

## The Highland Community Planning Partnership

Chief Officers' Group – 26 March 2015

Agenda Item	6.
Report No	COG 08/15

### Local Democratic Experiments and Community Empowerment: Proposal for learning from community groups – what works and what would make it better?

Report by Mhairi Wylie, Chief Officer, Highland Third Sector Partnership and Pablo Mascarenhas, Community and Democratic Engagement Manager, Highland Council

#### Summary

This report sets out the key issues to consider in continuing the development of a more supportive, beneficial and productive partnership between Community Planning partners and the community sector. It suggests new actions that the CPP partnership could initiate and highlights areas of work already in progress. The issues highlighted in sections 3 and 4 contribute to the CPP Board priority “**Engage in dialogue with communities in order to empower them to participate in service planning and delivery**”.

It is recommended that progress against this is monitored through updates on this SOA Development strand.

#### 1. Background

1.1 Highland has an extremely varied and active community sector. There are a vast range of organisations and groups operating in our communities providing both specialist and general services. The diversity of these organisations is also increasing with the growth of social enterprises and enterprising activity. Some operate in a single community or across a local district whilst others are Highland wide or operate in areas across Scotland. In addition there are organisations that deal with communities of interest. This picture is usually described as the third sector.

1.2 The relationship between the public and third sectors in Highland is set out in the Highland Compact. Its development is dealt with in a subsequent report to today's board.

<http://highlandlife.net/content/download/24700/99266/file/The%20Highland%20Compact.pdf>

However, in terms of partnership it highlights that learning from each other is critical-

*“We will recognise that we can achieve more by working together through co-operation, collaboration and cohesion. The contributions from different sectors will result in improvements as we learn from each other, recognising and valuing each other's strengths and progressive thinking.*”

## 2. How We Listen to the Sector?

- 2.1 Although the sector is multi-faceted and dynamic in the speed it changes at there are clear messages coming from it, both through its representative structures and local groups engaged with partners, about the type of partnership, structures and support from the public sector it requires to survive and thrive. An illustrative example of this is Transport for Tongue. A write up of their story is attached as appendix 1.
- 2.2 We need to continue a regular dialogue with the sector to shape our responses to these messages, however we need to consider the broad themes that exist and as a CPP ensure that our actions are consistent.

## 3. Key Areas for Consideration

- 3.1 **Structures-** one critique is that over time and with budget reduction and staffing changes our organisational structures have become remote and focussed on sustaining our own service delivery. In many instances we operate at a regional and area level not a community one. Our local knowledge, networks and connections have become poorer. This has left a lack of capacity and ability to engage in proactive dialogue with communities which in turn has meant we struggle to develop local solutions with community partners that work. We need to consider-
  - a. Re-learn to think local
  - b. Consider the scale that we deliver services at
  - c. Partnerships as core delivery not an add on
  - d. How we prioritise and facilitate local discussions
  - e. How our staff are skilled up to engage in community discussions
  - f. Accept challenge and criticism as a health test of our organisations
- 3.2 **Approach-**active, resilient communities are more likely to develop where an asset based approach is taken. This means that the starting point in a community should be around the skills they can draw on and physical assets they have. It is important that they have *control* over these assets. We need to consider-
  - a. what this means for us in terms of upskilling communities
  - b. ensure local facilities are managed either directly by communities or with significant control and input by them.
  - c. engage communities in the development of new assets and the rationalisation of existing assets
  - d. consider which services are suited to a developmental model rather than a direct delivery one
- 3.3 **Support-**communities will need support to further develop. This support is around advice, guidance, training, governance and funding. This support exists however it can be limited and fragmented. We need to consider-
  - a. building our knowledge of available support so that this can be promoted and facilitated with communities

- b. ensure our funding streams promote sustainability both of projects and the infrastructure that the sector needs
- 3.4 **Process**-our processes are viewed as cumbersome, lengthy and opaque. Community action tends to be driven by local issues that in a communities view are pressing and require quick actions. We need to consider –
  - a. Further development of common and single processes across CPP partners
  - b. Challenging the necessity of processes that may exist solely because of history
  - c. Listen to community feedback and commit to change
  - d. Be ready to respond to the rights that the Community Empowerment Bill gives communities
- 3.5 **Capacity**-our communities are all different. Some communities will relish and thrive in taking on an increased role in delivering services. However some will struggle to articulate their issues, organise themselves, and identify the skills and assets they require. There is a real danger these communities fall further behind in terms of their capacity to take action. We need to consider-
  - a. Prioritising those communities with the poorest outcomes
  - b. Developing the use of common data across partners when targeting resources
  - c. Ensure that the focus and deployment of community development resources is planned in a consistent manner

#### 4. **Key Themes in Supporting this Change**

- 4.1 The approaches we need to take are laid out in appendix 2 “The Enabling State” by the Carnegie Trust  
<http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/publications/2014/8-steps-to-an-enabling-state-infographic>  
 We can use this as a route map to achieve the shift in emphasis we need.
- 4.2 **Learning Exchange**-The skills and knowledge to develop the areas in section 3 above exist within communities and agencies. Additionally the national policy drivers around the shape of the public sector and local democracy and empowerment are providing support for developments such as participatory budgeting. However we should-
  - a. Research the size, state and scope of the third sector across Highland
  - b. Collaborate to provide common data sets to agencies and communities with which to plan services to achieve agreed outcomes
  - c. Develop a functional network that develops relationships and therefore collaboration within and between agencies and communities
  - d. Facilitate visits and shadowing between communities and more broadly between the third sector and CPP agencies
- 4.3 **Capturing and Celebrating Success**-within large diverse organisations change can be driven by highlighting the messages. We should-
  - a. Ask each CPP partner to capture inspiring stories on how they have

empowered communities

- b. Investigate social impact training for groups and staff
- c. Consider building community empowerment and democracy themes into our quality award processes
- d. Build a library of films capturing communities in action
- e. Consider building the public profile of the CPP by branding initiatives and materials

4.4 In addition to these actions there are already related ongoing pieces of work around-

- a. Joint resourcing
- b. Community learning and development planning
- c. Reviewing grant funding
- d. Leader programme
- e. Employability programme
- f. Review of District Partnerships and Area Committees

**Recommendation**

The issues highlighted in sections 3 and 4 contribute to the CPP Board priority **“Engage in dialogue with communities in order to empower them to participate in service planning and delivery”**.

It is recommended that progress against this is monitored through updates on this SOA Development strand.

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Date: 17/3/15

Author: Pablo Mascarenhas

Background Papers:

## **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 Skerray 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 Highland Council staff (David Summers, Transport Development Officer and Carron McDiarmid, Head of Policy and Reform) on 22nd August 2014. The T4T management team and Board members involved in the meeting were: Janette Wyper - Director & Treasurer; Ken Palmer - Operations Manager and Advisory Board member; Ian Harrison - Deputy Operations Manager/ Accounts person; Ngaire Mingham – Chairperson/Director; and Roy Slaughter - Director (Chairman designate to be appointed at the next AGM). Mhairi Peattie, Office Administrator, and Carly MacKay, Graduate Intern were also introduced.

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](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](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 Council

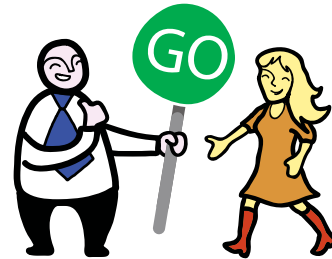
### Reflecting on the T4T story, there are 10 things to do differently:

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.

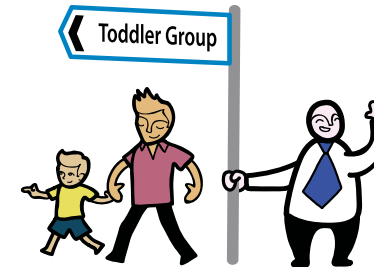
# 8 Steps to an Enabling State



**1** Get out of the way



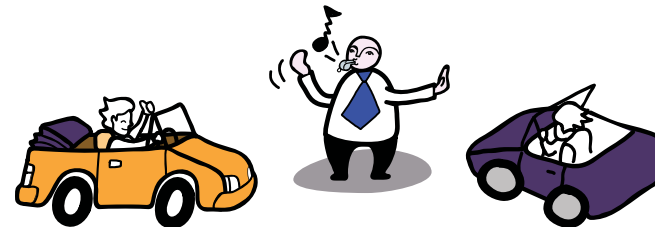
**2** Give people permission to take control



**3** Help people to help each other



**4** Help people to do more



**5** Give people more rights

**6** Enablement is the new normal



**7** Invest in disadvantaged communities



**8** Tangible focus on wellbeing