

Agenda Item	<b>6.</b>
Report No	<b>SCC/17/22</b>

## **THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

**Committee:** Sutherland County Committee

**Date:** 7 November 2022

**Report Title:** Repurposing Sutherland Place Based Investment Fund and COVID 19 Funds for Cost of Living Support

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

### **1. Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 Following the budget agreed by Highland Council in March 2021, a £100,000 Place Based Investment Fund was allocated to each ward. Following reports to Sutherland County Committee in August and November 2021, and recent discussions with Members, this report proposes repurposing remaining Place Based Investment Funding to provide cost of living support for communities and families.
- 1.2 In addition, following on from the decisions made at Highland Council on 7 January 2021, Sutherland Members have requested that remaining Covid 19 Ward Discretionary funds in Wards 1 and 4 are used to provide cost of living support for communities and families.
- 1.3 As these proposals will repurpose the funding, approval at Area Committee is required.

### **2. Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. Consider and agree the repurposing of COVID Ward Discretionary and Place Based Investment Funding for cost of living support as detailed in the report.

### 3. Implications

#### 3.1 Resource implications

The resource implications are set out in the report.

#### 3.2 Legal implications

Funding will be made available 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

Targeted funding to organisations that support families facing food and fuel poverty will address significant hardship in rural communities. Working through local groups helps build community capacity.

#### 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. Any grants to individuals will be administered by community-based partners such as 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 Funding

##### 4.1.1 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. In August and November 2021, Sutherland County Committee allocated funding as follows:

	Ward 1	Ward 4
Playparks	£50,000	£80,000
Mental Health and Wellbeing	£40,000	£20,000
Defibrillators	£10,000	-

At the date of writing this report the following funding remains unallocated:

	Ward 1	Ward 4
Playparks	£0	£0
Mental Health and Wellbeing	£0	£3,337
Defibrillators	£8,156	-

##### 4.1.2 Covid 19 Ward 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 Ward 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

Discretionary Fund are as follows:

Ward	Balance
Ward 1	£10,867
Ward 4	£14,238

#### 4.1.3 Total Funding

Combining these two sources makes the following amounts available to repurpose for each ward:

Ward	Balance
Ward 1	£19,023
Ward 4	£17,575

#### 4.2 Local Priorities

Discussions with Members have highlighted a wish to target remaining funding to support the cost of living challenges. This follows discussions within the Community Partnership. Sutherland Community Partnership has established two groups dealing with cost of living issues, with both bringing together local projects and organisations to support joint working and sharing of best practice.

The Food Group started as a network of food banks and demonstrated its value during COVID when this network of community groups and projects supported COVID affected households with food during the pandemic. Subsequently, the Food Group has been working to a strategy that delivers food banks and larders, growing projects and education and training.

The Fuel Poverty Group started as a network of community organisations seeking to raise awareness of fuel poverty in Sutherland including organising the high-profile Sutherland Fuel Poverty conference in autumn 2021. With the emergence of the cost of living crisis the Fuel Poverty Group is now focused on identifying support for communities and families through the 22/23 winter.

#### 4.3 Highland Council Cost of Living Support Fund

To help alleviate the impacts that the rising costs of living are having for Highland residents, The Highland Council agreed on 22nd September 2022 to create a £450,000 Cost of Living Support Fund. The aim of this cost of living grant fund is to enable community groups to provide local activities/provision that provide support to individuals and families during the winter months. This fund will support local initiatives to keep people warm, provide food and to enable people to heat their living areas and live safely in their homes.

The fund criteria are as follows:

- Provide community support initiatives that provide food/activities;
- Enhance existing provision through extending local hours or introducing/increasing food provision;
- Adapt existing provision to meet identified local needs;
- Strengthen or establish food larders or food table provision.

### 5. **Proposal**

#### 5.1 Repurposing COVID and Place Based Investment Funding for Cost of Living Support

It is proposed to create two Sutherland ward-based Cost of Living Support Funds to complement the Highland Cost of Living Support Fund, which is anticipated to be oversubscribed as demand across Highland will be significant. Like the Highland fund, the Sutherland ward-based funds will enable community groups to provide local activities/provision that support individuals and families during the winter months. This fund will support local initiatives to keep people warm, provide food and enable people to heat their living areas and live safely in their homes. The Sutherland funds will be launched towards the end of 2022 and will provide:

- additional support, over and above support provided by the Highland fund, to enable projects to expand or extend;
- support for projects unable to access the Highland fund once funds are exhausted.

5.2 The Sutherland funds 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 January 2023 for approval. Community groups will be asked to apply using the established process for Ward Discretionary Grants.

The allocations for the two Sutherland Wards are as follows:

Ward	Balance
Ward 1	£19,022.67
Ward 4	£17,575.14

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 11 October 2022

Author: Phil Tomalin, Ward Manager, Sutherland

Background Papers: