

West Lothian Council invests in funding directory for charities

West Lothian Council has backed a Third Sector website which helps voluntary groups tap into national funding streams.

The fund has been set up at a time when the county's Voluntary Sector Gateway has reported income in the charity sector dropping by almost 20% in the face of surging demands on the sector.

The council's Education Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) also heard that education department funding had helped more than 4,000 youngsters take part in summer holiday clubs.

Clare Stewart, Community Wealth Building Manager, told councillors: "In 2023/24 West Lothian Council invested in West Lothian 4 Communities, a funding website that supports the Voluntary and Third Sector to search for funding.

"The website is accessible for West Lothian based organisations to easily search for funding opportunities across the UK. The site will pull together a list of possible funding sources based on the type of organisation and what activities are being delivered or what will be achieved from the provision.

"The functionality of the website significantly reduces the amount of time spent searching for funding and increases access to funding that organisations are aware of to apply

too.”

She concluded “Whilst it is too soon to see the impact in terms of additional funding, feedback from the sector has been positive to date. The financial benefits are likely to materialise in 2024/25 and will be reported in next year’s annual report.”

The VSG annual report highlights over £42.4 million of funding going into the Third Sector from West Lothian Council, health partners and some external funding managed by West Lothian Council in 2023/24.

The report detailed that Income for the VSG had dropped 19.1% between 2022/23 and 2023/24 from £110m down to £84m.

Over the same time the expenditure of the Third Sector in West Lothian fell by only 0.67%- £89.5m down to £88.9m in the last financial year.

The report said: “With funding, there is much more investment that supports the Third Sector and Council to deliver than the investment that goes into the Third Sector through Council and partners.

“The key importance of how the Third Sector is able to draw down funding from external funders is recognised and how that ability helps to deliver key support to our local communities.”

The Gateway, which acts as the Third Sector umbrella group for voluntary organisations in West Lothian also has a crossover to the council’s Education portfolio, to the Children and Families forum within the sector.

It aims to improve the effectiveness and maximise the contribution of Third Sector to the planning and delivery of services and activities for children, young people and families.

Ms Stewart said: "The funding that was allocated to the 3rd and Voluntary sector in 2023/24 for the provision of playgroups, the Pupil Equality Funding from both primary and secondary schools for a range of provision and the collective delivery of the West Lothian Summer programme 2023 which engaged 4,815 young people. "

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter