

Hope for our Future: Sefton's Faith Groups, Community Recovery and Revival

A workshop at Linacre Mission, Bootle

Tuesday 25th October 2022



Welcome and Introduction:

Ven. Pete Spiers, Archdeacon of Knowsley and Sefton

Pete welcomed all to the event, the first face-to-face meeting of the Sefton Faith Forum since the pandemic, and outlined the programme for the morning.



After Covid and towards Sefton 2030 – how faith groups can help deliver the borough vision
Andrea Watts, Executive Director, Sefton MBC

Andrea opened with thanks to all those involved with the faith sector response to Covid-19, noting the vital contribution of local churches and other faith groups.

This also highlighted the importance of the Council commitment to joint working through the New Realities protocol, a collaborative approach to support community need through partnerships. Established in 2015, this has since been revisited to revise outcomes in light of changing conditions and new needs.

Details: <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/your-council/plans-policies/communities/new-realities/>

The Sefton Directory <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/sefton-directory/> provides access to available opportunities and services and feedback was invited on how accurate and user friendly this resource is, noting that digital skills and connectivity are areas for continued support.

The Cost of Living Crisis has brought new issues to the fore with a dedicated Council website page provided with support at: <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/costofliving> . Andrea stressed the important

role of the faith sector as community leaders, getting to know needs and how to help to enable early intervention and effective support. The valuable role of the sector in food banks and pantry provision, and now warm spaces was also highlighted as a crucial component of the borough's capacity to respond.



There is a particular need to recruit additional support for in house foster care and Andrea asked for support from the faith sector to promote opportunities. Current demands require remote care home provision outside the local community which is both costly and less effective support. More details at: <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/children-and-young-people/fostering-adoption/>

Council support is available through the Emergency Limited Assistance Scheme to help with food, energy and other hardships however it was noted that the demands are becoming more extensive and including those in the community who have not previously needed such support. Details at: <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/advice-benefits/emergency-limited-assistance-scheme/>

The Council has become increasingly aware of current challenges with a new Child Poverty Strategy <https://www.sefton.gov.uk/media/5726/childhood-poverty-strategy-proof-3.pdf> showing how the disadvantaged have been disproportionately affected by the impact of the pandemic, with evidence of a 17% increase in child poverty in Sefton over the past 5 years. Although overall data for the borough may 'even out' it is increasingly evident that there are local pockets of high deprivation, including areas with the relatively low gross weekly earning and high levels of free school meal need.

Childhood poverty and related adverse childhood experiences can produce long-term impacts and the Strategy includes work with partners to support better paid employment, encourage pathways from volunteering into employment. Additional Council initiatives include measures to reduce fuel poverty through the retrofitting of properties for those on the lowest incomes and the provision of additional affordable housing.

Andrea concluded noting that with continued – and increased public sector budget challenges the role of the faith and community sector will become ever more important and she urged representatives to feedback on any barriers or support needed to help sustain and develop this partnership.

Questions and comment from those attending followed, brief summary:

- Perhaps Church bodies as land owners could develop housing?
 - o Sandway Homes Ltd. directly contributes to Sefton’s housing strategy with affordable homes.
- Could there be a faith-led solution to provide homes for children in care with safe family support?
 - o Properties are being developed across the Liverpool City Region through ‘We are Juno CIC’ as ‘not for profit’ homes.
 - o The process takes time, identifying property, recruiting staff, etc.
- Challenges for groups to maintain volunteer capacity from communities struggling financially, needing to work longer hours.

Responding to Challenge: Food Equality

Debbie Shelley, St Leonard’s Youth and Community Centre

Richard Owens, Compassion Acts



St Leonard’s Youth and Community Centre

South Sefton Foodbank has been running for ten years, and there are now three South Sefton Foodbank pantries at: Caradoc Mission; Linacre Mission and St Leonard’s. ‘Your local pantry’ membership is £3.50 per visit for up to £20-25 worth of food – the value increasing now as inflation impacts on costs. This is also a concern as the pantries struggle to keep charges at the same level.

<https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/pantry-listings/south-sefton-st-leonard-s-y-c-c-pantry/>

The pantries provide a cost effective option through bulk buy, sourcing locally and also take Healthy Start vouchers to support young families. Additional initiatives include links with the Taking Root network volunteers and 'gleaning' – harvesting surplus produce such as cabbage and kale from local market gardens. Apples have been collected from the National Trust at Speke Hall.

Up to 80 people attend each weekly session which take place on different days at the venues, and there are links with St Leonard's Lottery funded community resilience project, providing a wraparound service including debt advice, self-help and activities with additional signposting to support. Agencies refer to St Leonard's and wide support is available with activities including craft and mindfulness at the Centre's Strand hub.

There are no criteria for food pantry use – these are open to all and Debbie noted that those in need now include many working people, including health-workers. Older people derive additional social benefit from the pantry and café support.

Compassion Acts

The North Sefton provision, in Southport and Formby shares some common issues with the previous South Sefton services. Beneficiaries include those referred to as 'just about managing'.

The pantry model is a £5 charge for about £25 worth of food and other essentials, the provision includes a community café as an important place of engagement for a chat, signposting and shopping support. Help includes benefits and debt advice, assistance with form filling.



The pantry takes donations and has shared good practice with others nationally. There are five venues in Southport and Formby, offering a 12 month membership by referral or self-referral – not linked to postcode (people may not want to use their local food pantry). The annual membership is on the basis that it is temporary, needs may change and the aim is to avoid dependency or a long term support.

Additional services include courses and financial management, with the strength of the church and support infrastructure, bringing the community together. More details at: <https://compassionacts.uk/food-pantry/>

Responding to Challenge: Sefton Ukraine Welcome Appeal – multi-agency response

Alan Lewis, Crosby Methodist Church

Alan has led local response in South Sefton collecting donations with Ukraine Welcome Centre established in the former Blundellsands Methodist church. Over 100 people have volunteered with a core group of 50 providing community support.

He outlined the plight of those arriving – with little or no English language and at most a suitcase of clothes and belongings. Essential support has comprised a welcome, and help with food, toiletries and clothing. Support has been provided for Homes for Ukraine sponsors. Challenges range from adapting to different culture and lifestyle, to pathways into work, the latter complicated by incompatible qualifications necessitating additional study, including language classes and support for business language with secondments to enable introduction to opportunities.



From an initial provision of 6 months support – hosts may commit for up to three years – ongoing issues include accommodation, with inevitable tensions from lengthy shared living and the need for suitable, affordable housing options to enable progression to settlement with independent living. Continued partnership working with Sefton Council, Sefton CVs and others will help sustain support. More details at: <https://www.uacentre.org/> .

Facing the Future – Opportunities for Action



Four breakout workshops were held to consider current activity, support available and discuss additional examples of good practice and areas of need. Brief summaries of each session follow:

1- Coping with the Cost of Living Crisis

James Green, Together Liverpool

Comments collated from those attending the session:

Issues and concerns

- The current crisis is complicated, cutting across all needs owing to energy cost increases.
- There are increased needs throughout the community.
- Advocacy and policy change – want to do more.
- Food bank places of welcome – need a bigger room to accommodate who wants to come along.
- Limited reuse of old church properties for housing.
- Children’s work but it’s difficult because of covid generation issues.
- Extra strain on schools – e.g. increased mental health issues post pandemic.
- Unhealed grief – pandemic generation.
- Increasing anxiety – reductions in donations, food, etc increasing dependence on charities to do more.
- People coming to the food bank having not eaten for days.
- Asylum seekers and refugees relying on foodbanks.

- Decline in mental and physical health, increase in loneliness, increase in fear, people scared of the following months, the rich get richer – the poor get poorer.
- Cycle of Mental Health concerns and poverty.
- Doubling of food bank attendance, more attending pantries or church lunch clubs.
- Schools contacting church for hampers for holidays to help families.
- Work that does not pay the bills.
- Worry of food banks heating and housing needs.

Response

- Faith sector can provide hope - there is always another way – you are not alone.
- Partnership working can help bring efficiencies and expand provision.
- Faith sector responses include:
 - o Food banks.
 - o provision of warm spaces (more than 40 across the archdiocese).
 - o extended places of welcome and hours.

2- Working together to maximise response

Zoe Starling, Brighter Living Partnership
Maggi Aslet, Sefton CVS

Barriers and solutions

- Finding the best ways to communicate and finding the time to link when people are so busy with the many roles they have.
- Fr. Tony Slingo spoke about the success of the WAVE (Woodvale Ainsdale Volunteering Enterprise) meeting and how it is a zoom once a month attended by a range of groups and community stakeholders including churches, schools as well as community organisations such as Ainsdale Lunch and Leisure, and Woodvale and Ainsdale Community Association.
- The meeting is an opportunity for groups to link, share information and offer support for the different projects in Ainsdale and Woodvale. It has been particularly successful in sharing information to support young people.
- Zoe Starling outlined her role as a social prescriber and how she links in faith organisations in North Sefton. She identifies needs which she shares with organisations and also signposts the different groups they offer such as luncheon clubs.
- Social prescribers are keen to link in with different organisations and an action from the group was to share the information on social prescriber leads with the forum.

Networks

- Maggi spoke about how a good way to link in with different organisations is to join any of the additional networks ran by Sefton CVS depending on need. These include:
 - o Every Child Matters Forum and the Thrive Network,
 - o Health and Social Care Forum,
 - o Sefton in Mind,
 - o Performers Network
- Relevance will depend on the activities of the faith organisation. More details at: <https://seftoncvcs.org.uk/networks-and-forums/>
- Making contact with the development team at Sefton CVS can enable introductions both internally within CVS but also to a wide range of community groups. This helps groups to coordinate, collaborate and helps avoid the duplication of services.

Additional information [post-event]

- Senior social prescribing contacts for Sefton comprise:
 - o Bootle - Heidi.Clark@seftoncv.org.uk -
 - o Seaforth and Litherland - Meadhbh.McDaid@seftoncv.org.uk
 - o Crosby and Maghull - Sarah.Moreton@seftoncv.org.uk
 - o Southport and Formby - Nikki.williams@brighterliving.org.uk
- There is a Churches and Social Prescribing webinar on 1pm on 5 December – details at:
- <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/churches-and-social-prescribing-tickets-444071458687>

3- Volunteering opportunities and support

Lauren Jones, Cat Hughes, Volunteer Centre, Sefton CVS

Issues and comment

- Birkdale Methodist Church. They are looking to develop warm spaces. Their volunteers are getting older and they want to know how they can retain enough people to do all they would like to do.
- The Waterloo Sefton Food Bank are low on volunteers.
- Noted that many churches rely on older volunteers and we can't do what we want to do.
- Need to reach volunteers who don't think of themselves on volunteers. Micro volunteers' small acts of kindness.
- The formality of volunteering can be off putting. Volunteering like acts of kindness, such as shopping for a neighbour.
- A volunteer led Formby Football Club during Covid called all their members (kids up to pensioners) to check on how they are. The lady who did all the calling is a volunteer.

Support available

- Sefton CVS Volunteer Centre provides support <https://volunteeringsefton.org.uk/> , promoting organisations and their volunteer roles.
- Also provide guidance and a volunteer co-ordinators' network.
- Social Prescribing works refer clients to volunteering, ensuring opportunities are appropriate for the individual.
- green social prescribing, for example like Friends of Darby Park. Its grown and made a difference.
- Looking into doing more the acts of kindness and micro volunteers.
- Citizens 4 Good provides a regular opportunity for volunteer recognition at a local event – details on the Volunteer Centre website.
- Discussion how volunteering both formal and informal is key to a healthy, functioning community.

4- Climate change and sustainability

Nigel Sharp, Sefton CVS

Context

- A legacy of high levels of consumption of carbon resources releasing CO₂ contributing to greenhouse effect with damaging impact on the climate.
- Increased warming of climate with global impact including weather extremes from floods to forest fires, widespread effects on environment, wildlife, agriculture and health.

- International response required to changes – HM Gov. commitment to net zero carbon by 2050; Liverpool City Region (LCR) similar pledge by 2040. Sefton Council aim by 2030.
- LCR recommendation – a need ‘to engage, encourage and educate’.

Example

- Sefton CVS set up a Climate Task group in 2019 to review the organisation and its operations.
- Included a staff travel (commute and work related) survey to inform a ‘Carbon Footprint’ Report, establishing an annual benchmark with actions for change.
- Aim to encourage and support change in organisation and raise staff/ family/ community awareness of issues and opportunities to make a difference.
- Anchor community bodies are trusted local leads with an influential role to bring positive behaviour change, e.g.
 - o reduced travel – increased public transport use, car share, active travel
 - o building energy efficiency surveys with reduction/mitigation measures
 - o procurement to use local materials, reuse, recycle
 - o staff education including carbon literacy training

Other examples, comment and support

- Emmaus undertaking energy audit of buildings and considering recommendations including installation of solar panels
- Looking at procurement of electric vehicles.
- Community garden provides local produce.
- Emmaus activity committed to recycling, upcycling and reuse.
- YKids – children enthusiastic, optimistic, older young people more concerned, challenge to involve and help make a difference
- Climate and environmental issues can help engage young people in local activity
- St Peter’s Church, Formby, St John’s Ainsdale and St Mary’s Waterloo are several local ‘eco-churches’ – details at: <https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/>
- Building energy efficiency audits and improvement, upcycling, uniform re-use and community gardening were highlighted as positive work.
- Tangible economic benefits from energy efficiency now more acute.
- Ukraine crisis refugees show both positive reuse and recycling of clothing and materials but also highlight just how much unnecessary stuff people have!
- A personal carbon footprint calculator is available at: <https://www.carbonindependent.org/>

Sefton Faith Forum – Closing comment, opportunities and next steps

James Green, Together Liverpool

Ven. Pete Spiers, Archdeacon of Knowsley and Sefton

James commented on the special and important role of the faith sector, connected and embedded in the community with local knowledge and the potential to support groups which may be otherwise isolated. He noted how the faith sector is a leading provider of support for diverse ages – from toddler groups to the elderly and vulnerable – and able to contribute to social action and social justice.

Together Liverpool is working to support people engaged in social action, with all invited to join the Network of Kindness to build relationships, share learning and campaign together. Details at: <https://togetherliverpool.org.uk/initiatives/join-the-network-of-kindness-members-sign-up>

Together Liverpool is also keen for South Sefton or North Sefton (Formby is the top of this area) organisations to be involved in a Learning Community – contact James for details james.green@togetherliverpool.org.uk

Pete concluded noting that the Sefton Faith Forum has been established for several years and recent, regular zoom meetings have enabled increased flexibility of participation, and may continue to help sustain links coupled with face to face events. He invited any comment on how to further develop or respond to new needs, perhaps with stronger local subgroups or focusing on activity in the future.

In closing, Pete thanked all contributors and Sefton CVS for their support to organise and coordinate the event.



Appendix:**Attendance**

name	organisation
Pete Spiers	Archdeacon Sefton & Knowsley
Pablo Guidi	Archdiocese of Liverpool
Martin Fairweather	Christ Church Southport
Richard Owens	Compassion Acts
Dympna Edwards	Compassion Acts
Nick Thompson	Emmaus
Susan Toothill	Homes for Ukraine, Formby
Val Gee	Linacre Mission
Joan Cumming	Linacre Mission
Doreen Iddon	Liverpool Rd Methodist, Southport
Alan Lewis	Methodist circuit - Ukraine Welcome Centre
Romils Mathew	Our Lady Queen of Peace, Syro Malabar Catholic Church
Richard Cope	Sefton Crisis Cafés
Greg Russell	Sefton Crisis Cafés
Andrea Watts	Sefton MBC
Tony Slingo	St John Stone RC, Ainsdale
Lindsay Jessop	St John's, Ainsdale
Eiryls Jessop	St John's, Ainsdale
Debbie Shelley	St Leonard's Youth and Community Centre
Janet Bissex	St Mary's, Waterloo Park
Paula Bridson	St Matthew & St Leonard, Bootle
Beth Anderson	St Nicholas Church, Blundellsands
Debbie Statter	St Oswald's, Netherton
Gordon MacLeod	St Peter's, Formby
James Green	Together Liverpool
Luke Meehan	YKids

Additional facilitators /officers

Maggi Aslet	Group Development, Sefton CVS -
Zoe Starling	Brighter Living Partnership
Conal Devitt	Social prescribe, Sefton CVS -
Steve Penn	Sefton CVS - IT-support
Lauren Jones	Sefton CVS – Volunteer Centre
Catrin Hughes	Sefton CVS – Volunteer Centre
Nigel Sharp	Sefton CVS – Group Development