

Highland Third Sector Forum 11/2/2010

Agenda Item 4 - Accessibility of HTSF for all voluntary sector organisations

Having asked for this item to be put on the agenda, I must apologise for not being at the meeting to introduce it myself. However, the reason for my absence is, appropriately, at the heart of the problem I wanted to discuss.

I represent an organisation, Inverness Samaritans, which is entirely staffed by volunteers. I believe this to be true of the great majority of voluntary sector organisations in the highlands. Because my paid work is not related to my voluntary work, I've been unable to attend HTSF meetings which are always held during the working day. In this instance, I had hoped to be able to take an early lunch break, but I must now be elsewhere at the time of this meeting.

Whilst there is an online discussion forum operated on behalf of the forum, this is virtually inactive with very few postings over the last few months and no apparent promotion of it's use to widen the accessibility of the forum. Therefore, as it is currently run, the only way to participate in the forum's discussions is to attend the daytime meetings which I (and, I would contend, majority of voluntary sector people) am unable to.

I would say that, as long as this situation prevails, the Forum is unable to meet any of it's purposes as detailed in it's Terms of Reference. A simple first step to addressing this would be for meetings to be held on weekday evenings or at weekends. A good next step would be active promotion of the online forum and positive engagement through it, in advance of forum meetings, to gather input from those unable to attend.

Keith Walker
Chairman, Inverness Samaritans