

# **THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY RADIO**

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## **THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL STRATEGY FOR COMMUNITY RADIO COMMUNITY BROADCASTING IN THE HIGHLANDS**

### 1. Introduction

1.1 The Highlands over the last few years have seen the emergence of a vibrant network of community radio groups (Appendix I & II). The network extends from Caithness FM in the far north to Speysound in the south, MFR Radio Action and Ross FM on the east coast, Nevis Radio and Lochbroom FM on the west coast and Cuillins FM on the Isle of Skye.

1.2 There is little doubt that Moray Firth Radio (MFR) and its success in providing a local commercial radio service to the Highland capital and surrounding area generated the initial interest in local radio in the Highlands. The establishment of Radio Action, MFR's community radio wing, in 1979 played an important role in encouraging the development of community radio across the Highlands.

1.3 The uncluttered airwaves of the Highlands assisted this development by providing relatively unhindered access to broadcast frequencies for radio licence applicants. The only hurdles remaining were attracting the necessary funding and demonstrating to the Radio Authority the commitment and ability to deliver a quality service. Training therefore became a key issue for community radio groups not only to enable them to acquire broadcasting skills, but to enable groups to demonstrate their ability to achieve and maintain the standards required by the Radio Authority.

1.4 The Radio Authority is responsible for the advertising of available licences, allocating available frequency and monitoring the quality and maintaining the standards of radio broadcasting in the UK. There is no specific provision in the relevant legislation for community radio and therefore in many circumstances no distinction between community radio and commercial radio. The Radio Authority however is keen to encourage as wide a range of choice as possible and has been flexible towards community radio particularly in the Highlands and Islands. The Radio Authority is supportive a specific category being set up within the legislation

for an independent community radio sector with its own licensing criteria. This viewpoint supports that of the Community Media Association which has lobbied the Government for change.

1.5 In particular the Radio Authority has enabled groups in the Highlands and Islands to broadcast for much longer periods than normal on Restricted Service Licences (RSL's). The Radio Authority had also been willing to consider a 'fast track' procedure for licence applications for permanent licences in the case of community radio groups in the Highlands and Islands which are outside areas of existing coverage. Licences have been advertised virtually on request in Highland areas where groups have put together a business plan, a programme schedule and done the necessary engineering survey work.

1.6 Community Radio is an ideal medium to create a sense of community identity and cohesion. Community radio stations across the Highlands and Islands involve between thirty and sixty volunteers per station, they often represent a significant cross-section of very small communities. The volunteers are drawn from across the generations and from all walks of life within communities, helping to build and sustain individual communities' sense of identity and cohesion. By providing opportunities for communities to broadcast in their own areas the social infrastructure of fragile Highland communities is therefore strengthened and often provided with a focus. The now famous Lochbroom FM midge count is one example of how local broadcasting can capture the imagination of not just the community but also visitors to the area.

1.7 The peripheral nature of the Highlands and its inherent isolation can be alleviated by promoting the productive use of radio and by encouraging the networking of community radio practitioners throughout the Highlands and Islands. With the support of The Highland Council, the Highlands and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation was formally constituted in November 1997. It is currently supported by The Highland Council and Argyll and Bute Council.

1.8 All sectors of the media in the Highlands are growing rapidly, none more so than the development of community radio stations into full time broadcasting. This growth provides secure employment in communities throughout the Highlands. Community radio also provides an outlet for the marketing of local businesses and generally acts as a catalyst for other economic development. Employment opportunities are now also being generated within the Community Radio Training project itself, as volunteers progress from trainee to trainer within the structure of the training and development programme. However community radio while creating some employment opportunities is predominately run by volunteers.

1.9 The development of community radio therefore supports the economic growth of the Highlands by providing local opportunities for training and career development and by encouraging integration of those excluded from the workplace. This improves the economic structure of the Highlands, by promoting development in a sector offering both growth potential and encouragement of innovation. The use of radio has numerous applications and can be cost effective in delivering a broad range of information to communities and visitors to the Highlands

1.10 The opportunities to develop Gaelic language and culture through community radio are immense and the Council works closely with the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee (CCG) on development issues and opportunities. The Highland Council's unique role in community radio resulted in a request from the CCG for the Council to co-ordinate a Scotland-wide working group for Gaelic Development

1.11 In 1991 ACE-HI (Association of Community Enterprise in the Highlands and Islands) successfully bid for European Social Fund assistance to deliver training to community radio groups. The project was supported by a number of local enterprise companies in the Highlands and Islands and the Highland Regional Council.

1.12 The project was successful in gaining European Social Fund assistance until ACE-HI went into liquidation in February 1996. At that time the Highland Regional Council was still a funding partner and following local government reorganisation The Highland Council put forward a proposal to provide continuity to the project and were supported in this by Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the Local Enterprise Company network. Cultural & Leisure Services were responsible for the proposal which was successful and started delivering training in August 1996.

1.13 The Highland Council, Cultural and Leisure Services continues to deliver the Support and Training for Community Radio Groups Programme across the Highlands and Islands. The project has been funded through successive bids to the European Social Fund assisted by eight local enterprise companies. Continuous support to the community radio sector has been rewarded by the demand for training consistently exceeding anticipated need. Many of the community radio groups have developed from part time community initiatives to full time broadcasters, creating employment opportunities. Of the twelve community radio groups established throughout the Highlands and Islands, five have now attained full time licences to broadcast.

1.14 The Community Radio Training Project delivers training across a range of skills including not only broadcasting, but also management and leadership skills. The key objective of the project is to support the community radio network by offering training to new and existing volunteers, developing their skills and abilities and enabling them to broadcast to their own communities. Importantly the training provides local opportunities for career and personal development and builds the confidence of individuals, encouraging them to take a more active role in community life generally. The recent development of an SVQ Level III in Radio Production is an important additional opportunity for individuals, enabling them to pursue employment or higher education in a media related field. The project also has the potential to develop further small businesses from those groups who currently broadcast under Restricted Service Licences (RSL's). Community radio in the Highlands & Islands is developing its own standards of excellence.

1.15 Legislatively the Highland Council cannot own more than a 5% share in any broadcasting company. However 'ownership' is not in the spirit to which The Highland Council entered into supporting community radio in the Highlands. The Council rather seeks to endorse the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) Charter for Europe (Appendix III). Of particular relevance is Objective 1, which states that community radio stations will 'promote the right to communicate, assist the free flow of information and opinions, encourage creative

expression and contribute to the democratic process and a pluralist society'. The Highland Council supports this objective and all others in the Charter, which seek to support and maintain an editorially independent community radio sector globally.

## 2. STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

2.1 The Highland Council wishes to support the continued development and growth of the community radio sector in the Highlands and has set specific objectives to ensure that there is a co-ordinated and sustained approach to the sectors activities.

2.2 The objectives recognise the important role of community radio in the Highlands and focus not only on the social and cultural benefits but also on opportunities for education, economic development and the strengthening of community identity and cohesion. While in the short term the economic benefits of community radio may initially seem limited, the advancement and divergence of media technology is identified as an opportunity for community radio groups to diversify into economically viable businesses.

2.3 The objectives will address how The Highland Council can continue to support and develop the community radio sector in the Highlands.

**Objective One:** To support the maintenance and development of the community radio sector in the Highlands.

**Objective Two:** To support and encourage the promotion of the Arts and the culture and heritage of the Highlands including the Gaelic language and culture through the medium of community radio.

**Objective Three:** To promote the use of community radio as a cost effect method of communication in the dissemination of advice and information to the public.

**Objective Four:** To work in partnership to facilitate and encourage the networking and exchange of information between the public, private and voluntary sectors and community radio groups.

## 3. ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

### 3.1 Objective One

To support the maintenance and development of the community radio sector in the Highlands.

The continuing provision of training to ensure that broadcast standards are met is pivotal to the ability of community radio stations to apply for and maintain licences to broadcast from the Radio Authority. The Highland Council over recent years has played an important role in community radio training as the lead organisation delivering training through a European Social Fund and Local Enterprise Company supported project.

The media world is one of the most rapidly developing business sectors in the world. The rapid development and divergence of media technologies are creating new opportunities. While the potential employment and overall economic impact of community radio to Highland communities is limited, opportunities for groups to diversify into areas such as the Internet, Television or multimedia in the future are possible. These opportunities may well provide the catalyst for existing and emerging groups to establish small but flourishing businesses within their communities.

The potential revenue from sponsorship and business advertising is important to the economic viability of any community radio station. While marketing skills will be addressed through the training initiative a business style approach is also needed in the management of community radio stations.

The Council wishes to facilitate and actively encourage the establishment of new community radio stations to further strengthen the existing network. Access to the Council's mobile equipment is also a key factor in assisting the development of community radio.

The Highland Council through Cultural and Leisure Services will:

- a) provide access to mobile studio equipment to enable the training of community radio volunteers.
- b) work with the Highland and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation to ensure that training appropriate to the needs of the community radio sector is put in place.
- c) provide access to training for new community radio groups and their volunteers. This will include establishing links with training providers such as the University of the Highlands and Islands and accrediting bodies such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Such partnerships will support the development of opportunities which offer individuals in community radio a local path to careers in the media.
- d) encourage community radio groups to involve primary and secondary schools in the running of their stations. Partnerships between community radio groups and schools will be encouraged to create opportunities for young people to broadcast; as an outlet for schools arts activities; to support media studies and provide work experience opportunities.
- e) encourage and support the Highlands and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation to look for opportunities for community radio groups to diversify through the use of new and diverging media technologies.
- f) encourage the exchange of information on technology development and seek partnerships with other agencies to promote the opportunities new technologies offer the community radio sector.
- g) ensure that the training opportunities offered community radio groups include the management and development of community radio stations as a business. In particular create opportunities for the development of management, marketing and financial skills.

h) through a partnership approach with local enterprise companies the Council will seek to ensure that community radio groups have access to advice and information on developing business plans and establishing their groups as businesses.

i) provide support and advice to individuals and communities wishing to establish community radio groups.

j) through a partnership approach with the Highlands and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation and other agencies investigate opportunities to link-up the network of Highlands and Islands community radio groups to enable exchange of programmes.

k) support the work of the Community Media Association in lobbying for an legislatively independent community radio sector.

### 3.2 Objective Two

To support and encourage the promotion of the Arts and the culture and heritage of the Highlands including the Gaelic language and culture through the medium of community radio

The Highlands have vibrant and energetic arts, heritage and cultural sectors, which receive significant support from all the relevant agencies in the Highlands. Community radio offers an opportunity to further develop and promote those sectors by working directly with both individual radio stations and with community radio as an network.

The Highland Council's, Cultural and Leisure Services co-ordinates a Scotland wide working group for Gaelic development in community radio on behalf of the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee (CCG). Both The Highland Council's Gaelic Committee and Cultural and Leisure Services Committee have endorsed the work of this group. The Council's Gaelic Strategy recognises that both Gaelic Medium and non-Gaelic Medium broadcasting have tremendous potential to influence the public's attitude towards attitudes and patterns of language use. This is particularly relevant to the community radio sector.

The Highland Council through Cultural and Leisure Services will:

a) support the development and diversification of programming to cover a broad range of art forms including drama (both amateur and professional), live music, literature including local writers and storytellers and as an outlet for the work of the Feisean and Mod movements.

b) encourage a bi-lingual approach to the development of the Gaelic programming within the community radio sector.

c) develop a partnership approach with the Comataidh Craolaidh Gaidhlig (Gaelic Broadcasting Committee) and all the other relevant agencies to assist community radio groups develop and promote Highland culture and heritage and in particular

Gaelic language and culture within their sector.

d) encourage the community radio sector to develop Gaelic programmes aimed at all age groups in the community but young people in particular.

f) work with community radio groups to ensure that opportunities are investigated and taken to preserve samples of each of the Highlands community radio groups broadcasts.

g) encourage the development of a library of Gaelic radio programmes for distribution throughout the community radio network

h) investigate opportunities for the community radio sector to contribute to the Gaelic Sound Archive at Sabhal Mor Ostaig.

### 3.3 Objective Three

To promote the use of community radio as a cost effective method of communication in the dissemination of advice and information to the public.

The medium of community radio offers a unique and cost effective way of disseminating information to the people of the Highlands. A large proportion of the Highland population now has access to community radio making it an important outlet for communication. It is however important that the information disseminated to community radio groups is appropriate to the community it serves. The example of Nevis Radio and their provision of airtime for Councillors in Lochaber is a good model of how the Council can work in partnership with the community radio sector. The use of community radio to disseminate information to visitors to the Highlands also represents an important opportunity.

The Highland Council through Cultural and Leisure Services and working with all other Council Services will:

a) establish partnerships between community radio groups, the Council and other agencies to further develop community radio as an important means of disseminating information to the public.

b) develop an information pack for Council services on how to contact and use community radio groups as an outlet for the dissemination of information and advice on Council Services.

c) seek in partnership with the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board and other agencies to strengthen the use of community radio as a tourist information service.

### 3.4 Objective Four

To work in partnership to facilitate and encourage the networking and exchange of information between the public, private and voluntary sector in relation to community radio.

While there are specific issues of networking and information exchange outlined in the objectives above, The Highland Council would wish to take a co-ordinated approach to ensuring everyone involved in community radio in the Highlands is informed about the opportunities and issues which surround community radio.

The Highland Council through Cultural and Leisure Services will:

- a) encourage networking opportunities between the private, public and voluntary sectors and community radio groups to ensure the exchange of information and experiences to help identify the needs and aspirations of the sector.
- b) encourage the strengthening of links between educational sector and community radio groups in the Highlands.
- c) through partnership with the Highlands and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation ensure that The Highland Council has an effective route to disseminate and exchange information between officers, members and other agencies and the community radio sector in the Highlands.

#### 4. MONITORING & EVALUATION

4.1 It is important that this Strategy is monitored and reviewed; it should be flexible and open to comments and amendment to ensure that it meets - and continues to meet - The Highland Council's goals and values and the needs and aspirations of people in the Highlands, whether they are in the community radio sector or have an interest in radio for recreational, cultural or educational reasons.

4.2 Links with other Highland Council services with an interest and/or involvement in community radio activity will be maintained and developed to ensure that the needs and objectives of these services are accommodated within the Strategy.

4.3 Contacts with organisations and individuals involved in community radio in the Highlands and Islands will be maintained and developed, and input from them in relation to the implementation and review of the Strategy will be encouraged. In particular the Highlands and Islands Community Broadcasting Federation will provide feedback to the Council on the effectiveness of the Community Radio Support and Training Programme.

4.4 The Strategy will be incorporated into the Service Plans, Management Action Plans and Personal Action Plans of the relevant services. These Plans will detail work programmes and targets for each particular year in the context of resources available.

4.5 Close working between the Education Service and Road and Transport Service at officer level will be vital for the successful implementation of the strategy, and a mechanism to ensure the regular exchange of information, joint project planning and monitoring of progress will be developed.

## APPENDIX I COMMUNITY RADIO GROUPS

### **Nevis Radio**

Nevis Radio were established in 1994 and broadcast to the Fort William, South Skye, Mallaig, Knoydart, Morar, Arisaig and North Ardnamurchan areas. It broadcasts on a full time licence and has over 50 community volunteers working at the station. It broadcasts 98 hours per week on frequencies 96.6, 97, 98, 102.3 & 102.4 FM.

### **Lochbroom FM**

Lochbroom FM was established in 1995 and broadcasts to the Ullapool & Coigach areas on a fulltime licence for 58.5 hours per week on frequency 102.2 FM for purpose built premises. It hopes to work with a community radio group in Gairloch to enable a service to the Gairloch area, which would enable a service up as far as Lochinver. Over 40 community radio volunteers and three paid staff run the station. It broadcasts a broad range of programming and has its own drama group with up to twenty participants.

### **Speysound**

Speysound was established in 1995 and broadcasts to the Badenoch & Strathspey area from an Aviemore base. It has a full time licence and operates with the help of over 50 community volunteers. Speysound broadcasts for 36 hours per week on frequency 96.6 FM.

### **Ross FM**

Ross FM as established in 1994 and broadcasts to the Alness, Invergordon and Ardross area. It broadcasts on a restricted service licence (RSL) for around sixteen weeks each year normally during the autumn and winter period. It operates with the help of over 45 community volunteers. Ross FM broadcasts for 45 hours per week during its RSL on frequency 107 FM.

### **Argyll FM**

Argyll FM was established in 1993 and broadcasts to the Campbeltown area. It broadcasts on a restricted service licence (RSL) for around sixteen weeks each year normally during the summer months. It operates with the help of over 50 community volunteers and broadcasts 42 hours per week during its RSL on frequency 105.4 FM.

### **Oban FM**

Oban FM was established in 1992 and broadcasts to the Oban and surrounding area. It has a full time licence and broadcasts with the help of over 85 community volunteers. Oban FM broadcasts for 35 - 45 hours per week on frequency 103.3 FM.

### **Isles FM**

Isles FM was established in 1995 and broadcasts to the Stornoway and surrounding area. It broadcasts on a full time licence with the help of over 50 community volunteers. Isles FM broadcasts for 35 hours per week on frequency 103 FM.

### **Cuillins FM**

Cuillins FM was established in 1995 and broadcasts to Portree and the north end of

Skye. It broadcasts on a bi-annual restricted service licence (RSL) for around sixteen weeks each year normally during the autumn period. It operates with the help of over 20 community volunteers. It broadcasts an evening schedule of programmes during their RSL on a frequency which varies with each licence award.

### **Radio Action (MFR) [www.mfr.co.uk](http://www.mfr.co.uk)**

Radio Action was established in 1979 as the community wing of Moray Firth Radio and broadcasts to the Inverness and inner Moray Firth area. It broadcasts under Moray Firth Radio's full time licence and it has over 100 community radio volunteers. Radio Action broadcasts for 50 hours per week on frequency 97.4 FM.

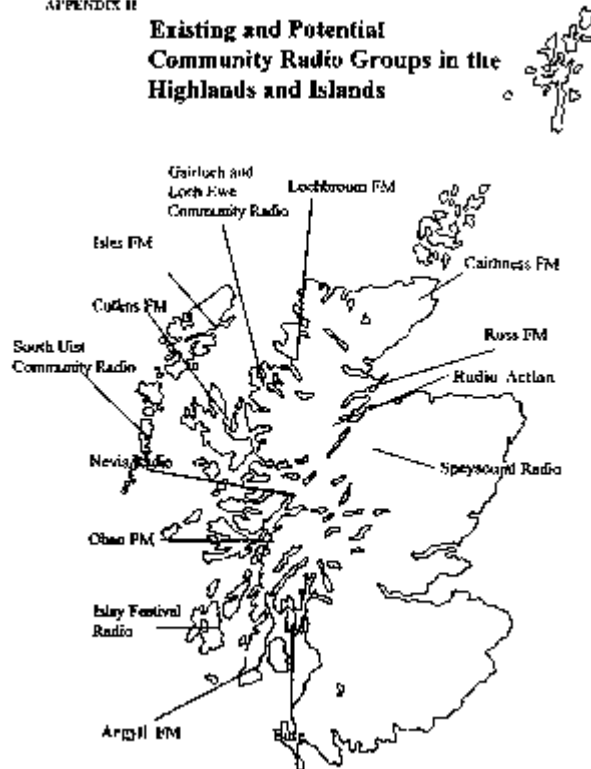
### **Caithness FM**

Caithness FM was established in 1995 and broadcasts to the Wick and surrounding area. It broadcast on a full time licence with the help of around 20 community volunteers. It broadcasts for 35 hours per week on frequency 102.5 FM.

## APPENDIX II

APPENDIX II

### **Existing and Potential Community Radio Groups in the Highlands and Islands**



## APPENDIX III

### **The Community Radio Charter for Europe**

Adopted on 18 September 1994 in Ljubljana, Slovenia at the first AMARC Pan-European Conference of Community Radio Broadcasters.

Recognising that community radio is an ideal means of fostering freedom of expression and information, the development of culture, the freedom to form and

confront opinions and active participation in local life; noting that different cultures and traditions lead to diversity of forms of community radio; this Charter identifies objectives which community radio stations share and should strive to achieve.

Community radio stations:

1. promote the right to communicate, assist the free flow of information and opinions, encourage creative expression and contribute to the democratic process and a pluralist society;
2. provide access to training, production and distribution facilities; encourage local creative talent and foster local traditions; provide programmes for the benefit, entertainment, education and development of their listeners;
3. seek to have their ownership representative of local geographically recognisable communities or of communities of common interest;
4. are editorially independent of government, commercial and religious institutions and political parties in determining their programme policy;
5. provide a right of access to minority and marginalised groups and promote and protect cultural and linguistic diversity;
6. seek to honestly inform listeners on the basis of information drawn from a diversity of sources and provide a right to reply to any person or organisation subject to serious misrepresentation;
7. are established as organisations which are not run with a view to profit and ensure their independence by being financed from a variety of sources;
8. recognise and respect the contribution of volunteers, recognise the right of paid workers to join trade unions and provide satisfactory working conditions for both;
9. operate management, programming and employment practices which oppose discrimination and which are open and accountable to all supporters, staff and volunteers;
10. foster exchange between community radio broadcasters using communications to develop greater understanding in support of peace, tolerance, democracy and development.

#### APPENDIX IV

#### KEY CONTACT NAMES AND ADDRESSES

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