

### Highland Community Planning Partnership

#### Community Planning Board – 1 February 2021

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	CPB/01/21

### Volunteering in Highland, Impacts of COVID-19

#### 1. Background

- 1.1 Scotland has a long history of volunteering within communities and the 2018 [Scottish Household Survey](#) indicated that 48% of adults participate in either formal or informal volunteering and that the levels of participation have remained reasonably stable for the last 10 years.
- 1.2 The [2019 Citizens Feedback Panel](#) for Highland Council suggested that 42% of respondents participated in volunteering through an organised club or group, which is consistent with the national expectations but does reflect some concerns that the overall level of participation in volunteering is very slightly reducing – pre COVID-19.
- 1.3 In 2018 the Scottish Government launched the [Volunteering for All: National Framework](#) which also confirmed that volunteers are more likely to be;
- Female
  - Self-employed/part-time employed or in education
  - From higher socio-economic and income groups
  - From rural areas
  - From less deprived areas
  - Health and non-disabled

There are also key differences in the types of volunteering people get involved in depending on gender, age and life stage.

#### 2. COVID-19

- 2.1 As part of the initial planning within Highland around the support for communities and a general interest in support and getting involved, Highland Council and HTSI agreed that HTSI would act as a SPOC for any enquiries that they received around volunteering. This was shortly followed by the Government's launch of 'Scotland Cares', a national call out for volunteers to register through a central point administered through SCVO.

The 'Scotland Cares' campaign was very successful at generating a lot of additional interest, particularly from people who haven't volunteered before, but nationally there was criticism that neither the Government nor SCVO had properly accounted for the needs for volunteers prior to executing the campaign. Like elsewhere in Scotland, Highland citizens responded immediately and over 2000 people were added to the volunteer list held by HTSI and fed by both the national and local referrals.

At the time of the campaign, however, most of the groups responding at a local level feedback that there was no need for additional volunteers at that time and the majority of the initial 2000 were unable to be placed. This has created some frustration amongst some who felt that they had been encouraged to meet an immediate need and felt that they were encountering a barrier to helping people.

Groups were also reluctant to accept 'new' people, people who had not at that stage had any involvement with previous activities or the civic leadership within that community. They preferred to manage response within the groups of 'trusted' networks already in place.

- 2.2 The immediate impacts of COVID-19 also necessitated significant changes to more 'regular' volunteering activities as premises shut down and activities were halted, either altogether or until modifications could be made.

There were also increasing concerns that the majority of older volunteers may choose not to return to pre-existing volunteering roles due to concerns over health or because the time of inactivity was likely to reduce interest or willingness to participate. Concerns around the impact of service delivery within the Sector therefore are very present.

- 2.3 It has also been hypothesised that the more informal volunteering roles may be increasing in the current pandemic and what longer term consequences this has over the balance between the two aspects of volunteering are unclear.

### 3. Survey results

- 3.1 Throughout January 2021 HTSI are running a survey to take an initial 'temperature check' on the impacts of COVID-19 on volunteering behaviour. The survey closes on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January but the response summaries from the 268 participants to date are below.

Age: There were respondents across all age categories however the predominance of response came from those aged 45 and over, with 32% in the 55-64 bracket.

Area of volunteering: Respondents are most active in volunteering in activities connected to health and wellbeing (37% of all respondents volunteered in this areas) and Community Development (30%) with belief-based activities (4%) and advice and information/citizen rights (6%) undertaken the least.

Type of volunteering: Almost 86% of respondents had undertaken formal volunteering of some sort in the last two years, 76% had been doing this regularly for more than 6 months. 27% had participated in some form of informal volunteering and 81 individuals had participated in some form of specific COVID volunteer response.

If COVID-19 has had an impact?: Half of all respondents reported that some of all of their usual volunteering roles had been stopped or suspended but 39% had been able to continue with one or more of their roles with adaptations. Only just under 9% had not been affected at all in undertaking their voluntary roles. Encouragingly, just under 15% reported an increase in volunteering since COVID-19 and just under 9% had started volunteering because of COVID-19. Over 13% had changed how they volunteer to keep them or their family safe and just over 6% had stopped altogether for the same reason. Just over 3% had stopped their usual activities but started new roles instead and 10% had stopped usual activities but were helping informally within their community instead.

How they felt about volunteering throughout the rest of 2021?: Really positively 65% intended to continue with their current levels of volunteering and 7% intended to increase that. 24% anticipated continuing to volunteer but were thinking about changing how or where they volunteer. Almost 20% were optimistic about returning to volunteering after a break due to the COVID-19 pandemic but over 5% had either decided to stop volunteering or were considering stopping volunteering.

Why people volunteer: As you might expect more than 85% of respondents recognised that one of their motivations for volunteering was to give something back to the community but 64% reported that it helped to keep them active and engaged within their community. Also scoring highly were to keep people mentally active and to provide structure or purpose. Surprisingly only just under 7%

reported seeking to develop skills specifically for employability, though this may reflect the older age dominance of the responses.

**Barriers to volunteering:** Understandably the biggest barrier to volunteering that individuals identified was lack of time (48%) but interestingly the sense that the commitment was more than an individual can provide (20%) may be more manageable to challenge by reshaping the ask of volunteers. Interestingly the following barriers were identified by between 17-15% of respondents: not knowing where to look for new volunteering roles (17%), being daunted at starting something new (17%), not feeling appreciated (16%) and local politics around volunteering in my community (15%).

The survey responses are accessible through this link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-B9PZQHR2/>

#### 4. Areas to highlight/Actions in response

4.1 The next steps will be to discuss the results with Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) and to gather evidence of their experience of working with volunteers and to compare this information with the results of this survey. The longer-term interest will be to try and ascertain:

- The changes to volunteer role types as a result of COVID-19 Learning and practice
- Change to volunteer demographics
- Sustainability of services delivered by volunteers

4.2 In wider response to barriers identified HTSI is looking to undertake or consider action on the following:

- Working with organisations to redesign or change the communication around the commitment associated with voluntary roles. For example, is it possible to break role or responsibilities down and make them more specific time bound activities?
- HTSI are working on a new volunteer matching site which should be accessible through mobile phones and an app interface. This will be launched later in 2021 and will also be accompanied with a new marketing and communication push. This is currently in testing and we hope to have more information on this within the next 8-10 weeks.
- A new Volunteer Managers group has been established and in addition to new North of Scotland TSI form for volunteering that HTSI is hosting, we will be looking at new tools, peer support and advice and 1-1 guidance on addressing the following areas:
  - Better support to transition people into roles, including induction and peer support
  - Volunteer appreciation and participation
  - Matching volunteer motivations against the experience, for example ensuring those who are motivated to volunteer because they want social interaction are getting that opportunity.
  - Promoting more of the volunteer quality processes and standards currently under review with Volunteer Scotland.
- Utilise Volunteer Week this year to promote the concept of quality and volunteering, also to use the opportunity to host a second long-service award ceremony, recognising volunteers who have underpinned sector delivery for decades.

4.3 Areas that members of the CPP could support:

- Considering how work could be undertaken to address the local politics within communities that are barriers to participation
- Supporting the promotion of the volunteer app/matching platform when this is launched
- Promoting the concept of volunteering within staff teams, including revising or introducing a volunteering policy. HTSI are happy to support this. Working age people are sometimes



## Highland Third Sector Interface

Thorfin House, Bridgend Business park, Dingwall, IV15 9SL

01349 864289 – info@highlandtsi.org.uk – www.highlandtsi.org.uk - @HighlandTSI

less likely to volunteer than those who are in fulltime education or retired but skills picked up in volunteering roles are transferable to the workplace and help promote personal development at no or minimal cost to employers.

- Plan and execute a larger scale celebration of volunteer week in June 2021

### Recommendation

For the **Board** to consider the above report and suggested areas of possible activity in item 4.3 as relevant to their organisation.