

Convention of the Highlands and Islands
1st June 2015
Kirkwall, Orkney Islands

Agenda item: Progressing Land Reform

1.0 Introduction and background

1.1 'Working Together for the Highlands 2012 - 2017' commits Highland Council to working with partners and the Scottish Government to support land reform. The Council is an associate member of Community Land Scotland (CLS) and in partnership with CLS has delivered a series of land reform seminars designed for those communities aspiring to become asset owners or wishing to register an interest in land.

1.2 The Council has a history of working closely with Highlands and Islands local authority partners, HIE and COSLA on the reform of the Crown Estate in Scotland. The Council chaired the Crown Estate Review Working Group which in December 2006 published the report '*The Crown Estate in Scotland: New Opportunities for Public Benefit*'

1.3 The publication of the report of Land Reform Review Group, with its 64 recommendations was warmly welcomed by the Council. Over the last 10 years the Council has contributed to many government consultations and enquiries on land reform and the Crown Estate and recognises the value of the Review Group report in pulling together so many strands which together are important enablers of a fairer system of land tenure in Scotland. The Group's focus on equalities and the common good is particularly refreshing.

1.4 For its own part Highland Council is committed to empowering Highland communities. The Council has transferred land and other assets into community ownership and management as one route to empowerment with over 20 assets transferred to community bodies. These have included village halls, former school buildings and land. The desk top value of these assets was £2.102m but most transferred for a nominal amount (£1). The community benefit was regarded as more valuable than the potential income to the Council. More recently the Council established a Community Challenge Fund of £0.5m to incentivise community groups to take over the running of Council services locally, including transferring assets where these can be run more efficiently and effectively by them. To date there have been considerable interest, with 11 applications proceeding.

1.5 The transfer of publicly owned assets will undoubtedly be an important mechanism supporting the achievement of the Scottish Government's 2020 target of 1 million acres of land in community ownership. **Highland Council would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Government and Convention partners on the development of its strategy and action plan for community ownership from 2016 – 2020.**

1.6 Convention members will be aware that they have much to offer in this area of policy, with the Highland and Islands leading nationally on community ownership of assets. Over 160 land and property assets have transferred in the region to date, accounting for 22% of all asset transfers to communities in Scotland.

1.7 The Community Empowerment Bill provides an excellent opportunity to support the process of implementing the LRRG recommendations and to improve community empowerment. The Highland Council is particularly pleased to see included in the Bill:

- The strengthening of provisions for community planning and the emphasis on CPPs reducing inequalities;
- The extension of the right to buy legislation to allow urban communities to participate, tackle abandonment and neglect and streamline the processes involved in asset acquisition;
- The provision of information on public sector assets and their transfer to communities (despite challenging timescales for the public sector);
- New provisions for the management of Common Good assets; and
- The provision and safeguarding of allotment land.

1.8 The Highland CPP has agreed to work together to empower communities by designing in partnership a streamlined and supported approach to asset transfers and a partnership approach to enable the new rights for communities to participate in improving outcomes.

1.9 In addition Highland Council also welcomes and looks forward to working with the Scottish Government and other partners on proposals which will advance land reform through:

- The Land Reform Act;
- The reform of succession law in Scotland;
- Proposals arising from the recent review of wild fisheries legislation and management;
- A Harbours Bill; and
- The enactment of the Smith Commission proposal to devolve the administration and management of the Crown Estate in Scotland.

2.0 Recent Consultation on the future of land reform in Scotland

2.1 Highland Council supports the proposed Land Rights and Responsibilities Policy and the establishment of a Land Reform Commission. The draft policy could perhaps be strengthened to include specific reference to increasing diversity among land ownership bodies and a Land Reform Commission could help coordinate and drive land reform and could review and recommend necessary changes in land reform and land use policy. The Commission could have a direct role in promoting land reform, monitoring and review of the Land Rights and Responsibilities Policy, and the commissioning of research necessary to demonstrate the wider community benefits of land reform. **A Land Reform Commission should be independent of Government but reporting to Government and Parliament and, given the important role of the transfer of public assets, should include representation from Scotland's local authorities.**

2.2 Other areas within the proposed Land Reform Bill which Highland Council supports are those promoting:

- Better coordination of information on land, value and ownership;
- A sustainable development test for land governance;
- A more proactive role for public sector land managers, and;
- Removal of the exemption from business rates for shooting and deerstalking

2.3 The Government's commitment to extending the Scottish Land Fund beyond the current programme and for the period 2016/20 will be very good news to aspiring community groups and is warmly welcomed by Highland Council. Of further benefit will be the enhancement of the Fund recently announced by the Firth Minister to up to £10m per annum. This should help ensure that a wide range of projects across Scotland, large and small are able to benefit from the Fund.

3.0 The Smith Commission and the Crown Estate

3.1 The UK Government command paper sets out clearly that the responsibility for the management of the Crown Estate's economic assets in Scotland, and the revenue generated from these assets will be transferred to the Scottish Parliament. Included in the transfer are the Crown Estate's seabed, urban assets, rural assets, mineral and fishing rights, and the Scottish foreshore for which the Crown Estate is responsible under The Crown Estate Act 1961. The definition of economic assets in coastal waters recognises the foreshore and economic activity such as aquaculture.

3.2 It is also clear that following the transfer to the Scottish Parliament there will be further devolution to local authority areas such as Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles, or other areas who seek such responsibilities.

3.3 A Memorandum of Understanding will be drawn up between the Scottish and UK Governments to ensure that UK wide critical national infrastructure in relation to matters such as defence, security, oil and gas and energy is safeguarded.

3.4 Responsibility for financing the Sovereign Grant to Scotland will need to be revised to reflect the revised settlement for the Crown Estate.

3.5 The Programme for the Highland Council commits the Council to working with its partners on campaigning for the devolution of the Crown Estate in Scotland. After around 10 years of effort this significant campaigning issue will now be delivered and the Council is very pleased that it has played such a significant role in bringing this about. The Council's involvement with the Crown Estate Review Working Group has been previously mentioned.

3.6 However, Highland Council is also committed to maximising the devolution of responsibilities for management and revenues arising from the Crown Estate in Scotland, to local authority, harbour authority and where appropriate to community management. It is this aspect of the transfer that the Council now wishes to focus on securing. Highland Council wishes to ensure that it and other coastal local authorities in Scotland that wish them have the responsibility for the management and revenues arising from the Crown Estate within their areas and seeks the support of its partners in the Highlands and Islands in pushing this forward.

3.7 The details of the transfer from UK responsibility, to the Scottish Parliament and below now needs to be worked up and Highland Council seeks the support of H&I local authorities, the Convention of the H&I and the Scottish Government, for the devolution of the Crown Estate to other coastal local authority areas that wish to have the responsibility, following initial transfer to the Scottish Parliament. **Highland Council is engaging with Scottish Ministers and COHI partners to progress this important aspect of the transfer of Crown Estate responsibilities.**

3.8 In order to assist moving this issue forward Highland Council is planning to host a one-day conference on the transfer and devolution of the Crown Estate with H&I local authority partners and Community Land Scotland. At present, timing of the conference is suggested for autumn this year.

3.9 Highland Council also seeks a widening of the Scottish Governments Islands Working Group to include interested coastal authorities and to help facilitate planning of the transfer of the Crown Estate to local authority level and below.

4.0 Challenges moving forward

4.1 While it is clear that great progress is now being made on land reform and on mechanisms to empower communities in Scotland there are a number of areas of work which the membership of the Highlands and Islands Convention could contribute significantly towards. These are themes that feature in the report of the Land Reform Review Group and have arisen in the Highland CPP which Highland Council invites Convention members to consider.

Working with rural communities – reducing inequalities

4.2 As noted above the Highland CPP Board has agreed to work in partnership by sharing staff time and resources to design the process for participation requests and asset transfer requests. In addition the Board also agreed that it needs to take action to ensure communities currently disempowered or least ready to participate in new rights to be afforded to them are supported to participate and have more power and influence over what matters to them.

4.3 There is a growing literature on the experience of asset transfer and ownership in communities. This highlights not only good practice and positive outcomes but also some sobering issues, warning against seeing community ownership as a panacea for participation and empowerment. Experience shows their success can be undermined by a lack of support and the need for the right human, physical, environmental and financial conditions to be available pre, during and post any

ownership¹. Others have focused on meeting capacity needs such as training, leadership and forms of governance².

4.4 We need to learn from this work when we are supporting community ownership and asset transfers as one approach to community empowerment and improving participation.

4.5 In addition we need to be mindful of issues of rural poverty and exclusion. Rural development aimed at inclusion has been criticised as favouring ‘the articulate, well networked and vocal’³. This point is made too by Shucksmith⁴ and his concern about ‘local notables’ dominating rural regeneration projects in Scotland, stating that:

“Even where projects address the needs of marginalised groups, the volunteers (unlike their urban counterparts) tend to come from better-off households rather than from socially excluded groups.’ He continues ‘In many instances existing power-holders become more powerful, partly as a results of the failure to consider systems of governance and the dimension of power....Doubts exist therefore about the extent to which empowerment in rural areas is possible without reorganisation of systems of governance and power, and without promoting the active involvement of socially excluded or disadvantaged groups. Often neither empowerment or rural people nor widespread participation have been achieved.” (p48)

4.6 This highlights the challenge of using area-based approaches in rural areas for promoting social inclusion given that poorer and marginalised people are more dispersed and hidden.

4.7 The different dynamics of rural poverty can also mean less developed welfare support and sometimes a less sympathetic anti-poverty agenda in rural communities. Having researched the process of ‘othering’ in the rural context of Wales Milbourne⁵ identifies a culture of self-sufficiency and negative attitudes towards welfare provision as reinforcing the shame poor rural households feel, contributing to their denial and secrecy about it; thus making it harder for them to participate.⁶

4.8 We need to be aware of these processes on exclusion in rural communities if we are to develop effective approaches for improving public participation and empowering disadvantaged people through asset transfer.

¹ Aitken, B., Cairns, B., Taylor, M. and Moran R (2011) Community organisations controlling assets: a better understanding Joseph Rowntree Foundation www.jrf.org.uk

² Skerratt, S, and Hall, C (2011) Management of community-owned facilities post-acquisition: brokerage for shared learning Local Economy 26(8) 663-678

³ Skerratt, S. and Steiner, A. (2013) Working with communities-of-place: complexities of empowerment Local Economy 28(3) pp320-338 (p323)

⁴ Shucksmith M (2000) Exclusive countryside? Social inclusion and regeneration in rural areas JRF

⁵ Milbourne P, 2010 ‘Putting poverty and welfare in place’ Policy and Politics vol 38 no 1 153-69.

⁶ ⁶ Milbourne P, 2013 ‘Poverty, place and rurality: material and sociocultural disconnections’ Environment and Planning A volume 45, 1-15

4.9 Some approaches being adopted in the Highland CPP include:

1. Using the Partnership Strategic Community Development Group to identify how best to share resources across partners to target support where it is needed most.
2. Joint planning to provide support to communities before, during and after asset transfer, recognising that some will need more support than others.
3. Working in the CPP to collect third sector stories of what works and why but also to be aware of what can get in the way. This includes for example how to sustain voluntary action and avoid volunteer fatigue.

4.10 A case study (T4T: Transport for Tongue) is included as an appendix to this report. It establishes 7 key learning points to share with community groups and 10 things for the Council to do differently. In short it begins to identify good practice when working with community groups and facilitates organisational learning.

4.11 It is likely that other Highland and Islands local authorities will be able to describe similar case study experiences and **Highland Council is keen to explore how it can share experience with COHI members. Going forward, there seems to be an important role for the proposed Scottish Land Reform Commission in pulling these together in order that public sector and community organisations can learn from the experience of others.**

The Crown Estate in Scotland

4.12 The transfer of the management and revenues of the Crown Estate in Scotland has been considered earlier in this paper.

The role of Land Value Taxation (LVT)

4.13 The Land Reform Review Group noted that local taxation used to form a far greater proportion of local government finance than it does today. In the post war years, rates, accounted for around 50% of local government funding. Today the proportion is nearer 10%.

4.14 Reviewing the earlier reports on taxation produced by the Layfield Committee (1976), the Mirrlees Review (2011) and the evidence provided during the review, the Review Group considered that 'taxing land is a good basis for local government revenue and that LVT has a number of strong advantages'. The Review Group considered that LVT is not a disincentive to the owner investing in and developing property and that LVT returns to the public the benefits that result from any increase in land value caused by public investment.

4.15 The Review Group recognised the difficulties that have arisen in other countries and that in Scotland an effective system of LVT would depend on knowing who owns land and having an understanding of its value. Work has already been carried out to investigate these difficulties in Northern Ireland.

4.16 Summarising its consideration of LVT the Review Group recommended that local government taxation in Scotland is in need of modernisation and that LVT should be seriously considered as an option. The Highland Council supports this

view and the detailed study of the scope and practicalities of introducing LVT in Scotland. **Highland Council is aware that the Scottish Government is in the early stages of considering alternative forms of taxation and looks forward to the opportunity to contribute on this issue via the Government's proposed independent commission to examine alternatives to the existing council tax system.**

Supply of land for rural housing

4.17 The issue of rural housing was considered by the Convention when it met in October 2014. Taking this issue forward, Convention members will wish to consider the Land Reform Review Group recommendation regarding the establishment of a Scottish Housing Land Corporation (HLC) with remit to markedly increase the supply of land for housing.

4.18 In rural Scotland the limited availability of suitable housing (affordable or otherwise) is often a major barrier to achieving sustainability in communities. Many rural communities face the challenge of arresting depopulation and retaining young people in what can be fragile local settlements.

4.19 Levels of homelessness are often higher in rural areas, relative costs of housing are higher and higher rates of disrepair and dampness are common. Crucially the Review Group identified a higher than normal reliance on the private rented sector.

4.20 Sticking with the Review Group report it identified three issues that need to be considered in addressing the provision of housing in rural areas:

- Patterns of land tenure and ownership
- Provision of sufficient land for housing development (at the right price), and;
- Making the most effective use of existing property

4.21 Recognising the dangers of chasing national house building targets, which could lead to gravitation of development towards the larger settlements the Review Group recommended that the HLC should have explicit performance targets that recognise the needs of rural communities.

4.22 While welcoming the ongoing consideration of the Review Groups recommendations via the existing Scottish planning system, Highland Council believes there is a clear requirement to consider specifically the needs of rural areas.

4.23 Highland Council invites partner local authorities, Housing Associations in the Highlands and Islands and members of the wider Convention to host a rural housing conference to consider the role, responsibilities and powers of a Scottish HLC in rural areas.

Valuing Public Land

4.24 The important contribution to land reform that the public sector can make has already been acknowledged, particularly via the transfer of assets into community ownership. Highland Council has already made significant progress in this area (para 1.4) and other local authorities will be keen to explore what transfers they can effect

in support of sustainable communities and public benefit. Local authorities are in a particularly influential position because they are able to transfer assets for values well below market value, where they identify there is clear community benefit in doing so.

4.25 Other public sector bodies do not enjoy the same flexibility. Highland Council is concerned that the value placed on other public land (e.g. forestry commission land) is detrimental to the Government's 20/20 land reform objectives and a real barrier to community ownership. Highland experience of the Scottish Land Fund suggests that it could contribute more towards the meeting of 20/20 objectives if it was not tied up in the purchase of expensive forestry land.

4.26 In order to enhance the contribution made by all public bodies towards the achievement of the Scottish Government's 20/20 land reform objectives Highland Council seeks the Convention's support for a review of the policies governing public sector asset valuation where the transfer of assets would clearly support sustainable communities and deliver public benefits.

Managing wild deer in Scotland

4.27 Evidence provided to the Scottish Parliament's Rural Affairs and Climate Change Committee in 2014 and confirmed by the Land Reform Review Group suggested that the contribution made by Deer Management Groups and deer management plans (where they exist) towards the sustainable management of deer in the public interest remains patchy.

4.28 The Review Group also recognised the changing focus of deer management in Scotland away from the open hill and into woodland and lowland areas.

4.29 Following the considerations of the Rural Affairs and Climate Change Committee and the Land Reform Review Group, the Scottish Government's recently published review of the national 20 year vision for wild deer management in Scotland is timely and a very welcome contribution towards the future management of wild deer. It should provide a framework for collaboration on deer management in the public interest.

4.30 However the impact of poorly managed deer populations on the economy, the environment and public safety remains a significant concern for the Highland Council and the strengthened powers proposed for SNH are welcomed. **While the voluntary approach via Deer Management Groups and deer management plans remains the current focus of deer management in Scotland, the Government's planned review in 2016 should further inform consideration of the need for a statutory approach to deer management. Highland Council seeks COHI support on this important issue.**

Case Study

Transport for Tongue (T4T): A Journey to Share

Development Experience and Key Learning Points

Introduction

Transport for Tongue (T4T) is a growing community enterprise providing tailored and affordable transport services for people living in Melness, Tongue and Skerry in North West Sutherland. Its development and achievements are impressive.

On request from Highland Council T4T has agreed to share its experience of development. The Council is keen that this information is used to enable learning in public service organisations, whether in the public sector or community / third sectors, so that better and localised community services can be developed, improving outcomes for people and communities across the Highlands.

Method

Following a visit from the Council's Chief executive, the T4T group extended their hospitality to meet with relevant other Highland Council staff on 22nd August 2014. The T4T management team and Board members attended the meeting with Council staff .

The conversation from that meeting told the story of T4T's development and identified several key learning points to share with other organisations and community groups. Specific actions were also identified from the meeting and are followed up separately.

Background and achievements

Forming in 2009 to enable older people to access health services when local provision was changing, T4T has grown from a few volunteers with a 5 seater wheelchair access vehicle funded by Highland Council and an aged donated 9 seater vehicle to become a community enterprise employing 7 part time staff in a variety of roles and 12 volunteer drivers plus several other non- driving volunteers giving their expertise in specialist roles. It now has 4 vehicles of varying size and accessibility, mostly less than 3 years old and all well maintained by the local garage. All drivers are accredited through MiDAS driver training. On average each week T4T provides affordable community transport to 84 people on separate routes. This helps people to go about their business, participate in social and cultural events and improves community connectedness and cohesion. Its annual turnover is £90,793.

T4T provides transport services Monday to Saturday covering six different routes, including a monthly return bus service to Inverness. In addition there are 4 routes to Lairg timed to connect with the Inverness train. These enable passengers to make a return trip to Inverness on Wednesdays, to visit Inverness for a weekend from Friday evening to Monday morning and enables visitors to come to Tongue for a weekend using public transport.

Ever responsive, new services and extended routes are developed as needs arise. These include trialling a new Monday route from Tongue to Bettyhill, a new route to enable local students to attend North Highland College from September 2014 and improving their marketing. Projects at the concept and planning stage include improving hospital transport and encouraging car sharing. T4T expands where it feels it has capacity and has noted its interest in providing school transport in the future.

T4T does not seek to displace other local providers. It is intent on causing no harm to local businesses. It aims to enhance local services based on local needs.

On fares and affordability, those with concessionary bus passes travel at no cost on eligible routes. The Door to Door local service is charged at 60p per passenger mile travelled. Longer journeys to Dentist in Lairg and hospital appointments in Thurso and Golspie cost £20 and £25 return respectively. It should be noted that there is no subsidized taxi service operating in the area.

When the management team and Board members told the story of T4T's development, the following key learning points emerged.

Key Learning Point 1: Use the skills of people already in your community and build on them

T4T feels fortunate that there were people living in the area with backgrounds in business, enterprise, operations management, banking, driving, vehicle maintenance and IT. All of these helped develop a strong community enterprise in a short period of time. Bringing these skills together needs a good organiser and communicator, someone tenacious, persuasive, good at managing relationships and community oriented. People with these skills can come from a variety of backgrounds.

So identifying and appreciating the skills that exist already in communities is essential for a community focused enterprise.

T4T is very aware of its need to continue to have the right mix of skills in the medium to long term. Its process to date has involved identifying local people with skills and actively supporting them with training and networking, and creating pathways for some to become Directors of the enterprise.

Key Learning Point 2: Meet a community need first

T4T were very clear that to be successful a community enterprise must understand what people in the community need and to build services from there; and not base community services on what providers do. T4T felt strongly that they are regarded well by the community because they understand what people need: who needs to be where and by when. This links to the key learning point below, particularly in understanding the connections needed with a range of public services, e.g. dentist, GP and lunch clubs.

T4T felt a particular need in their community came from elderly widows, who previously relied on their husbands to drive. Being able to access affordable community transport went some way to reducing their social isolation, helping them to keep active and healthy.

T4T were also aware of public service delivery that didn't seem to make sense. They highlighted two examples:

- Patient transport – where the current provider (Scottish Ambulance Service) can confirm travel with a patient only the day before travelling resulting in late cancellations of hospital appointments if transport cannot be provided. T4T has a proposal to provide an alternative service that suits patients better and at a much reduced cost. This would significantly reduce the number of cancelled hospital appointments. The local GP is also a Director of the Community organisation so knows about the issues that need to be improved.
- A contract the Council has with a national provider locally where a large bus is used and is very under-occupied. This questions whether the service is designed with a community's need in mind and whether this demonstrates best value or meets our ambition to lower the region's carbon footprint.

Key Learning Point 3: Seek out and take all the help that is offered

In addition to support from the Council, T4T acknowledged the support from various organisations and individuals. It recommends that others should engage with:

- The local CVS (part of the Third Sector Interface). They provide a whole range of supports for community enterprises and community groups including on governance arrangements. For T4T they helped with completing external funding applications and donated office furniture.
- The Social Enterprise Academy for skills development. For T4T an event was run in Tongue and T4T members participated in various courses and modules such as starting business, finance and accountability. T4T found this very valuable.
- The Community Transport Association (UK organisation). T4T worked with the Network Development Officer for Scotland and found them to be very supportive. As an organisation they provide support and advice to community transport groups including quality standards, safety, legal, licensing, training and technical issues advice.
- HISEZ. They support community enterprises to focus on being viable businesses. For T4T this meant providing a business health check, challenging T4T on their business plan and model and providing training on governance and partnerships.
- HIE. They provided financial support with valuation and legal fees facilitating the Asset transfer of the Depot from Highland Council to T4T. They are also match funding with Highland Council a 6 month pilot of the additional Lairg route service.
- The Centre for Scottish Public Policy's "Adopt an Intern" Programme. This provided a graduate Intern.
- Local business. For T4T the Royal Bank of Scotland Tongue branch had vacant space and provide accommodation on extremely reasonable terms.
- Local elected members. They can help in various ways and have been happy to do so with T4T. They have found their local Councillors very supportive and effective.

Key Learning Point 4: Create partnerships and collaborate to support your aims

T4T have created a number of partnerships that enable better services. These include:

- Establishing a working relationship with the Council - engaging with local elected members and transport staff. For T4T they feel there is an open door to the Council. Support has been provided through funding and through an asset transfer of a building to use as a vehicle depot (see below for how this transfer might have been easier). Their work has been nominated for a Council Quality Award. T4T speak highly of the officers they have built a relationship with. They value local member involvement and support. Building good relationships makes a difference.
- Providing transport for people attending the North Coast Connection lunch club. This organisation formed in 2011 in response to Highland Council's review of the local day care service which was then withdrawn in 2012. Numbers attending have since more than doubled to 42 and all those who attended the registered day care service were supported to attend the lunch club, including those with an assessed day care need and those from the outlying communities of Durness and Strathnaver.
- Engaging with the closest Dentist in Lairg to arrange appointments at a time that transport can be provided. This means appointments on Wednesdays when possible for people from Melness, Tongue and Skerray.
- Engaging with the local Health Centre to arrange appointments when transport can be provided.

- Linking with other community transport groups. This can be facilitated by the Community Transport Association and provide mutual support.

Key Learning Point 5: Identify all the external funding sources and apply

In addition to the income from fares, for T4T the sources of external funding included:

- Big Lottery <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/scotland>
- The Enterprise Ready Fund <http://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/programmes/the-enterprise-ready-fund.aspx> Now closed
- Caithness and Sutherland <http://www.cnsf.org.uk/>
- Highland Council Ward Discretionary Funding http://www.highland.gov.uk/directory_record/196482/ward_discretionary_fund/category/117/community_development For all Council grants see <http://www.highland.gov.uk/directory/17/grants>
- HIE <http://www.hie.co.uk/default.html> HIE also provides a range of supports for community enterprise.

The Highland Third Sector interface can assist all community groups with information on funding.

The Council has a new Community Challenge Fund that can support community groups to take over the running of a Council service if that means it will be run more efficiently or if it might prevent the need for a future service.

http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/677/council_and_government_grants/357/community_challenge_fund

The new round of European programmes will be clarified in early 2015. This will set out the types of projects from communities that would be eligible for EU funding.

Key Learning Point 6: Watch out for overloading volunteers and keep track of volunteer hours

T4T warn against volunteer fatigue. In rural communities lots of organisations need volunteers and often it is the same people involved in a number of groups. There are concerns with volunteer fatigue, burn out and implications for health and safety of services as well as sustainability of the organisation. T4T advice is to be honest and realistic about the hours and commitment volunteers are expected to have and to keep a track of volunteer hours, intervening to reduce these if needed. T4T has a concern about public bodies funding transport making assumptions about the cuts that can be made because of reliance on volunteers, but volunteer hours need to be managed carefully to ensure sustainability.

Key Learning Point 7: Find a base or office for your group to use

Having an office has made a huge difference to T4T. It makes discussions, meetings and decisions easier. Options to lease should be explored and rent negotiated.

What T4T's story means for the Highland Council

Reflecting on the T4T story, there are 10 things to do differently:

1. The T4T experience shows the assets-based approach to community development works – recognising the strengths of local people in communities first and supporting their development. It should guide our approach to community development and we should build our skills in this area.

2. Knowing where to get support needs to be clear and promoted for community groups and enterprises. There are good supports out there (for funding, training, business development and governance). Where they are used they have been effective. Building corporate knowledge of these supports would be useful.
3. The issue of scale seems important. T4T can design services that meet a community need well because they are close to that need. Localised and tailored services in small communities are easier to co-produce than regional contracts designed for efficiency through scale. We should consider which types of services might be delivered better this way and find ways of changing our approach to support them.
4. Good working relationships with community groups can come down to the approach of individual officers. We should learn from those identified by T4T and others with strengths in this area about what that means for staff behaviours and how we replicate those across the organisation.
5. Local members have a key role to play and by all accounts are doing it well in this Ward. It would be good to know how they feel about their role, how they make it successful and the barriers they come up against, to gather learning from them and support other and new members.
6. Community transport organisations take people to a range of other services, notably those associated with health and social care and further education in NW Sutherland. Our community planning processes should help and not hinder this process and sharing the lessons for the Council with our partners might identify future actions for them as well or joint actions with them. For example, the arrangements around patient transport in NW Sutherland to the Dentist, GP and Hospital could be replicated elsewhere.
7. Where community groups identify something we do that doesn't make sense locally we need to listen and respond accordingly. We should be grateful for constructive criticism and not defend the indefensible. Our corporate values should support this approach.
8. T4T was keen to acquire a Council asset as a depot for their vehicle maintenance. While this happened at nominal value (£1), the process took a long time and involved the building being on the market initially. The new Community Empowerment legislation should make this process easier for community groups, but public bodies need to be ready to implement that well.
9. Where public services have been withdrawn or changed, T4T has been able to make a virtue out of this and provide better services with greater reach than those previously provided by public bodies. We should be wary about assuming all communities could do this as they operate in different contexts and not all will have the right support or capacity; but clearly it is possible. Withdrawal of service or service change must be mindful of how else the gap could be filled if we are to avoid negative impacts particularly in rural communities.
10. We should try to capture the personal stories of people using such community-run services to help us understand and describe the impacts. This would help with our prevention planning and could sit alongside any quantitative measurement of impact.