

19th August 2026

Third Sector Forum

East Renfrewshire

Discussion Write Up

VAER

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Note from the VAER Policy Manager Luana Ackermann-Taylor

Thank you to everyone who was able to join us for our August Third Sector Forum (TSF). The focus of the session was to share policy updates, gather some feedback about the TSF so far and to continue conversations about third sector sustainability. The TSF is a key influencing mechanism for local and national decision-making. This means that your voice matters, so that the third sector and all its creative, resourceful, meaningful work is represented accurately.

Based on your feedback in the session we will continue to provide policy updates for East Ren and nationwide. We will also continue to create opportunities for networking and collaboration. I'm delighted to hear that there are a few new collaborations that have come out of the TSF already and hope many more will follow.

As ever, this space is intended to be useful to you, your organisations and ultimately the people we support. If there is any feedback you would like to share or asks for future sessions, please get in touch.

Executive Summary

The August 2026 Third Sector Forum brought together local organisations to discuss sector sustainability, strategic developments and future collaboration opportunities. The session featured updates on third sector sustainability, Scot Gov's proposed Third Sector Partnership Agreement and the East Renfrewshire HSCP All Age Commissioning Strategy.

Participants explored how the third sector can contribute to preventative, community-based support and reflected on key challenges affecting organisations, including funding pressures, workforce sustainability, volunteer recruitment and transport barriers. There was a strong focus on the importance of partnership working, shared learning and ensuring the third sector has a meaningful voice in local decision-making.

We also gathered feedback on the TSF so far. Participants expressed interest in the establishment of a HSCP and IJB sub-group and highlighted East Renfrewshire policy updates, networking opportunities and national policy developments as priorities for future sessions.

Key Themes and Insights - What is good?

Strengths of the Third Sector

- Creative with solutions because we have to be.
- Consulting the third sector for pilot projects.
- Flexibility with where we spend money i.e. support, salary, staff funding

Community Connections and Partnerships

- Small local authority, so easier to connect with other services.
- Partnership working and signposting are working well.
- Willingness to change.
- Aware that we need a say.

Transport and Access

- Providing transport for ageing population to access services.
- Possibility of ride sharing to and from groups/services to reduce transport burden, while also providing another opportunity for social connection.

Community Groups and Support

- Addiction groups as a safe space
- Afternoon Teas helping aging population to access others in the community.
- Carers Centre supporting carers in their role, making sure they are informed/signposted.
- BAME support services well attended and growing.
- Retail Trust trialing new robots to measure blood pressure/other simple diagnostic checks for residents
- Neighborhood networks working with young people around life skills as a preventative measure
- Parent carer network for people to come together and share experience and skill
- Gambling support for people, their families and organisations.

Key Themes and Insights - What can you offer?

Community Assets

- Community resources.
- Community-based care.
- Affordable spaces for people to use.
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Training and Capacity Building

- Free training sessions across Scotland helping organisations become more inclusive.
- Parliament workshops.

Community Activities

- Upcycling.
- Funded groups.
- Forum for support: Giving people a voice.
- Karate, baby sensory groups, arts & crafts, mens group, afternoon teas.
- Community cafe and classes.

Person-Centred Support

- Person-centred: Focus on unique needs.
- Social support.

Practical Support

- Minibuses.
- Volunteering opportunities.
- Signposting – community support volunteers.
- Community Transport mens group is £5 for pickup plus teas and coffees.

Key Themes and Insights - Barriers

Resources and Infrastructure

- Difficulty accessing venues and community space.
- Lengthy funding applications.
- Lack of long-term funding.
- Limited workforce security and recognition.
- Tension between affordability and sustainability of services.

Prevention and Early Intervention

- Services are reactive rather than preventative.
- Budget constraints limit early intervention.

Transport

- Poor transport links.
- Transport barriers for carers and older people.
- Transport affordability issues.
- Lack of volunteer drivers.
- Limited transport support for appointments and groups.

Reaching and Engaging People

- Hard to reach isolated and housebound people.
- Need better community reconnection.
- Challenges identifying what some groups want and need.

Volunteers and Workforce

- Difficulty recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers.
- Growing reliance on volunteers.
- Volunteer opportunities not well promoted.
- Financial pressures reduce volunteering.
- Limited budgets and pay progression.
- Staff stretched across multiple roles.

Partnership and System Challenges

- Rigid systems and processes.
- Tokenistic third sector involvement.
- Limited awareness of available services.
- Need stronger communication, relationships and collaboration.

Key Themes and Insights - Key Asks

Transport and Community Infrastructure

- Better transport options.
- Improved access to venues, including directories for finding and hiring community spaces.
- More shared resources, including storage facilities.

Workforce, Volunteers and Skills

- Increased volunteer recruitment and support.
- Training in volunteer management and recruitment.
- Peer support and leadership development.
- Mental health and dementia awareness training.
- Funding and bid-writing skills.
- Improved signposting, networking and mentoring opportunities..

Funding, Policy and System Change

- More government funding.
- Long-term, sustainable funding and policy commitments.
- Cross-party agreement on funding and strategic priorities.
- Greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

Collaboration, Awareness and Influence

- Stronger relationships between organisations.
- More opportunities to share learning, ideas and good practice.
- Improved awareness of local projects and services.
- Greater reach and engagement through events, open days, flyers and social media.
- Dedicated coordination and stronger collective influence on local and national decision-making.

Digital Resources

- Better use of digital platforms to promote services and opportunities.
- AI-supported directories and regularly updated community websites.

Discussion Summary

Organisations highlighted strong partnership working, effective signposting, flexible service delivery and a willingness to work together to meet local needs. However, these strengths continue to be tested by funding pressures, workforce and volunteer challenges, transport barriers and increasing demand for support.

Key priorities emerging across discussions include:

- Securing sustainable multi-year funding and longer-term policy commitments.
- Strengthening prevention and early intervention approaches across the system.
- Improving transport and access to services, activities and appointments.
- Building workforce and volunteer capacity, recruitment and retention.
- Enhancing collaboration, networking and information sharing between organisations.
- Increasing meaningful third sector involvement in strategic planning and decision-making.
- Improving awareness of available services and support within communities.
- Maximising the use of shared resources, infrastructure and community assets.

Discussions demonstrated a shared ambition to build a more sustainable, preventative and resilient third sector that can continue to support communities across East Renfrewshire.

Action Log / Next Steps

Theme	Action	Owner(s)	Notes
Volunteering	**Deliver volunteer recruitment and management training**	VAER	Explore re-introduction of volunteer managers network
Partnership Working & Influence	**Establish a regular programme of networking and partnership events**	VAER, third sector orgs	Ongoing through TSF
	Create opportunities to showcase innovative projects, good practice and effective partnership working.	VAER, thrid sector orgs	Ongoing through TSF
	Establishment of a HSCP/IJB Third Sector Sub Group	VAER	Get in touch to receive more details
Training & Workforce Development	**Deliver training on funding applications**	VAER	VAER delivers these, get in touch for more details
	Develop mentoring opportunities across the sector	VAER, third sector orgs	Explore funding for mentoring
Resources & Infrastructure	**Develop a central directory of services and community resources**	VAER	VAER Directory exists, get in touch for more details
Communication & Information Sharing	**Expand VAER wesbite use for resource sharing**	VAER	Ongoing

Attendees



- Carers Centre
- Community Transport East Renfrewshire
- Community Transport East Renfrewshire
- Cosgrove Care
- Deafblind Scotland
- Fairweather Drop-in Centre
- Mearns Kirk Helping Hands
- NAS East Renfrewshire branch
- Neighbourhood Networks
- PACT
- RCA Trust
- Retail Trust
- SDS Forum
- The Black Door Shop

Contact Us

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.
We would love to hear from you as we continue to develop the Third Sector Forum into a space that is useful to you.

If you haven't visited us at our Community Wellbeing and Enterprise Hub, we would love to show you around. Feel free to drop in when you are nearby or get in touch to arrange a visit.
We are open Monday to Friday 10am-4pm.



VAER

Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire SCIO
The Community Wellbeing and Enterprise Hub
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Scottish Charity Number: SC028103

If you would like to share thoughts, ask questions or meet for a chat, Luana (Partnership and Policy Manager with VAER), would love to hear from you:

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