

**Safer and Empowered Communities Forum  
Wednesday 22 November 2023 at 10am  
Zoom Meeting**

**Present:**

Eloise Wilson (EW) (Chairperson)	CVS Falkirk & District
Kerrie Hoggan (KH) (Minute Taker)	CVS Falkirk & District
Iain MacIntyre (IM)	CVS Falkirk & District
Marita Buchanan (MB)	Social Security Scotland
Rowan Eadsforth (RE)	Social Security Scotland
Navneet Sandhu (NS)	LinkLiving
Calum Renton (CR)	Cyrenians
John Hosie (JH)	Tamfourhill TRO and Hub
Lindsay Daniels (LD)	Dates n Mates
John Clarke (JC)	Dates n Mates
Sandra Lyon (SL)	TCV
Pauline Smith (PS)	Central Advocacy

**Guests:**

Stephanie Steele (SS)	Utility Aid
Emma Berry (EB)	Utility Aid
George Winter (GW)	Forth Environment Link

**Apologies:**

Derek Allison	Falkirk Foundation
Debbie Jupp	Committed to Ending Abuse
Claire Hughes	Transform Forth Valley

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

EW introduced herself, welcomed Forum members present and advised the meeting was recorded via Zoom. Introductions were made and apologies noted as above.

**2. Previous Minutes and Action Tracker**

The minutes of the meetings held on 24 May 2023 and 23 August 2023 were approved as an accurate record of each meeting.

**3. Update on Community Action Plans**

EW shared the presentation 'Updates on Community Action Plans' which was available on the CVS Falkirk & District (CVS) [website](#) and it was noted that previous Community Action Plans (CAP) were developed for Bainsford/Langlees, Denny/Dunipace and Grangemouth. With new CAP work underway in Camelon, and planning underway for Redding and Slamannan.

A discussion took place where some Forum members expressed frustration with the pace of the implementation of the recommendations within the CAPs, and the impression that the action planning was not joined up across the participants, leading to a sense of 'consultative exhaustion' without accompanying action. These concerns had been raised with Falkirk Council.

**Action:** The Forum requested attendance at the meeting by a representative from the Community Planning Partnership.

#### **4. Economies of Scale - Energy Support Project for the Third Sector**

EW introduced SS and EB from Utility Aid who thanked the Forum for the invitation to attend and outlined the background to Utility Aid as an energy consultant and brokerage specialising in working with the third sector and more recently, social enterprises.

EB drew attention to her presentation and outlined the background to recent uncertainties due to global events as detailed on the slide. The following points were noted related to energy cost management:

- i. Start to plan any renewal at least six months to one year ahead of the contract end date, bearing in mind that termination notice is likely to be in the region of 30 days.
- ii. Consider the contract type, is it future proofed or would it still cost the same if the organisation reduced usage in future.
- iii. Acknowledging that as bills were automatically produced, they could be incorrect. And work done by Utility Aid had helped customers recover over £6m just in charges and it strongly encouraged regular meter checks and taking photographs of the readings.
- iv. Flag to Utility Aid any fluctuations on the tax on a bill as this could be impacted by the addition of a climate change levy, which should not happen for organisations which consume under 10,000 kilowatts per annum.

EB then moved to practical things that an organisation could do to make energy cost reductions:

- I. Put in place an energy champion to create a culture of understanding, behavioural change and aims to save money in the meantime.
- II. Consider installing an Automated Meter Reader (AMR) which would track business energy patterns during operational and non-operational times. This would aid understanding business energy patterns and identify any anomalies.
- III. Check that the organisation was on the best value tariff. And schedule building usage around similar activities which required the same heating output.
- IV. Unplug unused items at the end of the day, as this 'phantom energy' can represent c.60% of an energy bill.

- V. Control temperature as much as possible, a slight reduction in a thermostat could make a significant difference to costs.

EB outlined details of group purchasing using the National Charity Tender, where organisations of all different sizes were grouped together to access energy at the lowest possible cost. To join this, approach Utility Aid and once accepted an organisation would be aligned to the next basket and be notified when it goes to tender, these operated on a rolling basis.

Any organisation which provides a service to its community was eligible to join the scheme, this includes Community Interest Companies, Social Enterprises, charities, and unincorporated organisations.

A discussion took place on challenges with funding and work that was being undertaken by Utility Aid to examine potential opportunities for funding for auditing energy use in buildings and the importance of undertaking the right assessment before any installing takes place.

EB and SS were thanked for their attendance and left the meeting.

## 5. Spark The Change Project

EW introduced GW, from Forth Environment Link (FEL), to talk about the service, Spark the Change.

This service was designed to help community groups in Falkirk create dynamic action plans which are focussed specifically on net zero targets, reflected the needs of the community, and the buildings they are based in. At its heart, a carbon energy auditing service designed to tell the stories of these community groups and feed into end action plan and go towards funding.

This service is starting as free, as FEL are upskilling in this area. Consequently, if something more impactful is found in a building, the community group would be advised to seek an accredited service.

In response to the Strategic Property Review, FEL were concentrating on groups working on Community Asset Transfer (CAT) and, with six groups enrolled, were at capacity. Although it would be re-opened to others at a later date.

Each of these groups had finalised their [Business Energy Scotland Audit](#), looking at Scope 1 and 2 emissions. FEL would soon to purchase a thermal imaging camera to assist by identifying heat loss or damp problems.

A discussion took place on funding challenged related to CAT and ensuring that buildings are properly insulated, plus the importance of the journey towards net zero with the impact of climate change in mind.

EW thanked GW and asked him to feedback in future on the findings from the work undertaken with the six groups.

## 6. CVS Forum Update

EW shared her presentation, titled "Safer and Empowered Communities Forum – Updates" and the following points were noted:

- i. The National Centre for Resilience launched its Third Sector, Community and Practice Fund for 2024-25. The deadline for applications was 31 January 2024.
- ii. Work was underway to develop a leaflet aimed at vulnerable adults that detailed various statutory and third sector supports and service. It would contain phone numbers, not web links. EW would confirm when printed versions were available.
- iii. All Forum members were encouraged to attend the Covid-19 'Let's Be Heard' session on Tuesday 3 December 2023.
- iv. The 16 Days of Activism campaign would take place from 25 November 2023, as part of an international campaign.
- v. LinkLiving was taking referrals for its 'Moving On Up' programme, due to start in January 2024.
- vi. The Fairer Falkirk team were in the process of creating a new anti-poverty strategy and were seeking input. More information was available [here](#).

## 7. Any Other Closing Business

The following updates were provided by Forum Members:

- i. A Christmas Fayre was being held at Tamfourhill Community Hub on 3 December between 12pm – 3pm.
- ii. JH shared that the Safer Communities' Youth Action Project Development Plan for Camelon, Tamfourhill and Bantaskin was live. He outlined that as a living document he is more than happy to receive any feedback.
- iii. Dates N Mates was hosting a Christmas Party on Friday 8 December at Bonnybridge Golf Club.
- iv. FEL was hosting a free 'Wish you a veggie Christmas' on 7 December at the Dawson Centre in Langlees.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed.

**Post Meeting Note:** All presentations, plus links to the Community Action Plans, were shared via email to the distribution list on 22 November 2023.

**Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday 21 February 2024,**

**10am – 12pm, via Zoom**

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