

As you will be aware, as a result of Scottish Government budget cuts, KoSDT have been unsuccessful in our bid to the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF) to continue to deliver The Energy Advice Service (TEAS) across Sutherland, despite the application being recommended for approval. This has resulted in the loss of the service and the loss of 3 highly valued members of staff.

CCF is the Scottish fund set up to tackle climate change through reducing local carbon emissions. However, the budget to support new projects through the CCF was cut from £5 million last year to £2 million this year. Only 22 schemes were funded in 2019, compared to 65 in 2018. 43 projects, including the application from KoSDT, that were recommended for approval by an independent panel, were not funded. This is despite repeated declarations from SG that we are in the midst of a climate emergency.

On-going public sector cuts, such as this, have changed the funding landscape considerably in recent times. Historically, 1 in 3 Third Sector funding applications were successful; that statistic is now 1 in 20! It is clear that public sector investments are now much harder to secure. This has a knock-on effect for other funding pots such as local community benefit funds secured from local Wind Farms. The availability of community benefit funding is more competitive than ever, meaning that there are inevitably going to be more disappointments as the funds do not have the ability to support all applications.

With current political uncertainty, we have to face the reality that KoSDT, just as any other charity, social enterprise and small business in the country will have to be fit for purpose and ensure that it remains sustainable in the future. This will undoubtedly have an effect of KoSDT and the number of staff members it can employ. In October of 2018, after a sustained period of growth, the Trust was employing 17 members of staff. However, funding for 14 of the 17 staff members was unsecured past June 2019. Therefore, there is a realisation that employing 17 staff was extraordinary and, whilst it should of course be applauded, it will be unlikely to be the norm as we move forwards.

We have already lost 3 staff members as a result of not securing CCF funding; 3 other members of staff have moved on to more secure opportunities as their contracts were running down. We are now in the process of re-applying to the Scottish Government for funding to continue with provision of the Community Foodstop and Keep Active Together Programme. These projects support one full-time and 2 part-time staff members. The funding bid will be submitted in June and although we are confident of being successful, the lessons learned from our unsuccessful application to the climate challenge fund, mean that we also have to be realistic that the investment may not be secured.

This would be another huge blow to KoSDT and the area that we support. However, the Board have made it clear that they wish to proceed with the Foodstop, come what may, as this is a valuable service that needs to continue to deliver in our community. We are looking at viable alternatives.

Given this, there is a need to move the Trust onto a more sustainable, long-term footing to ensure that we continue to be able to deliver for the community in years to come. To do this we are looking at generating income in other ways such as consultancy services, community ownership of renewable energy generation and through a community endowment fund.

At the same time, we will continue to assist and attempt to fund projects which can deliver long-term sustainable growth that strengthen the local community and make a difference to the lives of local people. We will, of course, also continue our work in facilitating other organisations to thrive.

Indeed, in May and June alone, KoSDT will have submitted 6 funding applications to help deliver community projects, secure jobs and help with communication within the area.

Please feel free to drop into the Trust offices at The Barn, Ardgay at any time to discuss ideas, involvement, existing and new projects or just to gain a better idea of what we do and how we do it.

Here's to a sustainable future.

David Watson

KoSDT Manager