**Community retailers ‘sharing good practice’ session
7 March 2017**

**Who was there:**Gordon (Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership), Jack (Gorgie City Farm), Gilly (Community Enterprise), Yvonne (Partnership for Procurement), Karen and Iain (Edinburgh Community Food), Kristina (Glasgow Community Food Network), Mary (Senscot), Alice and Anne (CFHS).

**Issues raised**
1. What is community food?
Lack of clarity about what the term means - differing definitions used across sector / sectors.

2. Social enterprise v charitable aims
Retaining charitable aims whilst becoming more enterprising can cause dilemma within community retailers (CR).

Being grant-free fantastic idea but won’t happen. Funded and commercial sides of CR operation support each other.

3. Community retailers’ capacity
Need community buy-in / ownership, to continue to run fruit and veg stalls. Community food initiatives / community retailers (CR) can up and run stalls, but these may falter when this support stops without community ownership.

Need to change approach used by CRs – flip on its head. Need to bring food up the agenda, and to find way of getting people engaged e.g. some corporate sector customers have in-house ‘champion’ who ensure service continues: need someone like that to take ownership in community retailing outlets.

Setting up and running fruit and veg stalls incurs infrastructure costs for CRs. Maybe CRs should utilise what’s already there e.g. work with local shops which could sell produce for community food initiatives. LCFHP is trialling in one local shop.

Managing change, including when need to changed is unplanned, takes capacity and time.

CRs are tapping into programmes that can provide additional capacity that they wouldn’t be able to afford otherwise e.g. Community Jobs Scotland.

4. Marketing
Context in which CRs operate has changed radically e.g. introduction of low cost supermarkets. CRs need a unique selling point e.g. ‘grab bags’, ‘meal in a bag’. CRs can also use other community food activities they provide to market their CR outlets (e.g. cookery sessions).

To maintain or increase sales, CRs really need to know their market and potential markets, and identify who can help them tap into these (e.g. ECF worked with Healthy Working Lives and Health Promoting Health Service to tap into commercial sector and NHS customers. ECF also have different prices for their ‘meals in a bag’ – commercial rate, community rate, and ‘pay it forward’).

Promoting ‘community’ side of work can win commercial sales (sometimes winning contracts from existing commercial suppliers).

Developing branding for needs to reflect its complexity, e.g. recognise how and why people spend money. Edinburgh Social Enterprise Network has made attempts to produce a brand for local social enterprises, but maybe branding for CR or community food is more appropriate at sector levels?

5. Collaboration
What areas of their operation could CRs collaborate around? Not collective purchase, which has been looked at previously. CRs lack logistics, capacity and staff to take this forward.

Need to recognise that every CR is different and operating a different model.

6. Supply chains
Community food initiatives and CRs are not tapping into suppliers for public sector contracts e.g. for fuel, food provision.

7. Being procurement ready
In Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership will move to local area funding, which will be a challenge for city-wide organisations. These need help to become procurement ready. They know this is coming and recognise the danger, if they don’t, that other organisations with no local connections may win the contracts.

**What opportunities are ‘out there’ for CRs?**Learning from each other - holding learning exchanges, including around the different business models adopted, and work being done. It was suggested that twice-yearly meetings are arranged for CRs.
Learn from other organisations e.g. Glasgow Community Food Network and its work.

CRs could be involving volunteers in promoting their services, including through social media (e.g. Gorgie City Farm volunteers produced a calendar, publicity leaflets, and use social media (including adding a different ‘story’ each week. The Farm’s user and customers are reacting positively to this).

Engage in conversations around the Scottish Social Enterprise Strategy, to increase recognition of CRs / community food work, and explore mutual benefits. Possible branding for Scottish social enterprises being explored, which would reflect the definition of social enterprise that has been adopted in Scotland.

Exploring what collaboration might look like for CRs. P4P is able to help with this, for CRs as a whole or for smaller groups (e.g. depending on the CRs sizes, or locations).

P4P is also able to help CRs to become procurement-ready.

LCFHP wants to discuss selling ECF’s ‘meal in a bag’ in Lanarkshire.