Agenda Item	4ii.
Report No	CP/06/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 19 August 2020

Report Title: Developing a Framework for Participation and Involvement

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 One of the Council's core strategic commitments is to improve our working with communities and encourage greater involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery. The onset of covid-19 has resulted in an overwhelming surge in local community involvement and action which presents an opportunity for all to change how we work together and how we as an organisation can improve how we involve our communities.

1.2 A key priority of the recovery plan is Community Empowerment. This priority focuses on understanding the impacts of covid-19 on our communities but also building on the experience and strength of community support over the last number of months in order to improve the working relationship with communities and their involvement in Council decisions and services.

1.3 The paper sets out the current context and presents a framework for engagement and involvement with our communities for the coming months. This will help us to better understand the impact of covid on our communities and individual groups; to understand the learning from the response efforts; to understand need and actions required to mitigate impacts on specific groups and to serve as a basis for establishing priorities for communities moving forwards.

1.4 A core component to the engagement framework is to hear from equality groups. A number of these will have experienced a disproportionate impact as a result of covid and therefore understanding the impacts upon this group are important. This work will inform all strands of the Council's Recovery Plan and the associated impact assessments required as part of our duties under the Equality Act. It will also help with the statutory review and development of new Equality Outcomes for 2021-2025.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:
- Note the context and the aim to utilise the learning from the covid-19 period to develop an ongoing framework for participation and involvement with communities;
- Consider and agree the engagement framework outlined at Appendix 1;
- Note the learning gathered to date from early engagement with community bodies as set out in Appendix 2; and
- Note the next steps and that an update report on outcomes from the various engagement strands will be presented to the next meeting of the Communities and Place Committee.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource: as outlined in Appendix 1, most engagement work will be undertaken internally or in partnership with our Third Sector or Community Planning Partners. Wherever possible, this will be incorporated into existing work with service users and groups. Some external support is likely to be needed for specific communities of interest where expertise in engagement is required and possibly Citizen Panel analysis. The costs of this will be met from within existing resources.

3.2 Legal: the report includes proposals to support our compliance with legal equalities duties described below and community empowerment legislation.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Recent guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission reminds public bodies of their continuing statutory duties when making decisions during and regarding the pandemic to take account of the Public Sector Duty to consider eliminating discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations. Additionally, the Fairer Scotland Duty requires the Council to take socio-economic disadvantage into account when making strategic decisions. An important outcome of this engagement therefore is that the feedback will help inform the Equality Impact Assessment and Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment of the Council's Recovery Plan. Engagement with equalities groups will also help to inform individual priorities of the recovery plan and the review of the Council's Equalities Outcomes, due April 2021.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever and Gaelic - There are not considered to be any implications.

3.5 Risk: there may be some challenges in engaging with particularly vulnerable groups. It is therefore proposed to work with trusted third parties or seek external support in order to mitigate this risk.

4. Background and Context for Participation and Involvement

4.1 One of the Council's key strategic priorities within its Corporate Plan is:

Work to invigorate local democracy and put our communities at the heart of the design and delivery of services at a local level. We will also develop the capacity of communities to decide and deliver their local priorities.

This is supported by a number of outcomes targeted at increasing engagement, increasing and encouraging community led and run services and involving more people in local decision making.

4.2 In recent years, the Council has had a strong focus on exploring how we can improve participation and involvement with our communities. From the Council's Localism Action plan, the Commission on Highland Democracy, Council Redesign and more recently our focus on developing a place-based approach, different approaches and methods have been tested and developed with an aim of strengthening local democracy and improving how we involve and engage with our communities at a local level.

4.3 There has been a strong message from Members and our communities that the Council needs to be more community-minded and connected to our communities. This means:
   • developing a place-based approach to understanding needs and co-designing services;
   • listening locally, providing information to help people make affordable local choices about local services;
   • freeing up staff to work imaginatively with communities and other bodies to find new ways of running services locally;
   • helping people to help each other, with new ways of supporting community groups and bodies;
   • supporting specific groups of people and a focus on certain places that need the most help to thrive;
   • more people having a say in what matters to them; and
   • bringing people together in new ways to be honest about and openly discuss the funding challenges which face public services and to find local solutions together.

4.4 What we have seen over the last few months has been overwhelming local community support in response to the current crisis. This has been demonstrated through:
   • increased levels of community sector delivery of service;
   • new volunteers and groups;
   • higher levels of commitment to community;
   • renewed sense of community cohesion;
   • new intelligence/data on specific communities;
   • understanding of inter-reliance between sectors e.g. community/voluntary/public; and
   • greater understanding of the causes of vulnerabilities and community specific vulnerability.

Key messages from early engagement work have highlighted the importance of the close working relationships that have developed, the strong local connections and improved communication between the Council and local groups and bodies. Groups are keen for

this joint working to be sustained and for groups to able to take a stronger role in delivery going forward.

4.5   The current situation therefore presents us all with an opportunity.   It is therefore vital that we as an organisation work with these new groups and developing community networks in order to improve how we involve our communities in the work of the Council. Whilst the recent months have been challenging in a number of ways, it also presents an opportunity for doing things differently going forward.

4.6   The paper focuses on presenting an engagement framework to support us hearing from groups and individuals impacted by the pandemic. It is important that we work with groups and individuals to:

- better understand the impacts of the pandemic on communities and individuals;
- understand the learning from the response efforts and what we could do differently both should the situation arise again but also in how we work together with communities;
- understand need and actions required to mitigate impacts on specific groups;
- understanding where existing inequalities may have been exacerbated as a result of covid;
- establish shared priorities with our partners and communities;
- developing an ongoing framework for participation and involvement with our communities;
- informing other areas of the Community Empowerment Recovery priority including learning from community action and greater community involvement in the delivery of services.

This framework outlines the immediate engagement required in relation to understanding the impacts of covid-19 and the recovery associated with that. However, it also reflects that engagement with our communities is a core element of our role and that the framework will evolve over the months ahead to reflect the current learning and establishing an ongoing basis for participation and involvement with our communities.

5.   Engagement Framework

5.1   A core action of the Community Empowerment priority of the Council's Recovery Plan, is to understand the impacts and experience of covid on our communities. This is with a view to developing a set of shared local priorities to support recovery going forward but also how we maximise the opportunities that have arisen as a result of covid to work differently and involve our communities.

5.2   At a Member level this work stream is led by the Council Leader, supported by the Chair of the Communities and Place Committee and will involve Area Chairs. The ECO responsible is the ECO for Communities and Place and the lead officer is the Head of Policy. Governance will be through the Recovery Board, Communities and Place Committee and the Wellbeing Sub-committee. There will need to be discussion with partners too, including through the Highland Community Planning Partnership and local Community Partnerships.

5.3   An engagement framework is proposed which includes:
- Engagement with communities – including individuals, community groups and people using Council covid services.
- Engagement with communities of interest – recognising that some groups and individuals within our communities have experienced greater impacts as a result of covid than others.
- Engagement with Business – with core sectors in the community, key representative groups and in specific places.

The full framework is set out in Appendix 1 and the three core areas for enquiry explored in further detail below.

5.4   The framework has been designed to consider immediate areas of enquiry related to covid impact and recovery but also recognising that ongoing engagement with our communities is a core element of our role as an organisation and that the current crisis also presents an opportunity to work differently with communities moving forward. The framework is therefore also about setting out an ongoing relationship and involvement with communities. This is to help inform priorities and local decision making and also to support communities to be more involved in the delivery and design of services/action at a local level. The framework will therefore evolve to reflect our learning as we move forward.

5.5   **Engaging with Communities**

5.5.1   This strand of engagement focuses on hearing from the following perspectives from our community:
- ***The general public*** – through a survey of our Citizens' Panel. The focus is to hear about individual impacts and experience of covid and the support services needed and used.

- ***Community groups*** – using a range of methods to hear from groups who have supported their communities through service provision. Key areas of enquiry include understanding impacts and experience of covid, understanding where existing inequalities may have been exacerbated as a result of covid, learning from the approach and priorities for their area related to recovery.

- ***Recipients of support*** – the Council has been in touch with a wide range of people throughout the period requiring support during the crisis. This includes people who were asked to shield and those considered to be vulnerable as a result of covid. This area of enquiry will explore individual impacts of covid and their experience of support services in order to better understand how to design such services/approach in the future.

- ***Members –*** through local area discussions on recovery, understanding of local impacts of covid, learning from covid response and recovery priorities for the local area.

- *Staff* – through staff surveys and discussion for a, understanding the impacts of covid on staff wellbeing and changes to ways of working and learning from specific community response from staff directly involved.

5.6   Engaging with Communities of Interest

5.6.1   It is good practice with any engagement to design an approach to ensure that the voice of groups with protected characteristics (as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and people who are excluded from participating due to disadvantage relating to social or economic factors, is heard.

5.6.2   In addition to good practice, the Council has specific duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to consider eliminating discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations in the course of its work. This includes when making decisions during and regarding the pandemic and in the course of recovery from it. The Fairer Scotland Duty also requires the Council to take socio-economic disadvantage into account when making strategic decisions. An important outcome of any engagement therefore is that the feedback will help inform the Equality Impact Assessments and Fairer Scotland Duty Assessments of each of individual priorities of the Council's Recovery Plan, and cumulatively the Plan itself.

5.6.3   We also know that there is an emerging body of evidence about those who are most at risk of covid and also those most likely to be impacted economically, socially and personally by decisions and policies in response to the pandemic. This includes: young people, older people, disabled people (including those with mental ill health), black minority ethnic groups (BME), people experiencing domestic abuse, carers and people experiencing homelessness.

5.6.4   There are some key drivers of disproportionate impact across identified communities and groups (including unintended impacts of 'lockdown'). These include:
- differential rates of serious ill health and morbidity from Covid;
- loss of important practical and social support and connections;
- reduced access to essential information, goods and services; including through digital exclusion and a lack of accessible information;
- diminished or interrupted care and support services;
- impact on mental health and wellbeing - fear, loneliness, anxiety, increased stress, suicide;
- stigma – loss of income/status, shielding/isolation – dependence on others 'not coping'; and
- loss of income and uncertainty regarding future earnings

5.6.5   It is therefore important that we hear from these groups who are likely to have experienced a disproportionate impact as a result of covid. The range of groups are outlined in the framework at Appendix 1 and key areas for enquiry include understanding the impact of covid, understanding where existing inequalities may

have been exacerbated as a result of covid, the experience and need during covid and actions needed to address impacts and aid recovery.

5.6.6   It is proposed to undertake this engagement in a number of different ways:

- utilise existing workstreams already in place to work with key groups e.g. work in schools (outlined below), with youth networks (via Highlife Highland)
- work within our existing partnerships to support engagement e.g. Corporate Parenting Board working with care experienced young people
- work with trusted third sector partners already working with key groups e.g. Women's Aid Groups, Senior Citizens' Network
- involve external support with specific expertise in engaging hard to reach/seldom heard groups e.g. disability groups, black and ethnic minority/refugee groups

5.6.7   *Engagement with school pupils* is a key area for action in the initial weeks of returning to school with a focus on health and wellbeing.   This is to allow staff and pupils to reconnect and ensure the return is supported, safe and responsive to pupil needs. Feedback surveys are planned in order to gather views on the positives from lockdown and also the challenges. The survey will be coordinated centrally by members of the Education Improvement Team to avoid duplication across schools but also to collate feedback to inform next steps. The survey will include health and wellbeing as well as curriculum support and digital approaches/training. Work with pupils to understand impacts of covid, the experience and potential actions will also be reflected in the work led by Highlife Highland and supported by the Education Improvement Team through the summer workshop programme and through the planned engagement with Youth Forums and Youth Parliament representations. Feedback from pupil engagement will be reported through the Education Committee.

5.6.8   *Engagement with Adult Health and Social Care Recipients* is a critical area for us to understand the impacts of covid. The engagement framework sets out key engagement which has already been undertaken by health and social care colleagues in relation to recipients of care at home or learning disability services, carers of service users of adult and with care home providers on the impact of issues which relate to service delivery. A range of engagement is also planned with older adults working through trusted third-party networks such as the Highland Senior Citizens' Form and Highland Connecting Carers. It will be important to ensure that this work aligns with partnership approaches overseen and being development by the Joint Monitoring Committee and Highland Health and Social Care Committee.

5.6.9   *Equality Outcomes* As noted at 5.6.2, this work will help inform all strands of the Council's Recovery Plan and the associated impact assessments required and it will also help inform the statutory review and development of new Equality Outcomes for 2021-2025. Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulation 2012 (as amended), the Council is due to report on its efforts to mainstream equality and the progress made to achieve its equality outcomes, and to publish a fresh set of equality outcomes and other equality employee information by 30 April 2021.

5.6.10   The Council (including the Education Authority and the Licencing Board) currently has 10 Equality Outcomes which can be found [here](). Equality Outcomes are the results of changes that are needed in order to further one or more of the three elements of the PSED and bring about change that will benefit people with protected characteristics. They do not reflect all equality work but are the priorities identified through engagement and evidence.

5.6.11   When setting equality outcomes, the Council is expected to take reasonable steps to involve people who share relevant protected characteristics and consider relevant evidence. The outbreak of the Coronavirus outbreak will limit the extent and opportunities for involvement and participation from local groups invested in equality. Engagement with equality groups through the engagement framework will help us to design our Equality Outcomes 2021-25 that will prioritise action to tackle the most significant inequalities.

5.6.12   Feedback on core messages from engagement will be reported to the next meeting of this committee and the revised Equality Outcomes and reporting on mainstreaming equality will be presented to this committee before the end of April 2021.

5.7   **Engaging with Business**

5.7.1   Economic recovery is a core strand of the Council's Recovery Plan. There are many aspects to this and feedback from the overall engagement framework will help to better understand impacts and areas of focus for economic recovery. In addition, however, it is also important to hear directly from the business community regarding current and potential future impacts as a result of covid.

5.7.2   At present there are three key strands:
   - *Sectoral engagement*: with specific sectors within the business community in order to understand impacts of covid and future priorities for economic recovery. This will be led by the Economic Recovery Group.

   - *Place based engagement*: including engagement with local chambers of commerce and feedback to Area Committees.

   - *PACE*: led by Skills Development Scotland, these local groups bring together partners to focus on employment where potential redundancies are anticipated. Feedback will help to inform on emerging impacts and potential areas for focus in recovery.

6.   **Next Steps**

6.1   The framework for engagement is set out in Appendix 1. It outlines, the core groups to engage with, the methods to use, the purpose of the engagement and the lead service/organisation or partnership. Questions will be tailored for each engagement and

according to the method utilised. Headline areas of enquiry can be found at Appendix 3.

6.2   A number of strands of work are already underway or currently being scheduled including:

- recovery discussions with Members at Area Committee workshops;
- HLH youthwork feedback;
- Chamber of Commerce discussions for Inverness and Lochaber;
- Area Committee feedback from community groups on their covid response;
- deliberations at the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee on covid impacts on adult social care arrangements;
- Leader and C&P Committee Chair discussions with third sector representatives on learning together for future joint working and support; and
- Leader, C&P Committee Chair and Area Chair discussions at local level with all groups registering their support with us (339 groups);
- Council and HTSI designed survey of community groups on impacts, actions and priorities.

The local sessions with groups registering with us as providing support are currently being scheduled and will take place over the next few weeks. A short summary of early messages from engagement undertaken with a small number of community groups and feedback from Area Committees can be found at Appendix 2.

6.3   Other aspects of the engagement will be dependent on the timescale for releasing staff from their covid related work and on the availability of external support, and the ability of partners to participate. Ongoing sustainability of this approach to engagement needs to be considered and linked to the new role of Community Support Coordinators.

6.4   Working with our partners across a number of the strands is crucial and it is important that this work helps to inform shared priorities at a Strategic and Community Partnership CPP level moving forward. This approach and framework for engagement will be shared with partners at the CPP Board meeting on 21 August 2020.

6.5   The framework will be informed and develop as we move forward and reflect our ongoing engagement and involvement with communities. An update on feedback and learning will be presented to the next meeting of the Communities and Place committee in November and interim reports will be presented to the Recovery Board to ensure that this is an iterative and evolving framework for engagement.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 3-8-20

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Appendix 1: Engagement Framework

Appendix 2: Early Messages from Community Body Feedback and Engagement

Appendix 3: Draft Areas for Enquiry

Engagement Framework

Engagement Strand	Method(s) of Engagement	Focus of Engagement	Lead Service/Organisation
Community			
General Public	Citizens' Panel Survey	Understanding impacts of covid, supports needed, supports used	Communities and Place Service
Community Groups	Area Committee Feedback and Post Committee Discussion	Understanding impact of covid Understanding where impacts of covid have increased existing inequality Learning from covid action Priorities for recovery	Leader and Communities and Place Service
	Feedback Covid Community Support Group Local Networks (ongoing)		Local Community Led Networks
	Covid Community Support Groups Survey		Joint survey – Communities and Place Service and HTSI
	Covid Community Support Groups Focus Groups		Leader, Chair Communities & Place, Area Chairs
	Supporting Communities Fund Anchor Organisation Feedback		Highlands and Islands Enterprise
	Grounds Maintenance Support Groups Focus Group	Understanding experience of groups providing grounds maintenance services during covid Learning from covid action Opportunities for future service support	Vice Chair Communities and Place Communities and Place Service
Recipients of Support	Telephone Survey	Understanding impacts of covid Experience of support services	Communities and Place Service
	Area focus groups of staff providing the support on their experience of need and issues in the locality		
Members	Recovery Discussions at Area Committee workshops	Understanding impacts of covid Learning from covid action Priorities for recovery	Communities and Place, Infrastructure and Environment and Transformation Services
Staff	Staff Surveys and Focus Group discussions	Understanding impacts of covid Learning from covid action	People and ICT and Communities and Place Services

Engagement Strand	Method(s) of Engagement	Focus of Engagement	Lead Service/Organisation
Communities of Interest – COVID Impacted			
Young People	School Pupil Survey	Understanding health and wellbeing as a result of lockdown Understanding curriculum and digital access and training	Education Improvement Team
	HLH Youth Work Lockdown Reports (completed)	Understanding impacts of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	High Life Highland
	HLH Youth Work Summer Workshop Feedback (completed)		High Life Highland and Education Improvement Team
	National Youthwork Survey Feedback (completed)		Nation Survey Report
	Voluntary Youth Network Lockdown Feedback		Health and Social Care Service
	Youth Forums and Youth Parliament Focus Groups (new)		High Life Highland and Education Improvement Team
	Action Planning for Youth Work Strategy (ongoing)		High Life Highland
Children and Young Experiencing Adverse Impacts as a result of covid (e.g. child protection/drug and alcohol related issues)	Child Protection Committee Alcohol and Drugs Partnership – review of findings from COVID-19 data Establish experiences of children, families and local service provision through consultation with Keeping Children Safe Sub-Committee (CPC)	Understand impact of COVID-19 on children and families Analysis of data on Vulnerable families Review of CPC Improvement Plan to ensure any new priorities are included Experiences of services engaging with children and families during COVID-19 – ASN, Domestic Abuse, Drug and Alcohol Issues etc.	Public Protection Chief Officers Group
Domestic Abuse	Through trusted groups e.g. Women's Aid Groups and RASASH	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Communities and Place Service

Engagement Strand	Method(s) of Engagement	Focus of Engagement	Lead Service/Organisation
Communities of Interest – COVID Impacted cont.			
Care Experienced Young People	Corporate Parenting Board Engagement with care experienced young people HLH Youth Worker Survey	To respond to the voices of Care experienced young people during the pandemic by coordinating a partnership response to their concerns around Bereavement, Early Death and Mental Health	Corporate Parenting Board
Disabled People and those with long-term conditions (includes physical and mental ill health, sensory impairment, learning disability)	Through trusted goups: Feedback through Equality and Diversity Groups	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Commissioned external support required
	Survey of Trusted Groups		Commissioned external support required
	Inclusion Scotland Survey		Inclusion Scotland Survey
	Wellbeing Sub Committee Enquiry (ongoing)		Wellbeing Sub Committee
Black and minority ethnic groups, including refugees and Gypsy/Travellers	Engagement through Trusted Groups: Refugee support; Tenant Participation Officers and site managers, Multi-cultural friends, Chinese Association, Mosque (faith group but diverse ethnicity) Mix Survey and Focus Group	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Commissioned external support required
Sex/Gender (focus on women)	Disaggregated Citizens' Panel Survey Results	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Communities and Place Service
LGBTI	Through trusted groups e.g. Highland Pride and LGBT Youth Scotland	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Communities and Place Service

Engagement Strand	Method(s) of Engagement	Focus of Engagement	Lead Service/Organisation
Communities of Interest – COVID Impacted cont.			
Older People	Through trusted groups e.g. Highland Senior Citizens Network	Understanding impact of covid Experience & need during covid Action needed to address impact	Communities and Place Service and Health and Social Care Service and linking with partnership arrangements with NHSH
	Analysis of by age of survey of recipients of support		
	Feedback from community groups on older people supported and issues arising during covid		
	Connecting with social care engagement methods in use or planned		
Adult Health and Social Care Recipients	Adult Support and Protection Committee review of impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable adults	Analysis of data to establish key impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable adults	Public Protection Chief Officer Group
	Feedback from telephone/zoom contact with care at home or learning disability clients who had declined service during lockdown or had amended provision in place.	Understanding service user wellbeing during covid. Understanding changing service needs.	NHS Highland SW and LD teams
	Feedback from care home providers on the impact of issues which relate to service delivery.	Impacts identified and reported during covid period and relevant supports put in place	NHS ASC Leadership Team
	Survey with carers of service users of adult social care services around impact of caring on supporting the cared-for person without usual day care and respite provision and regular support calls to carers (Zoom etc) and covid specific pilots to support carers from home	Understanding impact of covid and resulting changes in day care and respite provision Understanding of carer support options for moving forward	Connecting Carers Befrienders Highland Mackenzie Centre SW teams Creativity in Care

Engagement Strand	Method(s) of Engagement	Focus of Engagement	Lead Service/Organisation
Communities of Interest – COVID Impacted cont.			
People experiencing homelessness	Through trusted contact: Feedback from Homeless Team	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Housing and Property Service
Carers, including young carers	Through trusted groups e.g. Connecting Carers	Understanding impact of covid Experience and need during covid Action needed to address impact	Communities and Place Service
Disadvantaged communities	Disaggregated Recipients of Support Telephone Survey	Understanding impacts of covid Experience of support services	Communities and Place Service and CPP
	Through trusted contact: tenant participation officers		
	Discussion of experience among community partnership members		
Business			
Sectoral Engagement	Mixed methods dependent upon sector	Understanding of covid impacts and future priorities for economic recovery	Economic Recovery Group (HC lead)
Place-based Engagement	Discussion with local Chambers of Commerce Workshops with Members on Economic Recovery	Understanding impact of covid Action needed to address impact, provide advice and support to adjust service	ECO Infrastructure an Environment, ECO lead for area, Head of Policy and WM team where required, local members I&E Committee
Local PACE Groups (Partnership Action for Continuing Employment)	Feedback from Groups (ongoing)	Understanding of covid impacts and future priorities for economic recovery	PACE Group Leads (SDS/HIE)

Early Messages from Community Body Feedback and Engagement

This contains feedback from:

- Listening Event Focus Group with community bodies who had presented at Area Committees
- Emerging themes from Area Committee Feedback
- Areas of Community Activity from Area Committees

Listening event with community bodies presenting information to Area Committees

21.7.20

Background

Between 27th June and 9th July six Council Area Committees met and considered the humanitarian support required and provided in local communities during the Covid response. In those committee meetings third sector representatives described the work of local groups and volunteers in a formal and informal capacity. The meetings were minuted so a formal record will be available publicly on the Council's website when the minute is approved. A summary of the key points made and the common themes arising from the presentations is attached at Appendix 1.

The Council had a legal resilience duty to establish humanitarian assistance centres in response to Covid and the strategic and local approach to this was described in the committee meetings through presentations by Ward Managers.

As part of the Council's Recovery Plan, reflecting on our Covid response with partners and communities will help us to:

- learn from experience together; and
- share views on what to change and pay attention to as a priority for local and regional recovery.

This report describes the approach used to hear from community representatives attending Area Committees, the learning points emerging, and action points identified.

Next steps are highlighted.

Participants

Participating in the meeting using Microsoft Team were: Allan Tait, Caithness Voluntary Groups (CVG); Joan Lawrie Thurso Community Development Trust (TCDT); Heather Urquhart Caithness Community Connections; Flora McKee, Voluntary Action Lochaber (VAL); Jo Ford, Skye and Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations; Mhairi Wylie and Leah Ganley Highland Third Sector Interface (TSI); Jon Palmer Black Isle Partnership; Shona Street, Community Support and

Information Ross-shire (RVA); and Ellen Lindsay Brora and District Action Group; Cllr Margaret Davidson Council Leader; Cllr Allan Henderson Chair of Communities and Place Committee; Carron McDiarmid Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place.

Others invited but unable to attend were: Katrina Macnab; Pulteneytown Peoples Project (PPP); Margaret Sutherland Dunbeath and District Centre; Karen Derrick Vol Action B&S (VABS); Marion MacDougall North Coast Connection; Jim Johnston Bettyhill, Strathnaver and Altnaharra CC.

Methods

The event was held virtually using Microsoft Team and it was recorded with participants' permission.

Participants from the third sector were asked to share views on the following areas of enquiry:

1. What worked well during the response in our joint work together?
2. What could have worked better?
3. What change would you like to see in the Council going forward?
4. Do you plan to do anything differently in your group/groups or joint work with us?
5. If there was one thing you wanted us to change, what would that be?

All community body representatives contributed to the event. The learning points and action points are noted below.

Learning points and action points

1. What worked well during the response in our joint work together?
People and groups in the community were quick to respond locally providing help with shopping, food deliveries, medicines and befriending calls.

Once the hubs were established they were pivotal, and connections were built quickly.

Close working developed on:
- sharing information on where help was needed;
- uncovering need that was not known before;
- understanding patterns of need;
- helping each other;
- responding quickly and relaxing rules and regulations;
- how to make the most of the national call for volunteers;
- close and regular contact with Ward Managers and Pablo and this developed relationships and is valued; and
- in some places strong links were made with Councillors.

Regular meetings helped. Sometimes hosted by the Council as Emergency Liaison Groups (ELGs) and sometimes hosted as third sector resilience meetings. In some places they involved national funders. In Black Isle the Area

Committee Chair hosted a meeting with the Black Isle Partnership. Meetings were regular, they tended to be weekly and some moved to fortnightly.

New food initiatives have been created e.g. providing hot nutritious meals to people over a period of time has shown to improve their health; some communities now have food cupboards or community fridges for people to donate food and take food way; and food waste has been avoided.

2. What could have worked better?

Some things could have been sorted more quickly especially as the hubs were not set up immediately. For example, some groups were keen to take meals to children after the schools closed and requested food from the school kitchens but there was no response. Once the hubs were set up it took a little time to understand who was responsible for what.

The national approach to promoting the British Red Cross (BRC) as a route to volunteering was not helpful as their presence in Highland is limited.   It also created more work unnecessarily and the call to action nationally was confusing locally. HTSI and the Council had to work together on this but it needed HTSI to sort it out locally.

In some areas Community Councils were not able to help as their membership tended to be vulnerable because of age or too small for the voluntary effort required. Local TSIs should be the first port of call in emergency response as they have all the local contacts.

Some activities led to over provision of food and food dependency has been created. Duplication of food effort occurred e.g. in Skye seven groups were offering food in the same area. Better coordination and targeting of support are needed; although there is an understanding that targeting can create stigma. Finding ways to support people without stigmatising them are required.

Some long-standing community groups have experienced funding displacement to covid response and are concerned about funding going forward.

Some groups were surprised to be asked to help people with mental ill-health. Community bodies did not feel equipped to deal with people with complex social care or mental health needs. Links felt stronger with the Council than with NHSH or GPs.

3. What change would you like to see in the Council going forward?

The following changes are requested:

1. sustaining the joint working;
2. continuing with joint resilience meetings, whether chaired by the Council of third sector;
3. trust small communities more as they can identify where the problems are locally;
4. knowing who to contact in the Council and escalate issues to. This was a concern where someone needs help because of isolation or mental health,

but the contacts in social care (Council and NHSH) are not known by everyone;

5. targeting of support to those who need it going forward, supporting the right people at the right time;

6. devolving more powers to community bodies as they can respond more quickly;

4. Do you plan to do anything differently in your group/groups or joint work with us?

HTSI has commissioned some work into how to support people struggling with mental health difficulties and in suicide prevention.

Some groups intend holding resilience partnership meetings regularly.

Some groups want to offer meals on wheels instead of lunch clubs. For some this could be a paid for service.

In Skye the befriending service is moving to a firmer footing and five days a week from October. It has been supporting 50 people and has a pool of 60 volunteers.

Covid 'pop-up' groups will create more work for TSIs to support but concern about how this can be resourced. HTSI is undertaking a census of community bodies.

5. If there was one thing you wanted us to change, what would that be?

The following changes were identified:

1. Working together on food security, reducing food waste and fuel poverty. There is real concern that poverty will worsen as we come out of lockdown and when the furlough scheme ends. Better coordination of food support is needed, improved targeting and linked to broader welfare provision and rights e.g. CAB service.

2. Finding ways together of keeping people involved in their communities and in volunteering in general. Retaining young people volunteering.

3. Tackling mental health and social isolation together, and the Council has a role in scrutiny of NHSH service delivery. Training volunteers in mental health support is required. Knowing where to raise a concern or escalate an issue should be clarified.

4. Relaxing rules and regulations to respond well while being mindful of risks and safeguarding roles.

5. Communications on what will happen when shielding ends is required.

6. Role for community partnerships locally in dealing with hidden need and inequalities now revealed.

7. The marked difference in community capacity across communities needs to be addressed. We need to invest in community development where it is needed most and from across the CPP.

8. Refocus emergency response with local TSIs and not BRC.

Next steps

The changes identified need to be considered as part of our working relationship.

Further place-based engagement is planned with the 340 community bodies registering their support with the Council and this will be scheduled over the summer. Area Committee Chairs will also be involved. This will become a new and sustained way of connecting Area Committees and community bodies to enable joint work, joint problem solving and mutual support to support local communities. Local Third Sector Interface (TSI) groups have offered to help with the logistics for these meetings if required.

The Council's Recovery Board and Communities and Place Committee will agree and scrutinise the Council's framework for engaging and involving communities in recovery. This report can be considered by them in July and August.

Community Body Responses Presented to Area Committees 29th June to 9th July 2020

Themes emerging

Excellent cross partner/agency working taking place, including the pooling of resources. New relationships have been formed. There is a want /need for this to continue.
The financial (Covid 19) resources that have been made available has helped communities respond well to local need.
Some areas are starting to plan for recovery, undertaking community surveys etc.
Concern regarding the financial stability of community organisations moving forward. They have had no opportunity to fund raise / generate income during response.
Concern regarding resources moving forward – community larders, support for mental wellbeing etc will be required for some time.
Local co-ordination is critical. Questions of how to sustain this moving forward (paid positions?)
Structures and finances need to be kept in place to cope with the long-term support which will be required.
Volunteer fatigue and people returning to work are concerns. Questions around how to sustain/co-ordinate this.
Delivery of support moving into the winter months. The need for preparation and planning which might be more challenging due to winter road conditions.

Summary of areas of activity (as reported to Area Committees)

Area Committee	Activity highlighted
Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh	Providing a community newsletter to every household to support mental health Distributed £18,000 of food 'waste' Looking at ways of how this support can be continued Trust has set up a help line and voucher scheme Recent survey had 425 responses, highlighting fears and concerns regarding tourist industry restarting GALE has been the anchor organisation with the Car scheme delivering essential supplies to residents Funding a real concern for community organisations with the lack of events/fund raising opportunities
Lochaber	Over 250 volunteers delivery a wide range of support Community Councils have been working together Need to keep structures and finances in place should further outbreak happen Concern over long term economic impact and hardship on families reliant on tourism for income
Badenoch & Strathspey	Local community response has been strong with the support of VABS Well placed to cope with future wave/spike Concern that demand for 'community food tables' will be ongoing and how these can be sustained Concerns over how resilience models developed (over spring/summer months) would fair in the winter (when travel etc might not be so easy)
Caithness	Lead organisations had been identified to lead local residence efforts Thurso Community development company and Thrumster community development company have filled any gaps Leaflets and posers distributed for those not accessing social media Distributed items such as hand sanitizers, activity boxes to help improve wellbeing Preparing for future challenges such as furlough ceases Groups working with individuals who have been supported to increase independence Looking to develop more capacity around mental health Acknowledged as volunteers return to their work/everyday lives it is critical to continue to work in Partnership with the Council

Area Committee	Activity highlighted
Black Isle, Dingwall & Seaforth	Key has been pooling resources and expertise and expansion of existing services to respond to crisis Due to area age profile focus has been more on supporting businesses and people's wellbeing People finding themselves in need of support for the first time ever Concerns over tourists / visitors starting to come back – local poster campaign initiated Volunteer fatigue a concern Financial support would be helpful moving forward to employ community liaison officers Need to identify requests for financial assistance by communities not already in receipt of financial support
Sutherland	12 Anchor organisations have received £300,000 of funding towards emergency response. A comprehensive range of services have been provided including set up of community larders, hot provision of meals etc Community councils have taken an active role Help line has been set up to help with mental health A number of groups/organisations are taking a co-ordinating role Currently Reviewing food box and fuel poverty requirements and well as lessons learnt should a second wave take place

Areas for Enquiry

Headline areas of enquiry for individuals
- Impacts of covid
  - Income, employment, childcare, health and wellbeing, access to services, food fuel
  - Has covid exacerbated existing issues

- What support in place

- Challenges

- Ongoing challenges for you

- Ongoing challenges for the community

- Positive impacts

- Priorities for the Council

- Priorities for the community

Headline areas of enquiry for organisations (groups/trusts/businesses)
- Impact of covid
  - on organisation – volunteers, funding, activity
  - on your community (geographical or community of interest)
  - has covid exacerbated existing inequalities in the community

- Adaptions
  - Working arrangements
  - New COVID related activity

- Was there support for the organisation

- Learning from community responses
  - What worked well
  - What could have worked better

- Ongoing challenges
  - On organisation
  - On your community/individuals

- Area for action going forward
  - Priorities for your organisation
  - Priorities for the Council
  - Priorities in partnership
  - How should we work differently together