



COVID-19 Third Sector Response Forum
Wednesday 31st March 2021
3pm – 5pm
Zoom Meeting

Present:

Claire Bernard (CB) (Chairperson)	CVS Falkirk and District
Laura Jamieson (LJ) (Minute Taker)	CVS Falkirk and District
Scott Malcolm (SM)	CVS Falkirk and District
Alan Grey (AIG)	Forth Valley Migrant Support Network
Alison Hill (AH)	Change Live Grow
Anne Montgomery (AM)	Dennyloanhead Community Centre / Archibald Russel Centre
Angela Smith (ASm)	Corra Foundation – Dawson Centre
Ania Sandland (ASa)	Outside the Box
Charlie Greer (CG)	Grangemouth Older People's Welfare Association (Talbot House)
Claire Houston (CH)	NHS Forth Valley
Dave Cameron (DC)	Avonbridge Hall
David Paterson (DaP)	NHS Retirement Fellowship
Donald Johnston (DJ)	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Donald Park (DoP)	Forth Valley Voluntary Sector Group
Duncan Hearsom (DH)	Dial-a-Journey
Fiona Arthur (FA)	Smart Denny
Geoff Reid (GR)	SACRO Forth Valley
Hannah Gray (HG)	Strathcarron Hospice
Iain Goodall (IG)	Camelon Community Hub
James Sludden (JaS)	Addictions, Support and Counselling (ASC)
Janine Kidd (JaK)	Symington Drive Residents' Association
Jen Kerr (JeK)	Falkirk Council
Joan Sutherland (JoS)	Bainsford Hall Action Group
John McGhee (JMc)	Scottish Seniors Computer Club
Kelly Tulloch (KT)	Health Improvement Scotland
Lesley MacArthur (LM)	Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership
Lynne Boslem (LB)	Tamfourhill Community Hub / Tamfourhill Tenants and Residents Association
Lorraine Ferguson (LF)	Dennyloanhead Community Centre / Archibald Russel Centre
Madelene Hunt (MHu)	Bo'ness Community Council
Mairi Wright (MW)	NHS Forth Valley
Margaret Gardner (MG)	Hallglen Community Hub SCIO
Margaret Pow (MP)	Westfield Community Centre
Maria Ferrari (MFe)	Cyrenians
Maria Ford (MFo)	Bo'ness Networking Group



Martin Allen (MA)
Martin Kenny (MK)
Maureen Hill (MHi)

Paul Anderson (PA)
Paul Surgenor (PS)
Richard McLennan (RM)
Safia Ali (SA)
Sarah McHardy (SaM)
Sarah Murray (SMu)
Sharron Linton (SL)
Sheona McMorran (ShM)
Wendy Turner (WT)

Forth Valley Sensory Centre
Royal Voluntary Service Forth Valley
Braveheart Association and Forth Valley
Top Toes
Falkirk Council
Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership
Falkirk Safebase
Rainbow Muslim Women Group
Families Outside
Royal Voluntary Service Forth Valley
Symington Drive Residents' Association
KLSB Community Pantry
The Barony Players / Bo'ness Community
Council

1. Welcome and Introductions

CB introduced herself, welcomed forum members present and advised the meeting was recorded via Zoom. Introductions were made via the Zoom chat function.

2. Review of Previous Minutes (Wednesday 3/3/2021)

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the previous meeting, with the following updates:

- 2. "Action: CVS Falkirk team to create and share one document with food providers' organisation contact details; all providers present agreed."
 - Food providers had requested a single page format; completed and sent.
- 3.1. "Action: LH to speak with Men's Sheds about [Andy's Man Club] venue possibility."
 - Carried over to the next meeting.
- 3.2. "Action: CB to forward [ASC] details to appropriate person for adding to [mental health] leaflet."
 - As the leaflet has already been printed and distributed it cannot be changed; ASC's spring calendar is being shared alongside the leaflet, and is scheduled for CVS Falkirk's e-bulletin and [Spring Forward](#) campaign.
- 5. "COVID-19 Falkirk Third Sector Response Evaluation Report": the summary report will soon be available and sent directly to forum members.
- 6.1. "Virtual Funders Fayre Recap and Funders Present": SM has sent this summary sheet to forum members via the mailing list.
- 6.2. "Action: CB to find out if groups can apply to both the Communities Recovery Fund (CRF) and now Adapt and Thrive."
 - CB confirmed groups who received funding from CRF can apply to Adapt and Thrive.



- 7.2. “Action: CB will make enquiries [re: a third sector representative for the regional group] and contact DP.”
 - Carried over to the next meeting.

3. Falkirk Plan: Engagement with Thematic Groups – Paul Anderson and Jen Kerr, Falkirk Council

PA explained that at this meeting he and JeK are representing the [Community Planning Partnership \(CPP\)](#) (which includes Falkirk Council), and gave members some background on the Falkirk Plan:

- Local authorities are required by law to publish 10 year plans; other areas have called these Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIPs), while Falkirk’s previous plan was the [Strategic Outcomes and Local Delivery \(SOLD\) Plan](#), which ran 2016 – 2020.
- A first draft of the new Falkirk Plan (2021 – 2031) is due before the CPP board in June.
- As a result, the CPP is holding a series of [community engagement events](#) from mid-April, across 3 strands:
 - place-based (online) conversations throughout the Falkirk Council area
 - engagement with thematic audiences and communities of interest (including equalities groups and the third sector)
 - Falkirk wide engagement for anyone who lives, works or studies in the Falkirk area (via an online survey run during April and May)
- These plans are designed to deal with strategic issues facing local communities (as opposed to bin collections and littering, for example).
- The engagement features 4 key starter discussion points:
 - What would you see as the problems, challenges and issues in your communities?
 - What do you want to do about these problems and challenges?
 - How can the CPP help you do that?
 - How do you want to work with the CPP on this?

PA stated that they are keen to make the process as accessible as possible, and engage with as many people as possible (especially those who would not normally respond to these processes), in order to capture a range of perspectives. JeK noted that they want to be proactive, and that there is some flexibility in the engagement approach – for example, there hasn’t previously been a lot of discussion with communities of interest, so is the engagement process the best way to speak with them?

JeK went on to say they had designed this engagement based on feedback from last year’s session with the third sector, and that they aim for the Falkirk Plan to not be defined by only service data, as it is so much more, but include how the CPP can support the third sector’s work, and where that support can be improved and what they can do better (especially around communication). They recognise



that everyone is busy with COVID-19 work, and did debate if this was the right time to hold the engagement (and even held off on the engagement work until lockdown was due to ease). However, it was decided that if these questions weren't asked now when people are thinking of renewal, they may miss out on helping those who need help "sooner rather than later".

JeK then informed members that the CPP board meets in 2 weeks, and that there is the possibility to adjust the engagement timescales if this is a problem. She encouraged members to submit any issues they had via CVS Falkirk for presentation to the board at this next meeting.

There are tools and resources available to offer support (especially for communities of interest), though these are limited, which is why the CPP is keen to work with other partners and those working in communities, like the third sector.

They finished by highlighting that this engagement is not the last point of the journey, but a starting point in communicating more regularly, and that the Falkirk Plan will be reviewed on a regular basis over its 10 years as Falkirk's situation and priorities change. JeK also noted that the new Falkirk Plan will be reviewed yearly.

Members raised the following questions and points (grouped by topic):

Confusion and Lack of Clear Communication

- It sounds interesting, but [this member doesn't] quite understand, and so won't be able to pass on to their colleagues and audiences. The information also seems conflicting: the CPP would like to know the problems communities face, but not problems like littering; it can be hard for people to think of and identify bigger picture issues, especially when they deal with littering etc daily.
- Another member highlighted the amount of "community"-titled work being done recently, and the confusion between them: Community Choices, Community Conversations, Community Planning, etc. This member took part in recent Community Conversations, which they thought were linked to Community Planning sessions in December, but turned out to be part of Falkirk Council's strategic property review (SPR).
 - Additionally, these 4 questions seem to be linked to the questions in December, but aren't motivating or clear enough on what is needed from people (and why) to engage people who aren't already engaging. "What are your priorities?" is too broad.
 - CB: It's about people understanding what they're engaging with.
 - JeK: The CPP recognises their communication with community groups needs improvement. However, while there is a lot of separate areas of work going on (both by Falkirk Council and the CPP), they



are aiming to present all of this work as a whole, hence the repeated use of “community” in titles.

- JeK: Also highlighted that the December sessions with the third sector were very valuable, and that the CPP learned a lot, which they have put into designing the Falkirk Plan. The Plan is also about how the sector wants to engage with all CPP partners (not just the council).
- JeK: The questions have been left deliberately broad in order to allow work with communities of place who are further into their planning process (like Denny, Bo’ness and Grangemouth) and who are stronger and more able to co-design service delivery, as well as those areas who are just starting.
- One member pointed out that the Falkirk Plan starts out local and then develops a wider focus, which is confusing; local would be better.
 - JeK: Agreed; the Falkirk Plan is a plan of a plan, and it should link to local plans.

Other members also echoed this point; one described the questions as “unmemorable”.

Timescale Issues

- One member is pointed out their worry that the engagement will miss out on certain community voices with the June deadline, as many groups are still only meeting online, which not everyone can take part in.
 - JeK: Will take that point on board; is there a better date in mind, if an extension is possible?
 - Member: It is still impossible to predict, but based on last year’s restrictions, late summer (possibly August).
- SM: There needs to be time to put out materials and information to help people become more familiar with such a complex issue, in order to make an informed decision. Without that familiarity, it’s difficult to know how one (possibly small) thing affects others.
 - PA: Communities are not being asked to make decisions; these are listening exercises, to allow the CPP to capture opinions and lived experiences on the headline issues that will help make Falkirk communities better, more positive places to live and work.
 - SM: In that case, there needs to be work done to build capacity.
- Another member’s biggest concern with the timeline is that community groups don’t know what will happen in the future; they are waiting to reopen when restrictions ease, but this could change. Wider community engagement is better, and easier, when these groups are open and can speak to more people. It’s also hard to know what will be needed and what the focus will be when you don’t know what you’ll have; everything else is guesswork.



- PA: This is a legitimate point; he expects that the information and views captured now will be different to a year or so ahead, when restrictions have hopefully fully eased.
- In response to the final point under Consultation Fatigue (below), one member noted that the timelines definitely need to change, as the sector, individuals and communities definitely want to work with the CPP, but they need time to learn about this process, and to allow for follow-up; otherwise, they can't engage.

A number of other members also raised this point.

Consultation Fatigue

- One member spoke about the number of consultation work and events in Denny last year, with the community wondering why they had spent so much time consulting then when the same questions were being asked now.
 - This member realises that things change and Denny's communities should have a chance to input at these stages, but pointed out different questions will be needed to encourage people to contribute.
- The challenge will be active listening; the Falkirk Plan needs to have an active, annual or biannual review of the plan in place, as community comes out of lockdown, and this needs to look at language used, and other ways of communicating. Fatigue is very real, and many people think, "What's the point if Falkirk Council isn't joined up and feeding back what we say to each other?" This needs to be different, or it won't work.
 - JeK: Agreed; the CPP wants to create a continuous process, so that they are able to stop "engagement" and simply communication, but this needs to start with engagement. There will definitely be a change in the language used as this continues, perhaps around "working with" instead of "asking".
- A member described this as a "learning point" for the CPP and Falkirk Council, and that it was good to know they were listening, but would they hear what they were told?
- Bo'ness is on their second local action plan, and also experiencing fatigue, as nothing seems to change.
- Other members noted they don't feel they are being heard at all, and that they "might as well be talking to [themselves]". There are lots of new ideas in their area, but everyone is very deflated as a result of not being listened to.
- Additionally, a member described the SPR meetings they joined as "appearing to be a rather empty exercise to demonstrate some due consultation process", an "inconclusive exercise" where they had "wasted 6 hours" attending meetings.
 - JeK: The council had an idea of what may happen as a result of the SPR, and wanted input on this; they spent several months gathering



information and learning that there was a lot more involved than they had anticipated, and a lot more options to appraise and consider. The council had previously looked at property over the last 6 years from their cost and sustainability perspective; however, these conversations raised a number of points relevant to the communities' perspectives (namely those who hadn't been appraised yet).

- JeK: As a result, those conversations changed the process and the next steps in the SPR, which is how Falkirk Council wants to work with communities going forward. The information gathered has stopped the work the council thought was needed, and instead where more work is required (including delays to property enquiries from community and third sector groups).
- This same member mentioned that asset transfer has been noted as an option during the SPR Community Conversations, but they and other groups had experienced significant issues with the asset transfer process.
 - JeK responded that Falkirk Council's asset transfer team would work with community groups and come to the best solution once they knew what community groups had planned for the building(s) in question.
 - The member reported this had not been the case, and that definite answers were needed, or again, people would wonder what the point of contributing to these "vaporous" processes was, especially with proposals made for closing halls and merging schools.
 - It is JeK's understanding that no decisions have been made, and the council team is keen to help community groups take on asset transfers; however, if anyone has any questions, issues or concerns, they are welcome to submit them in writing to JeK, who will take them to her colleagues.
 - SM: There has been a project manager vacancy posted on [myjobscotland](https://myjobscotland.gov.uk/) with a remit to "manage the school estate", which suggests a decision has already been made (especially in the vacancy's wording).
 - JeK: This is only to manage the changes around schools, but it is not yet known what all of these will be. This will be referenced in the education committee papers, but JeK will take the point back to the council, and that it is important for the CPP to understand that one partner's work and relationship with local communities impacts those with all the partners.

Consultation fatigue was also mentioned repeatedly by other members in their own points.

PA and JeK noted that they are aware of and understand the fatigue, and people's cynicism, but that this is a process. They reiterated their commitment to change, and that this engagement is about all the partners, who all want to engage.



Miscellaneous

- Has there been a review of the SOLD Plan – if not, why not? Reviews will be essential to the new plan, and should be built in from the start.
- Each respective group will give different answers based their community and users, so why the decision to conduct place-based engagement?
 - JeK: Agreed, and this is recognised by the CPP; this is why they are also looking at communities of interest. They are not looking to create one single plan for all of Falkirk, as some areas will have more capacity, resources, and are at different levels.
- Use of language (eg. “thematic”, etc) – much of the language used is difficult for people not familiar with CPP work, whether due to language barriers, formal wording or jargon (which multiple members noted as an issue).
 - JeK: There is a particular need to do more around migrant communities, BAME communities, and other communities of interest with regards to language; they are aware of this, and are looking into ways to work on this, bring these voices forward, and build further equalities into what they do.
- Who is the CPP board, and why are they making decisions if they don’t deliver services?
 - JeK: The board is made up of senior officers from each of the partners, who come together to discuss what is working within services and what is needed, or where there are barriers or recurring issues, which they then commit their services to. However, they are aware they are not engaging enough with communities of place, and this needs to be better.
- Isolation – the member noted that they understand this engagement is focusing on long term, but they believe the CPP should be focusing on short term and COVID-19. They would like to see support from Falkirk Council on reopening of groups and centres. Social isolation been terrible over the last year (particularly for elderly people, but for everyone), and they would like to see the council focus on how to get people into public spaces, reducing social isolation. They believe it would be better to look at what can be done in the next year, rather than the next 5 – 10 years, when things will change.
 - JeK: This is an issue that has been around for a long time, and the CPP are aware of it. There was work being done before COVID-19, which worsened social isolation, but also saw it improve, because of the efforts of the sector. If groups aren’t able to reopen as a result of COVID-19, meaning social isolation will again increase, this needs to be looked at and addressed (including around support and sustainability).
- Capacity building is essential – so many people are excluded digitally or through language, and it takes time to gather information. Falkirk Council



and the partners should be giving groups the tools to develop these processes.

- The third sector and volunteers have done a lot of things during the pandemic that normally comes under CPP partners – this should be recognised.
 - JeK: A lot of this work does sit with the community, and has been demonstrated to be everyone’s interest.
- Will the Falkirk Plan include the work and plans from places like Denny and Bo’ness? The need for a wider plan is understood, but with different areas at different stages, this needs to be taken on board.
 - JeK: Agreed, and while there are a lot of silos involved, this is being worked on, so that all partners are aware of all the work being done.
- It is also important not to perpetuate the view of “Falkirk Council/the partners do ...”, as this may be disempowering; this member suggests that local authorities operate at 3 levels:
 1. let communities do what they can (eg. litterpicking)
 2. support them when needed (eg. in sourcing black bins)
 3. do what communities can’t (eg. deal with flytipping)
 - JeK: Agreed; this is why these particular questions were chosen and designed to be vague, in recognition that different communities are at different levels and need different support.

There were also discussions on resources, accountability and responsibility, as well as inequality around resource allocation between partners. Additionally, many members spoke about their own group’s experiences, particularly around resources and asset transfer.

One member noted that they were glad that many other people in the meeting felt the same as them.

3.1 Offer from CVS Falkirk

CB highlighted that CVS Falkirk is more than happy to engage and facilitate any meetings with groups to come together around particular themes; JeK encouraged members to get involved with this, and to submit any requests for frank conversations around equity, budgets and transparency to the board.

Action: CVS Falkirk to facilitate a meeting for Bainsford groups (as requested by one of the Bainsford groups present).

On behalf of the sector, the CVS Falkirk team will also pull the comments from the chat and submit them to JeK and PA; however, given the council’s structures and timelines, a written account of these questions and comments may not be ready in time for the CPP board meeting in two weeks.

According to JeK, the paper for the next board meeting has been drafted (detailing the planned engagement), but it will then be debated by all partners at



the meeting. CVS Falkirk can therefore submit a summary of comments as representative of the third sector's view. The minutes of this meeting (and all minutes from this forum) will be valuable evidence when it comes to analysing how best the CPP can work with the sector.

CB also noted that the [recent independent evaluation on Falkirk's response to COVID-19](#) (which was led by the third sector, while there was support from partners) had a number of questions and recommendations, looking specifically at how partners engage with the third sector.

As a result, CVS Falkirk (as the TSI) needs to have discussions with partners on how to make these changes, because one of the key findings of the report was that the third sector was treated as an equal partner, and this needs to continue; the fear and concern from third sector and community-based work is that this will be lost when the pandemic is over and recovery begins, and the power imbalance will return.

JeK asked if CVS Falkirk would like to present the report to the CPP board; CB replied that the report has been shared with partners and stakeholders and they have been asked to present at other committees, the summary report is now being worked on and will be shared soon.

4. AOCB

CB noted that the other agenda points from this meeting would be carried over to the next, in order to fully give the third sector this opportunity to speak on the engagement process.

**Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 28th April, 3pm – 5pm
via Zoom**

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