

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT SERVICE COMMITTEE

12th MARCH 2009

VILLAGE HALL REPORT

Report by Director of Education, Culture and Sport Service

Agenda Item	
Report No	

Summary

This report updates Members on progress to date on the equalisation of funding arrangements for village halls.

1. Background

- 1.1 There are 170 village halls in Highland, 157 of which are operated by independent community groups which are eligible to apply for annual revenue grants from the Council. In 2007/08 the cost to the Council of providing this support to independent halls was approximately £135k.
- 1.2 The Council directly operates 13 halls in Ross & Cromarty and Inverness. In 2007/08 the net cost to the Council of providing this service was approximately £146k.
- 1.3 As part of the budget setting process for 2008/09 Elected Members agreed that funding arrangements for village halls, including Council-run facilities, should be equalised.
- 1.4 The equalisation of funding arrangements was made up of a series of measures, one of which was to increase the annual revenue grant for independent halls by 25% to £1k. An up-dated village halls' policy was agreed as part of the process and is attached at Appendix 1. The policy reflects the equalisation process and the Council's move away from the role of direct service provider to that of an enabler of voluntary and community action in relation to village halls.
- 1.5 The other equalisation measures seek to address historic anomalies and inequalities in Council support for halls through:-
 - Reduction of the historically higher levels of grant for halls in Badenoch & Strathspey to similar levels to grants available for village halls elsewhere in Highland.
 - Offering transfer of ownership of 13 Council halls in Ross & Cromarty and Inverness to communities and provision of similar levels of grants as available to village halls elsewhere in Highland.
 - Discontinuation of halls management post in function in Ross & Cromarty and hall caretaking and cleaning functions in Ross & Cromarty and Inverness.

2. Progress towards equalisation

2.1 During the current financial year, the following steps have been taken:-

- Grants to independent village halls have been increased from £800 to £1k
- A phased process to reduce grants to village halls in Badenoch & Strathspey has been introduced and will be completed by 2012.
- The halls management post in the former Ross & Cromarty Area has been deleted from the staff establishment

2.2 In addition, the following steps have been taken for the 13 Council halls in Ross & Cromarty and Inverness.

- A series of community meetings has taken place and designated members of staff have been working through the issues and queries which have been raised by individual communities.
- A flexible approach to timescales has been adopted. Although the overall implementation timescale remains 31st March 2010, community groups have been asked to indicate by the end of the current financial year whether they are interested "in principle" in taking over their local hall rather than by the original date of the end of November 2008.
- For those communities wishing to run their local hall, a series of evening seminars is planned focussing on the training and information needs identified by the community groups. The topics for the first seminar at West End Hall, Alness on 22nd April 2009 are governance and finance. Participants will highlight the areas and issues they wish future sessions to cover.
- The next step for communities wishing to take over their local hall is to start the process of transferring ownership to them. This includes seeking Scottish Ministers' approval to dispose of assets at less than market value.
- A future Committee report will be brought forward for those halls which fail to attract community interest.
- Information on progress to date for each of the 13 Council halls is attached at Appendix 2.

3. Supporting the transition process

3.1 Communities which are interested in taking ownership of the hall will be supported by council staff during the process. After the hall is transferred council staff will be available to provide advice and information on the range of issues which may affect them such as funding, licensing and insurance.

4. Conclusion – Summary of Progress

4.1 In general terms, the implementation of the equalisation of funding arrangements for village halls is progressing well. There remain some outstanding issues, currently being worked through, relating to the transfer of operation of some of the Council run halls to communities in Ross and Cromarty and Inverness. It is anticipated that the original timescale of March 2010 is achievable although this will be kept under review.

5 **Recommendation**

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the progress to date on the equalisation of funding arrangements for village halls.

Signature:

Designation: Director of Education, Culture and Sport

Date: 26th February 2009

Ref: HF/IM

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VILLAGE HALLS – SCHEME OF REVENUE SUPPORT GRANTS

General

The Highland Council will provide annual revenue grants up to a maximum of £1000 per year to encourage community use of independent halls in the Highlands. Halls will be able to apply up to 30% of their annual running costs and the organisation's most recent annual accounts will be examined to determine the appropriate level of grant.

Eligibility

To qualify for assistance, halls applying for grants must meet the following eligibility criteria.

- They must be independently owned or leased on a secure and long term basis to the community.
- They must be properly constituted, non-profit making organisations which exist for public benefit
- The facilities must be available, within reason, to **all** members of the community
- They must be run and managed by an elected, representative committee from the community

Additional Guidance

- This scheme is designed for halls which provide services to the whole community. Therefore, halls or premises owned and used by specific interest or activity groups (e.g. sports clubs, youth clubs, arts centres, day care centres) will not be eligible to apply for these grants.
- It is recognised that halls are particularly important in rural communities and are often the only facilities available locally. People living in larger centres of population usually have access to a range of facilities. For these reasons, priority will be given to providing funding for halls serving communities with a population of less than 3000 people.
- Unless there are exceptional circumstances, only **one hall** in each community (as defined above) will be supported.
- Where there is more than one hall in villages/communities of less than 3000 discussions will take place with Ward Members who will nominate the facility they wish to support.
- For larger towns/villages (i.e. those with a population of more than 3000) discussions will take place with Ward Members who will nominate the independent halls they wish to support. It is anticipated that that total number of independent halls in these supported will relate proportionally to the total population.
- In both instances, decisions will be taken in light of the other community facilities which are available locally for example, community schools, town halls etc

PROGRESS REPORT: HALLS IN ROSS & CROMARTY AND INVERNESS

Cannich Hall

The first public meeting held on 04 September 2008 where a community working group was established. The community has carried out a community survey which identified that the community was interested in running Cannich Hall and has visited other community halls. A land transfer from Scottish and Southern Energy to Highland Council of the existing car park has been agreed.

Key/outstanding issues – (a) the group has to establish itself on a formal basis (b) the land transfer for the car park has to be legally concluded (c) the community group has yet to decide whether it wants to take on the existing hall or work towards building a new one.

Fort Augustus Public Hall

The community and local Members wanted the question of the value of the hall/land considered prior to a public meeting. This has been included in a feasibility study (separately agreed and funded) on the development of the Kilchuimen Schools' Campus as a community facility.

Key/outstanding issues – A community meeting will be required once the feasibility work has been completed (due in February/March 2009).

Fort Augustus Memorial Hall

Transfer of this facility to the community is not considered to be feasible because it comprises two rooms in the service point building and is the Registrar's office.

Key/outstanding issues – explore transfer of the hall and its operating budget to the Service Point.

Culduthel Hall

The initial user meeting was held on 11 December 2008. Ten members of the public/community council/users attended. Attendees wanted to see the hall maintained as a hall but only one person was prepared to become involved in further work to progress community ownership and operation. The next meeting on 21st January 2009 agreed to form a steering group to take discussions forwards.

Key/outstanding issues – The hall is owned by a trust which will have to be re-established by appointing new trustees.

Smithton Hall

An ECS officer met with the chairs of the local Community Council and Residents Association in November 2008. At a users' group meeting on 22 January 2009 it was agreed to establish a steering group to take discussions forwards.

Key/outstanding issues – no issues identified at present

Ardersier Hall

The initial public meeting was held on 07 October 2008 with a follow-up community meeting held on 20 November 2008.

Key/outstanding issues – The village hall contains a Library/Service Point and there is another hall (the Memorial Hall which is run by the community) in Ardersier. The community has yet to decide whether to take on the ownership of the village hall or focus all of its efforts on running and upgrading the Memorial hall. If the community does not wish to run the Council owned hall it may be possible for the Council to sell it and relocate the Library/Service Point in an adjacent, unused, Council owned building known as Mary's Flowers.

Diamond Jubilee Hall, Evanton

A steering group, representing hall users and community interest, has been established and Council community learning and leisure staff attend its meetings. The steering group is interested in principle in taking on ownership. Evanton Community Trust, on behalf of the steering group, has been granted Ward discretionary funding for a survey of the hall. Council ownership of the hall has been confirmed.

Key/outstanding issues – a) building community capacity to a level at which the community is ready to take on ownership and running of the hall. b) Costs of DDA work - £30K- could to be off-putting to community ownership.

Perrins Centre, Alness

A steering group was set up but the numbers were initially small and the group was subsequently re-formed on 28 January 2009. Before progressing further, the group has requested a property survey and funding has been granted from the Ward discretionary budget. Council ownership of the hall has been confirmed.

Key/outstanding issues - (a) the size of the building and concerns regarding maintenance and caretaking costs and (b) costs of DDA work - £40K - could to be off-putting to community ownership.

Milnafua Hall, Alness

A steering group has been set up and meets regularly with ECS staff. Council ownership of the hall has been confirmed.

Key/outstanding issues – (a) concerns about the very poor state of repair of the building; (b) need for community capacity building with steering group and (c) costs of DDA work - £10K – could be off-putting to community ownership.

Saltburn Hall, Invergordon

ECS staff are in contact with the Saltburn & Westwood Community Council which is acting as a steering group. Currently awaiting final confirmation on ownership issues.

Key/outstanding issues - concerns about potential cost of DDA works - £40K - could be off-putting to community ownership.

Polnicol Hall

Although ECS staff are in contact with individuals in the community a steering group has not been established and no community interest in taking ownership has been expressed.

ECS staff will provide an up dated brief to Ward Business meeting on 2nd March. Council ownership of the hall has been confirmed.

Key/outstanding issues - (a) various other options for community facilities in the area, e.g. Balnagown Estate proposed new housing and community facility and proposed new Milton community facilities complicate the issue (b) costs of DDA work - £30K could be off-putting to community ownership, (c) concern about poor state of kitchen and toilets

Fearn Village Hall

ECS staff are in contact with Fearn Community Council which is acting as a steering group. Additional information requested by the community council was supplied on 11 February and a response is awaited. Council ownership of the hall has been confirmed.

Key/outstanding issues – (a) concerns regarding the cost of owning and running the hall (b) concern about potential cost of works to upgrade the hall e.g. DDA - £10k - and rewiring

Muir of Ord Hall

A series of community meetings have taken place and a steering group made up of representatives of user groups, the community council and the community association has been established to take the project further. The steering group is presently considering what improvements are required to the premises and how they may be funded as well as clarifying the running costs, income potential etc. ECS staff are supporting the group through this process. Work will also be required soon for renewal of Public Entertainment Licence. Council ownership of the hall has been confirmed.