



Keeping the doors open

What do older people's community groups need in order to recover from the impact of Covid-19?



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We are the national charity for older people, working to improve the lives of everyone over the age of 50.

Our mission is to inspire, involve, and empower older people in Scotland, and influence others, so that everyone can make the most of later life.

We are a membership organisation and work with hundreds of local community groups and organisations who provide vital services and activities for older people.

For more information about this report, or to discuss its findings, contact Age Scotland's policy team on policy@agescotland.org.uk or 0333 323 2400



Introduction

Age Scotland community member groups are independent organisations, many of which have been set up by older people for older people and are volunteer run. They include lunch clubs, befriending groups, Men's Sheds, day centres, campaigning groups, and social and learning clubs.

In June 2022, Age Scotland surveyed our community member groups to identify the main challenges they are facing and find out more about their experiences over the course of the coronavirus pandemic.

As groups return to the delivery of a broad range of services and activities for older people, we wanted to ensure we have a fuller understanding of the support they

need to keep their doors open – and that we could share this with funders, local authorities, and other partners.

The survey covered a variety of topics, including:

- attendance levels and whether these had changed since before the pandemic
- whether groups and organisations had met or delivered services during this time
- whether they are currently meeting or delivering services
- what challenges they face and how these could be resolved.
- We also asked groups to share with us in their own words what they mean to the people that attend them and their local community

The majority of responses mentioned the central role community groups and services for older people play in tackling loneliness and social isolation.

Other answers included helping people to remain active, offering educational activities and learning, improving mental health, supporting people living with dementia and unpaid carers, and enabling older people to access information and signposting.

We sent the survey to all members electronically and by post to include member groups who do not have internet access. In June 2022, there were just over 400 Age Scotland community groups in membership who received the survey. Almost a quarter responded.

Most local authority areas were represented in responses and there was a broad geographic spread between groups in urban and more rural areas – the majority of respondents self-described as being based in a semi-rural area or a small town.

Sadly, over the past two years more than 30 older people's community

groups in membership of Age Scotland have closed and we know that others are struggling.

This report highlights what those groups who were still active told us in their own words and makes recommendations about how we can support them going forward.

While the rich insights captured in this survey are likely to be familiar to those involved in organising and attending older people's groups, we hope this report will underline the importance of older people's community groups and the scale of the challenges many groups are facing.

We have come up with recommendations for funders, government, politicians, and others to ensure Scotland's older people's community groups can thrive.

This report centres around the experiences and views of Age Scotland's member groups. Some of the featured comments have been edited for length and clarity.

An appendix with further insight on a range of key themes from survey responses is also available at the end of the report.



Men's Sheds have been revolutionary in improving the health and wellbeing of their members

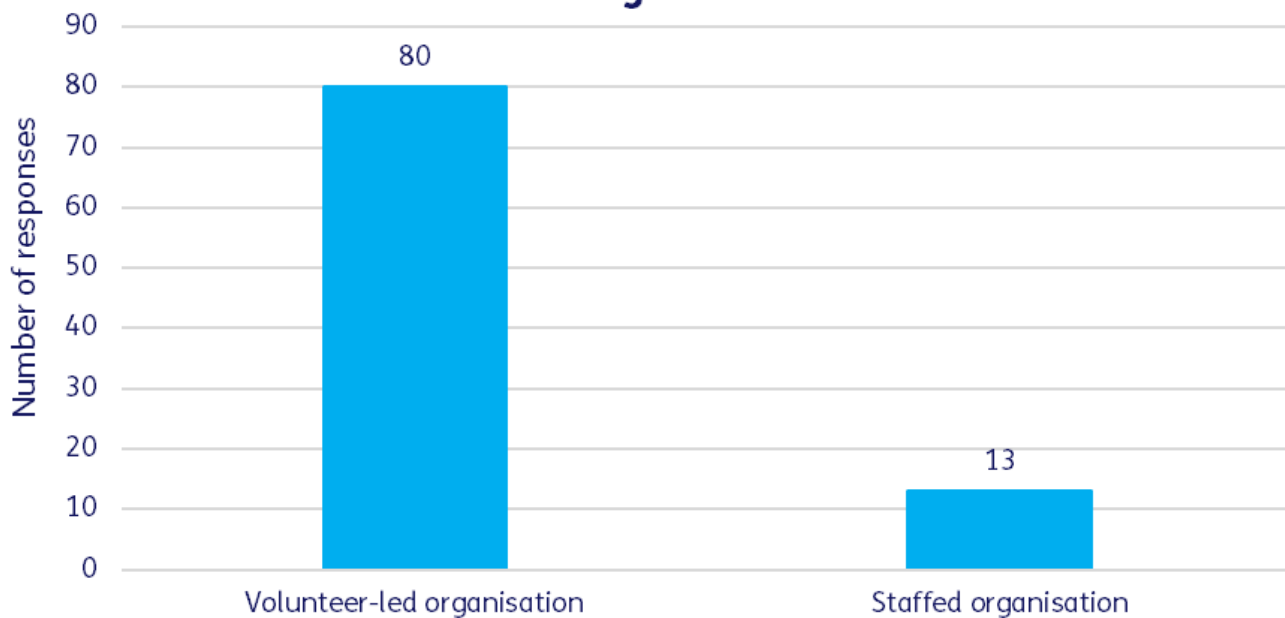
Overview of responses

- 93 responses overall
- The majority were from volunteer-led groups (80), with 13 staffed organisations responding (3 of which had volunteers as well)
- Groups of 25-49 members (30) and 10-24 members (26) were the most common
- Groups providing social activities made up the majority of respondents (46). There were also Men's Sheds (10), ethnic minorities groups/organisations (7), groups providing services (10), groups which lobby and campaign (2), and veterans' groups (2)*

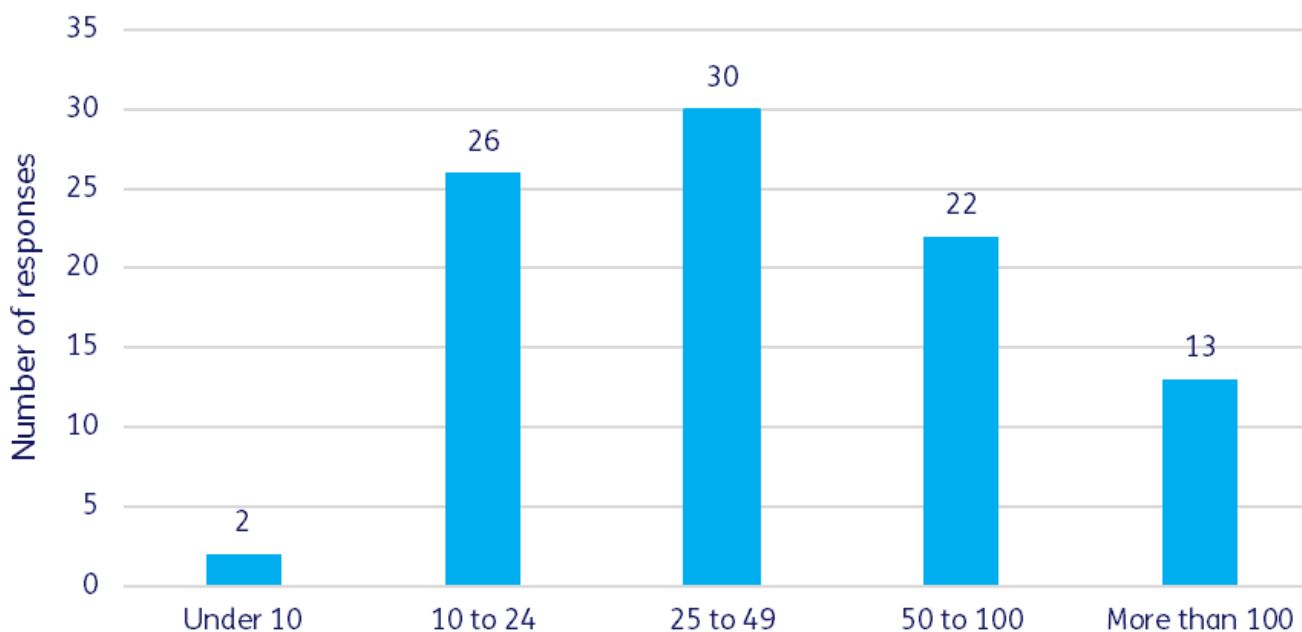
We are incredibly grateful to the groups who took the time to share their experiences and views in this survey, and for the vital work undertaken by all older people's groups across Scotland.

*Several respondents selected multiple options and self-described as providing a mix of social activities or providing services, in conjunction with other activities.

Proportion of volunteer-led and staffed organisations



How many individual older people normally take part in your group/organisation?



What groups told us

Attendance Levels

We asked whether the number of people taking part in groups or using services had changed (either reducing or increasing) since before the pandemic and why.

A clear majority answered 'yes' to this question (67 out of 93 respondents).

The majority of these 67 answers were from groups which had experienced a reduction in attendance numbers. Where attendance had reduced, the reasons given included illness and poor health, drops in fitness levels and mobility, fear of Covid-19, people moving away or into care, and loss of members through bereavement.

On the other hand, some groups had seen an increase in numbers due to new members joining or reported that they were now building up their membership again after a decline in numbers.

Some respondents did not make clear whether their numbers had reduced or increased.

Several responses highlighted that groups had experienced a fluctuation in numbers, commonly reporting that numbers had dropped off during the pandemic but were now increasing.

A few of the 'unsure' responses explained that they did not know because the group had not reconvened or was due to do so in coming months when they would have more insight.

"Whilst the majority of the active elderly members were delighted to return to face to face interactions, approximately 20, who all had to cope with shielding arrangements, have not returned."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Glasgow City

"We have received a Scottish Government wellbeing grant to increase our membership and so far we have gone from 48 to 87."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, services, and lobbying/campaigning, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire



Older people's community groups are a lifeline to their members

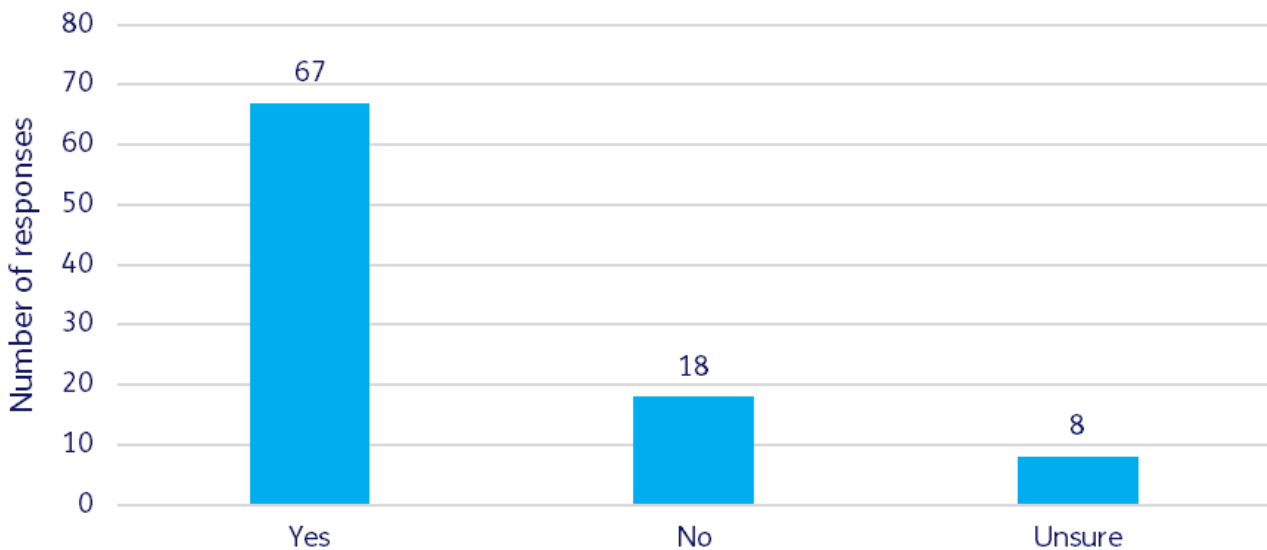
"Sadly, we lost a couple of our members during Covid, but we have a couple of new members since starting back in September 2021."

Volunteer-led group providing social activities and services, 10-24 members, Fife

"We have lost a few members due to death and are finding it difficult to get new members."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

Has the number of older people who normally take part in your group/organisation changed since before the pandemic?



During the pandemic

61 out of 93 respondents told us they delivered services and activities or met online or in person when it was safe to do so during the pandemic. 48 of the groups who met or delivered services or activities were volunteer-led, and 13 were staffed.

Groups offered a wide mix of activities, services, and ways of keeping in touch, such as regular phone calls; transport services taking people to appointments; providing entertainment including books, DVDs, and games; online classes and social meetups; food shopping and meal deliveries; collecting prescriptions; walking meetups; dropping off cards and gifts for special occasions; and meeting in person when social distancing allowed.

These initiatives were a lifeline for many older people, helping them through lockdowns and public health restrictions. The responses also demonstrate the mobilisation of communities and the resilience of older people's groups and services, and more widely of older people themselves.

Although groups adapted their services and activities where they could, we know that this cannot replace face to face interaction. Human connection and social contact make a big difference to tackling loneliness levels among older people.

"We ran a weekly online exercise class and kept in touch with some of the members by phone."

Volunteer-led organisation providing health improving activities, 25-49 members, Argyll and Bute

"We delivered meals on wheels, collected prescriptions, delivered shopping etc as well as offering support and advice by telephone."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"Deliveries of food/medication; Books/jigsaw deliveries; afternoon tea box deliveries to sheltered housing complexes; telephone befriending weekly service; targeted 'in person' meetings."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Dundee City

Current activities

82 out of 93 groups were currently meeting or providing activities or services.

The majority of these seemed to be back to as close to “normal” service delivery/activity as possible.

65 groups were meeting face to face, and 17 groups were taking a hybrid approach.

Groups most commonly reported meeting once a week (36) followed by more than once per week (21).

Ten groups were not currently meeting – though several of these groups were on their summer break at the time of filling in the survey and would be shortly recommencing their meetings and activities.

There was one blank response in this section.

Two of the groups who were not meeting at all provided insight into why this was the case:

**"Treasurer went through a big operation, she is taking each day as it comes (her words)
Chairperson had a knee operation...We have lost some as moved away, passed away, one in a home etc. And I have lost my get up and go. Hopefully it will return. Two years plus is a long time."**

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"Our group has been decimated over the pandemic period, not through the virus, but through the advanced age of group members. We are at present attempting to re-establish the group. So hopefully we will be up and running again in the near future. Meantime, we will continue to rebuild."

Volunteer-led veterans' group, 10-24 members, Argyll and Bute



Walking sport options have been increasing in availability and popularity in recent years

Groups who had restarted their activities provided some insight as to what this was like, including whether they have had to make any adjustments or faced any challenges in getting back to “normal”:

"We have started back up again and are more or less back to what we were doing pre-covid. Most of the groups who use our hall have started back too."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Falkirk

"We have started back but just starting to get into a routine again as we had problems filling the committee."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"It has been really hard to re-establish activities once again. Having been told to socially distance for instance it is hard for people to accept that they can now get back to 'normal'..."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Scottish Borders

"Our services are now fully operational and home visits increasing month by month."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Aberdeen City

Challenges facing groups

We asked groups about the challenges they are currently facing and what they believe their group needs for the future – a number of the rich responses they shared are included later in this section.

The overall picture was of a wide mix of concerns and priorities, as each group's circumstances are different.

The survey asked groups to indicate whether they were experiencing any of the following challenges:

- venue availability
- rising energy bills
- other operating costs
- loss of members
- loss of committee members
- securing core funding for staffing and running costs
- coronavirus impacts and safety concerns

Most groups were experiencing at least one concern from the list, and several mentioned additional issues such as transport and travel costs and increased demand for services.

There was also the option for groups to tell us that they were not

experiencing any challenges – which seven selected.

The most common concerns were:

- 1) loss of members
- 2) other operating costs
- 3) rising energy bills
- 4) securing core funding

A later question asked respondents to rank the challenges in the list by whether they were “extremely”, “slightly”, or “not at all” concerned about them.

The issues which most groups were “extremely concerned” about were

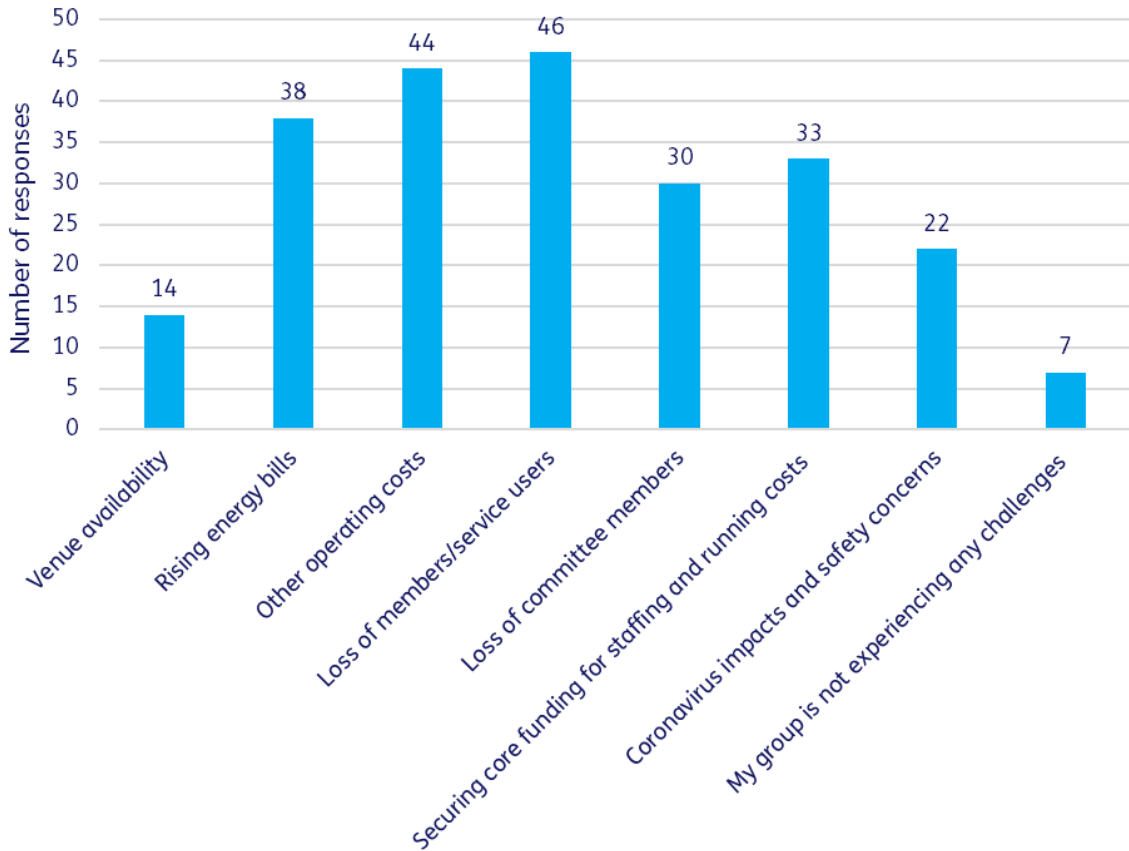
- 1) rising energy bills
- 2) other operating costs
- 3) securing core funding

Venue availability was the issue which the highest number of respondents selected “not at all concerned” for (52).

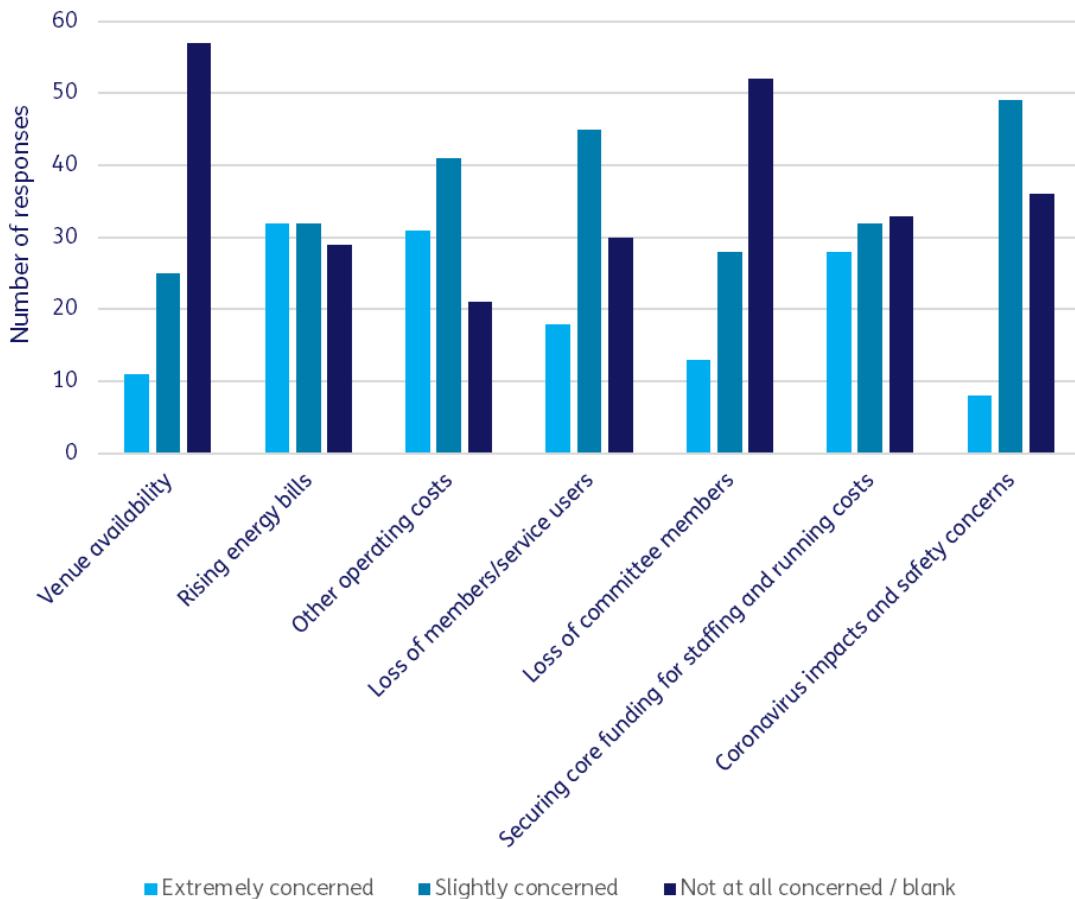
The issues which most respondents selected they were “slightly concerned” by were:

- 1) Coronavirus impacts and safety concerns
- 2) loss of members/service users
- 3) other operating costs

Most commonly selected challenges facing Age Scotland member groups



How concerned are Age Scotland member groups by particular challenges



Groups were also given the opportunity to comment on the challenges they are facing and their future needs. Many of the comments refer to multiple challenges being experienced at once.

Venue availability

The location where groups met was broadly split between their own premises, community spaces, church halls or religious spaces, and local authority premises.

The majority of respondents had to pay to use the venue they met in (56) or make a partial contribution of some form (5). 30 did not need to pay to use their venue, sometimes providing maintenance or a donation in lieu.

Several groups highlighted venue-related issues, including running costs, challenges securing a venue, and changes in venue.

Some groups have more specific needs for their premises, such as Men's Sheds, which can make it harder to find or adapt suitable spaces.

Acquiring land or buildings from local authorities, securing low rental costs, and long-term lease agreements can all provide stability for groups.

"Our running costs for our meeting place are very expensive. We were unable to secure use of previous building – we now rent from council and costs are very high, with numbers attending low."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"Cannot hire venue we were in for over 20 years...Some members have medical issues and cannot get to new venue in a different area."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, South Lanarkshire

"As a new group, we are faced with all the challenges involved in a men's shed start-up - securing premises, adapting these to our needs...all the time ensuring safety and inclusivity."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, Dumfries and Galloway



Older people's groups and forums are a valuable place for members to share their experiences and influence policy makers

Rising Energy Bills

Increases in energy bills are affecting us all, but for older people's groups and community services it is a particularly worrying time as they are not protected by the same price regulation as consumers of domestic residential energy.

Instead, these services will be offered a short term, six-month energy bill relief package, that will still leave these vital groups in immediate uncertainty over the sustainability of running their premises.

This comes at a time when many groups will wish to offer safe, accessible, and warm spaces to their members during the cold winter months.

"Our electricity supplier has asked us to raise our monthly payment to them from £150 to £740..."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"I have serious concerns that it may not be possible to continue operating in this current environment of large energy bills."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 10-24 members, Falkirk

"Rising electricity bills are making us look carefully at our consumption and how we can reduce our spend. Fewer members have resulted in less weekly subscriptions. We are now having to be even more self-sustaining to survive by selling more of our projects/items as opposed to just making items for fun or experience of giving something new or different a try."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Scottish Borders



Before the Covid-19 pandemic, older people's groups would regularly host hundreds of thousands of members

Membership and attendance

Many groups explained that they were worried by a drop in the number of service users or attendees.

For many respondents this was linked to older people being worried about coronavirus or having lost confidence or having fallen out of the habit of going out during the pandemic.

Others were keen to attract new members to keep their group going.

For many groups, increased membership meant they stood a better chance of being able to meet their often rising costs.

"We would like more members, especially younger people."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Stirling

"We are a new social club, we are the first mixed club, advertising and advice on how to acquire new members is a problem."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, East Ayrshire

"The numbers who are finding it hard to resume 'pre-pandemic' activities is a cause of real concern to our small committee, but we hope to persuade them to come out in October."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, North Lanarkshire

"If we cannot increase the membership, then the member's contributions will not be sufficient to meet the running costs of the shed. And it will be forced to close."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

Committees, staffing and volunteers

Several groups shared that they were finding it difficult to encourage people to join their organising committee or group. Other groups had lost staff and were attempting to recruit to fill the gaps.

More widely, many groups were looking to expand their volunteer base to allow them to continue with their activities.

These pressures pose a challenge for groups' long-term sustainability and ability to operate.

"...most of our volunteers are also elderly and we have no younger volunteers willing to take over their positions so in the near future we shall have much reduced volunteer numbers so will have great difficulty remaining open."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 10-24 members, Falkirk

"Trustees, chair, volunteers that can use a computer for website, mail and advertising..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"During the pandemic we lost 70% of our staff members and 40% of our service users..."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

"We lost a few of our committee members during the pandemic but trying to recruit more."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

Funding

Securing funding – including for core costs, staffing costs, and running costs – is a recurring issue Age Scotland hears about from older people's groups.

Groups tell us they want multi-year not single year funding models, not only to increase financial security but so beneficiaries can work on longer term projects.

Single year funding models which require funded organisations to show their impact in just a year makes it more likely that these groups will interact with communities which are already engaged, meaning those who

have not been previously included continue to miss out. Longer-term funding also brings stability and allows groups the certainty needed for planning.

For volunteer-led groups it can also be difficult to know where to apply for funding and grants, or to dedicate the time required to applications. Groups were also unable to raise funds in many of their usual ways during lockdowns and while public health restrictions were in place.

Local community services and groups are often the first line of support and signposting in communities and need to be adequately financed to do so.

In the survey, we heard from groups who have had their grants from their local Health and Social Care Partnership cut.

The backdating of cuts is also presenting an issue, and there was some frustration expressed at the lack of consultation involved.

Other respondents were worried they may need to ask members to contribute more to cover running costs (such as rent and other bills) to ensure the group's survival.

"Our core funding from the local authority has not increased in several years. With rising wage costs, fuel increases etc we will struggle to meet costs this year. Costs will have to be passed onto our service users in order to balance our finances."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"...Many funders have changed priorities during the pandemic, with some now excluding services such as ours. This is a concern."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, more than 100 members, East Renfrewshire

"Because we are a small club and rent and insurance etc is going up we find it difficult to raise funds. We don't wish to increase membership fees."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"At present we raise our own funding from hall lets which might not be sufficient to cover costs. Most of our members are on the basic state pension and cannot assist financially."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Argyll and Bute

"We work from year to year not knowing if we will have enough support to continue, if this could be assured for even two or three years it would take a lot of the stress out of running a club."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, services, and lobbying/campaigning, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

Coronavirus impacts and safety concerns

Several respondents highlighted that they were aware of older people who remain afraid about catching coronavirus or who have lost confidence over the course of the pandemic, affecting their participation. These may be individuals who were told to shield or who have subsequently developed health issues.

Lockdowns and loss of contact will have had a serious impact on their mental health and feelings of isolation and loneliness – we must not forget that for many older people, the virus remains a very real threat. For others, lockdown might have led to a loss in mobility or meant they got out of the habit of going out.

"Being isolated and less active for the 14 months we were closed appears to have accelerated mobility loss and dementia issues as well as having a noted negative impact on our members' mental health and confidence."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We need pensioners to have the confidence to go out again, many are still afraid to leave their homes."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Glasgow

"Our group is mainly in the 80+ age range and a number of them lost confidence and didn't feel that they could go out on their own."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, North Lanarkshire

"We are working to get those who lost confidence or were unwell during covid lockdown, back into mainstream community."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, veterans' activities and services, 25-49 North Ayrshire

Demand for services

Some groups reported experiencing more demand for their services following the pandemic.

Even before undertaking this survey, we had been hearing more and more that community groups are taking on extra responsibilities, which are not necessarily within their remit – for instance, local authorities may close their day care

centre and instead signpost people to the group instead.

Although this has been happening for some time, we are hearing about it more commonly. Groups may not have the training or resources to deal with these referrals (for instance, if they are not trained in dementia care but are being signposted to for this).

All of this results in pressure on groups and their staff and members, which could result in people stepping back from their roles.

"High number of referrals - capacity issues; staff recruitment; volunteer recruitment; transport capacity."

Staffed organisation, providing social activities, more than 100 members, Fife

"Higher demand for our befriending project, social activities, supported volunteering opportunities and lunch club for people living with dementia."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, more than 100 members, East Renfrewshire

"The number of requests has risen dramatically. We are still not doing as many as pre-covid, but the numbers are rising all the time."

Volunteer-led organisation, providing services, more than 100 members, Perth and Kinross

"We have received more contact requests."

Staffed organisation with volunteers providing services, more than 100 members, Dundee City

Transport and travel

Issues regarding transport were commonly highlighted – including fuel prices, difficulty sourcing transport for members to get to meetings and events, and high hire prices.

Several organisations supported by volunteers using their own cars highlighted the impact of rising fuel costs on their activities.

Help with transport costs and needs was commonly raised as something which would help groups to remain stable financially and able to operate.

"Some ladies are wheelchair bound and are isolated in their houses. If we can get help with transport they also can come and join us..."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities group/organisation, 50-100 members, West Lothian

"Rising fuel costs, our drivers use their own cars..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Perth and Kinross

"Grant funders do not always consider the value and importance of outings for older people who are not able to travel independently. Therefore funding applications for this are often unsuccessful resulting in groups not applying."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, South Ayrshire

"Organisations like ourselves are struggling with rising transport costs and we are unable to get social work community transport since reopening."

Staffed ethnic minorities group/organisation, more than 100 members, City of Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian, and West Lothian

Benefits of older people's groups

We asked respondents to tell us in their own words what they think are the main benefits of attending their group for attendees and the community.

Tackling and reducing social isolation and loneliness was mentioned in an overwhelming majority of responses.

Other benefits mentioned in responses included:

- Supporting health and wellbeing
- Educational activities and learning new skills
- Community resource and space
- Access to information and signposting
- Support for older people with health conditions and unpaid carers
- Campaigns and advocacy

Tackling loneliness and social isolation

"Many of our members felt lonely during the whole covid period and were so happy when we re-opened again. Ongoing structural work on our premises meant we couldn't offer any services during that time."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Falkirk

"Our club is the only group meeting in our village. As we no longer have a shop or community hall it is the only way for us to meet regularly and keep in touch."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"The number of clubs like ours that have gone since the coronavirus is vast and as I think that we are the best way to fight loneliness and isolation it is essential that those left are supported to ensure they do not go the same way..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, services, and lobbying/campaigning, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"What has come across at our meetings, and especially the coffee mornings and afternoons, is 'having contact'. People have said on being invited to a coffee event that this was the first time they had been out socially since the beginning of the pandemic. Our normal meetings have been better attended because people wanted social contact."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"There is no doubt in my mind that our club is a lifeline to many, especially those who live on their own...."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Scottish Borders

Supporting health and wellbeing

"West Lothian Milan Group has been running for twelve years now. Looking at the older community they desperately needed help. Some friends and volunteers got together and formed this group. Now a great difference. Before older ladies had no social activities, feeling isolated and depressed in their houses."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities group/organisation, 50-100 members, West Lothian

"Main benefits are help with health and wellbeing. Another benefit is helping people to stay independent by helping them get to appointments etc."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 50-100 members, Highland

"...A varied programme of serious/light events also seems to go down well. Older people like to be entertained particularly with musical items - singing, instrumentals, even a little light exercise at times (a wee dance)."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"This particular group relies on each other to lean on, we know how social anxiety can be worse within our older communities. They have created a bond and a routine that they depend on and enjoy hugely."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Glasgow City

Educational activities and learning new skills

"...learning new skills/hobbies; satisfaction at being involved with others and achieving something."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"...attending classes that improve empowerment; improving health and wellbeing, physical, social, mental and emotional; improving digital access and skills."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social and educational activities, 50-100 members, North Lanarkshire

"As a member of 'Jed Shed' (or indeed the men's shed movement in general) social interaction and exchange of skill sets. Help and inspiration, in particular to try something different support from like-minded similar aged members. Mostly, positivity from people in similar situations as myself. The chance to meet new and interesting people who've become friends and the exchange of many skills."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Scottish Borders

"Purposeful action by woodworking groups...Support of elderly men. A 'free' venue for older members with optional additional interests."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 50-100 members, Aberdeen City

Community resource and space

"To smile, have a meal in a warm safe environment, being made to feel welcome at all times and listened to."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Fife

"We cater mainly for the over seventies. The shed gives them a safe place to meet and converse that does not require them to gamble or drink alcohol. It offers a sense of purpose for those members who participate in some of the activities offered. And for those who do not it offers the chance of some social interaction and serves to tackle loneliness and social isolation. We have recently attracted some funding to purchase PCs to allow us to also tackle digital poverty among our members."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"Almost all the people benefitting from our organization belong to ethnic communities, refugees, and asylum seekers. These are marginalized and vulnerable communities. Due to language barriers and other social and financial constraints, these members of the community are unable to benefit from mainstream activities happening in the area. When they come to our sessions, they feel at home. They feel that they belong here and that they will be listened to in a judgment-free environment. We provide them with guidance, support and various learning and recreational opportunities."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities group/organisation, 10-24 members, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, and Stirling

"The men's shed is a vital resource for the local community to help men (and women) meet up in a safe and welcoming environment."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

Access to information and signposting

"Our service users are mentally and physically stimulated through targeted activities. We also support them, their families and carers with practical advice and assistance at all times. The feedback from all involved is 100% positive."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"...receiving/access to information on other services available by other partners."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Argyll and Bute

"There is also the Living Hub base at the Centre on a Wednesday and they can ask them for any advice or help that they need so they don't have to go to the main town or search the internet for things, this is an additional resource that has been set up recently..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Shetland Islands

Support for older people with health conditions and carers

"As a senior and a carer of a disabled husband, I, like many members, value the group in terms of friendship and support. Many carers are isolated despite having a member of one's family at home. It is wonderful to come to the group and take part in activities etc with others who understand. Also helping carers remain at home while their family are at the group is vital to them. We all reap the benefits of getting together and have developed, over the years, a close and caring group of people."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"Our goal is to ensure all our members who have a diagnosis of dementia engage in fun, stimulating activities, provide respite for carers and ensure that our members avoid or delay the need for residential care."

Staffed organisation providing services, 50-100 members, City of Edinburgh

"Improving the quality of their lives; assisting carers and families of attendees by providing support and information; boosting the confidence of those recovering from stroke or heart and chest problems; encouraging physical and verbal improvement in those who have been afflicted by injury."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, South Ayrshire

Campaigns and advocacy

"Reminds older people that someone is there to advocate on their behalf. We campaign for older people's rights and services and have had some successes in dealing with decision makers on their behalf."

Volunteer-led lobbying/campaigning organisation, 50-100 members, Dundee City

Our support and impact

Age Scotland's own support for member groups had to adapt during the pandemic – this included the development and distribution of resources to help groups stay in touch with members and a funding guide which contained information on making grant applications and ideas for Covid-safe fundraising activities.

Age Scotland also launched a new fund to provide health and wellbeing grants designed to assist member groups with delivering activities during lockdown.

Several responses acknowledged the support provided by Age Scotland's Community Development team during this period or other Age Scotland support which assisted them.

"...It is great that Age Scotland can and does support even small groups such as us and in such remote areas as often we feel that we can be overlooked by people living and working in the central belt."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"Without the backing, help, and advice from Age Scotland and recently the help of Heather Baillie, development officer for Ayrshire, this club could have folded."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 50-100 members, East Ayrshire

"Thank you for the support (and funding) from Age Scotland. This was the seed corn money to prime our trial befriending (6 month) project...for which we now have 5 year support and funding."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Dundee City

"With the aid of Age Scotland and Sky we now have Sky Digital Champions assisting our master my technology classes..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social and educational activities, 50-100 members, North Lanarkshire

"...Over the years Age Scotland have been very supportive, both financially (grants) and advice and guidance (especially during covid pandemic)..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Scottish Borders

Conclusions

The survey's findings clearly demonstrate the importance of older people's groups and the enrichment they bring to individuals and communities.

Across Scotland, older people's groups act as lifelines providing opportunities for learning and leisure, regular social interaction, chances to build up friendships, as well as routes for support and advice – including peer support and information sharing about local and national services. Their importance has never been clearer than during a global pandemic.

Despite difficult operational circumstances many groups continued to provide services for their members and attendees throughout lockdown and beyond. The responses clearly highlight the range of ways groups adapted to the pandemic and the breadth of what was offered, although the picture varies locally and groups' experiences differ depending on their circumstances. Support mechanisms such as phone calls, online meetings and classes, the provision of meals, shopping and prescription deliveries, and the

distribution of books, videos and other activities and forms of entertainment were vital for many older people during extraordinary circumstances.

As the survey distribution process targeted groups which were still in Age Scotland membership in June 2022, the majority of responses were from groups who were still operational and either currently meeting or soon to be resuming regular meetings.

Although not captured in this survey, it should be noted that over 30 older people's community groups in membership of Age Scotland have closed their doors permanently since the start of the pandemic.

As evidenced by the survey responses, many other older people's groups are struggling and may be at risk of closure. Pressures which groups already face, such as volunteer shortages and funding issues, are being intensified by outside factors such as the fallout of the pandemic and the soaring cost of living.

Older people's community groups play a key preventative role in tackling social isolation and loneliness.

Loneliness is a public health issue – it is as damaging to someone's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and increases the risk of cognitive decline, dementia, heart disease, and stroke. The Covid-19 pandemic has compounded the problem and had a demonstrable negative impact on older people's mental health. Groups are part of the solution and must be funded and resourced to allow them to continue to make interventions to combat loneliness.

Additionally, older people's groups are an important channel through which many older people access leisure and cultural activities. They can also help people to navigate some of the barriers to accessing these opportunities – such as transport issues and lack of knowledge about what is available.

Groups also enable people to learn new skills, maintain their physical health and provide a community space. Their value in our communities cannot be overstated.

In addition to shedding light on the breadth of activity and the positive impact of older people's community groups, the survey demonstrated the range of challenges facing groups and organisations. It has also shown that as each group's circumstances and situations are different, so are the challenges they face.

Although securing funding is a long-standing challenge for Age Scotland member groups, increasingly, and as attested by the findings, we are hearing of challenges receiving stable and long-term funding to keep groups running which is being exacerbated by the surging cost of living.

The cost of living crisis is not only having a devastating impact on older people at an individual level, but is also affecting older people's groups and their ability to operate. Rising costs for venues and energy are a pressing issue. Additionally, the difficulty posed by transport-related costs came through in responses.

Against the backdrop of the rising cost of living, groups will arguably have an even more vital role than

ever, providing service users and attendees with somewhere to come together. However, they will suffer if they can no longer meet their essential costs or if their members have to cut back on their participation as they cannot afford to make ends meet.

Many of the responses highlight there are some older people who are reluctant to re-join groups – including due to “getting out of the habit” of socialising and leaving the house, losing confidence in their mobility, and anxiety around Covid-19 or other health issues. These individuals must not be forgotten and should be supported to re-integrate into groups and wider society. Drops in membership and attendance put groups’ futures at risk if they cannot remain sustainable.

Another issue some of groups are facing is a lack of new volunteers coming through to replace current committee and board members, some of whom have been in their roles for many years. Often community groups and services are dependent on older people themselves to keep them going – which can take a huge amount of

time, effort, and energy. Pandemic-related closures gave some people the chance to step back and take a break from their responsibilities, and some groups are choosing not to form again. If groups in this position cannot secure new volunteers to help them organise and carry out activities, their recovery and future is at risk.

If the range of issues facing groups are not addressed these valuable community resources could be lost, increasing levels of loneliness and making Scotland a less happy place to grow older.

Unless these current challenges and vulnerabilities are met head on, it is likely that the situation will deteriorate further. It is clear that if we did not already have a network of older people’s groups enriching our communities, they would need to be invented.

With every door that closes, even temporarily, the fabric of connectedness for older people across Scotland becomes more eroded.

Calls for action

Older people's community groups make Scotland a happier and healthier place to live.

We are calling for the Scottish Government, local authorities, funders, politicians, and other partners to commit to continuing to provide groups with the resources and support they need to flourish in the long term.

There are a number of things which we can all do across Scotland to ensure this:

- Recognise the vital work which older people's community groups are doing
- Ensure there is wider acknowledgement and awareness of the role played by groups from the public and wider community
- The wider community could also consider how they can support older people's groups in their communities

More specifically, we have set out a number of targeted recommendations for the Scottish Government, local authorities, and others over the following pages.

Scottish Government

- View investment and support for older people's community groups as a preventative spend
- Continue to recognise loneliness as a key public health issue and view groups as part of the solution to tackling it
- Establish a national fund to support older people's community groups help their members through the cost of living crisis

Local authorities

- Continue to support older people's groups with premises and meeting spaces, funding, grants mechanisms, and other support
- Prioritise maintaining existing infrastructure, such as day centres and lunch clubs, to help people during the cost of living crisis
- Consider whether they can offer "open" or "warm" spaces this winter to help older people's groups and individuals

MSPs and MPs

- Continue to support community groups and recognise how they contribute to making Scotland a better place to grow older

Funders

- Recognise the needs of older people's groups and build these into criteria
- Ensure they are as accessible as possible to groups and communities
- Provide unrestricted funding to ensure the greatest flexibility

Age Scotland

We also have a role to play in continuing to strengthen and support older people's community groups:

- Continue to listen to and engage with older people's groups and support them to have their voices heard by decision makers
- Assist with continuing to publicise the good work done by older people's community groups across Scotland

Changes in membership

"We have lost a few members due to death and are finding it difficult to get new members at present."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"Whilst the majority of the active elderly members were delighted to return to face to face interactions, approximately 20, who all had to cope with shielding arrangements, have not returned."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Glasgow City

"Our regular attendees sat at between 25 and 35 pre-pandemic. Now a good attendance is around 17/18 with the average over our three opening days each week being only 13. So, we have seen a drop of more than 50% in our regular attendance, which in turn has an impact on the shed's funds. We currently have 42 active members."

Volunteer-led Men's shed, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"Sadly, we lost a couple of our members during Covid, but we have a couple of new members since starting back in September 2021."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 10-24 members, Fife

"Although we lost some of our members through illness, we have at least six new ladies coming to our coffee mornings..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Falkirk

"The membership has become younger. A number of members in the 70 to 80 age band passed away. New members are in the 60 to 70 age band."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Highland

"Although we unfortunately lost a number of members to covid, I am glad to say that we have held our own and seen a very small increase in numbers."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services and social activities, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"A number of regular shedders have not returned since covid struck. They have been contacted personally. Most wish to retain a link with the shed, but some still do not have enough confidence to return, plus they are 2 years older. We have however got some new members to take their place."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"Our numbers are down about 40% since the pandemic. Either our service users have passed away, become housebound or gone into a nursing home. We are now encouraging new members and working with those who have lost their confidence to go out."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

"During the pandemic, our activities reduced to online programmes, which greatly diminished participation. When we were able to meet again, our membership grew exponentially."

Volunteer-led group providing health improving activities, 25-49 members, Argyll and Bute

"Increased by 15 new members."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Argyll and Bute

"We have received a Scottish Government wellbeing grant to increase our membership and so far we have gone from 48 to 87."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, services and lobbying/campaigning, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"Organisation is still operating at a reduced capacity since reopening in July 2021, although we are slowly increasing the amount of members in the centre on a daily basis."

Staffed organisation providing services, 50-100 members, City of Edinburgh

"Less members. Members need more support."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Moray

"With the ending of covid restrictions we have started recruiting again."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 50-100 members, East Renfrewshire

"4 members 'passed' during covid; 5 members now in 'poor health' and unable to attend."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, North Ayrshire

"It reduced from just over 100. We started back in September 2021 with around 45 participants and are now back up to around 80 and are inviting new members for most of our classes."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social and educational activities, 50-100 members, North Lanarkshire

"This is due to deaths and members going into care."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"We have lost a few of our members since the pandemic."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"It has reduced due to bereavements during the pandemic."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Stirling

"A lot of members have medical issues since the pandemic. Plus we were not allowed to use the same venue. Plus a lot of ladies have mental health issues, i.e. being afraid to go out."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, South Lanarkshire

"Pre-pandemic we operated two sessions each week over two separate days for two different groups. Men - Tuesday and Wednesday, average attendance was 6-10 both days, but is now about 6. Ladies - Monday and Thursday, average attendance was 8-13 both days, but is now about 3."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Scottish Borders

"We have less coming now but we are working hard to encourage them to attend. We still have all the hygiene measures, CO2 monitor and heap filters in place to make the Centre as safe as possible and working really hard on an exciting programme of activities and guest speakers to encourage more to come back and welcome new members."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Shetland Islands

"Ten of our regular members have passed away and several have advised they will wait until September before returning to Lunch Club."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Highland

"During the pandemic the committee contacted elderly people in the group and outwith the group. This, I think, has helped to increase our numbers."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"Some have moved on to long term care. Some sadly passed away. Some not as fit as they were pre-pandemic."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Moray

"A lot have either passed or are no longer able to swim, but I try to keep in touch with them either by post or a phone call and invite them down to our wee dances where they listen to the music and blether to friends."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

During the pandemic

"We ran a weekly online exercise class and kept in touch with some of the members by phone."

Volunteer-led organisation providing health improving activities, 25-49 members, Argyll and Bute

"Monthly doorstep delivery of activity pack or resources. Supported the local authority food parcel deliveries. Weekly emails to members with information on covid restrictions or other services being offered (including Age Scotland phone service) – letter to members not on email. Offered food shopping service."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Argyll and Bute

"We delivered meals on wheels, collected prescriptions, delivered shopping etc as well as offering support and advice by telephone"

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We carried out weekly welfare phone calls to all our members – we still do this for those that cannot attend activities. We delivered audio books, shopping, and any other items such as aids for independent living. We carried out socially distanced garden visits to alleviate social isolation; we continued to issue quarterly newsletter."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services, and support for those with a visual impairment, 50-100 members, Dundee, Angus, and Fife

"We delivered Easter and Christmas parcels to our members and tried to keep in touch with the ones living on their own or needing support."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, South Ayrshire

"Deliveries of food/medication to various homes; Books/jigsaw deliveries; afternoon tea box deliveries to sheltered housing complexes; telephone befriending weekly service; targeted 'in person' meetings."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Dundee City

"We provided meals to homeless and people in need. We organised charity nights for local rape and abuse centre. We provided elderly people with meals who were struggling and we organised zoom calls for them to meet up."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, more than 100 members

"No meetings were held at the shed. Several members were involved in a food distribution programme for those in need and elderly people who hadn't resources."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Highland

"Online: tai chi, dementia support, bereavement support, social activities, IT classes; Phone: befriending; face to face (when appropriate): befriending."

Staffed organisation providing services and social activities, more than 100 members, East Renfrewshire

"We ran zoom sessions twice per week to ensure continued contact particularly for those who would have suffered from social isolation without these sessions."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"Food delivery to veterans and their families; prescription deliveries; hospital/doctor visits; communication to combat isolation; zoom groups, bingo etc, home repairs when required (emergency)."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and veterans' services, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"We delivered food parcels, prescription medicines, activity packs, and general help and guidance during pandemics. These activities were in person following the social distancing protocols. We also arranged zoom Zumba and yoga sessions."
Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 10-24 members, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, and Stirling

"We kept in touch with all the groups and operated a telephone buddy system where volunteers would phone someone weekly for a chat. We sent out afternoon teas, small packs with magazines, crossword puzzles, home baking, and cards made by the toddler group. We organised an online tea dance and helped with online connections and delivered afternoon teas. We also had volunteers who

collected shopping and prescriptions for those who were shielding. We did a weekly online cooking class and sent out ingredients and knitting and sewing materials to the group."
Volunteer-led lobbying/campaigning organisation, 50-100 members, Stirling

Current activities

"We have started back up again and are more or less back to what we were doing pre-covid. Most of the groups who use our hall have started back too."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Falkirk

"All meetings and services including outings to events back to pre-covid levels."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, South Ayrshire

"Normal service offered within day centre but numbers still low. Alternative service continued after we reopened."
Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We are back to meeting once a week again but now finish earlier in the afternoon at 2.30pm as the transport is taxis who have other calls on their time."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"We have now reopened about 75% of all our services. Numbers are down from pre pandemic levels and we are working with service users to rebuild their confidence to get out again."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

"We have started back but just starting to get into a routine again as we had problems filling the committee."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"Our services are now fully operational and home visits increasing month by month."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Aberdeen City

"It has been really hard to re-establish activities once again. Having been told to socially distance for instance it is hard for people to accept that they can now get back to 'normal' or resume the way things were..."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Scottish Borders

"...After a long battle with the local authority we opened with vastly reduced numbers. From 16 down to 6 users per day. We have only just been allowed to increase this back to pre-pandemic levels in the last week."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"We are trying to resume pre-pandemic activities. Helping to identify those suffering the effects of isolation and ill health from lockdown."

Volunteer-led veterans' group/organisation, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"We are back to our social evenings with entertainment and meals for over 100 pensioners."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Aberdeenshire

"...we have been running a service of installing interlink smoke/fire detectors to members on request we have also been active lobbying to our MSP & local councillor in improving the my bus scheme for our members in need."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 50-100 members, East Ayrshire

"Our walking group is fully operational although numbers are slightly reduced."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Clackmannanshire

Venue availability

"During the pandemic...the venues used became vaccination centres and others were taken out of commission to be upgraded. All our venue costs have increased in light of rising energy bills."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services, and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

"Cannot hire venue we were in for over 20 years...Some members have medical issues and cannot get to new venue in a different area."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100

members, South Lanarkshire

"Our running costs for meeting place are very expensive. We were unable to secure use of previous building – we now rent from council and costs are very high, with numbers attending low."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"As a new group, we are faced with all the challenges involved in a men's shed start-up - securing premises, adapting these to our needs, equipping them to meet the needs and ambitions of the group - all the time ensuring safety and inclusivity."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We need to have a venue to meet that is a priority. We are lucky to have the venue we have and hopefully will continue to have, but we have a few other options if this is necessary."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 10-24 members, Inverclyde

"We are a remote island off the coast of the Isle of Lewis with a fairly high number of older people who live alone and need company."

We are the only social club here offer a chance to meet others during the day time, many older people do not want to go out in the evenings, and as such we need to be able to continue to use the community centre and cover our costs for hall hire, refreshments and the odd trip out to ensure that our members have a safe, warm and comfortable place to come to and meet friends and take part in gentle activities thus reducing the feelings of isolation and loneliness."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Membership and attendance

"Still some covid-affected members. Also some hesitancy of members to return fully."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 50-100 members, Aberdeen City

"Keeping up level of members and volunteers and finding funding to cover essential costs incurred in maintaining a viable group."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, South Ayrshire

"Less people come, afraid of covid. We are trying to keep the club going. One day we were only two but we sat full time."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 25-49 members, South Lanarkshire

"The numbers who are finding it hard to resume 'pre-pandemic' activities is a cause of real concern to our small committee, but we hope to persuade them to come out in October."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, North Lanarkshire

"We are a new social club, we are the first mixed club, advertising is and advice on how to acquire new members is a problem."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, East Ayrshire

"We would like more members, especially younger people."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Stirling

"Drop in numbers for sequence dancing – discontinued."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Falkirk

Committees, staffing and volunteers

"If we cannot increase the membership, then the member's contributions will not be sufficient to meet the running costs of the shed. And it will be forced to close."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"...Some weeks the attendance can be really low and income that week doesn't cover the cost of hall time and other outgoings - e.g., monthly admin costs."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"Prior to the pandemic we had 26 active members. Post pandemic we have 10 members of which 7 active. Our plans to involve 30 members active is still realistic once the shed is fully open again and PR campaign is launched to attract interest."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Highland

"It is a challenge to get new people to take office and recruiting new members is an ongoing challenge."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"We lost a few of our committee members during the pandemic but ongoing trying to recruit more."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"...members are reluctant to get involved in committee roles. It is the same people who do most organising."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"More people coming forward to take up trustee & office bearers people are content when all is going well but not willing to be active in the running of a club at present we are running on the bare bones of a committee but we will survive."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 50-100 members, East Ayrshire

"New Committee Members maybe younger with fresh ideas to encourage more people to attend."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, North Lanarkshire

"Trustees, chair, volunteers that can use a computer for website, mail and advertising..."
Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"During the pandemic we lost 70% of our staff members and 40% of our service users..."
Staffed organisation providing social activities, services, and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

"Whilst members are very willing to assist 'on the day' difficult to recruit walk leaders who plan, ensure safety etc."
Volunteer-led walking group, 10-24 members, Angus

"Reduction in our volunteer pool."
Staffed organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Glasgow City

"Our biggest problem is the recruitment of volunteer drivers."
Volunteer-led organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Perth and Kinross

"We need some more Volunteers and also more core funding to run the Community Car Scheme."
Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 50-100 members, Highland

"Due to covid we are basically having to start from scratch with an even bigger hill to climb finding volunteers and funding to fulfil our dream of building community."
Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Highland

"We need a few more volunteers or look at a part time paid member of staff to support the group as we are all in the age group of 70 Plus, very few are in the 64 to 69 age group. There is no taxi service in the village and we are dependent on volunteers to pick up some of our members."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Shetland Islands

"Increase in number of active volunteers (local campaign ongoing)."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"To maintain staffing levels both paid and volunteers..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"Also most of our volunteers are also elderly and we have NO younger volunteers willing to take over their positions so in the near future we shall have much reduced volunteer numbers so will have great difficulty remaining open."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 10-24 members, Falkirk

Funding

"Our core funding from the local authority has not increased in several years. With rising wage costs, fuel increases etc we will struggle to meet costs this year. Costs will have to be passed onto our service users in order to balance our finances."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"Our grant from health and social care covers approx. 70% of salaries and associated costs (21/22) leaving us to find c. 32K before any other expenditure. A 6.6% pay rise has been applied for 22/23 along with rising employer NI and employer pension costs before we pay any other expenses. Fundraising - limited opportunities."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"Because we are a small club and rent and insurance etc is going up we find it difficult to raise funds. We don't wish to increase membership fees."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"Secure, long term funding. Many funders have changed priorities during the pandemic, with some now excluding services such as ours. This is a concern."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, more than 100 members, East Renfrewshire

"Additional funding would help to ensure the future of club. At present we raise our own funding from hall lets which might not be sufficient in

the near future to cover costs. Most of our members are on the basic state pension and cannot assist financially."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Argyll and Bute

"Per our grant application we are experiencing meal cost increases of 88% which the elderly cannot fund...Member numbers have reduced but as mentioned we anticipate this rising by Sept 2022..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Highland

"We are seeking grants/additional funding to continue operating. Membership is slowly increasing but financial constraints prohibiting a return to pre-covid numbers at the moment."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We are trying our best to keep our club going. Any help financially will be welcomed."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 25-49 members, South Lanarkshire

"We work from year to year not knowing if we will have enough support to continue, if this could be assured for even two or three years it would take a lot of the stress out of running a club."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, services, and lobbying/campaigning, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"We urgently require a rise in core funding from East Lothian Health and Social Care Partnership. Greater support from the local authority in the maintenance and upgrading of our premises which is leased from them. We had to raise £20K to make alterations to allow us to re-open."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"We are currently extremely worried regarding core costs for staffing and running costs. Due to the increase in the number of people benefitting from our organization, it is mandatory that we secure funding to recruit 2 salaried workers which can ensure the smooth running and management of the group."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 10-24 members, Clackmannanshire, Falkirk, and Stirling

"Because we are a small group of elderly women we have concerns about funding for help with outings etc."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Renfrewshire

"We require financial support by way of soft grant to assist our members with the cost of meals and subsidise outings events. The elderly are struggling with the cost of living and without grant support for the lunch club many would be precluded on the grounds that they could not afford to attend."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Highland

"Core funding - we can do fantastic community work (jolly bags of kindness) but needs fund to do so, hence much effort put into trying to secure grant funding."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, North Ayrshire

"Our organisation is primary funded by the local council and we have had to demonstrate 9% efficiency savings, despite rising costs across the board. This core funding is our baseline but with the cost of living

rising so significantly, my concern is the funding will not allow us to cover our basic services in the future."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services, and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

Coronavirus impacts and safety concerns

"We need pensioners to have the confidence to go out again, many are still afraid to leave their homes."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Glasgow City

"More local awareness and confidence over covid safety issues."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"Being isolated and less active for the 14 months we were closed appears to have accelerated mobility loss, dementia issues etc as well as having a noted negative impact on our members' mental health and confidence."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We find some of our members are reluctant to come out and mix with others, but slowly we can see they are beginning to enjoy the company of their friends."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, Falkirk

"People are finding it hard to come back into social settings for fear of getting covid."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"I think people are too worried about mixing, also some have lost their confidence."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, South Ayrshire

"Many of the members and indeed others who attended our men's shed had sheds of their own. With lockdowns and covid the automatic response was to self-isolate. Members are still self-isolating in their sheds. No members, no visitors. Lack of requests equates to drop in funding. It will take a long time to return to original numbers and activities."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Moray

"Our group is mainly in the 80+ age range and a number of them lost confidence and didn't feel that they could go out on their own."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, North Lanarkshire

"We are working to get those who lost confidence or were unwell during covid lockdown, back into mainstream community."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and veterans' services, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

Transport and travel

"If our group want to go on an outing we have to hire transport as we live in a rural community and the local bus service albeit reliable does not take us from our homes to our destination in one journey."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, South Ayrshire

"Rising fuel costs, our drivers use their own cars. We are also struggling to find enough volunteer drivers."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Perth and Kinross

"Some ladies are wheelchair bound and are isolated in their houses, if we can get help with transport they also can come and join us, a change for them at least once a week."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 50-100 members, West Lothian

"Funding for travel to allow elderly people to feel safe and to allow them to attend groups safely."

Volunteer-led lobbying/campaigning organisation, 50-100 members, Stirling

"Grant funders do not always consider the value and importance of outings for the elderly who are not able to travel independently. Therefore funding applications for this are often unsuccessful resulting in groups not applying."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, South Ayrshire

"Organisations like ourselves are struggling with rising transport costs and we are unable to get social work community transport since reopening."

Staffed ethnic minorities organisation, more than 100 members, City of Edinburgh, Midlothian East Lothian and West Lothian

"Bus hire costs are horrendous e.g., to Largs from East Kilbride £490."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, South Lanarkshire

"The cost of transport has become problematic..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"...Replace minibus, while we still have designated parking space..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

Tackling social isolation and loneliness

"...Our members live alone and so look forward to meeting up with others and taking part in our activities. This in turn helps alleviate loneliness and isolation in the community."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 10-24 members, Fife

"The sense of family and togetherness...a rejection of loneliness and isolation."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Dundee City

"The main benefits of our group are keeping its members free from loneliness in their own homes and isolation. You can see the difference in our members as they mix and enjoy a blether with others and taking part in our games and activities."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 10-24 members, Fife

"Reduced social isolation; improved mental wellbeing...to offer a gateway back into society for those who have been excluded."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Highland

"Many of our members felt lonely during the whole covid period and were so happy when we re-opened again. Ongoing structural work on our premises meant we couldn't offer any services during that time."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Falkirk

"Reduction in social isolation; the establishment of supporting relationships; the opportunity to engage with their peer group..."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Argyll and Bute

"Social interaction (fun) carer respite; something to look forward to; physical/cognitive stimulation."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Fife

"Our members tell us we are their lifeline. Some view us as their family. We provide nutritious food, company, and activities. We look out for their wellbeing and support them with practical issues and offer advice or seek help as appropriate.

Assisting members in this way offers respite to carers and families as well as reducing pressure on care service requirements, e.g., lunchtime visits."

Staffed organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"Ability to meet and talk with friends, listen to various speakers or enjoy singing and music, all with a cup of tea and transport provided."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, East Ayrshire

"Our group provides company for our members and a good meal at lunch time. Our members look forward to meeting members of their own age every week and playing their games in the morning

and bingo in the afternoon."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Aberdeenshire

"Main benefit is it gives change to come out twice a week, look forward to chat and go out for a meal. Helps to cut out loneliness which is the main cause of depression for older people."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 25-49 members, South Lanarkshire

"Happy faces at the club, great days out for all especially the ones who live alone."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, East Ayrshire

"Daily social activities to alleviate loneliness of social exclusion. Activities are mostly gentle exercise based which improves mental health and mobility. Attendees can have a 2 course lunch each day giving them the opportunity to enjoy a home cooked meal with others. The camaraderie and enjoyment members gain from attending."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, services, and support for people with a visual impairment, 50-100 members, Dundee, Angus, and Fife

"Attending the group reduces isolate on improves health and wellbeing and offers a safe environment in which to rebuild friendship and encourage new friendships. Being part of the community."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, North Lanarkshire

"Friendship, support, interests and interesting speakers, meals out, activities, coach trips."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, City of Edinburgh

"We meet weekly in afternoons so helps people meet other older people so helps with loneliness and our trips allow them to get away for a day."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Renfrewshire

"Meeting with people of similar ages and being able to share experiences and stories about current and past activities and concerns..."

Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Moray

"Social cohesion, prevent isolation and loneliness, mutual support, leisure, health and keep fit class."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Clackmannanshire, Stirling, and Falkirk

"Social intercourse is of the essence. Folk are really keen to meet again after covid restrictions. Fun and fellowship, sharing and caring hallmarks of our week club. Trips are really important as most are otherwise stuck at home."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, North Ayrshire

"Reduces loneliness, helps with mental health issues and support. Provides community services, builds confidence in individuals, raises self-esteem."
Volunteer-led Men's Shed, 10-24 members, Highland

"Reduce loneliness and isolation... allow individuals to stay mobile and connected. Interaction with likeminded people."
Staffed organisation providing social activities, services, and Men's Shed, more than 100 members, Renfrewshire

"Attendees value social contact. The focus of attending a session helps structure the week and supports general wellbeing, mobility and connections with local community."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Falkirk

"Making new friendships and rekindling old ones. Enjoying speakers or entertainers. Bus outings to places of interest which would normally not be possible. Helps with mental health problems being able to socialise."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, South Lanarkshire

"Our club is the only group meeting in our village. As we no longer have a shop or community hall it is the only way for us to meet regularly and keep in touch."
Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Dumfries and Galloway

"We try to stop isolation in the over 50s although we have lost some of our older members, we are still getting new people to join. So it seems we are still helping people by giving them somewhere to go and meet friends and enjoy themselves instead of sitting at home alone."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"Keeps people connected; they have support and friendships and feel less isolated and lonely. They make new friends and learn new skills and talk about their lives, everyone has a story to tell..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Shetland Islands

"It's nice to have all our pensioners together. Many had not been able to contact friends since lockdown. Our functions are well attended and thoroughly enjoyed by all."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Aberdeenshire

"Being able to socialise together, meet old friends and make new ones."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Glasgow

"Our organisation combats the threat of social isolation amongst the active elderly in a community where many of them have no local family support. However our member's families are in turn comforted by the knowledge that we provide social connections at little or no cost to their elderly relatives."

Staffed organisation providing social activities, more than 100 members, Glasgow

"People enjoy the company and especially those who live alone. Hopefully, speakers are returning to us and the members always enjoy this."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Stirling

"The number of clubs like ours that have gone since the coronavirus is vast and as I think that we are the best way to fight loneliness and isolation it is essential that those left are supported to ensure they do not go the same way as so many others."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, services, and lobbying/campaigning, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"Living on an island with some villages quite remote from the centre, it is very beneficial for those living in the remote villages to be able to attend our club. The pandemic left our island's elderly quite fractured over the last few years, it is evident at the club that we all feel stronger together."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"Somewhere to socialise weekly in the company of friends. Getting out of the house to combat isolation and loneliness. Stimulation of interesting speaker topics, mental stimulation of organised activities. Communication and laughter with friends."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, South Ayrshire

"Getting out of the house' and meeting others is often said by members as the most important things for them. Giving them something to look forward to each week is vital to their mental health..."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"The main benefits of attending our group is to combat loneliness and isolation and to provide friendship and companionship to a growing elderly community in which we live in. Our group is here to ultimately make a difference to people's lives."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, South Ayrshire

"What has come across at our meetings, and especially the coffee mornings/afternoons, is 'having contact'. People have said on being invited to a coffee event that this was the first time they had been out socially since the beginning of the pandemic. Our normal meetings have been better attended because people wanted social contact."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, East Lothian

"Prevents isolation, encourages socialising, provides the tenants with company, fun, exercise etc. Many see no one else but this group. Good for their wellbeing and mental health. Some are/remain very anxious following covid and lockdown."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 10-24 members, Moray

Age Scotland's support and impact

"Veteran breakfast clubs offer comradeship and a common link with past experiences. The informal communication and banter breaks down barriers and has helped many with mental health issues. Demand led from meeting once a month to weekly and the pre-breakfast walks help."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and veterans' services, 25-49 members, North Ayrshire

"Allowing others to get together to have a chat and to have a meal together as many of them live quite far apart from each other. It's the only chance that they can meet as a group."

Volunteer-led ethnic minorities organisation, 25-49 members, Perth and Kinross

"There is no doubt in my mind that our club is a lifeline to many, especially those who live on their own. There's a fair buzz in the room - what a racket - laughter and socialising - stimulation and fun. It's an absolute tonic to see and hear this - and a privilege to be part of it."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Scottish Borders

"...It is great that Age Scotland can and does support even small groups such as us and in such remote areas as often we feel that we can be overlooked by people living and working in the central belt."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, under 10 members, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

"Without the backing, help, and advice from Age Scotland and recently the help of Heather Baillie, development officer for Ayrshire, this club could have folded."

Volunteer-led organisation providing services, 50-100 members, East Ayrshire

"Thank you for the support (and funding) from Age Scotland. This was the seed corn money to prime out trial befriending (6 month) project...for which we now have 5 year support and funding."

Staffed organisation providing services, more than 100 members, Dundee City

"Thanks to Age Scotland for their commitment to fighting for the betterment of older people."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities and services, 50-100 members, North Ayrshire

"Just would like to thank Age Scotland for all the help and advice that you give to the older generation and for the work that you all do for the aged. Thank you."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 50-100 members, Renfrewshire

"With the aid of Age Scotland and Sky we now have Sky Digital Champions assisting our master my technology classes. We also received 25 chrome books from Connecting Scotland. These have free Wi-Fi from Vodafone for 2 years at least. This also has a 'ripple effect' with all other classes, e.g., our Tai Chi participants can use YouTube and other 'links' to empowering, educational and entertaining resources. We have a good source of links (many provided by Age Scotland)."

Volunteer-led organisation providing social and educational activities, 50-100 members, North Lanarkshire

"Positive experience of Age Scotland booklets for supporting people with dementia and their unpaid carers – before and during the pandemic – and that continues – so thank you. positive experience of face to face Age Scotland training for Dementia Awareness – thank you."

Volunteer-led organisation providing

services, 50-100 members, South Lanarkshire

"Duns Senior Citizens Club - young@heart, is a vibrant and thriving club. Its members may be ageing but there's plenty life in them yet! Over the years Age Scotland have been very supportive, both financially (grants) and advice and guidance (especially during covid pandemic). Please convey our thanks to all concerned - keep up the good work! Calum Strang Community Development Officer especially!"

Volunteer-led organisation providing social activities, 25-49 members, Scottish Borders



www.agescotland.org.uk

Helpline: 0800 12 44 222

Age Scotland, part of the Age Network, is an independent charity dedicated to improving the later lives of everyone on the ageing journey, within a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in Scotland. Registration Number 153343. Charity Number SC010100.