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# Consultation Response

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COVID-19 Recovery Committee:  
Pre-Budget scrutiny

September 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](mailto:sarah.latto@volunteerscotland.org.uk)**

# Introduction

Volunteers and the voluntary sector have a key role in supporting Scotland's recovery from Covid-19. They were on the frontline of the response to the pandemic as it happened, and have had an important contribution in responding to more recent challenges such as the war in Ukraine and the cost of living crisis. They are also central to Scotland's efforts to become a wellbeing economy, with volunteering and volunteers supporting efforts to address inequalities. As a result, the budget needs to address the significant challenges faced by the voluntary sector and volunteers at present to ensure it can continue to contribute to Scotland's ongoing recovery from the pandemic.

## 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.”* ([‘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 2022-23 Programme for Government where volunteering is not mentioned ([‘A stronger and more resilient Scotland: the Programme for Government 2022 to 2023’](#), 2022, Scottish Government) and in the recent Resource Spending Review where volunteering is also 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 ([‘Volunteering Action Plan’](#), 2022, Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland) was launched by the Scottish

Government, Volunteer Scotland and other partners in June 2022 and builds upon outcomes identified in the Volunteering for All framework ([‘Volunteering for All: National Framework’](#), 2019, Scottish Government). Both acknowledge the vital role of volunteering in Scotland, with the Action Plan in particular detailing the societal impact of volunteering on promoting wellbeing, addressing inequalities and creating more resilient communities.

## Consultation Question Responses

We have chosen to respond to a number of relevant questions in the consultation. Below we have shared the written responses to the open text fields.

### COVID Recovery Strategy

**Is there sufficient clarity and transparency surrounding the indicative spending plans in the Resource Spending Review associated with Covid recovery and the ongoing costs of the pandemic?**

With regards to the role of the voluntary sector and volunteers in Scotland’s ongoing recovery from Covid-19, we do not feel that the Resource Spending Review is sufficiently clear or transparent. The Spending Review states that it will introduce ‘long term funding for the third sector’, and further states that there are ‘strong expectations’ for public sector bodies to work effectively in collaboration with the third sector ([‘Resource Spending Review: Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement’](#), 2022, Scottish Government). However, this seems contrary to the actual Spending Plans which show a reduction in funding to the third sector by £1 million in the next financial year. In the current economic climate this does not reflect the vital role of the voluntary sector in the ongoing recovery from Covid-19 and in the response to the cost of living crisis.

The third sector is incredibly diverse with over 40,000 voluntary organisations estimated to exist, including 24,832 registered charities ([‘Sector Stats’](#), 2022, SCVO). As a result of significant restrictions on time and resource, many voluntary organisations find it difficult to engage with collaborative decision-making processes as suggested in the Spending Review. The recent evaluation of the Volunteering Action Plan development process found that many organisations struggled to maintain engagement due to time constraints, particularly given funding challenges and the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic ('Development of Scotland's Volunteering Action Plan: Evaluation Report', publication pending, Volunteer Scotland).

Cost of living increases are also starting to affect the balance sheets of many voluntary and community organisations. Demand for services is increasing, as are operating costs, yet the money available is often decreasing. Those whose core funding comes from the public sector are often subject to either fixed funding (but declining in real terms due to high inflation) or reduced funding. This is compounded by the fact that many people will likely 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).

From a volunteering perspective, volunteers and volunteer involving organisations are feeling the strain after the pandemic. 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, particularly in smaller organisations with no paid staff ([‘November COVID-19 survey: Volunteers and Trustees Supplementary’](#), 2020, OSCR).

We also know from research during the pandemic that some volunteers are experiencing burnout, and there is a concern that the sustained demand for help from volunteers due to the current cost of living crisis will add significant additional pressure. For example, the Scottish Government’s survey of Volunteer Involving Organisations in May 2021 found 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). For volunteers to continue supporting Scotland’s recovery from the pandemic, and our response to the cost of living crisis, we need to urgently widen participation and relieve pressure on volunteers who are feeling fatigue.

Quite simply, the Scottish Government cannot continue to expect the voluntary sector and volunteers to provide vital services, whilst also collaborating with public sector partners, without an uplift to funding. As stated by SCVO, a commitment to multi-year funding for the voluntary sector is ‘vital’ ([““Overlooked”: Voluntary sector body reacts to Scottish Government’s four-year spending plans for public services’](#), 2022, SCVO). In a response to the Spending Review, they stated that:

*‘it is disappointing to see that it contains more warm words on the need for collaboration and partnership with the voluntary sector, yet next to no mention of the fair, long-term funding that voluntary organisations so desperately need.’*

Similarly, the Scottish Government acknowledges the vital role of volunteers, and the need to widen volunteering participation in the Volunteering Action Plan, but has not yet provided detail on how volunteering will be prioritised within allocated funding across a range of directorates.

For the voluntary sector, and its volunteers, to remain as a key partner and service provider in Scotland's recovery, clarity around how volunteering will be represented in policy from a range of Scottish Government directorates, in line with the Volunteering Action Plan, is required.

It is also vital that the investment required to promote wider volunteer participation is addressed through the Scottish Government's directives to those who distribute funding on its behalf, ensuring that appropriate resource is provided and adherence to appropriate standards for volunteer engagement are met.

**To what extent is the Covid Recovery Strategy reflected in the Resource Spending Review and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)?  
What are your thoughts on the level of detail provided on the provisional spending allocations for Covid recovery contained in the Resource Spending Review and MTFS?**

The Covid Recovery Strategy acknowledges the vital role of the voluntary sector and volunteers in the response to, and recovery from, Covid-19. It states that:

*'Key to the resilience of our communities has been the work of Scotland's third sector and volunteers. Third sector organisations have led the way in adopting innovative, person centred, holistic services which wrap around families and individuals. Third sector organisations are also often working with those most marginalised including those most impacted by the pandemic. It is therefore essential that we strengthen our partnership with the third sector in our approach to recovery.'*

It then proceeds to recognise the important role of Third Sector Interfaces in 'facilitating collaboration across a diverse sector' and acknowledges the need to commit to the Volunteering Action Plan. It also recognises that the contribution of individuals in communities – often volunteers – is key to their resilience, and commits to an 'Empowering Communities Programme' which provides financial support to community-based organisations across the country.

Unfortunately, the commitment made to the voluntary sector and volunteers seen in the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy is not adequately reflected in either the Spending Review or the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Indeed, volunteering is not mentioned once in either document, despite its key role in responding to the

pandemic. Similarly, the vital role of Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) in facilitating collaboration, as well as building the capacity of the local third sector and promoting volunteering best practice, is not reflected in spending plans either. Indeed, it is vital that the volunteering function of TSIs is protected, and efforts introduced to ensure consistent volunteering services in each local authority area.

Central to the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy is the 'Collective National Endeavour for Recovery', which talks about partnership and collaboration with the third sector, However, as with the Spending Review, these commitments are meaningless if the sector is not afforded sustainable funding to effectively contribute as equal partners.

To achieve the goals set out in the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy, the Scottish Government needs to commit to sustainable funding for the voluntary sector, including the introduction of multi-year funding. Many of the actions detailed within the Volunteering Action Plan will require dedicated resource, and Third Sector Interfaces require sustainable funding to continue in their role of ensuring their local third sector is meaningfully consulted and considered in decision-making.

**The Covid Recovery Strategy states its aim to make progress towards a “wellbeing economy”. What do you understand “wellbeing economy” to mean, and is there any link with this and the allocations for Covid recovery in the Resource Spending Review?**

A 'wellbeing economy' is an economy that bases its financial decision-making on the wellbeing of the country and its people. In her Ministerial Foreword to the Wellbeing Economy Monitor earlier this year, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy stated that she would like to create 'a wellbeing economy – an economic system that places the wellbeing of current and future generations at its core'. (['Wellbeing Economy Monitor'](#), 2022, Scottish Government).

There are clear links between ambitions for developing a wellbeing economy and recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, plans detailed in the Covid-19 Recovery Strategy for developing a National Care Service and supporting resilience partnerships are key to developing a wellbeing economy.

We know from the Scottish Household Survey results in 2018 that 48% of the adult Scottish population volunteered in some form during that year, which equates to over 2.17 million people (['Scotland's Profile of Volunteering'](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland). This equates to 361 million hours of help, providing £5.5 billion to the Scottish Economy. Volunteering increased during the pandemic, with 64% of the adult Scottish population giving their time – an increase of 16% compared to 2018 ('Comparative analysis of SHS 2018 and 2020 data', 2021, Volunteer Scotland). These figures highlight the significant contribution of volunteers to the wellbeing of the Scottish economy and society, particularly in times of hardship.

Volunteers have a major contribution to the delivery of social care, with key roles in both statutory and community-based care roles. The Scottish Household Survey 2020 showed that 17% of Scotland’s formal adult volunteers supported organisations or groups focused on health, disability and wellbeing, which equates to 201,075 people (Analysis of SHS 2020 data, 2021, Volunteer Scotland).

We have recently submitted a response to the Scottish Government’s consultation regarding the National Care Service Bill which can be found on the [Policy page of our website](#).

Our key recommendations for the National Care Service are:

- that plans need to ensure that the voluntary sector will be meaningfully included in decision-making structures
- that funding for providing social care services covers costs associated with engaging volunteers
- that the financial challenges facing the voluntary sector are addressed in the long-term funding of social care.

Volunteers in local communities were central in the initial and ongoing response to Covid-19, and Third Sector Interfaces often became key players in local resilience partnerships during the pandemic. Our report from 2021 provided evidence that 95% of Third Sector Interface organisations led coordination around volunteering responses to the pandemic, and 93% supported local organisations to develop their volunteering responses ([‘Road to Recovery’](#), 2021, Volunteer Scotland). One respondent in this survey stated that:

*“ The local coordination across [our] TSI, the local authority and the HSCP was excellent throughout the pandemic” ([‘Road to Recovery’](#), 2021, Volunteer Scotland)*

Volunteer Edinburgh was heavily involved in the local response to Covid-19 and established a ‘Community Taskforce’ which has more recently been involved in greeting refugees from Ukraine (‘Community Taskforce Volunteers’ webpage, 2022, Volunteer Edinburgh). Similarly, community-based volunteers and organisations had a key role in responding to the aftermath of Storm Arwen earlier this year, as reflected in the Scottish Government’s review of the storm response which recommends:

*‘Resilience Partnerships ensure that key Voluntary and Community Sector assets and capabilities in their areas are adequately mapped, and processes for their swift activation, deployment and coordination are developed on a collaborative basis.’*

And:

*‘Resilience Partnerships fully integrate the Voluntary Sector into their planning and response structures, and offer representation at resilience meetings at all levels.’*  
([‘Storm Arwen review recommendations update: June 2022’](#), Scottish Government)

It is clear from these recommendations that volunteers and the voluntary sector have a crucial role in community resilience; a key factor in both our recovery from Covid-19 and in our development of an economy focussed on wellbeing. However, as previously stated, both volunteers and voluntary sector workers are experiencing significant pressures at the moment.

If the Scottish Government is committed to Covid-19 Recovery, and indeed to the development of a wellbeing economy, it is vital that it provides sustainable investment for the voluntary sector, with a particular focus on Third Sector Interfaces as a key conduit for supporting the local voluntary sector in resilience activity.

**The Equality and Fairer Scotland Statement show evidence where the impact of Covid has not been felt equally across Scottish society. Do the Resource Spending Review and MTFS provide sufficient detail as to how the Scottish Government will provide funding to address the inequalities associated with the impact of Covid throughout the recovery period?**

Whilst the need to address inequalities is central to plans detailed in the Spending Review and MTFS, the failure to identify the voluntary sector and volunteering as spending priorities will greatly undermine efforts in this regard.

Volunteers have a key role in the provision of services that address inequalities, which were greatly exacerbated by the pandemic. The Trussell Trust, which operates foodbanks across the country, reports that 36,000 volunteers support their UK wide network in a wide range of roles, and that 32% of their volunteers have lived experience of poverty ([‘Impact Report 2022’](#), 2022, Trussell Trust). Given that the Trussell Trust recently reported a 50% increase in foodbank use since before the pandemic, this is likely placing significant pressure on existing volunteers in their service ([‘Food bank charity hands out emergency parcel every 13 seconds as demand soars’](#), 2022, The Mirror).

Fife Gingerbread, a small charity supporting lone parents, engages volunteers – many with lived experience - in all its projects. One volunteer coordinator, who started as a volunteer, said: ‘Things have evolved so much since I started but one thing that hasn’t changed - the feeling you get when you see families progressing so much from being so low to thriving in a better place’ ([‘Volunteers’ Week 2022’](#), 2022, Fife Gingerbread). This is typical of the impact volunteers have when working with groups experiencing significant disadvantage.

In addition, many people volunteer to improve their own wellbeing. Our analysis of the 'Time Well Spent' research by NCVO in 2019 found that four out of five (80%) Scottish volunteers agreed that volunteering had improved their mental health and wellbeing ('NCVO – Time Well Spent Scottish Analysis: Volunteer Impacts', 2021 Maltman, D. and Linning, M.). Regular volunteering can also alleviate depression, anxiety and stress, and reduce loneliness and social isolation (['Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing'](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland).

We also know that the benefits of volunteering for mental health and wellbeing are intersectional. Research shows that the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering are more pronounced for those experiencing significant disadvantage. In 'Time Well Spent' research, 77% of Scottish volunteers from lower socio-economic groups agreed that volunteering helped them feel less isolated than volunteers from higher socio-economic groups, compared with 68% of ABC1s ('NCVO – Time Well Spent Scottish Analysis: Volunteer Impacts', 2021, Maltman, D. and Linning, M.). Further evidence shows that individuals who are disabled, unemployed or older – and thus more likely to experience challenges to their mental health - are likely to generate the highest benefits from volunteering (['The contribution of volunteering to Scotland's health and wellbeing'](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland).

There is also evidence to demonstrate the wellbeing benefits of volunteering for young people, who have the worst mental health of any age group in Scotland (['Volunteering, Health and Wellbeing'](#), 2018, Volunteer Scotland). The 2019 'Young People in Scotland' survey showed that volunteering increased the confidence of 52% of young people and helped 54% to learn new skills amongst other career benefits (['Young People and Volunteering in Scotland 2019'](#), 2019, Volunteer Scotland).

However, inclusive volunteering requires more resource and will therefore require additional investment. Volunteers often need targeted support to overcome systemic barriers to participation, and to break down the stigma that volunteering is not appropriate for them. In a Scottish Volunteering Forum discussion about volunteer motivations and barriers, one volunteer with lived experience of homelessness and mental health issues suggested that he wouldn't be volunteering if it wasn't for the guidance and encouragement from his support worker (['Thematic Discussion: Volunteer Motivations and Barriers'](#), 2019, Scottish Volunteering Forum). He also stated that his volunteering has been 'transformational' and stops him from 'reverting back to the dark days'.

Given the significant evidence of the benefits of volunteering for addressing inequality, contributing to a wellbeing economy and ensuring communities are resilient, we feel that dedicated resource to support greater volunteer participation and overcome stigma, in line with the Volunteering Action Plan, is required.

## Covid-19 Strategic Framework

### **To what extent is the Strategic Framework reflected in the Resource Spending Review and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)?**

The Strategic Framework advocates for a place-based approach to tackling inequalities, with a focus on community-led health improvement services. As detailed previously, volunteering and the voluntary sector have a significant contribution to make in addressing health inequalities and promoting community wellbeing. As such, the lack of support for volunteering and the voluntary sector in the spending review – beyond identifying them as a key partner for collaboration – is a significant oversight.

The Strategic Framework also acknowledges the important role of the National Volunteer Coordination (NVC) Hub in supporting the Covid-19 response, particularly in vaccination and community testing programmes, and states that:

*“We will work with partners, across civic society, including our partners in Local Government, to further develop the NVC Hub users’ requirements in the longer term and put sustainable arrangements in place to help meet demand for volunteer resources in future national emergencies.”* (‘Covid-19: Scotland’s Strategic Framework Update’, 2022, Scottish Government)

The role of volunteers and the voluntary sector in ongoing community resilience through programmes like the NVC Hub is acknowledged in the Spending Review. It states that it will support:

*“More resilient communities and work to build Scotland’s resilience by improving Scotland’s understanding and preparedness against a range of hazards and threats, through multiagency planning, strengthening national work on risk and prevention and working with partners to build and deliver capacity”*

Whilst this is reassuring to see, it is unclear how this translates into spending. In particular, this seems at odds with the decision to reduce dedicated third sector funding next year by £1 million.

### **What should be prioritised for funding in the Scottish Government’s COVID-19 Strategic Framework?**

Given the role of the voluntary sector and volunteers thus far in the response to the pandemic, and the nature of the challenges we continue to face with the cost of living crisis, the war in Ukraine and increasingly severe weather events as a result of climate change, we believe that investment in initiatives which promote ongoing community resilience is key. Ongoing investment in the National Volunteer

Coordination Hub is vital to ensure it is able to respond swiftly and smoothly to an increasing range of challenges. We also believe that further investment in local Third Sector Interfaces is vital to ensure that they can continue to engage with local resilience partnerships and coordinate local responses to emerging challenges, whilst also providing ongoing promotion of best practice with regards to volunteer engagement.

Finally, the Volunteering Action Plan is committed to improving volunteering participation rates in Scotland. As previously mentioned, many volunteers that have been engaged during the pandemic are experiencing fatigue. We also know that those who benefit most from volunteering are currently the least likely to participate. Dedicated resource across a range of Scottish Government directorates, in line with the Volunteering Action Plan, will ensure that our reliance on volunteers to respond to future challenges is sustainable and inclusive.

## Conclusion

It is clear that volunteering and the voluntary sector have had a vital role in our response to the Covid-19 pandemic thus far, and continue to have a significant contribution as we recover from the pandemic. The Government is committed, as part of this recovery, to become a wellbeing economy.

Scotland is in a challenging financial environment at present, with the cost of living and inflation projected to rise into the next financial year. If the Scottish Government wishes to continue its recovery from Covid-19 whilst also responding to fresh challenges presented by the cost of living crisis, it is vital that it invests in the voluntary sector and volunteering. Here are our key recommendations for the Covid-19 Recovery Committee:

- Seek clarity around how volunteering will be represented in policy from a range of Scottish Government directorates, in line with the Volunteering Action Plan.
- Request that the Scottish Government's directives to those who distribute funding on its behalf ensure appropriate resource is provided and compliance with appropriate standards is met for sustainable volunteer engagement.
- Ensure sustainable funding for the voluntary sector, including multi-year funding.
- Ensure increased funding for Third Sector Interfaces to continue in their role of supporting volunteering in their local authority areas.
- Ensure that the financial challenges facing the voluntary sector are addressed in the long-term funding of social care, under plans for a National Care Service.

- Request ongoing investment in the National Volunteer Coordination Hub to ensure it is able to respond swiftly and smoothly to an increasing range of challenges.



**Volunteer Scotland**  
Jubilee House, Forthside Way, Stirling FK8 1QZ  
T: 01786 479593 E: [hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk](mailto:hello@volunteerscotland.org.uk)  
W: [volunteerscotland.net](http://volunteerscotland.net)



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