Key Messages

Date: 31st March 2026

Co-chairs:

- Tejesh Mistry, Chief Executive at Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS)
- Sarah Redmond, Chief Officer of Development at The Health and Social Care Alliance (The ALLIANCE)

Party Representatives:

- Cllr Euan Davidson from the Scottish Liberal Democrats (ED)
- Emma Harper from the Scottish National Party (EH)
- Patrick Harvie from the Scottish Greens (PH)
- Helen McDade from Reform UK Scotland (HM)
- Carol Mochan from Scottish Labour (CM)
- Brian Whittle from the Scottish Conservatives (BW)

Attendees: 90

Welcome from Chairs

- Both Tejesh Mistry and Sara Redmond shared a summary of the VHS and The ALLIANCE manifesto asks respectively:
  - VHS - Manifesto for Health Creation
  - The ALLIANCE - Our Collective Voice: 2026 Scottish Election Manifesto

Opening Statements:

- ED spoke about the link between where you live and your health, and the importance of focusing on prevention. He further reflected on the need to

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properly back the third sector and to decentralise decision-making. He finished by speaking about the need to better value unpaid carers.

- EH reflected that life expectancy should not be shaped by your postcode, and spoke about the need to shift the balance of care towards preventative and community-based services, including the introduction of walk-in GP clinics. She added that the third sector is central to this shift.
- HM shared her prior role providing the secretariat of the Cross Party Group on ME and her long interest in standing for election. She reflected that health spend is increasing but health outcomes are not improving, and that the NHS is financially unsustainable. She spoke about the need to shift to prevention, and the important role of the third sector.
- PH spoke about his first-hand experience of the value of the third sector from his time working in the sector. He spoke about his advocacy for preventative and rights-based approaches, including an economy that values rights and wellbeing. This includes a progressive approach to taxation.
- CM reflected on the persistence of health inequalities and stated that the public health and preventative approaches are an investment in our communities. She shared the commitment of Scottish Labour to the third sector, and the importance of cross-portfolio working.

Question 1: The third sector has a key role in delivering preventative interventions but often struggle to plan long term due to unsustainable funding and issues with procurement. How would your party ensure that the third sector is sustainably funded or procured to deliver health services?

- PH reflected that fair funding is often difficult to deliver in practice due to late funding settlements from the UK government. He stated that he would bring privatised services back into public hands.
- CM stated that Scottish Labour take this issue seriously and would introduce a New Deal for the third sector as early as possible in the new parliament.
- ED stated that proper funding of Local Government would support the third sector given that they are a major funder of third sector services.
- HM agreed that multi-year settlements for Local Government are important and stated that there needs to be a distinction between services and lobbying in third sector funding.
- EH also agreed that multi-year funding for the third sector is important but again reinforced that the UK government determines the budget for Scotland on an annual basis.
- BW stated that it is not beyond Holyrood to guarantee multi-year funding for the third sector, or at least 80-90% of it. He also stated the need to be able to follow money in a clear way.

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Question 2: What will your party do to ensure that people in Scotland are informed and empowered to make healthy choices, and that commercial actors, such as the food, alcohol, and tobacco industry, are encouraged to promote and provide for a health supporting environment?

- BW reflected on the importance of education for establishing life-long habits/behaviours. He also spoke about the Active Play Network and the role of promoting healthy diet for young people.
- PH stated that it is not just about education. He spoke about the need to increase the availability of healthy food through levies on big retailers and prioritise sustainable travel options.
- EH shared her long interest in healthy food and diet and spoke about the government's Good Food Nation Plan and commitments to the Climate Change Plan.
- ED agreed that education is vital but warned against potentially patronising messaging.
- HM spoke about the role of parents in childhood diet and the need for wider policy, including the Right to Rehab, to support parents in looking after their children. She further spoke about the role of social prescribing.
- CM stated that people do not choose to be unhealthy and we need government intervention to address barriers to healthy living, including on advertising.

Question 3: Evidence shows us that volunteering has health and wellbeing benefits, and that those who would benefit most are least able to access it. This means that many people with disabilities and those living in deprived communities are missing out on the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering. What tangible actions would your party take enable these people to participate in volunteering?

- HM stated that that the party doesn't have a policy on volunteering but reflected from her on volunteering experience that it can be costly to engage people who have additional barriers and that we can't legislate for everything.
- BW also reflected on his volunteering experience and stated that it is becoming more and more difficult for people to volunteer due to bureaucracy. He suggested introducing measures that encourage people to volunteer through their employment, particularly pre-retirement.
- CM spoke about the role of workplaces in helping people to volunteer and reflected on the role of Community Link Workers in supporting people who are socially isolated to volunteer.

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- EH shared that the government should continue to recognise the role of volunteering and reflected on the value of online tools like ALISS. She also spoke about the need to address barriers like rural public transport.
- PH spoke about the value of volunteering for improving health and wellbeing, as well as increasing access to culture and community spaces. He reflected on the need to address cultural barriers including prejudice and stereotypes.
- ED spoke about the importance of multi-year funding for the third sector in supporting volunteering. He also shared the need to invest in social prescribing to realise the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering.

Question 4: How would ensure lived experience becomes an integral part of decision-making and planning around health?

- CM stated that the Scottish Government made great strides in embedding this but said that accessibility needs to be a priority to facilitate participation in decision-making.
- HM also stated that the Parliament has done good work on this. She spoke about the need to provide training for medical staff on ensuring proper time for discussion and increase the length of GP appointments.
- BW spoke about his role on the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and reflected that they had reached out to people really well. He then reflected on how these reports actually influence decision-making, with the National Care Service being the 'worst example'.
- PH said that consultation 'doesn't cut it' and that decision-making bodies need to be more diverse. He stated that the Human Rights Bill would embed people's right to have their voice heard.
- ED reflected about his role on the Edinburgh Integration Joint Board and how it had benefitted from patient voice. He shared the importance of involving voices as early as possible.
- EH reflected on the expertise provided by people with lived experience and shared that the Lung Health CPG meet remotely to improve accessibility. She also shared that patients could request a longer GP appointment.

Question 5: How do you intend to tackle loneliness and social isolation to improve the health of the nation?

- EH spoke about the progress of the Scottish Government in progressing the Loneliness and Isolation Strategy and reflected on the role of social prescribing and volunteering. She shared the good work of the Carers team in Dumfries and Galloway in addressing isolation in young carers.
- ED reflected that this is a big issue in communities and reinforced the need to invest in local services such as social prescribing.

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- HM spoke about the importance of anchor organisations like post offices and reflected on the challenges presented by the shift to online services. She reflected that we need to decide what kind of society we want to live in.
- BW spoke about community erosion that was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. He shared the role of volunteering, the third sector, and other local services.
- CM spoke about the role of services like Cosy Spaces, and the need to ensure funding for third sector services. She also reflected on the importance of intergenerational work.
- PH shared that this links back to everything previously spoken about such as long-term funding, access to volunteering, and community-based services. He also reflected on the harm caused by dangerous messages and propaganda in our online spaces.

Question 6: What will you do in government to prioritise and deliver the potential co-benefits that come from action on climate change that enable people to live healthier lives?

- ED spoke about the need to reform planning policy to promote the development of green spaces. He also spoke about the need to investment in public transport.
- EH shared that climate change mitigation needs to be embedded across portfolios, e.g. the Population Health Framework and the Good Food Nation Plan. She also spoke about the need to target UPF and focus on local food which is often better for the environment.
- PH stated that we currently have a high carbon economy and reflected that we need transform the economy to focus on the wellbeing of the planet as well as the wellbeing of people. He further spoke about sustainable transport infrastructure.
- CM spoke about the need to look at procurement processes, sustainable travel in rural areas, housing, and planning and reflected that technologies that benefit the climate are an investment in the future.
- BW also spoke about procurement processes, specifically the need to improve 'field to fork' transparency in schools and hospitals. He also spoke about the need to improve roads to make bus travel more palatable.
- HM spoke about the need to support farmers, import less food, and keep local shops open by reviving our high streets.

Final Remarks

- HM stressed that Reform UK will continue engaging with the third sector as part of the wider health and social care sector.

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- BW spoke about the importance of the third sector, and the need to integrate the third sector more in statutory services, with a focus on outcomes
- CM share the need to move towards a model that prioritises prevention, focusing on local and third sector interventions that have an equalities focus.
- PH stressed that every party is offering policies that require investment, and that this doesn't reconcile with tax cuts. He spoke about the need to redistribute individual and corporate wealth.
- EH spoke about the need to trust the third sector and ensure ongoing engagement. She also spoke about the importance of a prevention focus.
- ED spoke about the need to shift power and resources back to local communities with genuine co-production.

Tejesh Mistry reflected that an investment in communities is an investment in the future. He further reflected on enabling factors such as social prescribing and volunteering.

He thanked the party representatives, The ALLIANCE colleagues, and closed the event.

For more information about this event, please contact VHS Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Sarah Latto, by emailing sarah.latto@vhscotland.org.uk.

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