness).

In research undertaken by Befriending Networks into the benefits of befriending in one specific project, beneficiaries reported positive changes in their confidence, happiness and social connection (['A stitch in Time - The benefits of Befriending'](#), 2015, Befriending Networks). Befriending and mentoring services have a key role in ensuring that many people have regular meaningful social interactions, which in turn improves their mental wellbeing and can help to prevent onset of more severe health issues.

Volunteers also support a range of services that aim to keep people in their home environment for longer. For example, the charity Food Train provides a range of volunteer-led services to support older people to eat well, including a shopping service and engaging volunteer 'meal makers'. In a report published in 2018, Food Train found that the increase in demand for services coupled with reductions in public funding are providing significant challenges. They found a postcode lottery of statutory food services, with many Local Authorities offering very limited choice in the services they provide (['Meals and Messages'](#), 2018, Community Food and Health Scotland & Consumer Focus Scotland).

Another key service supporting people to stay in their homes is the provision of community transport. For the Community Transport Association, 'community transport is about providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs, and often represents the only means of transport for many vulnerable and isolated people, often older people or people with disabilities' (['What is Community Transport?'](#), 2022, Community Transport Association).

Many community transport services are either volunteer-led or reliant on volunteers. Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport Company engages volunteers to drive older people and those with reduced mobility to medical appointments, community events and to get shopping (['Member Profile – Badenoch and Strathspey Community Transport'](#), 2017, Community Transport Association). According to one volunteer, Kenny, BSCTC is a 'lifeline' for older residents.

Many of the opportunities for people to remain physically active are also supported or led by volunteers, thus decreasing the burden on care services. The Scottish Sports Association published a report into ‘#whysportmatters’ for older adults and social care ([‘#WhySportMatters to Older Adults and Social Care’](#), 2021, Scottish Sports Association). It found that participation in sport or being active led to a 30% reduction on risk of falls for those with mobility problems and a 38% reduction in cognitive decline, amongst other benefits. It also recently reported in its 2021 manifesto that Scotland’s 13,000 sports clubs are reliant on 200,000 volunteers ([‘SSA Manifesto for Scottish Sport 2021’](#), 2021, Scottish Sports Association).

As such, the Scottish Government must acknowledge the vital role of volunteers in supporting health and social care services – both in treatment and prevention - within relevant policy and allocate sufficient funding to sustain this.

Benefits of Volunteering for the Health and Wellbeing of Volunteers

Participation in volunteering can also have significant health and wellbeing benefits for the volunteers themselves, which in turn can prevent or reverse more serious health issues. In a report from December 2018, we found that regular volunteering can alleviate depression, anxiety and stress, and reduce loneliness and social isolation ([‘Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing’](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland). This same research also found that the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering were more pronounced for those experiencing significant disadvantage. In particular, it found that volunteering can help to alleviate the symptoms of those experiencing mental and physical health problems or help them to cope with symptoms more effectively.

We also know from our research that those living in the areas of greatest deprivation have significantly worse mental and physical health ([‘The contribution of volunteering to Scotland’s health and wellbeing’](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland). Therefore, the implication is that those who have the highest demand for health and care services are likely to generate the highest benefits from volunteering.

There is also evidence that there can be ‘therapeutic’ value in volunteering for an organisation that supports people experiencing similar issues. The Scottish Volunteering Forum spoke about this in a discussion exploring volunteer motivations and barriers in 2019 ([‘Volunteer Motivations and Barriers Summary Report’](#), 2019, Scottish Volunteering Forum). Two member organisations shared that service users and family members regularly request to volunteer, and they described it as a ‘win-win’. The volunteers benefit from the ongoing input from the organisation, are

able to give something back to an organisation that has supported them, and the organisation benefits from the knowledge, skills and understanding that their lived experience brings.

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 improving volunteers' ability to cope with illness (['The contribution of volunteering to Scotland's health and wellbeing'](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland). To reinforce this, a survey completed by volunteers for Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland, found that 60% of respondents reported that volunteering helped to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness ('Volunteer Survey', 2022, Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland).

Given these benefits, it is vital that the Scottish Government invests in volunteering programmes which promote inclusion, particularly within those groups most likely to experience adverse health and wellbeing outcomes.

Recovering from Covid-19

The Committee has requested information about how budgets for health and social care could be best spent to support recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is well documented that volunteers in local communities were on the frontline of responses during the pandemic. Research by Volunteer Scotland in June 2020 found that volunteering participation in Scotland increased by 26% in the early stages of the pandemic, with 74% of the adult population (equating to 3,342,841 people) helping in some way (['Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering participation in Scotland'](#), 2020, Volunteer Scotland). As we begin to look towards recovery from the pandemic, it is clear that volunteers will continue to play an important role.

In a 2021 report, The Health and Social Care Alliance (The ALLIANCE) identified significant disruption to health and social care access, deterioration in physical and mental health, widening of health inequalities and reduced person-centred care resulting from the pandemic (['Health, Wellbeing and the Covid-19 Pandemic: Scottish Experiences and Priorities for the Future'](#), n.d., The ALLIANCE). The same report also identified that local communities and the third sector provided an important 'buffer' against some of the negative impacts of the pandemic, and 'bridged the gap' caused by the withdrawal of healthcare services. When looking at potential priorities for the recovery of health and social care post-pandemic, the report identified the following as priorities (among others):

- Holistic, person-centred care
- Resourcing thriving, vibrant, asset-based communities

- Prioritising mental health recovery

As demonstrated earlier in this response, volunteering has a key role in the delivery on all three of these key priorities.

It should also be highlighted that Covid-19 has had a significant adverse impact on both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, which is being exacerbated by the cost of living crisis. 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 because of the current cost of living crisis will add significant additional pressures. For example, we know from the Scottish Government's survey of Volunteer Involving Organisations in May 2021 that 47% of respondents acknowledge 'Volunteers experiencing fatigue/burnout or other wellbeing issues' was presenting 'major/some challenge' ('Scottish Third Sector Perspectives on volunteering during Covid-19: Survey Report', 2020, Scottish Government).

Organisations supporting volunteers are seeing similar challenges. In Volunteer Scotland's recent research exploring the impact of Covid-19 on volunteering, 48% of volunteer involving organisations identified dedicated funding for their volunteer programmes as a priority for their medium or long term recovery (['Road to Recovery'](#), 2021, Volunteer Scotland). Similarly, OSCR's survey exploring the impact of Covid-19 on Scottish Charities exposed a particularly acute issue related to fatigue and burnout experienced by trustees, who are volunteers, particularly in smaller organisations with no paid staff (['November COVID-19 survey: Volunteers and Trustees Supplementary'](#), 2020, OSCR).

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 in the months ahead. The Charities Aid Foundation recently found that 12% of individuals are planning to cut back on charity donations (['Cost-of-living squeeze hits donations to charity sector'](#), 2022, Charities Aid Foundation).

For volunteers to continue supporting the recovery of Scotland's Health and Social Care sector, and simultaneously address the current cost of living crisis, volunteer involving organisations require significant investment within the budget.

National Care Service

Volunteers have a clear and unique role to play in enhancing social care and making it more person-centred, as demonstrated in the sections above. The fact that volunteering is a personal choice changes the volunteer's relationship with the beneficiary and can make intervention feel less formal and more personal. Volunteers are also often able to spend more time with beneficiaries than paid employees and can build meaningful relationships.

In one example, Volunteer Edinburgh manages a volunteering service at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. As part of this service, volunteers – who are themselves inpatients at the hospital – create personalised CDs for patients of dementia ('Royal Edinburgh Hospital Volunteer Hub Annual Report 2021-22', 2022, Volunteer Edinburgh). This service was described by one Occupational Therapist Assistant Practitioner in the dementia service as 'invaluable', particularly in easing stress and bringing cheer.

Volunteering activity can also ensure that the specific interests of people in receipt of care are acknowledged in care pathways as well as providing support for their carers. Paths for All engage volunteers to support inclusive walking and wheeling activities for older people, often building in opportunities for social interaction and accessible volunteering opportunities (['Walking and talking started Jessie and Alice's volunteering journey'](#), 2022, Paths for All).

Two volunteers at their Dementia Friendly Health Walk in Carluke shared their experiences of participating, with one saying: "...the Friday Walk is an excellent opportunity for people to get out and about for a stroll and a good blether. It is a chance for carers to talk with folk in the same situation as themselves and exercise in the open air is good for everyone. We have both been in the same situation as the people who walk on Fridays so know first-hand how beneficial the walking group can be. Every wee bit of support helps."

The Scottish Government must ensure that the budget to support the new National Care Service acknowledges the vital role of volunteering, both in the delivery of social care services and in preventing/delaying the need for social care services.

Demographic Pressures

It is clear that Scotland's health and social care services are facing growing pressure as a result of the ageing population, as well as the increasing number of people with long term health conditions. In Scotland's 2011 Census, people aged 65 and over

outnumbered under 15s for the first time with the number increasing by 85,000 (10.6%) since 2001 ([‘Census Results at a glance: Population’](#), 2021, Scotland’s Census). In addition, just under half of adults (47%) live with a long term health condition, and this increases significantly with age ([‘Scottish Health Survey – telephone survey – August/September 2020: main report’](#), 2021, Scottish Government).

As has been previously explored in the [‘Volunteering in Health and Social Care’](#) section, services supported by volunteers play a key role in reducing pressure on Scotland’s social care services by preventing or delaying the need for residential care, and supporting people to stay in their homes for longer. This is true for both older adults and adults living with long term health conditions. Participation in volunteering also has significant benefits on health and wellbeing, as described in the [‘Benefits of Volunteering for the Health and Wellbeing of Volunteers’](#) section.

A further important point is the significant contribution that older people and those with disabilities/long term conditions can make as volunteers in Health and Social Care settings. The Scottish Household Surveys in 2018 and 2020 demonstrated that adults over the age of 60 are the most likely group to volunteer in ‘Health, Disability and Wellbeing’ organisations, with 19% in 2018 and 20% in 2020 of older volunteers doing so (‘Comparative analysis of SHS 2018 and 2020 data’, 2021, Volunteer Scotland). In addition, formal volunteers who have long-term health conditions contribute a greater number of hours per month compared to those who don’t have a long-term health condition – 10.7 hours vs. 9.3 hours per volunteer per month ([‘Who contributes most to Scottish Volunteering?’](#), 2021, Volunteer Scotland). So volunteers with disabilities and/or long term health conditions contribute more hours per person than their non-disabled peers, despite less disabled people actually participating in volunteering overall.

This highlights the importance of the Scottish Government investing in volunteer-led services which support the health and wellbeing of older people, including the inclusion of older people as volunteers.

Appropriate Engagement of Volunteers

Volunteers can have a valuable role to play in the provision of health and social care services, but it is vital that this is not a replacement for duties previously performed by paid staff. In response to a question regarding waiting lists for social care in parliament on the 4th May 2022, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing and Social Care stated that ‘Through contact with partnerships, I am aware that there is a range of local initiatives across the country to support recipients of care, using volunteers,

redeployed staff and third sector partners' ([‘Minute of Meeting of the Parliament – May 4th 2022’](#), 2022, Scottish Parliament). Whilst we welcome the recognition of volunteers in the provision of health and social care, referring to them as part of a solution in the context of staff shortages could unintentionally condone the displacement of paid staff by volunteers.

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’ ([‘The Volunteer Charter’](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland). 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 adhered to by public services facing reduced funding to ensure that volunteers or volunteer-led services are not replacing paid staff.

Link to National Outcomes 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.

One area where the strategic significance of volunteering has been realised in policy is 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 ([‘National Indicator Performance’](#), 2022, Scottish Government). ‘A Connected Scotland’, the 2018 strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness, was co-produced by a wide-ranging group of partners and acknowledges the key role of volunteering in responding to this issue ([‘A Connected Scotland’](#), 2018, Scottish Government). 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.

To support this strategy, the Scottish Government provided £5.9 million in late 2020 to target digital exclusion, social isolation and loneliness exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic ([‘Winter Support Fund for Families and Children’](#), 2020, Scottish Government) and has committed a further £10 million for social isolation and loneliness over 5 years ([‘£1 million to tackle social isolation and loneliness’](#), 2021, Scottish Government). 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 funding streams to befriending organisations, which led to a cumulative total of 745 additional befriending matches, equating to over 20,000 befriending hours ('Befriending Fund Report', 2021, and 'Befriending Fund Report', 2022, Befriending Networks). 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. The information detailed previously in this response highlights the considerable impact of volunteering for health and social care, but volunteering remains under-represented in policy and thus in government spending.

It is vital that the Scottish Government budget reflects the important role of volunteering in contributing to the National Outcome on Health.

Conclusion

Volunteering has a clear and significant role to play in supporting the Scottish Government's ambitions related to health and social care. Volunteers support statutory and community-based health and social care services, in roles ranging from visiting people in hospital wards to ensuring people have nutritious meals in their homes. In addition, participating in volunteering has significant health benefits for the volunteers themselves, which helps to reduce the burden on health and social care services.

Volunteering will help to support Scotland's ongoing recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic; it alleviates the growing pressures on health and social care services arising from an ageing population; it will have a wide-ranging role in Scotland's new National Care Service. Finally, the voluntary sector and volunteering will be central to Scotland's response to the current cost of living crisis which is having such significant adverse impacts on people's health and wellbeing, especially mental ill-health.

However, there is a concern that the engagement of volunteers could be used to address staff shortages, particularly in the current financial climate. To ensure that volunteering continues to meaningfully support the Scottish Government's priorities related to health and social care, we have the following recommendations for the Committee:

- Ensure that the Scottish Government reflect their commitment to volunteering, and to the Volunteering Action Plan, in the budget.

- Ensure that the Scottish Government invests in volunteering programmes which promote inclusion, particularly within those groups most likely to experience adverse health outcomes.
- Ensure that the Scottish Government provides dedicated investment for volunteer involving organisations to ensure that volunteers can continue supporting the recovery of Scotland's Health and Social Care sector.
- Ensure that the budget to support the new National Care Service acknowledges the vital role of volunteering, both in the delivery of social care services and in preventing/delaying the need for social care services.
- Ensure that the Scottish Government invests in volunteer-led services which support the health and wellbeing of older people, including the inclusion of older people as volunteers.
- Ensure that the principles detailed in the Volunteer Charter are adhered to by public services facing reduced funding to ensure that volunteers or volunteer-led services are not replacing paid staff.
- Ensure that the budget reflects the important role of volunteering in contributing to the National Outcome on Health.



Volunteer Scotland
Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ
T: 01786 479593 E: hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk
W: volunteerscotland.net



[@volscotland](https://twitter.com/volscotland)



[@volscotland](https://www.facebook.com/volscotland)



[@volunteerscotland](https://www.instagram.com/volunteerscotland)