

**Funding Officers Network  
Wednesday 14 February 2024  
Zoom Meeting**

**Present:**

Tariq Mahmood (TM) (Chairperson)	CVS Falkirk & District
Kerrie Hoggan (KH) (Minute Taker)	CVS Falkirk & District
Euan Robertson (ER)	CVS Falkirk & District
Laura Anderson (LA)	Transform Forth Valley
Blair Cremin (BC)	Warriors in the Community
Kim Edgar (KE)	Freedom of Mind Community Choir
Elaine Grant (EG)	Falkirk Delivers
Chris Gunn (CG)	Falkirk Community Football Foundation
Rebecca Heggie (RH)	Cyrenians
Laura Kearney (LK)	PLUS Forth Valley
Stephen Sutton (SS)	Bailliefields Community Hub SCIO
Nicole Forsyth (NF)	ENABLE Scotland
Stefanie Paterson (SP)	Falkirk Delivers
Dave Cameron (DC)	Avonbridge Community Café
Steve McQueen (SM)	Sustainable Thinking Scotland CIC
Jan Wiseman (JW)	Quiet Waters
Girijamba Polubothu (GP)	Shakti Women's Aid

**Guest:**

Emily Berry	Utility Aid
-------------	-------------

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

TM introduced himself, welcomed forum members present and advised the meeting was recorded via Zoom.

**2. Review of Previous Minutes**

After due consideration, the minutes of the meeting held on 9 August 2023 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

**3. Guest Speaker – Utility Aid**

TM introduced Emily Berry, Partnership Manager from Utility Aid. Emily shared her presentation, which can be found [here](#) on the CVS Falkirk webpage. She covered four main areas:

1. **Market Overview** - Referring to the 2024 Updates, Emily pointed to the graph that illustrated the unprecedented high prices of two years ago, and that although these had reduced and the market was relatively benign, Utility Aid was still watching the market.
2. **Understanding Your Bills** - Utility Aid reviews every single customer's utility bill and had observed the following points:
  - I. the two most common overcharges it had seen were related to estimated readings or inaccuracies with VAT and CCL (Climate Change Levy) charges. As estimated readings usually result in overestimated costs, ensuring that bills were based on as accurate readings as possible was essential.
  - II. If an organisation, for example a charity, qualified for a reduced rate of VAT, it was important to let the supplier know as soon as possible. Especially as each supplier does its calculations differently and may not backdate any savings to the beginning of the contract, instead it referred the client to HMRC. Plus, consider de minimis, the threshold of usage on the site.
  - III. Eventually everyone will be on a smart meter that reports data on a half-hourly basis, with this there was a legal requirement for a Meter Operator (MOP), a contract separate from the main electricity contract. Utility Aid had noted that many organisations were currently overpaying on these types of contracts. Emily advised that the easy way to check whether this half-hourly approach applies is to look at whether the invoice shows 00.
3. **Reducing Energy Consumption** - Creating a culture of energy consumption changes for everyone in an organisation made a huge difference financially and environmentally. Emily referred to this and four other energy saving tips shown on the presentation, including checking your tariff, controlling the temperature (between 18 to 21 degrees Celsius was recommended), phantom energy – such as keeping devices on standby and the use of an Automated Meter Reading (AMR) device, which enabled the tracking of business patterns.
4. **Journey Towards Net Zero** - Also within the presentation were details of how to get started with a Carbon Footprint Assessment and of Scope 1, 2 & 3 emission assessments, which would be done in order.

A discussion took place following the presentation, and the following points were noted:

- i. At present there was no incentive or encouragement for local authorities to seriously consider carbon reduction, resulting in organisations that were carbon negative feeling frustrated. Emily commented that she anticipated that this would change, and that pressure would rise, but she acknowledged the

frustration with the current situation and that this had been experienced with colleagues at Utility Aid. Emily also confirmed that Utility Aid can support organisations with their carbon footprint, even if not supporting with utility bills.

- ii. TM shared a recent experience of a community asset transfer (CAT), where the first utility bill was thousands higher than anticipated. This highlighted the lack of knowledge around VAT exemptions for charities, as well as the challenge in getting an accurate estimate of future bills from Falkirk Council, as its energy was bought as a block for its properties.
- iii. Positive news was that the cost of wholesale energy had reduced from a high of 55p per kilowatt hour (kWh), to 16p-17p, and contracts were now available for between 24 and 36 months, previously the maximum term was 12 months.
- iv. For any new connections, the standing charges from utility companies would be high, as suppliers were generally risk averse.
- v. Two organisations commented to their positive experience supported by Utility Aid.

Emily was thanked for her informative presentation and left the meeting.

#### 4. Network Member Updates

Network members were invited to feedback on recent funding experience any updates to share:

- I. It was confirmed that the outcome of the Community Mental Health & Wellbeing Fund would be communicated at the end of February 2024 [**post meeting note:** confirmation was issued on Tuesday 5 March 2024].
- II. SS outlined that Bailliefields application to this fund had been redirected to the Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) Dementia Innovation Fund, which demonstrated collaboration across funding organisations.
- III. A discussion took place on the [Self-Management for Life Fund](#) from Alliance and whether any organisations had applied [**post meeting note:** this fund closed on 5 March 2024]. It was noted that the parameters of the fund changed every year. BK offered that, in order to strengthen any application, he was keen to collaborate with other organisations if similar work was being undertaken.
- IV. TM followed this by outlining the challenges when seeking funding and that it often felt like a competition. He outlined that the National Lottery use local intelligence and seek to encourage organisations to collaborate in this way.
- V. Recent experiences of applying for [National Lottery - Awards for All](#) funding were shared. It was noted that timescales changed depending on the number and type of applications received in any one month and that applications from Falkirk had significantly increased. And that once approved, the monies were transferred quickly.

- VI. It was noted that Kirsty Hood had moved to the Scottish Land Fund and Eilidh Aitken had replaced her.
- VII. Redevelopment on the two barns at Bailliefields was underway and the organisation had applied to several different sources for support, including the Scottish Land Fund for a footbridge to improve accessibility to the site.
- VIII. EG and SP shared their experience of applying unsuccessfully to [The Agnes Watt Trust Fund](#), which had also received a higher number of applications than previous rounds. The next deadline for applications to this fund is 31 December 2024.
- IX. LK shared that PLUS Forth Valley had made a successful application to the [Kingdom Group Community Initiatives Fund](#) which offered quite a straightforward application process for small grants. She also spoke about her positive experience at the 2023 Funders Fayre, which enabled her to access two grants one from Falkirk Community Schools Fund and the other the HSCP Carer's Fund.
- X. GP was introduced as a new Network member. She was based in Edinburgh with [Shakti Women's Aid](#), which had two members of staff in Falkirk, working with black minority ethnic (BME) women, children and young people who are experiencing, or have experienced, domestic abuse. The Falkirk support was currently provided by HSCP, but replacement funding might be required.

## 5. CVS Falkirk & District Update

Euan Robertson, recently appointed Capacity Building Development Officer, introduced himself to the Network. Euan would be involved in the Empowering Communities programme and will also provide support on funding opportunities. His email is [euan.robertson@cvsfalkirk.org.uk](mailto:euan.robertson@cvsfalkirk.org.uk) or he can be contacted on the phone via 01324 692000.

TM promoted the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Funders Fayre which would take place on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> March. As well as between 24 – 25 exhibitors, there would be talks from Utility Aid and from CVS Falkirk & District to promote its 'Get on Board' programme, to support organisations in the recruitment of new trustees. **[post meeting note: the event took place and more details can be found [here](#)].**

## 6. AOCB

TM confirmed that future meetings would be a mix of face to face and online, possibility of hybrid in future too. Details to be confirmed.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed.

**Dates of Next Meeting:  
Wednesday 15 May 2024, 10am – 12pm**

**[www.cvsfalkirk.org.uk](http://www.cvsfalkirk.org.uk) | 01324 692 000 | [info@cvsfalkirk.org.uk](mailto:info@cvsfalkirk.org.uk) | @CVSFalkirk**

CVS Falkirk and District is a Company Limited by Guarantee in Scotland No. SC085838 | Scottish Charity No. SC000312 | Registered office: Unit 7b, Callendar Business Park, Callendar Road, Falkirk, FK1 1XR