

West Lothian's charities see income drop by almost a fifth

West Lothian's charities have seen income drop by 19% in a year when demand for their work is relied on ever more by the public and local government.

Charities spend £90m a year operating in the county with almost half that funding coming through the council and health providers.

Income dropped from £110m the year before to just £84m last year.

The bulk of funding comes from a variety of sources, all of which have seen demands grow as the pot of money shrinks.

Alan McCloskey, the chief executive of the Voluntary Sector Gateway (VSG), the Third sector umbrella group in the county, told councillors the falling income stream was a "concern".

Discussing the annual report of the VSG he told councillors in a meeting of the Economy, Community Empowerment and Wealth Building PDSP: "The report captures the vital role and essential services provided by charities, social enterprises, and community groups across West Lothian, as well as the incredible role played by volunteers. This is all set against the backdrop of the ongoing cost of living crisis.

"Of particular note and concern is the 19% drop in income experienced by the sector from the previous year, while costs have remained constant and demands on services have

increased.

“The report highlights the size and scale of the third sector both locally and nationally, along with case studies that pay testimony to the amazing difference small grass roots organisations are making to help those in most need.”

Many areas have seen increasing demand in the wake of the pandemic. A Scottish Government grant of £450,000 made each year to the VSG for community mental health projects has been met with bids of more than £1.5m each year.

During 2023/24 the VSG has continued to support the West Lothian Food Network and its members, by providing independent governance support to the network. VSG receive and pays out funds on behalf of the Food Network in the interim until the its' own charitable status as an SCIO is established as a legal registered entity and has its own bank account.

The Food Network is a coalition of charities and social enterprises which in the last year provided food support to more than 73,000 people in the county.

Presenting the annual report during National Volunteer week, Mr McCloskey praised the significant amount of work provided by volunteers on a daily basis.

“The report highlights the incredible amount of work volunteers do, he told councillors.

There are 502 registered charities operating in the county, slightly down on last year's number. Of these 86% are locally based, 9% are national and 5% international.

Of the top five activities concentrated on the bulk, 163 charities, are involved in social care. Other sectors include community, economic and social development, sport and culture, religious activities and research and education.

The VSG provides training and support to charities across the

county. Mr McCloskey fears that many charities will struggle to sustain themselves in the face of growing demands and shrinking income.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter