

29th January 2026

Third Sector Forum

East Renfrewshire

Discussion Write Up

VAER

What to expect from this report

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Note from the VAER Chief Officer Ruth Gallagher

Thank you to everyone who was able to join us for our Third Sector Forum (TSF) at the end of January 2026. The focus of the session was to begin discussions and start to shape how the TSF can collaborate, influence and support the re-design of Health and Social Care in East Renfrewshire.

During the past 2-3 years we have seen significant challenges in the way our local Health and Social Care services are funded along with a shift in the needs and asks from our communities; focused on increased requests for social activities community groups and support for local residents with one or more long term conditions such as dementia, Parkinson's, and adults with additional support needs ranging between 18-65 years old.

If we do nothing, our HSCP is potentially facing a £27 million funding gap over the next 4 years, which translates to a £6.8m pressure within the 2026/27 budget.

East Renfrewshire are not alone in this situation, with Scottish Government undertaking one of the biggest pieces of redesign of Public Services.

This year we have seen a new Chief Officer join our HSCP with a clear vision to re-design the way Health and Social Care (H&SC) is delivered across East Renfrewshire, with the introduction of a new Adult and Healthy Communities Board - offering a renewed opportunity for the 3rd Sector, Community Groups and Individuals to influence how this is implemented - our 3rd Sector forum has been identified as one of the main mechanisms to influence H&SC service design.

The Board itself will be co-chaired by the Chief Officer of the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and the Chief Officer of Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire (VAER). This dual leadership approach is designed to provide balanced oversight and ensure that leadership reflects a broad representation of partners involved in the delivery of health and social care services across East Renfrewshire.

Together we have an opportunity to change this through collaboration, coordinated funding bids and collective action to influence local and national policy development and service design.

Executive Summary

This report brings together the discussions captured from the Third Sector Forum on 29th of January 2026. Participants described acute pressures on people and services, widening gaps between “moderate” and “critical” need, and the consequences of short-term funding and staff churn. The group also discussed practical opportunities to collaborate, share data more effectively, and improve how the Forum operates (e.g., accessibility, advance agendas, and a living directory).

Headline insights: prevention is being displaced by crisis response; people are being bounced around due to eligibility thresholds and unclear pathways; data flows are largely one-way from the third sector to statutory partners; and workforce instability undermines trust and continuity. The Forum asked for clearer feedback loops, quarterly main meetings with active sub-groups, and simple, privacy-respecting ways to share intelligence and coordinate offers.

Key Themes and Insights

Pressure & Emerging Need

- Support withdrawn for people deemed low/moderate priority, returning later in crisis; prevention displaced by crisis response.
- Isolation increasing; cost-of-living impacts compounding rent, heating and food insecurity; older people and adults with learning disabilities highlighted as at risk.
- Parents/carers of autistic children face long waits (e.g., educational psychology and diagnosis), leading to school non-attendance and loss of income.

Pathways & “Bouncing Around”

- Eligibility thresholds vary between services; people fall between moderate and critical criteria.
- Assessments delayed; unclear referral routes; services no longer exist or have long waits; discharge without a safety net triggers relapse.

Workforce & Sustainability

- Short-term funding cycles and low pay drive churn; loss of tacit knowledge and trust; training investment lost as staff move on.
- Volunteer reliance rising, with concerns about role boundaries and substitution.

Data, Evidence & Shared Intelligence

- Third sector routinely provides rich outcomes and demographic data to funders and partners but struggles to access reciprocal data (e.g., ASN transition numbers).
- Desire for simple shared tools (CRM/data hubs) and plain-language reporting accessible to carers and service users.

Collaboration - What Works & What Gets in the Way

- Trusted local relationships (e.g., housing with mental health partners) enable fast-track support.
- Competition for funding can duplicate services; call for joint bids, shared premises, and regular networking (including informal drop-ins).
- Privacy/consent is paramount—especially for autistic children and families; alignment of principles matters when partnering.

How the Third Sector Forum Should Run

- Quarterly main Forum with sub-groups meeting more often; agendas and questions circulated in advance; opportunities to submit questions anonymously.
- Hybrid/accessible formats; alternate venues across the authority; schedule mindful of school pick-up times; publish attendee list and summaries in plain language.

Discussion Summary

Understanding Impact & Emerging Need

Participants consistently reported a shift from preventative, relationship-based support to crisis intervention. People assessed as “moderate” are losing support and re-presenting later with higher acuity. Isolation and loneliness are growing, particularly among older people and adults with learning disabilities. Parents/carers of autistic children described long waits and insufficient school-based support, pushing families to breaking point and removing parents from the labour market.

Housing and cost-of-living pressures are intensifying: rent increases and energy costs constrain household budgets; more tenants are switching off heating and relying on foodbanks. Providers observe that cuts to social and wellbeing activity budgets reduce community participation and resilience.

Where People Fall Between Services

Different services apply different thresholds, creating a gap between “moderate” and “critical” need. People are signposted repeatedly without clear pathways; some services no longer exist, and assessment delays stall access. Discharge without a safety net leads to panic and rapid deterioration. Veterans and older men were cited as cohorts that can be missed by current pathways.

Workforce, Volunteers & Service Capacity

Short-term funding and low pay drive turnover: staff move on after training, eroding trust and continuity for families. Organisations spend disproportionate time on funding paperwork. Volunteer roles are expanding out of necessity, raising boundary concerns about job substitution and training needs.

Small groups—often volunteer-run—want to stay small due to capacity limits. While they hold valuable insight and case studies, formal data collection can be burdensome without support.

Data, Evidence & Learning Loops

Organisations collect substantial quantitative (demographics, outcomes) and qualitative (case studies, lived experience) data. However, statutory partners and funders are perceived to request data without sharing back strategic datasets (e.g., ASN transitions). This undermines planning and early intervention. Participants asked for plain-language feedback on how shared information informs decisions and resource allocation.

A practical proposal was to use shared digital tools—CRM or simple shared platforms—so collaboration and targeting can improve. Peers offered to share lessons learned from their CRM implementations.

Collaboration & Principles

Trust and value alignment are prerequisites. Some organisations avoid 1-to-1 work to protect privacy; consent around children's images and stories must be rigorous. Successful examples include local housing working with mental health partners to fast-track support, and community transport enabling access to activities. Competition for scarce funds drives duplication; ideas included joint bids, alternating venues to widen participation, and monthly non-agenda "speed-date" networking/drop-ins to maintain connections between quarterly Forums.

Improving the Third Sector Forum

Make meetings more accessible (hybrid options, clear language, shorter papers). Circulate agendas, questions and attendee lists in advance; allow pre-submitted or anonymous questions to support quieter voices. Record breakout rooms and ensure scribing. Publish post-event reports in plain English and share them with carers and families. Consider alternating venues across the authority and adjusting times to accommodate school pick-up.

Action Log / Next Steps

Action	Owner(s)	Notes
Establish a simple shared data/CRM approach	VAER with HSCP & ERC; interested orgs	Scope options (data hub or shared CRM), focusing on privacy, minimal admin, and value to smaller groups.
Create a living directory of services and contacts	VAER	Start with organisations mentioned here; maintain online and circulate updates quarterly.
Quarterly TSF with active sub-groups	VAER + all orgs	Define sub-groups (e.g., Autism & ASN; Carers; Sensory loss; Housing & Transport). Publish dates a quarter in advance.
Improve accessibility of meetings	VAER	Hybrid option; alternate venues east/west; schedule mindful of school pick-up; offer anonymous question submission.
Plain-language reporting and feedback loops	VAER / HSCP / ERC	Post-event summaries accessible to carers; explain how insights influence decisions and resourcing.

Action	Owner(s)	Notes
Privacy & consent standards	All organisations	Agree cross-sector guidance for images/stories, especially for autistic children; model good practice.
CRM peer-learning session	Sophie & William (with VAER)	Share CRM lessons (what worked/what didn't), templates, and light-touch data standards.
Transitions & ASN data sharing	Education / HSCP / VAER	Seek earlier visibility of young people at risk of disengagement; co-plan supports well before leaving school.
Volunteer role clarity & support	All organisations	Develop guidance to avoid job substitution; training and boundaries for volunteer activities.
Networking "drop-in"/speed-date sessions	VAER	Monthly informal slot for signposting and collaboration between quarterly Forums.
Pre-circulate attendee list & agenda	VAER	Include short blurbs; invite questions in advance to help reserved participants contribute.

Attendees



- Avalon Autism Parental Support & Respite Services
- Barrhead Housing Association
- East Renfrewshire Carers Centre
- Community Transport East Renfrewshire
- Corra Foundation
- Cosgrove Care
- Deafblind Scotland
- Fairweather Hall
- Include Me 2
- NAS East Renfrewshire
- Neilston Golden Girls / Neilston Men's Group
- RAMH
- RCA trust
- SDS Forum East Renfrewshire
- The Autistic Collective CIC

Contact Us



Thank you for taking the time to read this report, we hope it is useful to you. 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 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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