

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	SCC/20/21

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Sutherland County Committee

Date: 22 November 2021

Report Title: Sutherland Place Based Investment Fund and COVID 19 Ward Discretionary Funds

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following on from the budget agreed by Highland Council in March 2021, a £100,000 Place Based Investment Fund was allocated to each ward for the 2021/22 financial year. This fund is intended to enable a flexible local response to address the 4 harms of Covid which are identified as direct health harms; health impacts not directly related to Covid; societal impacts and economic impacts.
- 1.2 Early discussions with local Members in Ward 1 have identified three key priority areas for spend. It is proposed that the £100,000 Place Based Investment Fund allocated to Ward 1 North, West and Central Sutherland is used to fund playpark improvements, initiatives that support mental wellbeing and provision of defibrillators in communities.
- 1.3 Following the report to Sutherland County Committee on 16 August 2021, which allocated £100,000 to play parks and mental wellbeing projects, this report provides further detail on proposals against these allocations.
- 1.4 In addition, following on from the decisions made at Highland Council on 7 January 2021, Sutherland Members have requested that a portion of the remaining Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds in Wards 1 and 4 are used to support households experiencing fuel poverty. As this will repurpose the funding, approval at Area Committee is required.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- i. Consider and agree the proposed allocations of the Place Based Investment Fund for Ward 1 as follows:
 - Support for playparks £50,000
 - A grant fund to support mental wellbeing initiatives £40,000.

- A grant fund to support provision of defibrillators £10,000
- ii. Consider and agree the proposed use of both Ward 1 and Ward 4 allocations for playpark funding as set out at sections 5.7 and 5.8 of the report
- iii. Consider and agree the proposed allocation up to £10,000 from each of Ward 1 and Ward 4 COVID 19 Discretionary Funds to address fuel poverty

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications

The resource implications are set out in the report.

3.2 Legal implications

Funding will be made available to external groups and/or other Council services in line with the Scheme of Delegation, meaning that grants of up to £10,000 can be administered locally by the Ward Manager in consultation with Members, and grants larger than £10,000 will require Sutherland County Committee approval.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) impacts

Support for projects that improve the quality of community outdoor space, that address the mental wellbeing impacts of COVID and support community resilience through provision of defibrillators will deliver positive impacts on communities and working through local groups helps build community capacity.

Targeted funding to support families facing fuel poverty will address significant fuel poverty in rural communities.

3.4 Risk implications

Grants will be made following established grant making procedures to minimise the risk of project failure, funding shortfall or funding being used for other purposes.

New play equipment will in time require maintenance and repairs, and at present resources are extremely limited for this. The future maintenance burden can be mitigated by Amenities staff working with communities to help ensure that any new equipment is low maintenance and uses standard parts; and by encouraging community groups to purchase service packages from manufacturers/ installers when they buy new equipment.

Fuel poverty grants will be administered through Citizens Advice Bureaux following established procedures and based on their extensive experience and expertise in assessing clients' requirements.

3.5 Climate Change, Gaelic implications

There are no Climate Change or Gaelic implications.

4. Background

4.1 Place Based Investment Fund

As part of the Health and Prosperity Strategy agreed through the 2021/22 budget process, £2.1m was approved for distribution through Area Committees to support local responses to address the four harms of COVID (direct harm caused by COVID; other health impacts; societal impacts and economic impacts) and consider local investments to support recovery. £100,000 per ward was agreed. Discussions with communities and partners have highlighted three key priority areas for potential spend of the funding allocated to Ward 1:

- Play areas
- Initiatives to promote mental health and wellbeing
- Community defibrillators

4.2 Covid 19 Discretionary Fund

It was agreed at a meeting of the Highland Council on 7 January 2021 that if Members wish to set aside a portion of their remaining COVID 19 Discretionary Fund for other purposes than originally intended, this should be agreed at a meeting of the appropriate Area Committee. The current balances of each Sutherland Ward's COVID 19 Discretionary Fund are as follows:

Ward	Budget c/f 1/4/21	Exp to 9/11/21	Balance
Ward 1	£23,009.03	£2,441.89	£20,567.14
Ward 4	£25,972.14	£4,234.00	£21,738.14

5. **Playparks**

- 5.1 Communities in Sutherland have identified playparks as key community infrastructure in need of investment. It is noted that this would have a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of children and young people but also the potential for wider benefits for the whole community. Some communities have established groups to help fundraise to refurbish playparks and/or provide new equipment.
- 5.2 At the Committee meeting on 16 August 2021, Ward 4 Members agreed to allocate £80,000 for play areas. Work was still required to understand the condition of play areas across Sutherland and how specifically to allocate this funding.
- 5.3 Members have now been briefed by the Amenities Service on the condition of playparks in Sutherland. The recent round of play park inspection reports includes a number of recommendations for repair and maintenance. Completing these tasks will ensure that as much of the existing equipment is retained as possible and should be treated as a priority.
- 5.4 For Ward 1, the total funding allocation proposed would be directed to the repair and maintenance of existing play equipment as identified through the recent round of play park inspection reports. The total sum required to address the repairs identified is greater than the funding allocation proposed, and further funding will be considered from other sources to meet this need. This is detailed further at 5.7.
- 5.5 For Ward 4, following the repairs and maintenance required set out at 5.8, it is proposed- to support community groups wishing to improve play areas in their communities. A funding contribution from Highland Council to community fundraising efforts will strengthen the community bids to external funders and enable the Council funding to assist as many communities as possible. Community groups will be expected to work closely with the Council's Amenities Service to ensure that any proposal considers sustainability and maintenance going forward. Criteria for applying, which will include sustainability and alternative approaches to playparks, will be developed in conjunction with the Amenities team and funding bids will be assessed with assistance of Amenities staff.

If after both completion of repairs identified in the inspection reports and after the assessment of community bids for funding for Ward 4, there are any funds remaining, these will be allocated to Amenities to purchase additional equipment and spares.

5.6 Any grant fund will be managed by the Ward Manager in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, with any applications of £10,000 or over being reported to Sutherland County Committee in February 2022 for approval. Community groups will be asked to apply before 10 January 2022 using the established process for Ward Discretionary Grants. The allocations for the two Sutherland Wards are outlined below.

5.7 Ward 1 North West and Central Sutherland

Following discussion with Ward 1 Members it is proposed to allocate a total of £50,000 to playparks. Following an analysis of the recommendations in the inspection reports, the cost of repairs to existing equipment is estimated to £58,900. It will be necessary to identify an additional £8,900 to complete the repairs from other sources.

Allocated to Amenities for repairs/ maintenance of existing playparks and equipment	£50,000
Funding gap (funds to be identified)	£8,900
Total	£58,900

5.8 Ward 4 East Sutherland and Edderton

At Sutherland County Committee on 16 August 2021 Members allocated £80,000 of Place Based funding to playparks. Now that the inspections have been completed and the required works costed, Members are recommended to allocate funding as follows:

Allocated to Amenities for repairs/ maintenance of existing playparks and equipment	£31,000
Allocated for community led playpark projects	£49,000
Total	£80,000

6 Mental Wellbeing

6.1 Mental wellbeing has emerged as a major impact of COVID. The Sutherland Community Partnership led workshops with young people and the wider community in September 2021. This work forms the foundation of a Sutherland Pathfinder replicating the methodology used for Caithness Cares. Focusing in particular on children, young people and families, the Sutherland Pathfinder aims to support the community to collaborate with statutory services to improve services and identify gaps in provision to aid good mental health and wellbeing.

6.2 The Sutherland Pathfinder, due to be launched in early December, is subject to a separate report to the Health, Social Care and Wellbeing Committee on 11 November, and following discussion with Members it is proposed to use Place Based funding to support projects and initiatives from both the community and statutory partners that align with the Sutherland Pathfinder.

6.3 Ward 4 Members agreed an allocation of £20,000 from the Ward 4 Place Based Investment Fund at August Sutherland County Committee for mental wellbeing projects in Ward 4. It is proposed to allocate a further £40,000 from Ward 1 Place Based Investment Fund for projects that align with the Pathfinder aims and objectives. Organisations and groups will be asked to apply within an agreed timescale and all projects must be completed by December 2022. Applications will be made via the established process for Ward Discretionary Grants, with any grants awarded of £10,000 or over being reported to a future Sutherland County Committee for approval.

7 Defibrillators

7.1 Following discussion with Members in Ward 1, it is proposed to establish a fund of £10,000 for groups to install defibrillators in communities where there are no

defibrillators available to the public 24 hours a day. Defibrillators provide a degree of community resilience in rural communities, potentially saving lives until the emergency services arrive.

- 7.2 Organisations and groups will be asked to apply within an agreed timescale and all projects must be completed by December 2022. Applications will be made via the established process for Ward Discretionary Grants. The funds will be managed by the Ward Manager in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation

8 Re-purposing Ward COVID Funding for Fuel Poverty

- 8.1 The latest Scottish Government figures show that 42% of all households living in remote rural Scotland, including Sutherland, experience fuel poverty. These figures compare with 24% for the rest of Scotland. Fuel poverty is related to both income, which is often lower and/or irregular (e.g. seasonal) in remote rural areas, and to the relative cost of fuel which is higher in remote rural areas where there is no mains gas. Added to this are the impacts of COVID19 on household incomes and the current spike in fuel prices which have put unprecedented pressure on fuel poor households in Sutherland.

- 8.2 In recognition of the above, and following discussion with Members, it is proposed to use part of the remaining Ward 1 and Ward 4 COVID 19 Discretionary Funds to create a fuel poverty support fund as a one-off measure to assist families facing the impact of COVID and high fuel prices this winter. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no guarantee or commitment that the funding will be available in future years.

- 8.3 It is proposed to repurpose up to £10,000 from each Ward COVID fund to create a fuel poverty support fund to be administered by East Sutherland CAB and NW Sutherland CAB. In the first instance funding of £5,000 per ward would be made available, with the option to extend this to up to £10,000 per ward should this prove to be necessary. The funds will be split as follows to reflect the fact that East Sutherland CAB serves part of Ward 1. Part of the initial award to each CAB will include £250 to cover additional administrative costs incurred.

	Ward 1	Ward 4	Total
NWS CAB	£3,500		£3,500
ESCAB (covers central Sutherland)	£1,500	£5,000	£6,500
Total	£5,000	£5,000	£10,000

- 8.4 The funding will be used for grants of up to a maximum of £300 per household for the winter (to 31 Mar 2022), although it is anticipated it will be less in many cases. Clients will not be limited to one grant, but the total will not exceed the £300 per household limit. Clients will be provided with a service (e.g. meter key/ card top up, coal, heating oil, logs, gas bottle etc.) not cash, following an assessment of clients' needs as part of CAB standard assessment of support required.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 9 November 2021

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Background Papers: