

## Welfare Engagement Report

2015-16

## Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

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### Summary

- Community Capacity and Resilience Fund supported innovative local projects otherwise unreached.
- Welfare Roundtables highlighted the importance of partnerships and local sense of ownership.
- Roundtables encouraged discussions and provided vital networking and relationship building opportunities
- Wide interest in the welfare cuts bulletin and scope for its continuation
- Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations' approach to welfare is expanding, taking on a human rights based focus

### Introduction

The 2014 research, [Third Sector and Welfare on the Frontline](#), completed as part of the welfare engagement post, revealed a clear picture of the significant hardships being placed on many of the most marginalised individuals in society, which in turn substantially increased demand and pressure on the third sector. The research highlighted many organisations' lack of capacity to both keep abreast of welfare changes as well as develop networks and partnerships.

In response, SCVO received funding from the Scottish Government to manage the Community Capacity Resilience Fund (CCRF), facilitate a series of welfare roundtables across the country, and deliver a series of e-bulletins updating the sector on welfare developments. As well as intelligence gathering and information dissemination, these spaces provided busy frontline organisations with fantastic networking opportunities, allowing for the sharing of best practice and acquisition of knowledge regarding welfare reform campaigns.

This briefing provides an overview of this welfare engagement work, highlighting key learning points, alongside a brief summary of SCVOs future direction of travel in relation to the welfare system.

### **Community Capacity and Resilience Fund**

A core part of this role was to manage the Scottish Government's Community Capacity and Resilience Fund (CCRF) providing grants to frontline community-based organisations who did not have the expertise or previous opportunity to access government funding. CCRF outcomes reveal that the flexible and relaxed funding approach resulted in creative and bespoke projects that effectively met the needs of communities.

“There is not another fund out there that we have been able to apply to that gives us the ability to respond to need in the same way.” *The Libertie Project*

Feedback shows that the support provided by the welfare reform engagement officer facilitated the creation of successful funding bids, improved the structure of effective projects and increased the engagement of target audiences.

“The support from Zoë at SCVO was invaluable to myself as I had never completed a funding application and the training day SCVO held was very helpful.” *Glasgow South East Foodbank*

The fund facilitated and promoted partnership working which allowed organisations to both become more robust in the face of welfare reform challenges and to offer increased holistic support to vulnerable people facing multiple obstacles. In fact, 87% of

the funded organisations said that they could not have developed key partnerships without the fund.

The fund's impact can also be seen in research findings as well as lessons learned from all funded projects that will benefit communities and other organisations alike. Further, the fund was instrumental in allowing organisations to empower people, both service users and volunteers, to access training, education, work placements and employment. A more detailed analysis of the fund is [available online](#).<sup>1</sup>

## **Connecting the National to the Local**

A central feature of this project involved connecting local frontline experiences with national policy discussions. To further this aim, SCVO participated in a range of different networks, to articulate local experiences to national policy makers. This included the [Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform](#), and the Scottish Welfare Fund Reference Group and the Welfare Reform Scrutiny Group, both led by the Scottish Government. In addition, communications channels were opened up with Voluntary Action Scotland to connect with various Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), as well as with NHS Lothian.

Drawing on intelligence gleaned from previous SCVO research, cross-sector partnerships were identified as a key local strategy to mitigate the worst impact of the welfare reforms. As such a total of nine roundtable events were held across Scotland and provided several key insights.

*“Perhaps the key role for EVOC in these events was the link to a wide network of organisations (large and small) which brought a new mix of people together to work out what the sector most needed to mitigate the impact of welfare reform.” Laura Plumb, Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations’ Council (EVOC)*

Across the nine welfare roundtable events, the range of organisations in attendance varied significantly. Conversations were most fruitful when a wider variety of both public and third sector organisations were represented, drawing together actors and agencies

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scvoevidencelibrary.org.uk/Home/ReadResearchItem.aspx?f=h&rid=1565>

who would not normally engage with each other over welfare policy and practice. The ability to generate impressive interest in the seven locally based roundtables was in large part determined by the degree of relationship between organisers and the local Third Sector Interface (TSI), as well as the TSI's level of local connectivity.

There was a large degree of uniformity in issues presented as most pressing for third sector organisations at both national and local level discussions, although with significant regional variations such as rural transport challenges.

When viewed collectively, one of the most striking themes of the welfare roundtables was the degree to which different local actors took ownership of the challenges they faced and transmitted this into a drive for change. Certain participants tended to dwell on the sheer scale of the problem, believing all the power for change resided in other decision making bodies, not least the UK Government. Others, however, contextualised their position within the welfare system and explored the possibilities for collective local solutions to mitigate particular negative impacts of the welfare changes. A crucial vehicle for achieving this latter positive approach was limiting discussion on the challenges, shifting the focus instead to an assets based approach.

Of the potential collective solutions explored, greater information and resource sharing – alongside the ability to create an online referral system – emerged as being of vital importance across the spectrum.

“In Edinburgh there was real enthusiasm to develop improved links for all through an online referral system” - possibly by building on EVOC's [RedBook](#) and systems used elsewhere in Scotland.” *Edinburgh Roundtable Participant*

It was out-with the scope of this project to oversee a process of comprehensive discussion and implementation of local partnership-based solutions. However, through sharing learning from both national level and other parts of the country, organisers were able to facilitate fruitful interactions, in order to gauge existing local activity and plant seeds for future growth. Through follow up conversations and emails, it is clear that the roundtables encouraged thinking on local partnership working in several areas.

## **Human Rights and Welfare**

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For the final two roundtables – Inverurie and Dumfries and Galloway – the focus shifted to viewing the welfare system through the lens of human rights. This framework encouraged participants to identify their experiences and the experiences of the people they work with through the language of fundamental human rights. It highlighted how the welfare reforms had serious implications for numerous human rights, in particular the right to an adequate standard of living. The roundtables sought to encourage participants to move from a needs-based to a rights-based approach, highlighting the benefits this would bring.

“We were pleased to work with SCVO to highlight the relationship between human rights and welfare entitlement, and to understand this through the lens of local experience. Those who participated in our event discussed their rights in relation to everyday experience and identified human rights based solutions to local problems. This is essential if human rights are to be practical tools.” *Inclusion Scotland*

## **Feedback**

A comprehensive feedback exercise was undertaken with participants at the first Edinburgh roundtable to provide a snapshot of views. The results show an overwhelmingly positive response (Appendix 10), highlighting the strong cross-sector demand for joined-up welfare mitigation work.

## **Welfare Cuts Bulletin**

The Welfare Cuts Bulletin has provided important information regarding research and forthcoming events to key actors and agencies across the public and third sector. Content from the Scottish Government and a range of different charities has been sent in for inclusion by the editors. In addition, with a subscription list of just under 1000, combined with an open-rate of 25-35%, it is clear that there is a broad and keen interest in the continuation of the bulletin.

In line with the change to SCVOs approach to welfare as outlined below, there is clear scope for the bulletin to continue in a modified form.

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## Future

The focus of SCVOs work in relation to the welfare system is now changing. The previous '[Taking it on](#)' campaign began as a direct response to the UK Government's programme of welfare cuts, but is now being transformed to compliment the launch of a campaign promoting human rights based approaches within the third sector.

This role has been an invaluable part of the third sector's response to the increasing impact of welfare reform on vulnerable people in Scotland's society. It has served as an information conduit between the third sector – specifically previously unconnected frontline grassroots and community-based organisations – and UK, Scottish and local governments. It has championed relationship building, resource sharing and asset based approaches to make the third sector more resilient in the face of the growing challenges brought about by welfare reforms, particularly Universal Credit. As third sector funding is cut further and welfare reform increasingly challenges people and organisations alike, the value of this role and its outcomes will become more apparent. It is therefore vital that this work continues in the future.

## **Appendices**

**Appendix 1** – Intelligence briefing summarising the outreach and communications work involved in the project

**Appendix 2** – Intelligence briefing summarising the East Ayrshire Welfare Roundtable

**Appendix 3** – Intelligence briefing summarising the West Dunbartonshire Welfare Roundtable

**Appendix 4** – Intelligence briefing summarising the East Lothian Welfare Roundtable

**Appendix 5** – Intelligence briefing summarising the Overcoming Welfare Cuts event held at The Gathering

**Appendix 6** – Intelligence briefing summarising the Refugees and the Social Security System in Scotland event held at the Gathering

**Appendix 7** – Intelligence briefing summarising the two welfare roundtables held in Edinburgh

**Appendix 8** – Intelligence briefing summarising the Welfare Reform and Human Rights roundtable held in Inverurie

**Appendix 9** – Edinburgh Roundtable 1 Participant Evaluation

## **Contact**

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## Appendix 1: Outreach and Communications

### Content

- Communicate experiences of frontline organisations in national conversations
- Identify and establish links with similar initiatives
- Deliver a high quality communication service

### National Conversations

SCVO has actively participated in various national conversations around welfare reform, ensuring experiences from the local frontline are heard. This has included involvement in the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (SCOWR), Challenge Poverty Week, the Scottish Welfare Fund Reference Group, and the EVOC AGM. In addition, SCVO hosted a Fairer Scotland conversation in July.

**Reflections:** Local third sector concerns of stretched resources and predicted increased challenges due to further welfare changes, have been echoed nationally. The Welfare Fund provides a vital lifeline across the country and future developments require cross-sector input. SCVO's discussion significantly helped shape the October update from the Cabinet Secretary on the wider Fairer Scotland conversations so far, with many key principles such as a rights based approach grounded in dignity and respect being central to this. SCOWR conversations have highlighted potential challenges around the Scotland Bill, not least the administration of new powers.

### Links with other initiatives: Glasgow

Two Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) initiatives - the Building Connections project and a Welfare Reform Expert Group – have brought together third sector organisations mitigating welfare reforms in the city on a regular basis to share learning and best practice, and develop partnership working. In addition, GCVS has identified a cross-sector community of practice approach as a possible future strategy.

The Poverty Alliance recently launched their Welfare Trackers report, which completed a 15 month partnership approach involving GCVS, Scottish Drugs Forum and the Poverty Alliance. This aimed to develop third sector understanding of the impact of welfare changes in Glasgow, and provide learning for the GCVS initiatives identified above.

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Given current proposals to disperse Syrian refugees across various local authorities, SCVO and Scottish Refugee Council organised a roundtable on refugee integration and the social security system at [The Gathering](#), in February 2016.

**Reflections:** Glasgow has a strong and broad network, delivering partnership-led, assets-based approaches to welfare reform, with intentions to operate across sectors. There is potential for engagement around welfare and integration experiences of refugees.

## **Communications**

SCVO has produced a fortnightly Welfare Cuts Bulletin (WCB) highlighting the latest developments and forthcoming events around welfare reform to keep third sector organisations informed. This has involved drawing together academic and third sector reports; notice of upcoming events including Fairer Scotland; and information regarding parliamentary motions, committee hearings and legislative changes. Notable pieces have included a budget special edition and a series of four reports from Sheffield Hallam University on the impact of welfare reform in Scotland.

This e-bulletin currently has 954 subscribers and an open rate around 25-30%. The WEO asks readers for contributions and has received input from various charities and the Scottish Government. The format, content and delivery time are currently under review to determine ways to maximise outreach.

Earlier in the year a questionnaire was sent out to readers of the bulletin to gain valuable feedback. Of the 32 respondents, feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 96% describing it as good or excellent. News and reports and research were considered the most useful content (both over 70% useful) with funding opportunities the least (25%).

**Reflections:** the WCB provides a useful platform for third sector knowledge, with potential for greater growth and impact maximisation.

## Appendix 2: East Ayrshire Welfare Roundtable

### Key findings

- Increasing service demand is often preventing strategic partnership discussion and planning
- Desire from public and third sector for widening working relationships
- Key barriers of communication, time and resources

### Introduction

SCVO collaborated with third sector organisations in East Ayrshire with the help of the local TSI, CVO (East Ayrshire). The aim was to share experiences and information around tackling welfare reform and poverty, to facilitate cross-sector partnerships, and to establish new methods of working together to further mitigate the impact of welfare reform.

The meeting was attended by members of the public and third sectors, including Ayrshire College, Ayrshire East Foodbank, Barnardo's, Citizen's Advice Bureau, East Ayrshire Council, Kilmarnock Credit Union, NHS Ayrshire & Arran, Police Scotland, and DWP - Welfare Reforms Team.

Zoë Westwood (SCVO) presented examples of collaboration and cross-sector partnership working to show how collaboration could lead to better communication and service provision. She highlighted Argyll & Bute's online referral system set up by the A&B Council and local third sector organisations; FORT, Fife's renowned online tracking system which now includes a budgeting tool and messaging service; and Dundee's knowledge hub, which uses existing social sharing technology at little cost.

### Vision

The group defined their goals for East Ayrshire which centred on preparing for the introduction of Universal Credit. They wanted to widen the scope of their partnerships, have more training, and provide a better safety net for people in crisis.

### Partnerships

The participants went through a process of identifying potential partners and discussing how best to build relationships that might lead to a problem-solving collaboration. This

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involved talking about supermarkets that might aid foodbanks or create a hiring programme to help people struggling to find a job, involving energy companies in programmes to lower household bills, and local media who might support campaigns to change public perception of benefit claimants.

An excellent partnership taking place currently was the Financial Inclusion Group which looked at energy, financial capability, food issues and employability. Any future work could be taken forward by this group.

### **Challenges**

Lack of time and resource was highlighted as a major concern as was the lack of communication. Discussion centred on who might lead or coordinate communication and the best way to take action forward with limited resources. Participants highlighted the need for better promotion and marketing of partnership services that exist already. The principal challenge was combating high levels of deprivation.

### **Assets**

The group listed the assets they could use to better advantage: Financial Inclusion Group, motivated people, an established network with good partnerships in existence already, the East Ayrshire money website, the fact that East Ayrshire is in charge of Ayrshire Crisis Response, the local CAB has meeting rooms, Ayrshire College can offer resources, the Health & Social Care partnership, the NHS offers free training and ultimately a drive to make positive changes.

### **Next steps**

The participants felt the third and public sector should widen the scope of their relationships, they should have an accessible website, scale down the information going to the frontline, including the volunteer advisors, and increase the uptake on personal budgeting assistance.

The following actions came out of the discussion:

- Participants to feed back to Financial Inclusion Group and ask the group if they will take this process forward.
- Can we bring in any excluded groups or organisations to the Financial Inclusion Group?
- Survey service users and ask them what they want. How could we provide a better service?

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- Look into available funding
- Start a joint training programme

## **Reflections**

It is apparent that service demand is so high on the frontline that organisations do not have the space to think and plan, though this might benefit them in the future. This is corroborated by SCVO's 2014 research about the mitigation of welfare reform on the frontline.

The mood was willing until practical considerations necessary to achieve change were brought up. It was difficult to find people to take ownership of any actions that resulted from the meeting, as no one had time or resource to volunteer.

It was a successful meeting but had less input than expected. People do not know where to start so trying to encourage participation is challenging. It's possible that the group had expected answers rather than facilitation through a process to find the answers themselves.

Turnout was strong, due to connections of the local TSI. For the future, it is important to do more to encourage grassroots organisations to attend and to encourage a mixture of statutory organisations as well as any businesses that may have an interest.

## **Appendix 3 – West Dunbartonshire Welfare Roundtable**

### **Key findings**

- Welfare reforms pose significant challenges for organisations on the front line in West Dunbartonshire
- Silo mentality and budget protectionism present obstacles within the sector
- Opportunities exist for expanding and developing existing partnership opportunities, through both broadening and deepening current engagement.

### **Introduction**

This briefing provides an overview of intelligence gleaned from a welfare reform roundtable held in West Dunbartonshire in September 2015. The session sought to identify and improve partnership working opportunities, provide examples of initiatives taking place across Scotland and to propose key actions to further develop local sector-led welfare reform mitigation activity. The discussion brought out the need to pursue a more inclusive, multi-layered approach to collective working.

### **Participants and issues raised**

A range of local third sector organisations were represented, including information and support providers, housing associations and the local third sector interface (TSI).

Joe McCormack of West Dunbartonshire Citizens Advice Bureau helped to set the local scene giving some key insights into issues of concern arising from welfare reform actions. This included a high success rate (50%) for JSA sanction appeals, cuts and freezing of benefits, combined with subtle but significant changes causing difficulties for claimants. In addition, the prevalence of zero hours contracts, combined with the statistic that 45 people apply for each job in West Dunbartonshire, meant employment is not a viable route out of poverty for many locally.

The conversation outlined how these changes could interact with, and further compound, existing poor local health outcomes. There was a shared concern of the challenge of responding to needs whilst effectively challenging cuts and reforms.

Participants also raised points regarding current operations of collective working in West Dunbartonshire, citing silo mentalities and the challenge of budget protectionism

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across the sector. However, there was enthusiasm for developing an enhanced approach to new and existing partnerships, bringing in new partners and working across different layers, as examined below.

### **Opportunities for greater partnership working**

- **Improve coordination of existing projects.** There was an articulated need for an overarching coordination of key initiatives currently being taken forward. This could include enhancing communication, such as via Knowledge Hubs or Customer Relationship Management Systems. This could help overcome current local challenges including a lack of local legal representation and the need to keep abreast of ongoing legislative proposals and changes, such as the Scotland Bill.
- **Sector-led anti-poverty strategy.** This could feature the development of a sector led safety net to help tackle the immediate financial crisis faced by many. Once developed, the strategy would be presented to the Community Planning Partnership (CPP).
- **More localised networks.** Although issues were consistent across West Dunbartonshire, it was noted that the three major towns could be quite distinct in their reactions and needs – raising the potential to look at recreating area committee style structures. The ongoing CPP led initiative to move towards a neighbourhood management approach may be useful in helping initiatives to reach into communities, but participants felt that it was too early in the process to tell.
- **Bring in other voices.** There was agreement to involve people with direct experience of the welfare reforms more directly. Also, it was agreed that local business may be useful allies given the potential reduction of local spend which follows benefit cuts. In addition, the potential to create a ‘people’s assembly’ was discussed. Further to this, the sector in West Dunbartonshire contains a broad spectrum of community voices, with a substantial level of campaigning and engagement skills at their disposal.

### **Next Steps**

It was agreed that there were some key actions which should be progressed after the session. A central option discussed was the creation of a working group to support ongoing activity, with the local TSI to facilitate. The TSI also identified plans to convene a broader community conversation on the issue of the impact of austerity. As well as the TSI set to play a pivotal role for developing future actions, all participants were encouraged to look for opportunities to engage in neighbourhood management approaches as they become available and to help shape a sector led anti-poverty strategy.

### **Reflections**

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There is clear enthusiasm within the third sector in West Dunbartonshire to re-examine partnership working to mitigate the numerous significant local impacts of welfare reform. The notion to both broaden and deepen partnership working could be a key strategic step towards a more comprehensive approach. Of particular note is the recognition that individuals with direct experience of the issue face barriers to participating but can play a crucial role. Further to this, public recognition of their individual and collective strengths is a positive step forward towards realising their aims.

After this initial meeting, however, SCVO has not been included in the development of the next steps and as such is unable to measure how much progress has been made. In addition, only third sector groups participated in the discussion and as such it is unclear what the level of involvement of public sector bodies will be in future development.

## **Appendix 4 – East Lothian Welfare Roundtable**

### **Key findings**

- Significant rural challenges exist regarding welfare access in East Lothian.
- Situation expected to worsen with arrival of digitised Universal Credit, piloted in Musselburgh.
- Opportunities to increase local cross-sector partnership working around information and resource sharing, lobbying and training.

### **Introduction**

This briefing provides an overview of intelligence gleaned from a welfare reform roundtable held in East Lothian in January 2016. The purpose was to bring together local individuals and agencies to share experiences, identify collective problems and explore innovative partnership mitigation strategies going forward. It highlighted clearly the substantial challenges facing local organisations in East Lothian and the desire for opportunities to develop greater collective working.

### **Participants and issues raised**

A range of local organisations were represented, including East Lothian local authority, Strive (the third sector interface), Citizens Advice, Homestart and a local food bank. Of the issues raised, of particular note were the time and costs associated with accessing parts of the system, such as the three hour round trip from Dunbar to Edinburgh Park to attend a tribunal. Transport challenges were felt to be particularly acute for individuals in vulnerable situations, such as with mental health conditions.

The rurality of East Lothian and the centralisation of key services provided challenges for claimants, particularly individuals in vulnerable positions. In addition, fears across the board were raised about the forthcoming digitalisation pilot of services for universal credit claimants in Musselburgh, further increasing the hardships and isolation faced by those in vulnerable situations.

### **Opportunities for greater partnership working**

Those present indicated a keenness for greater local cross-sector partnership working to help address the effects of the welfare changes, as outlined below.

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- **Better distribution of information** was identified as an area for development, such as sharing food bank user demographics. Methods highlighted for achieving this included increasing access to the council's electronic newsletter, greater use of the Strive website and the potential for an online referral network, such as the FORT system in Fife.
- **Increase resource sharing** by building on existing successful arrangements, such as between the council, Citizens Advice and Homestart. Ideas discussed included combining caseworker visits to both make better use of time and tackle underlying causes of financial problems.
- **Greater participation in existing partnerships** to ensure a wider range of groups are represented and workload is shared. In particular, it was noted that increased awareness of existing local authority led strategies, such as the [Poverty Commission](#), and more face to face contact could yield greater intelligence and collective working. The role of Strive was discussed as a possible vehicle for facilitating closer cross-sector projects.
- **Increasing access to lobbying and training** by connecting with national bodies to ensure East Lothian voices are heard at the top level. Strive and Citizens Advice were mooted as possible conduits for connecting with lobbying and training bodies such as Child Poverty Action Group.

## Reflections

Although the event was well publicised, an attendance of nine people from a targeted 15 was slightly disappointing. Participants surmised this was largely due to work pressures and travel issues facing some frontline organisations. In addition, uncertainties over future funding was seen as preventing engagement with certain organisations around future work.

That said, attendees were appreciative of the opportunity to network and share experiences with other local organisations impacted by welfare reform, despite the pressures of time and work.

It is clear that greater communication could help overcome logistical barriers to information deficits and lay the foundations for enhanced reach through resource sharing. In addition, the roundtable showed the potential for the council to work alongside local charities which previously had not engaged with them. Further to this, the discussion showed the need to ensure the specific rural challenges for welfare access in East Lothian were being heard in national policy discussions.

## **Appendix 5 –Overcoming Welfare Cuts Event**

### **Key findings**

- Flexible, person centred approach, centred on listening to identify correctly the barriers individuals are facing
- Creativity and innovative solutions should be encouraged for tackling the impacts of welfare cuts.
- Need for more meetings on the big picture and evaluative solutions

### **Introduction**

Thursday, 18 February, 2016 - Glasgow. This gathering event aimed to allow delegates to share ideas and solutions around mitigating welfare reform, hear about innovative community projects, productive partnership ideas, and new funding opportunities.

### **Speaker**

Adnan Miyasar, Secretary of the Fife Arabic Society, gave an inspiring account of his travels to the Greek Island of Kos as part of an international group of volunteers helping to rescue, shelter, feed, and clothe Syrian refugees fleeing across the sea from Bodrum. Additionally, his Community Capacity and Resilience Fund (CCRF) funded community project is helping recent refugees who have settled in Fife, who have in-turn volunteered to help future Syrian refugee arrivals to settle into their new lives.

### **Group Discussions**

The group sessions focused on the positives that are taking place in service provision relating to welfare. Groups discussed what could be learned from assessing the positives and exploring how we can build on those experiences to better tackle the impact of the benefit changes on people and communities.

### **Discussion 1: What works well and makes a positive difference?**

In the stories people shared we noticed the following themes and attributes:

- Really listening to people in a non-judgmental way created an accepting atmosphere which breaks down barriers and builds trust. It enables people to overcome the 'cultural taboo' of asking for help.

- Different approaches help different people. Flexibility and informality are important in providing effective solutions, as are opportunities to offer practical help and to take services to where they are needed, removing barriers.
- Evaluating a problem or community need holistically is essential to finding effective solutions, and it encourages partnership working.
- Sharing food seems to bring people together and is a cornerstone of many successful community-based relationship building projects.
- People feel valued through volunteering, which serves to motivate and empower. Acknowledging volunteer contribution builds confidence as does recognising their skills and offering opportunities for them to actively contribute.

## **Discussion 2: What conditions supported and enabled this to happen?**

- Access to the right resources including funding (Scottish Government, Big Lottery, crowdfunding), staff, volunteers, premises
- Sharing ideas, goals and outcomes, internally and externally
- Second-tier support, training
- Good communication, both internally and externally
- Creating the right environment for volunteering, welcoming and flexible, valuing motivation, and facilitating volunteering to benefit people and service provision
- Values-based approach to people, starting with positive attributes, and therefore building trust

## **Discussion 3: How can we transfer this positivity and success to other areas?**

- By myth busting and challenging narrative misinforming the public as well as changing culture by publicising true and positive stories of people
- Using multiple platforms to share information and influence national policies
- By having sustainable, long-term and flexible funding, trust in organisations to deliver, and reasonable reporting requirements
- By greater advocacy and showing how we are implementing policy, such as highlighting examples of community empowerment
- Through collaboration, networking and partnership, pooling resources and sharing knowledge of solutions and community needs

- Through creative and innovative projects meeting community needs and encouraging local activism
- By recognising, sharing and promoting good practice

## Reflections

By focusing on the positive activity taking place in the third sector, this event gave staff the space and opportunity to identify what was enabling success. However it was a struggle for some to step back, look at the big picture and highlight the positives taking place through their services. This seemed to stem from being overwhelmed by demand on services, so that tackling the negatives were the top priorities of their organisations.

Holding more events focusing on the big picture and evaluate solutions, allowing organisations and communities to become more practiced at identifying the factors which act as catalysts to a project's success, would be beneficial.

Collaboration and sharing of information and resources was a key theme to the discussions, yet resource and a framework to take effective partnership working forward is lacking. Additionally, there is a lack of ownership regarding the need to challenge the stigmatising narrative of 'benefit scroungers', with the Scottish Government being nominated frequently as the one who should mount a campaign to tackle the media's vilification of claimants.

There was a strong focus on volunteers, the value they provide and how to empower them. A strong focus on discussions was the need for volunteers who have experienced welfare problems and can provide peer support and empathy. However, unfortunately, we only had two benefit claimants at the event, who weren't supported by any organisation. More needs to be done to attract individuals who have been effected by welfare reform to these events, if we are going to have truly frank discussions on how to mitigate the impact of the benefit changes.

## Appendix 5: Refugees and the Scottish Social Security System

### Key findings

- Challenges for claimants negotiating the social security system and seeking employment are often heightened for refugees
- Crucial knowledge gaps and misunderstandings exist regarding asylum seekers, refugees and the new welfare powers coming to Scotland
- A favourable climate exists across sectors in Scotland, with innovative positive initiatives being undertaken by the third sector.

### Introduction

This intelligence briefing highlights learning gained from a workshop on Refugees and the Social Security System in Scotland, held at the Gathering, February 2016. The rationale for the discussion was to bring together key and interested agencies in the third and public sectors, alongside individuals with direct experience of the refugee process, to share learning and probe challenging issues.

The need for this discussion seemed particularly pressing with the announcement in September 2015 that, for the first time, all 32 local authorities in Scotland had agreed in principle to accommodate newly-arrived refugees. In addition, since February there has been fresh discussion about the possibility of asylum seekers being housed in new areas of Scotland.

### Participants

A diverse group of individuals attended the workshop, including refugees with personal experience of engaging with the welfare system. In addition, there were advocacy groups, support organisations, housing associations, social workers and civil servants. As well as agencies with a history of working with refugees and asylum seekers in Glasgow, representatives from other parts of the country were present, keen to learn from Glasgow's experience.

Wafa Shaheen, from Scottish Refugee Council, outlined key demographics and statistics for the asylum and refugee population in Scotland. She was followed by Lesley Irving, from the Scottish Government, who highlighted the [New Scots strategy](#) and the strategic approach being followed by the Government. Aimee Ottroh, from the Poverty truth Commission, then helped to set the scene by talking of her own personal

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experience of coming to Scotland in 2011 to claim asylum and subsequent attempts to find employment after being granted refugee status.

## Issues raised

- 1. Refugees negotiating the welfare system in Scotland face a number of challenging issues.** Of particular note was the fact that many arrive with very low levels of English and few recognised qualifications, into an area where they have few, if any, social and familial connections to provide support. In addition, many will be arriving from countries with little or no welfare provision, further adding to the confusions experienced by claimants trying to claim benefits, undergo the Work Capability Assessment or adhere to conditionality, within a constantly evolving system.
- 2. Crucial knowledge gaps exist in a dynamic field.** It was clear from discussions that although many participants were well informed about key aspects of refugee integration in Scotland, greater knowledge sharing and awareness raising is needed. This included the different legal positions of refugees and those seeking asylum. In addition, it was felt that many had not fully appreciated the barriers faced by many, both seeking to adhere to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) processes, as well as look for employment. There was collective agreement that hearing directly the experiences of refugees was vital to help overcome this, combined with greater awareness raising of positive third sector initiatives. Further to this, uncertainties were raised regarding how the forthcoming devolved powers were going to be implemented.
- 3. Favourable climate in Scotland.** It was identified that whilst voices critical of refugees were heard, that the debate in Scotland appeared more favourable than other parts of the UK and that both the third and public sectors have responded enthusiastically to the dispersal process. It was highlighted that strong leadership from the Scottish Government was a key factor in this. Well-established organisations such as Scottish Refugee Council were seen as having played a vital role as well, alongside the emergence of various grassroots campaigns. These ranged from local time-banking initiatives in Bute to help overcome practical integration issues, to more national welcoming projects, such as public demonstrations, donations and letter writing campaigns. It was emphasised that a positive cross-sector approach is crucial, highlighting the wealth of skills talent and knowledge which refugees and those seeking asylum bring to Scottish Society.

## Reflections

The discussion helped bring to the fore both the magnitude of the challenges, and the support available, for refugees progressing through the social security system in Scotland. Many participants seemed genuinely moved by hearing refugee experiences

first hand, and understood this to be a pressing issue for their organisation and local area.

The positive reception to integrating refugees into Scottish society could provide the vital catalyst to ensure all individuals and families are given the crucial support they need. In addition, there is much to be recognised in the current work of the third sector around this issue. The challenge, however, is to preserve this climate and to ensure resources, knowledge and expertise – not least lived experiences – are distributed effectively to best overcome current gaps and develop greater cross-sector partnership working.

## **Appendix 7: Edinburgh Welfare Roundtables**

### **Key Findings**

- Participants keen to pursue an online referral system
- Close working with a well-connected TSI enhanced the process
- Second stage of discussion was vital to refine the process

### **Introduction**

This briefing provides an overview of intelligence gleaned from two welfare reform roundtables held in Edinburgh. An introductory roundtable was held on December 16, 2015, with the aim of drawing together key players to share experiences, identify collective problems and explore innovative partnership mitigation strategies going forward.

A follow up roundtable was held on March 24, 2016, in order to probe more critically the opportunities identified in the first roundtable and to widen out the conversations to include additional voices.

The roundtables highlighted the benefits of a follow up session to better channel collective energy, combined with the strength of a well-connected Third Sector Interface (TSI).

### **Participants**

Over 40 individuals participated in at least one roundtable, with a significant number attending both. Participants were a mixture of individuals representing professional bodies and those with direct experience of the welfare cuts. Organisations present included NHS Lothian, Edinburgh City Council, emergency food providers, housing associations, disability rights groups, and community information centres.

A crucial reason for the impressive turnout of over 30 key local figures at the first discussion was in no small part due to the work and standing of the local Third Sector Interface (TSI). The TSI, EVOC, were very enthusiastic about the venture and have a well-established network of local public and third sector contacts.

Meeting with both EVOC and City of Edinburgh Council beforehand was vital to ensure a strong turnout at both events. The latter saw the roundtables as an opportunity to



highlight their current work to smaller organisations, often community-based ones, who have not engaged with the council over their welfare reform strategy.

### **Issues raised: first discussion**

At the December event, five core themes emerged to shape future work:

1. Shape culture change to tackle stigma
2. Develop an online referral system
3. Shift to more preventative work and capacity building
4. Promotion of localisation and Personalisation
5. Better information sharing and communication across local organisations

### **Issues raised: second discussion**

During the interim period between roundtables, a process of refinement was carried out, which identified the need to further explore three key areas in greater detail. Speakers were invited to present an overview of their organisation's work, and this was followed by a facilitated appreciative inquiry approach to identify key learning for Edinburgh.

**Information Sharing.** The key features of the [Fife Online Referral Tracking](#) system were outlined. The current situation in Edinburgh means referrals are not tracked and points of referral are often only chosen due to prior knowledge of individual referrer, not necessarily through access to an extensive list. **Actions:** Individuals and organisations to pursue discussions with the City of Edinburgh Council, and possibly the Scottish Government around funding the system. Participants also agreed to arrange a meeting with the creators of the FORT system to get a more detailed understanding of costs and running requirements.

**Campaigning.** A representative from the Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty (ECAP) outlined their advocacy campaign for disabled claimants. Individuals are legally entitled to have someone accompany them, but in reality people can be denied this and ECAP serves to ensure they are represented when engaging with the Job Centre. **Actions:** participants to defend vocally the right to have proper advocacy and signpost individuals to ECAP where relevant.

**Support and Advocacy.** A speaker from Advocard talked about her role providing independent advocacy for people with mental health conditions who are affected by

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welfare reform. She explained the importance of listening, asking questions, and understanding the way in which a person is affected by their condition. **Actions:** Everyone agreed to use the new contacts around the table to help with making effective referrals.

## **Reflections**

Holding two roundtables, ensured a deeper level of discussion regarding potential next steps. From this, the pursuit of an online referral system appeared to generate the greatest enthusiasm. This proposal, however, requires a substantial initial finance commitment and the discussions did not progress significantly enough in the time allocated to determine how this would be generated. It is clear that closer working between key organisations in both the third and public sector is vital if this goal is to be realised.

A strong turnout at both events indicated a keen local appetite for greater collective working, with overwhelmingly positive feedback provided by participants (Appendix 9). Large numbers was also reflective of the key role played by the local TSI to bring together public and third sector agencies.

## Appendix 8: Inverurie Welfare and Human Rights Roundtable

### Key Findings

- Exciting opportunities for developing hub and regional partnership working
- More voices need to be heard, with the third sector best placed to facilitate
- The burden is increasingly falling on non-commissioned services

### Introduction

On Friday 8, April in Inverurie, third and public sector representatives from across Aberdeenshire, Morayshire and Aberdeen city came together to discuss welfare reform. The event examined the impact of welfare reforms in a human rights context, before exploring opportunities for more local assets-based partnership working. The discussions centred on the need to involve a broader range of participants in welfare mitigation projects.

### Welfare Reform and Human Rights

To set the scene, the [Seven Towers housing project in Belfast](#) was highlighted as an example of how a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) can lead to improved housing standards, greater participation of local residents in decision making and enhanced administrative efficiency for public bodies.

The key initial stage in an HRBA is to establish the lived reality for people claiming social security. A key concern raised by many participants was rent and mortgage arrears. It was feared that the introduction of Universal Credit would likely increase problems, and could deter private landlords from renting to claimants. Another issue outlined was the barriers faced by people with disabilities, such as individuals in Stonehaven being charged £120 by GPs to get a health report done in order to appeal benefit disallowances.

Further challenges included IT, literacy and numeracy skills. A few participants voiced concerns that the burden was increasingly falling on non-commissioned services to fill the gap left by underfunded commissioned services. This has been coupled with an increase in referrals from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to the third sector to work with individuals facing multiple barriers to employment.

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These issues cut across numerous human rights, in particular the right to an adequate standard of living. Groups present felt they were often only able to provide a needs-based crisis response, such as making referrals to food banks, and that numerous human rights were not being realised for many individuals.

### **Partnership Working Opportunities: Group Discussion**

- 1) **Hub model.** There was enthusiasm for this approach, drawing on learning from the Aberdeenshire Council-led '[Here for You' Centre](#), amongst others. There was support for a central manager in place to give strategic direction. A hub could be the catalyst for a greater sharing and pulling of resources, and would provide increased flexibility for opening hours, including weekends and evenings, taking account of the busy lives of many individuals.
- 2) **Developing current partnerships.** There are already established forums in the North East which could be suitable basis for expanding collective welfare mitigation work. This includes the partnerships which have been created to forward the integration of health and social care, as well as the Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Advice Forum.
- 3) **Inclusive IT system.** Energised by successful examples from other parts of Scotland, individuals were interested in developing more collective digital information systems, such as an online referral system. It was suggested that the council could lead on this.
- 4) **Regional approach.** Individuals identified that there was much to learn for all three areas from each other. This could produce a more consistent service for individuals across the board, and allow for valuable information sharing.
- 5) **Seek new partners.** A greater involvement of individuals with lived experience of the changes was seen as important for decision makers to get a better understanding of the issue and the unfair choices individuals have to make. The police and local businesses were also seen as important community players who could share knowledge and help implement collective responses.
- 6) **National conversations.** The need for closer connections to the national scene was articulated. This included developing links to national advice agencies.
- 7) **Role of TSI.** The potential for the local Third Sector Interface (TSI) to act as a broker in this was seen as crucial. Face to face meetings, and a greater awareness and tolerance of how different organisations operated, were seen as being key factors in the success of the Here for You model.

### **Reflections**

The roundtable identified the numerous barriers to realising the human rights of individuals claiming welfare benefits in the North East. It was clear that many successful cross-sector approaches, particularly at local level, were achieving significant outcomes, but that opportunities exist for a more holistic approach, shifting the focus from meeting needs to fulfilling rights.

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There was a noticeable lack of inclusion of individuals personally impacted by the welfare changes. To implement a [Human Rights Based Approach](#) properly, this barrier must be overcome. Encouragingly this was recognised by the group as being an issue of concern. In addition, the idea of including the police and other public service bodies not normally present at welfare discussions, alongside involving local businesses, highlighted potential for innovative work in the area.

## Appendix 9 – Edinburgh Roundtable 1 Participant Evaluation

We carried out a feedback exercise at the first Edinburgh roundtable to provide an insight into how our roundtables were being received, detailed below.

### EVALUATION: Tackling Welfare Reform in the Round 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015, The Mews Edinburgh

#### 1. Did you find today's Roundtable event useful?

Yes	No	Don't Know
19	0	0

#### 2. What did you find most helpful?

- Networking. Learning from other people's knowledge / experience.
- Learning what services other people provide
- Information sharing
- All the different services coming together
- Chatting to others
- Shared experiences. Motivating ideas
- Meeting other advice providers and networking
- Categorising discussions by theme and setting actions
- The discussions and sharing of other organisations and agencies. The acknowledgement of a similar thread of issues and concerns away the Welfare Reform
- Facilitator led chat
- Networking and getting involved in a project that will benefit our own working plus the wider group of organisations
- Actions!
- Sharing of ideas and new awareness of different organisations and the work they do. Creating potential for partnership working
- Discussions
- meeting other agencies, discussing partnership working
- Open and honest discussion
- Discussions. Overview by Allan Young - especially ideas from Dundee / Fife
- Networking. Cake! Space/time/chat
- Networking and learning more
- Meeting useful contacts and gaining information

### 3. What could have been better?

- The accessibility of the venue
- Bit warmer. Sound was not good
- More dynamic presenters
- Sub-groups are difficult to create at short notice
- Nothing
- A wider range of organisation involved
- More time to follow up
- Nothing - get date in diary for spring 2016 catch up quickly
- Acoustics
- Bit cold in room? Other than that all good!
- Acoustics were dreadful
- Nothing, liked the set up

### 4. Will you be working with anyone new after today?

Please tick where appropriate

Yes	No	Don't Know
15	2	2

### 5. If yes, what will you be doing together?

- Cross referrals
- Follow up session
- Meeting up
- Sharing information. Possibly training
- Hopefully agency visits and sharing case studies
- Looking at online database of agencies
- We are organising another 'sub-group' meeting in the New Year. Arranging visits. Linking in with Disability Scotland
- Online directory and referral service
- Information sharing and discussion on partnership working. Potential to establish new foodbank advice hub in area
- Hopefully working on a new information and communication event group?
- My group will be meeting to look into organising an online referral system

**6. How would you describe the organization of this event?**

<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
13	6	0	0

**7. Was the venue:**

- <b>Accessible?</b>	<b>Yes</b> 18	<b>No</b> 1
- <b>Easy to find?</b>	<b>Yes</b> 15	<b>No</b> 4
- <b>Comfortable?</b>	<b>Yes</b> 18	<b>No</b> 1

**8. Is there anything else you want to say about today's event?**

- It was focused on 'managing' when it should have been about changing
- Needed more promotion -attendance less than desired. Needed better focus to get engagement and produce worthwhile and meaningful outcomes
- Looking forward to the next one in 2016
- Great meeting lots of different people. Great presentations. Looking forward to a follow up Meeting with ' Sub group' and then the larger group carry together, with (hopefully) more agencies organisations invited
- Send out postcode with address. Thank you SCVO/EVOC for organizing
- Really enjoyed it. Found it useful and a good time length. And the lunch was great!
- Audio not so good. Great start