



Safer and Empowered Communities Forum
Wednesday 11 March 2026
10am – 12pm
Via MS Teams

Present:

Eloise Wilson (Chairperson)	CVS Falkirk & District
Laura Jamieson (Minute Taker)	CVS Falkirk & District
Angela Graham	Central Advocacy Partners
Asha Qadir	Committed to Ending Abuse (CEA)
Barry Jordan	LGBT Youth Scotland
Caroline Nisbet	Forth Valley Sensory Centre
Chloe Mackie	Red Cross
Diana Morgan	Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)
Elaine Grant	Falkirk Delivers
Harrison Crawford	Falkirk Foodbank
Jill McEwen	Barnardo's Forth Valley
Lorraine Mackenzie	Freedom of Mind Community Choir
Lou Carberry	LGBT Youth Scotland
Margaret-Anne MacMillan	Falkirk Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP)
Maria Throp	1 st Step Development Ventures SCIO
Rachael Scott	Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs (SFAD)
Ricky Taylor	Maggie's Forth Valley
Safia Ali	RISE Forth Valley
Scott Driver	Home Energy Scotland
Susan Milne	Christians Against Poverty
Guest Speakers:	
Richard Mcfarlane	Fairer Falkirk at Falkirk Council
Apologies:	
Kelly Tulloch	Healthcare Improvement Scotland
Sharlene Ramage	Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers Centre

1. Welcome and Introductions

Eloise introduced herself, welcomed forum members present, and introduced the guest speakers: Richard Mcfarlane from the Fairer Falkirk team at Falkirk Council, and Harrison Crawford from Falkirk Foodbank.

Members then introduced themselves with a brief description of their role, and Eloise provided background on the forum and its purpose.

2. Review of Previous Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held in December 2025 were sent to members for approval by email, and are now available to view on the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website (linked for your convenience), along with the presentations delivered.

3. Fairer Falkirk Update on Poverty and Related Priorities: Richard Mcfarlane, Fairer Falkirk

Richard provided an update on what is being done to tackle poverty in the Falkirk District by Falkirk Council, along with what the Fairer Falkirk team would be focusing on going forward, along with information on his own role (including acting as the chair of the Fairer Falkirk Partnership).

He noted that he is keen to provide members with the opportunity to have sight of the team's work, and ask questions regarding this. Richard's presentation is available to view or download from the [CVS Falkirk & District](#) website, with key points noted below:

- Poverty impacts on people's ability to pay bills, heat their homes, eat well, and socialise. This then leads to poorer outcomes in general for people, including their healthy life expectancy, wellbeing levels, and levels of attainment for children.
 - Officially, 1 in 4 children in Falkirk District live in poverty (which is around the national average), but as some communities experience deeper, concentrated poverty throughout the district (with no even spread), in some areas this is actually 1 in 2 children.
 - In the Falkirk District, access to transport is a major contribution to poverty; 1 in 5 households in the area have no access to a car (which is again higher in rural or more deprived communities), which then has an impact on access to employment opportunities, healthcare services, education, and social connections.
 - Between the most and least deprived communities, there is a 25 year gap in healthy life expectancy.
 - Child poverty is estimated to cost the Scottish economy around £4 billion per year in lost earnings, increased demand for services, the cost of providing those services, and in reduced tax revenue.
 - Over 90% (9 in 10) of children who experience poverty belong to one of the six priority family groups: lone parent families, minority ethnic households, families with a disability in the household, families with three or more children, families with a parent under 25 years old, and families with a baby under one year old.
 - Older people living on their own are also at significantly higher risk.
- As a result, poverty is a major focus of the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) in Falkirk District, and the [Falkirk Plan](#), reflecting the key national mission for Scotland (including legally binding targets to reduce child poverty to 10% by 2030).
- The [Building a Fairer Falkirk 2024 – 2029](#) plan has been adopted by all CPP partners working in Falkirk District, demonstrating the continued commitment to tackling child poverty, and forming the Child Poverty Action Plan for the next five years.
 - Its creation has been shaped by local people, with their lived experiences and concerns (including barriers to access and services (both physical and digital



- barriers), transport, lack of awareness of available support, and fragile trust in public services).
- The Fairer Falkirk team has focused on applying the plan, and its approach, locally across the district in a way that reflects and meets local needs; this includes:
 - using data to better support people before they are in crisis
 - supporting people towards, and within, work
 - treating transport as a strategy priority around poverty
 - Richard then highlighted the ways in which using this data-led approach works well, its successes, and areas the team is making improvements in.
 - In a previous exercise, the team used data to identify which areas of support have the lowest levels of uptake, and who is missing out on this support. They then used this information to target communications and information more effectively.
 - Further examples and case studies are available in the [Strategic Update Report](#).
 - While the team will continue to focus on data-led approach, maximising incomes, supporting employment journeys, and addressing transport barriers, there are some changes to be made, especially as part of the Whole Family Wellbeing approach (which aims to ensure wraparound, person-centred access to services).
 - This includes the new, enhanced [Benefits Calculator](#).
 - There will also be a Family First Response pilot in the Falkirk North ward (mainly in Bainsford and Langlees), which is funded by Scottish Government and will have a family support worker coordinating support for families. The pilot will also establish a multi-agency panel, to work with families facing more complex challenges.

Richard finished with:

“Poverty isn't something that's inevitable. It's very much something that is shaped by the systems, the choices and the structures around about us, and that means we can change it. I think we all do have that shared responsibility to do what we can to tackle poverty. And that means potentially how we design support and deliver it, and how we use information.”

Questions were then asked around Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) sanctions, use of credit cards, future planning (such as pensions), concerns many people (including those who are older or disabled) may have around using the Benefits Calculator, and from there, the stigma and shame in different communities of accessing benefits and being in poverty.

There was also discussion on members’ experiences supporting people in poverty, what has worked (especially in partnership with Falkirk Council), and what can be done better.

- 4. Falkirk Foodbank Strategy and Access to Provision: Harrison Crawford, Falkirk Foodbank**
- Harrison presentation consisted of a brief overview of the foodbank and its activities, support and processes, and an opportunity to learn more about its new “No One Left Out” Strategy. The presentation is available to [view or download as a pdf](#); for access to the Strategy, please contact Harrison directly by email: manager@falkirk.foodbank.org.uk

The following key points were noted:

- Falkirk Foodbank is an independent charity, partnered with the Trussell Trust (not part of it), and a member of its foodbank network.
- The foodbank provides 7 day parcels (which can include household cleaning supplies, and white goods); they provide around 7,000 parcels per year.
- The new “No One Left Out” Strategy was developed in 2025 with the foodbank board and volunteers, identifying two key groups they believe are underrepresented in the referrals they receive; however, Harrison stressed that the foodbank is there to support any Falkirk District household in crisis, not just these groups.
 - Underrepresented Groups:
 - Older adults: around 3% of referrals received were for households with people of pension age; less than 3% of parcels went to these households.
 - Working households: less than 10% of all parcels reached people in work (both those accessing benefits and those not).
 - Harrison noted that the majority of Falkirk Foodbank parcels are going to households with single adults (with or without a child), and the minority are going to working households.
 - The foodbank team doesn’t believe that these statistics mean there is less need for their services amongst these particular groups, but rather less awareness of the help they can receive.
 - The Strategy is communications based, with five settings to focus on: third sectors and faith groups, health and social care settings, education and family-facing settings, the local authority and Community Planning Partners, and employers and community settings.
- Harrison also detailed how partners can help, including other food providers in the community, through supporting each other: *“It doesn’t matter to us what pantry or foodbank people go to, we want to make sure people get help, full stop. And communication and partnership is key.”*

Harrison then summarised the foodbank’s delivery timelines and referral process: these must be done via the referral form, by email. Referral forms can be requested by email:

referral@falkirk.foodbank.org.uk

It was also noted that while households are not restricted in the number of parcels they can receive, if they have received three in a six month period, Falkirk Foodbank cannot guarantee any more, but they will try to fulfil any request.

Questions included:

- Is it known if these two groups are not accessing food support across all Falkirk District providers, or just Falkirk Foodbank?
 - Harrison explained that he couldn’t say for sure, though he suspects that families are more likely to visit pantries for support, and that the statistics regarding older people will be similar across all food providers.



- Is there a possibility of introducing self-referral?
 - As this would be a big change to the foodbank's processes, Harrison thought it was probably unlikely, but is happy to discuss ways it could work and be put in place.

There were also a number of collaboration offers, including around accessibility, and the [Fuel Bank Foundation](#). Eloise also offered use of CVS Falkirk & District's meeting space to facilitate any coming together of groups to discuss ways of collaborating to provide better support for communities.

5. Member Updates

- SFAD: Rachael shared SFAD's [Forth Valley Family Support Service](#) information and FAQ leaflet, which details the kinds of support available, who can access the service, and confidentiality, amongst others.

6. AOCB

None.

**Date of Next Meetings: Wednesday 3 June 2026,
10am – 12pm
venue tbc**