

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES PROGRAMME

2024 – 2025 Update



**CVS FALKIRK & DISTRICT
PLACE BASED APPROACH**

Table of Contents

Empowering Communities Programme Overview	3
Community Voices	4
Community Ownership Support	5
Community Spotlights	6
Community Ownership Group Network	9
Volunteering and Participation	11
Community Spotlights	12
Events and Training	14
Session Spotlights	15
Increasing Capacity within Falkirk & District	18

Empowering Communities Programme: Overview

This report provides an update on the delivery of CVS Falkirk & District's Empowering Communities Programme and the difference it has made to the third sector and communities across Falkirk District.

CVS Falkirk & District received continued support from UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, administered by Falkirk Council, throughout 2024/25 to deliver the Empowering Communities Programme. Whilst the financial investment available has been reduced for 2025/26, we are pleased to have been able to work with partners to enable further delivery of the Programme until March 2026.

The Programme's achievements and impact so far have been evaluated, with this report including an overview of some of the highlights, and more information about the support offered through the Programme, as well as feedback and case studies from local groups and individuals demonstrating the positive difference the Programme has made for them.

Key achievements of the Programme:

- 151 third sector groups and organisations received support
- 17 community buildings facing closure had their business plans and applications for Community Asset Transfer accepted and validated
- 115 participants benefitted from fully funded community-based training
- 51 new Volunteer Opportunities created

We have been delighted to celebrate alongside local groups as have they reached major milestones towards achieving their aspirations of developing their activities, securing funding, welcoming new volunteers and/or working towards community ownership and Community Asset Transfer. However, we understand that many groups would benefit from significant future support to help them thrive in coming years, and so we are currently seeking to secure investment to continue the Programme past March 2026.

Community Voices

As part of evaluation of the Empowering Communities Programme, CVS Falkirk & District surveyed participating third sector groups and organisations about their experiences:

- 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CVS Falkirk & District understands their organisation and its needs.
- 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CVS Falkirk & District provides services and support that are relevant and suitable for their organisation.
- 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that CVS Falkirk & District's knowledge, experience and support benefit their third sector organisation.

Survey respondents had the opportunity to provide examples and comments to further demonstrate the difference participating in the Empowering Communities Programme made for them:



Having specific people to talk to, knowing who they are and being able to meet with them regularly has been really important. Also having meetings facilitated by the team to be able to be with other like minded organisations. Support for funding has also been helpful. (The Breastfeeding Network)

Using the experience of CVS [Falkirk & District] in going through the application process has been invaluable. The help in putting together the full application pack whilst utilising their knowledge and experience was invaluable. Euan and Iain were a treat to work with, always pleasant, and answered any questions we had. (E.S. Galaxy FC)



Absolutely everything that we have achieved so far has been with the support of CVS Falkirk [& District], they have been invaluable in all aspects of our journey, with both practical help, but also just being there, either in person or at the end of a phone or through email. (Limerigg Action Group)

Community Ownership Support

Delivery of the Empowering Communities Programme has continued to be a lifeline of support for those local groups who continue to work towards achieving ownership of their local community building. Our approach helps interested groups to explore the opportunity for community ownership so as to make an informed choice on the best decision for them. Falkirk Council's Strategic Property Review is still ongoing and at time of writing, there are still new groups seeking support for the first time – with buildings in 'phase 3' of the Review closing on Wednesday 1 October 2025 unless local volunteers completed a significant amount of work towards community ownership.

By April 2025, CVS Falkirk & District had engaged with 83 groups interested in community ownership including Community Asset Transfer. Of these groups, 44 decided to work towards Community Asset Transfer and were supported to develop their approach. Furthermore, through development and submission of a robust and detailed Community Asset Transfer application form and business plan, 17 groups reached the milestone of having their case for community ownership validated by Falkirk Council.

Support provided has been responsive to the unique needs of each group, however (as shown through the evaluation process) for a majority of groups the key activities benefiting most from this support include: support to create a business plan (81%), planning for Community Asset Transfer (71%), seeking funding (62%), creating a new legal structure to achieve Community Asset Transfer (52%) and submitting a business plan and CAT application to the relevant authority (52%).

We asked those groups supported to work towards achievement of Community Asset Transfer which element of our support had been the most beneficial and valuable for them:

- ***The team have helped to engage with the members and explain the process, helping us to break down the process into manageable chunks so that its not so daunting. Been there when need them.***
- ***The engagement helped us build confidence and confirm we are going in the right direction.***
- ***Assistance with the Business Plan, specifically the social return on investment calculations!***
- ***CVS [Falkirk & District] have been on hand at every stage and every question raised. Monthly meetings and online training has been invaluable. Setting up other halls and feeding off good practices and useful advice. CVS [Falkirk & District] have been a massive support, I would hope that this will continue for at least 6 months post CAT.***

At time of writing a further 4 groups have had their case for community ownership validated by Falkirk Council, whilst most have begun to engage with the legal process that precedes completion of a Community Asset Transfer – a significant achievement that recognises a robust and effective CAT application and business plan is in place.

Community Spotlight: Ettrick Dochart Community Hall

Groups seeking Community Asset Transfer had a range of aims and aspirations for the future and each group's community ownership journey is unique, however, what unites all of them is their passion for ensuring that community spaces, and the valued activities that happen there, are safeguarded for the future.

Formed as a charity in 2009, the Ettrick Dochart Community Group have managed and maintained the Community Hall ever since. In 2023, they began the Community Asset Transfer process to ensure that their mission of providing *“recreational facilities, or the organisation of recreational activities, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the persons for whom the facilities or activities are primarily intended”* would continue.

Expanding on this, the Ettrick Dochart team explained their concerns for their local community had their community building closed, *“We are in an area of high deprivation and our population is also getting older, so to lose this building, it would have been the loss of a lifeline for many of the people that use it.”*



Ettrick Dochart Community Hall, Hallglen

They shared with us the difference our support made to them, both dedicated support for the group and facilitating opportunities to network with other groups working towards community ownership:

“One thing I would do if I was to [go back to the start of the process] would be go to CVS [Falkirk & District] straight away. It wasn't until we got involved with CVS [Falkirk & District] that we were actually able to progress our application, and our business plan. The help from them has been invaluable. We've been attending the COG meetings which have been a massive benefit to us in getting to be involved with other groups going through similar.”

Spotlight: Polmont Playgroup

Polmont Playgroup are a local charity providing affordable and high quality childcare for children aged 2½ – 4. The organisation has operated in the Braes area for 25 years and when the future of their activities was threatened by the possible closure of community buildings they sought a way to create an opportunity to not only safeguard their future but to increase their sustainability for years to come, in a new home.

Reflecting on the process, their spokesperson highlighted:

“Business planning was definitely something that was new to us. We threw together a business plan and we shared it with CVS [Falkirk & District], who were absolutely invaluable throughout this entire process in helping us put that together and we worked very closely with them over a period of probably six months until that was ready for our final submission. And we couldn't have done it without CVS [Falkirk & District]’s help to be honest.

The community ownership group meetings are invaluable to us. It's great to see and hear everybody else's experiences going through exactly the same process. We share land with the Grange Community Centre and we have been working very closely with that group. They had initiated the managed service contract and presented that at one of the community ownership group meetings. And the plan with that was just to try and get a list of really helpful joiners, plumbers, electricians that were willing to agree to a managed service where we could all just call one number and get them to come out. So being able to piggyback on the back of that and contribute to that has been absolutely, you know, the best thing that we could get involved in.

Probably the most useful sessions that we attend monthly are the CVS [Falkirk & District], arranged community ownership group meetings. We find it really useful that the companies that come in, the most recent one was the Heat Hack, which was really useful to managing the building/the asset itself, lots of things that I didn't know and didn't know I needed to know, which was really helpful. And just networking with all of the other community centres and the likes around has been invaluable.”

Polmont Playgroup are delighted to now be renovating their new space to transform it into a bespoke community venue for the benefit of local children and families:



Community Spotlight: Polmonthill Community Snowsports Centre

Polmonthill Snowsports Centre has been a unique local sports venue since first opening in 1973. In October 2024, management of the centre was taken on by newly established charity, Polmonthill Community Snowsports Centre as a response to the Strategic Property Review:

“When it was announced that the council was offering community groups the chance to take it on, we obviously wanted to do that but we didn't really know anything about that process. So, we had to find members of the community who were happy to work together and were willing to take it on, and then had to go through the official process of forming the charity, the SCIO, to enable us to have the legal basis on which to take on the community ownership.”

Polmonthill Community Snowsports Centre were driven by a wish to take a community approach to maintaining an opportunity for local young people to learn a new skill:

“The Polmonthill Community Snowsports Centre is a great local asset. It would have been an absolute shame if it if it was lost from the community. We were all agreed that we had to do something to keep it open. The fact that the council was offering community ownership, the chance for us to take it on as a group and run it was appealing. It put the put the power in our hands that the control of the future of the asset of the ski centre of young people's opportunity to come here and learn to ski in the Falkirk area. We were keen to take it on and make sure we could do that.”

They explained the value of participating in both formal training sessions as well as less formal support sessions as they have progressed:

“We've taken part in formal training that's been organised by CVS [Falkirk & District] in facilities management, governance, risk management and first aid. There's also been a lot of informal learning that we've done through having conversations with CVS [Falkirk & District] and Development Trust Association Scotland about community ownership. In general, we've learned an awful lot about what community ownership is like, how to go about applying for funding for community projects, how to manage community projects. So, I think almost every day we've been learning something and a lot of that has come from our conversations with the folks at CVS [Falkirk & District].”



CVS Falkirk & District Community Ownership Group Network

The monthly Community Ownership Group (COG) Network meetings have become a focal point of the community ownership support through the Empowering Communities Programme, with feedback highlighting the positive difference it makes for participating organisations to be able to come together to share experiences, challenges and learning with other similar groups. As well as networking opportunities, we use these meetings to offer short learning sessions and to host introductions to representatives from other relevant support services.

In addition CVS Falkirk & District developed and delivered a series of bespoke Community Ownership training sessions, responding to the needs and concerns of local groups and using a scenario planning training model to support participants to proactively consider and plan their approach to the practicalities of being responsible for the running of a community building:

- 18 COG Network meetings facilitated
- 5 bespoke COG Network training sessions delivered
- 1 COG Network celebration event hosted

Reflecting on their experience within the Survey, respondents highlighted:

“Couldn't have done it without them [CVS Falkirk & District] to be honest. It was such a grey area and lack of knowledge and experience in this area. But the small steps that we took (some larger than others) helped us along the way to see the bigger picture and then work back from that to get us to where we are today” (Carron and Carronshore Hall Management Committee)

The COG meetings have been extremely beneficial. We have benefited from the experiences of the other members who are all going through a similar journey to us. On a practical level we share information, contacts and support. On an emotional level we find it useful to talk to people who understand the frustrations of the process we are engaged in. (Limerigg Action Group)

As part of Programme evaluation, groups participation in the COG were asked what they found most valuable about attending the sessions:

- 93% of respondents felt they have benefitted from hearing the experiences of similar groups.
- 93% of respondents felt they have benefitted from other groups sharing hints, tips, and information.
- 87% of respondents felt they have heard from relevant speakers sharing useful information.

CVS Falkirk & District Community Ownership Group Network

Spotlight: Partnership Sessions



HeatHack

In partnership with FEL Scotland's Community Climate Hub, we were pleased to welcome a representative from specialist organisation HeatHack to deliver a taster session to the COG Network all about learning tips, tricks and actions to enable a practical approach to reducing energy usage in any community venue. All participating members took away a free ThermaPro room heat monitoring tool on the night to try out in their own building.

Eric Liddell Centre

The Eric Liddell Centre is a successful community run centre in Edinburgh, home to a range of local projects, service and activities, since 1980. In March 2025, a representative from the Centre kindly visited the COG Network to share information about their successful approach to sustaining their space for the future. COG Network members took the opportunity to ask lots of questions to learn from the experience of this organisation.



Celebration

To mark the significant contributions of all members and their volunteers, we hosted a special celebratory meeting of the Community Ownership Group Network to take stock of the the incredible efforts made by groups to progress towards Community Asset Transfer in a relatively short space of time. We are so inspired by the incredible commitment and dedication shown in order to safeguard a community building for the future.

Volunteering & Participation

The volunteering and participation element of the Empowering Communities Programme takes an asset based approach to encouraging and nurturing community activity aiming to grow and sustain this for the future, with a particular focus on the communities of Bonnybridge and Bo'ness.

Through engagement with CVS Falkirk & District, 57 groups received support to grow and develop volunteering including:

- Help to develop, promote and recruit for new and existing volunteer roles
- Participation in bespoke and targeted volunteering information recruitment opportunities
- Volunteering policy, governance and funding support delivered
- Support to achieve the Volunteer Friendly Award
- Engaging with the Get on Board initiative to recruit new Directors and Trustees

In addition to supporting third sector groups we took a range of opportunities to speak directly to community members to help them understand the different pathways available to getting started with volunteering or to increase their participation in their local community. Through developing partnership opportunities with third sector organisations, we were able to target this support to individuals and groups who could benefit most from volunteering and participation, including those with Protected Characteristics, including:

- 4 events for individuals aged 50+, with 47 people helped to engage with opportunities to volunteer or participate in community activity
- 5 sessions for parents participating in programmes of support, with 16 people helped to engage with opportunities to volunteer or participate in community activity
- 7 community, school and college based events for young people, with 81 young people engaged and encouraged to volunteer, and to sign up for Saltire Awards
- 2 events for individuals with additional support needs, with 16 people helped to engage with opportunities to volunteer or participate in community activity

Community Spotlight: Greenhill and District Scottish Women's Institute

The Greenhill and District Scottish Women's Institute (SWI) have a rich history within Bonnybridge, promoting connection to improve local quality of life through friendship, education, and fun.

A member of CVS Falkirk & District, the Greenhill and District SWI have engaged with funding support through CVS Falkirk & District over the years – and most recently, through the Empowering Communities Programme, received individual funding and participation support through engagement with the CVS Falkirk & District Volunteering and Participation Development Officer. Working together on plans to mark their historical 100th anniversary celebration and look to future development through volunteering and participation recruitment, they utilised resources presented through CVS Falkirk & District to develop and progress a funding application to the 'National Lottery Awards for All':

"Meeting Beth for the first time back in January was very positive. She was interested in our organisation and eager to find out what our hopes were to celebrate a significant milestone. From the start she listened and gave us realistic advice on how to present our application. Beth was excellent at keeping in touch and guiding us through the process. We are forever grateful to have had such a kind and helpful person to assist us throughout. Thank you."

As a direct result of this support, the Greenhill and District SWI team highlighted they are more able to plan for the future with confidence as *'we have more knowledge about the opportunities, resources and networks available to us'*. Emphasising the element of CVS Falkirk & District's support that has been the most beneficial and valuable, from their experience is *"the funding element, the support given to navigate everything"* as *"the opportunity to discuss projects and formulate ideas to increase participation has been extremely useful"*.

Having the Empowering Communities Programme support has increased confidence in planning and delivering safe and engaging community and volunteering events and activities with Greenhill and District SWI confident that our services and activities will be effective in meeting community need.

"We are very impressed and grateful for the support we've been given".



Community Spotlight: Eden Animal Sanctuary

Eden Animal Sanctuary aims to advance and provide for the veterinary care, comfort and adequate welfare and wellbeing of resident animals and poultry within a protected environment, whilst promoting knowledge and understanding of the sanctuary's wildlife, their natural habitats and the biodiversity required maintaining the animals' and wild fowls' wellbeing. By doing so, they hope to maintain and enhance the natural environment and the biodiversity to create stable wildlife colonies to enable their proliferation and to explore the potential of the creation of wildlife corridors to the nearby Nature Reserve.

They first engaged with the Empowering Communities Programme following the CVS Falkirk & District 2024 Funders' Fayre, when they had an initial meeting to discuss setting up a volunteer-led project for adults and children with additional support needs to visit the sanctuary and interact with the animals following a model of animal-assisted therapy. During the development of this project, they received individualised volunteering and capacity building support to develop the policies necessary to launch the volunteering programme – and through CVS Falkirk & District, accessed fully funded accredited training (First Aid training in July 2024, and Lasting Leadership in March 2025).

Through the Empowering Communities Programme, the Eden Animal Sanctuary highlighted they have *'increased knowledge about how to plan, deliver, and promote volunteer opportunities, community events, and activities'*. From their experience, CVS Falkirk & District's support has been most beneficial through *"providing knowledgeable friendly support, identifying potential funding and providing practical courses to better equip us to sustain the Charity and move forward"*, specifically *"providing the opportunity to access First Aid accreditation, exploring volunteering opportunities and advising on ways we might offer help to persons with special needs of all ages"*.

Expanding on this further, Chairperson Marjorie Delaney, emphasised that *"they [CVS Falkirk & District] have provided all the assistance that we need but going forward I am sure that when our organisation develops it will be with their assistance"*.



Events & Training

With support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, CVS Falkirk & District were able to purchase a digital hybrid meeting kit to enable training sessions and workshops to be fully accessible to a greater number of participants. Our organisation has a wealth of experience in delivering training and events in a range of formats and we were keen to be able to respond to feedback that a truly effective hybrid option could maximise our ability to meet participant needs in relation to individual circumstance, accessibility and preferred learning style. The hybrid meeting kit purchased delivered a range of functionality to ensure that all participants joining sessions benefited from equitable opportunity to communicate with the session leader and wider group, and to engage with the training and learning materials used. Evaluation of the Programme identified that over 40% of participants engaging with relevant training sessions did so digitally through a hybrid approach, demonstrating the value of this investment throughout the Programme and beyond.

One participant told us : *“Online availability was vital to our group for ease. We work full time so getting to courses in the evening is difficult. Subjects delivered were carefully thought of and delivered well.”*

All events and training sessions were developed and delivered to respond to the current needs of third sector groups and the communities they serve, from providing fully funded access to accredited training, such as First Aid to help them increase the safety of their events and activities, to the development of bespoke training sessions where participants explored common challenges experienced by groups responsible for managing a community building to support them to develop a proactive response to these types of scenarios. In addition to training delivery, bespoke resources with accompanying guidance and learning points were created in response to our engagement with groups through training sessions and the wider Programme to add value and contribute to a continuous improvement approach, for example:

- Basic Adult Safeguarding Policy with Guidance
- Basic Health and Safety Policy with Guidance
- Basic Risk Assessment Template with Guidance
- Scenario Planning Walkthroughs with Guidance
- Facilities Walkthrough Template with Guidance

Session Spotlights: First Aid Training

Supporting the development of volunteering across the District, and with many of the groups undergoing the Community Asset Transfer process starting from the beginning, a key step in their journey is undergoing First Aid Training, ensuring that community events and activities benefit and have trained individuals on-site, creating a safer environment for participants.

In July 2024, CVS Falkirk & District welcomed representatives from 8 groups based in Bonnybridge and Bo'ness to take part in a Emergency First Aid at Work course facilitated by St Andrews First Aid. This course aims to provide participants with the confidence to deal with most common emergencies.



In July 2025, CVS Falkirk & District welcomed representatives from 14 groups to take part in a 6-hour Emergency First Aid at Work + Automated External Defibrillator (AED) Course facilitated by Mountain Medicine. This course gave the new Emergency First Aiders the knowledge and skills to summon help and give safe, prompt & effective emergency first aid to a casualty, whilst providing the confidence and knowledge to use an AED confidently and accurately.

“The First Aid training has been a great success and our volunteers were made aware of various Health and Safety procedures, which we have implemented.”



Session Spotlights: Saltire Ambassador Training

Aimed at young volunteers aged 11 – 25 years old in Scotland, the Saltire Awards offer recognition for young people as they meet milestones between 10 – 500 hours of volunteering. Alongside the Awards themselves, volunteers can become a Saltire Ambassador – encouraging peers to volunteer within their communities, and to receive recognition for the commitment already shown. Developing our communities from all age groups, CVS Falkirk & District were pleased to visit Falkirk High School in March 2025 to launch a new rollout of Saltire Ambassador Training.

Welcoming nine students put forward by their school, the trainers explained what Saltire Awards are and explored what volunteering meant to each student, encouraged them to work together to research and present case studies of local volunteering opportunities, and developed their confidence in speaking to peers about volunteering and Saltire Awards. As the launch group, we asked participants to provide feedback on the session around their expectations and experiences, with key themes including:

"[The session was] Fun and useful to understand what is expected of an Ambassador."

"I can be an Ambassador and show others what can come from small amounts of hours at a time."

"I'm excited to start volunteering."

Following the session, the young people kept in touch with the CVS Falkirk & District Volunteering team through a designated WhatsApp group to showcase their successes, share what they have planned, and ask any questions that arise. Thanks to the Empowering Communities Programme, future sessions of Saltire Ambassador Training will be delivered at schools across the Falkirk District in the coming year.



Session Spotlights: Bonnybridge Wellbeing Open Day

Highlighting the community health and wellbeing support resources fostering connection, togetherness, and belonging in your community, the Bonnybridge Wellbeing Open Day featured over 30 organisations supporting our local communities. The goal of the day was to demonstrate the variety of opportunities through which communities can come together to offer support and promote wellbeing to their friends and neighbours. Certainly, this seems to have been achieved with many visitors highlighting they were now more aware of the potential services they could engage with and find support from:

“The event gave me a better knowledge of what’s around, e.g. FDAMH session on menopause and Autism meetings in the community centre.”

“This event was helpful as there were a few organisations I hadn’t heard of and some of the info was useful for work as well as myself personally.”

With lunch provided by local community organisation ROOTS, the day also offered taster sessions for some of the initiatives being run across the Falkirk District, such as: CPR and Defibrillator Demonstrations with Forth Valley First Responders; Introduction to British Sign Language (BSL) Workshop with Forth Valley Sensory Centre; Conversations around Grief with Strathcarron Hospice; Mindful Makers Crafts with Central Wellbeing; and Qi Gong and Martial Arts with Pause & Breathe CIC. These opportunities to connect with groups directly was important to the CVS Falkirk & District team:

“Having the connection between information stalls and interactive workshops were crucial to our wellbeing day offering as it allowed the resources and services to come to life for our attendees – demonstrating the impact these groups create and illustrating how we can show up both, for ourselves and for others.”



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Increasing Capacity within Falkirk & District

To support the continual development of Falkirk District's third sector, CVS Falkirk & District must also evaluate our own activities and services to ensure we are able to meet local need. Through regular engagement with local groups and organisations, we are able to tailor our support offerings through an increased understanding of Falkirk District's diverse third sector. From this, and with support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, we have been pleased to be able to build our own organisational capacity in a range of ways.

Flexible: Key to the success of the Empowering Communities Programme has been our dedicated staff resource enabling a flexible approach to supporting groups at the time, place and pace that works for them. For instance, the Community Ownership Group (COG) provides organisational support, training opportunities and peer networking sessions which allow groups going through asset transfer to come together in community spaces across Falkirk District to learn from and share experiences in real time.

Accessible: We are committed to ensuring all of our events, meetings and activities are fully accessible, and to supporting third sector colleagues and stakeholders to fully participate. To ensure we can deliver presentations and training which accommodates all attendees in various venues, we have purchased equipment such as: Hearing Loops; Hybrid Conferencing System; Portable Projector Screens; Audio and Connectivity Accessories; and more. We welcome the opportunity to loan these tools to local groups to reduce barriers to engagement and increase accessibility across all communities.

Digital: The Organisational Resilience and Capacity Assessment (ORCA) is a digital self-assessment tool for third sector groups and organisations that is available to access online at any time. Completion of the ORCA helps groups to understand area of strength and opportunities for improvement with a particular focus on organisational resilience. In recognition that some groups benefit from support to engage with digital tools, we are taking a holistic approach to encouraging local groups to engage with ORCA by providing supportive in-person sessions focused on getting started with ORCA, as well as providing those with a level of digital skill to self-serve at times that work for them.

As we reflect on the progress made so far in our Empowering Communities Programme, we are thankful to the funders, groups and volunteers who have engaged with us and allowed this project to be successful. For more information about the programme, please contact our team by emailing: info@cvsfalkirk.org.uk.



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Empowering Communities Programme
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