

Agenda Item	3.
Report No	LA/18/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Lochaber Committee

Date: 11 December 2020

Report Title: Highland Coastal Communities Fund – Support to Businesses in Lochaber

Report By: Executive Chief Officer: Infrastructure and Environment

1. PURPOSE/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Within an overall allocation to Highland of £3,034,703, the Lochaber Area Committee has been awarded £462,032 of Crown Estates net revenues for distribution within the Lochaber Area. Funding will be distributed as the Highland Coastal Communities Fund – Lochaber (HCCF) with the overarching purpose of supporting community and economic regeneration and sustainable development around coastal areas.
- 1.2 Within the overall broad eligibility criteria that is set for the scheme, local areas may wish to set additional criteria or prioritise how funds are targeted. Applications can be made to the fund from a variety of organisations including community groups and businesses.
- 1.3 During October, initial discussions took place with Elected Members as to how the funds could be dealt with in Lochaber. An action arising from this was to investigate how best to deliver support to businesses with a report due back to the ward business meeting on 16th November.
- 1.4 To inform the report for Members, discussions took place with the following parties:
- HIE
 - Federation of Small Businesses
 - Highland Council Economy & Regeneration Manager
 - The Highland Council CV19 Business Grants Team
- The report outlined the following main findings:
- Support should be tied into existing support structures to avoid further complicating the landscape for businesses and to achieve best value;
 - Support for business hardship remains difficult due to the fast moving and evolving nature of support available nationally;
 - There is a need over and above what is already available to provide financial support to businesses that are growing or making adaptations arising from CV19; and
 - Support needs to be flexible to identified needs as identified by experts in the business sector.

1.5 Given the points above, Members agreed that it would be appropriate to seek a proposal from Business Gateway as the recognised first point of call for businesses looking for support. The proposal should outline the added value to the Business Gateway service through the provision of HCCF grants to businesses in Lochaber and in order to ensure efficiency should in the first instance build on an existing scheme or already identified need.

1.6 Appendix 1 details the proposed Lochaber Business Digital Support Scheme.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members are asked to agree:

- i. the proposal for delivery of business support through adding value to the Business Gateway service in Lochaber, as set out in the Appendix 1; and
- ii. a ringfenced sum of £30,000 of HCCF – Lochaber funding to deliver the proposal for digital support grants to businesses.

3. IMPLICATIONS

3.1 **Resource** – it is proposed that an initial sum of £30,000 be ringfenced to specifically add value to the services provided in Lochaber by Business Gateway through provision of grants to businesses. Members may review this allocation at any time based on a demonstration of need.

3.2 **Legal/Risk** – When managing external funding it is imperative that the risks to The Highland Council are assessed/mitigated and any back to back grant award letters with third parties, and financial claims management protect The Highland Council financial and reputational interests.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** – The purpose of the additional grant is to support the business sector in Lochaber in order to bring wider economic benefit to coastal/rural areas.

3.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever** – No direct implications arising albeit specific businesses receiving grants may bring positive impacts.

3.6 **Risk** – As per 3.2 above.

3.6 **Gaelic** – As per 3.4 above.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Infrastructure and Environment

Date: 26 November 2020

Author: Fiona Cameron, Programme Manager

Appendices: Appendix 1 - Lochaber Business Digital Support Grant



Lochaber Business Digital Support Grant

Digital technology has revolutionised how businesses function and the purpose of the Business Digital Support Grant is to offer support to small and micro businesses based in Lochaber.

The purpose of the grant will be to assist businesses invest in digital technology and help sustain and rebuild the Lochaber economy.

This grant fund is additional and is available to businesses that have engaged with the Business Gateway Highland Service about their digital needs. These businesses understand what is required digitally and now need resources to take the next step.

The maximum grant is £2500 and will be to support projects that will help a business to improve its digital effectiveness. It therefore will be available, for example, for businesses who have identified a need to:

- enhance the back-office effectiveness and processes, for example, search engine optimisation
- initiate or enhance their digital marketing, for example, social media
- initiate or enhance their online trading capabilities
- improve customer relations management
- improve cyber security

All applicants will need to demonstrate how this would support their existing or new business. To receive the maximum 100% the businesses would have to demonstrate the following:

- What is your business and what are the digital challenges?
- What support from BG have you received?
- What support has been identified to help your business adapt/survive?
- How will the business measure the success of the support over 6-12 months?

- How much would you require? (*Three quotes for the work will be required – see below*)

The proposed process for applying for the grant is:

1. The BG Highland team will contact Lochaber businesses who have engaged with the Business Gateway Service regarding digital support and indicating that with funding from the Coastal Communities Fund (*or exact name to be used*), the Lochaber Area Committee have targeted resources to enable Lochaber business realise their digital plans.
2. Interested businesses will then (*a short time restriction will apply to keep things moving – see Note below*) be asked to contact the BG team to discuss their proposals and submit a completed application form (and relevant paperwork, i.e. bank account details/evidence etc.) (*and/or other central admin requirements – tbc*).
3. Once received and reviewed, the BG local officer will review application and advise/confirm that the proposed works meet purpose of grant. Dialogue/input from the BG local officer or specialist Digital Boost adviser may be called upon at this stage, if developments or amendments needed and ensuring grant is best focused and additional.
4. Businesses will then be offered grant, conditional on three quotes for the work etc. being sought/received.
5. Once the works complete, the business will return a claim form and payment of the grant will be retrospective or upon receipt of invoices received. The BG local officer will confirm that the agreed works have been undertaken, thereby instigating the payment of grant.

Note:

It is proposed that the grant scheme is first being directed to Lochaber businesses who already have engaged with the BG Highland service and identified a need to invest in their digital capabilities as a means to sustain or grow their business, but who now need support to take next step.

The BG team will first work with these businesses, but then subject to progress and budget availability, will market the Lochaber Business Digital Support Grant alongside their localised Digital Boost programme to new business participants.