

Agenda Item	10
Report No	CIA/31/20

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: City of Inverness Area Committee

Date: 19 November 2020

Report Title: Community Wellbeing and Recovery

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment
Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 At the last meeting of the Inverness City Area Committee (CIAC), Members discussed how to consider using the underspend¹ in the Common Good Budget this year, on a one-off basis, which has resulted from civic and events and festival activities not progressing. It was agreed to further explore a number of potential infrastructure projects but also, given the socio-economic pressures on individuals and families as a result of the pandemic, to consider what support the Common Good Fund could provide in those areas. A workshop with Inverness Members reported back on the session with Inverness groups providing mental health, wellbeing, employability and poverty related supports and the key areas for challenge at the current time. It went on to consider and discuss a number of potential areas where support could currently be provided in order to provide support to Inverness communities. Discussions have also taken place through the City Area Recovery Group, (CARG) which has reflected the views of partners such as HIE and Skills Development Scotland as well as Inverness Chamber of Commerce, Inverness BID and the Federation of Small Businesses.

1.2 This report provides Members with an outline of the work since the last committee to consider where best the Common Good underspend could be currently directed. This includes updating on Events and Festivals work and the infrastructure projects identified at the last meeting alongside the work on poverty, mental health and employability. The report recommends a number of areas for Members to invest Common Good funding to provide community support at this current time.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. the feedback from the workshop with Inverness groups and the key issues and challenges identified;

¹ Note that £1.8m was allocated from reserves to balance the budget for 2020/21 in order to support the delivery of City projects.

- ii. the update on the ongoing review of events and festivals and the wider arts and that a paper will be presented to the February committee on a new approach and programme for going forward; and
- iii. the update on City Centre infrastructure projects identified in the August paper and how it is proposed to progress these.

2.2 Members are asked to agree to allocate the following sums from the underspend in the 2020/21 budget:

- iv. (up to) £20,000 to develop a City marketing/branding campaign in order to increase footfall into the City Centre and surrounding areas to support local business;
- v. (up to) £10,000 to develop an awareness raising campaign and associated digital training to tackle discriminatory/hate activity targeted at disabled people unable to wear face coverings with a view to promote confidence within the City Centre
- vi. (up to) £40,000 grant fund for third sector organisations to support projects and activities to:
 - a. Support employability through provision of digital devices
 - b. Address social isolation through digital inclusion projects
 - c. Develop training programmes to support wellbeing, managing anxiety and social isolation
 - d. Support food/fuel related programmes providing targeted support to individuals
 - e. Develop covid safe arrangements to enable them to provide support/peer support/direct service provision to vulnerable groups
- vii. (up to) £30,000 to MFR Mission Christmas to provide direct support to children and families this Christmas through provision of Christmas gifts for the principal benefit of the residents of the Burgh.

2.3 Alternatively, there is an option for Members to retain the underspend, in part or whole, in the Common Good Fund reserves.

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource** – There is currently an overall projected underspend of £258,000 in the agreed Common Good budget for 2020/21². As a result of civic and events and festival activities not progressing during the year, an underspend on these headings of £341,000 was reported to August committee which was identified to support recovery and poverty/wellbeing related projects within Inverness City Area. At CIAC in August, £80,000 of this underspend was allocated to support the Inverness Winter Payment Scheme.

The paper proposes to allocate up to £100,000 of the remaining underspend. The remainder should be retained in reserves. There are no additional administration costs associated with the projects identified. Further details can be found in the Financial Monitoring and Capital Projects Report – item 6a.

The ICGF's financial reserves are reducing in order to support the delivery of City projects. Any new expenditure commitments made in the remainder of the year diminishes the ability to help rebuild those reserves to a long-term sustainable level.

² Note that £1.8m was allocated from reserves to balance the budget for 2020/21 in order to support the delivery of City projects.

- 3.2 **Legal** – The purpose of the Common Good Fund is to “*benefit the people of Inverness*”. There has to be demonstrable benefit as a result of spend.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island)** – Members have identified vulnerability as a priority for Common Good budget underspend with a particular focus on poverty, mental health and wellbeing and employability related activity. The projects proposed as a result of engagement with a range of groups from across Inverness and aim to tackle some of the key challenges facing communities at the current time including those related to poverty and equality.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** – Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency is a fundamental part of the Council’s recovery strategy.
- 3.5 **Risk** –The projects identified for support are designed to minimise risk of delivery.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** – there are no Gaelic implications.

4. Background

- 4.1 An update on City Recovery was provided to the CIAC meeting on the 27 July. This included a summary of current projects and interventions but also potential capital projects to support recovery going forward. It was agreed that a Member workshop would be held to provide a focus on potential future projects. This should also consider how the Inverness Common Good Fund could be deployed to support recovery.
- 4.2 An update on the discussions from this workshop and a workshop focused on general recovery, was reported to the August meeting of the CIAC. Whilst there was still a focus on recovery, a strong message from the Member workshops was that a further area of focus should be on projects to support vulnerability and mitigate the current and immediate impacts of covid. The report concluded that there were three potential areas of focus for the underspend in 2020/21 Inverness Common Good Budget:
1. Events and Festivals projects – attracting people into the City in a covid-safe way
 2. Short term infrastructure projects - designed to support improvements in common spaces in Inverness and attract footfall to the City Centre
 3. Poverty, wellbeing and employability projects focused to support vulnerable people across the City.

It was agreed that officers would work to develop these ideas further with updates provided to the City Area Recovery Group and recommendations for Members to consider to this meeting of the CIAC.

- 4.3 This report provides Members with an update on the work undertaken to date. This reflects the updates provided to the City Area Recovery Group, Events and Festivals Working Group and the workshop held on 5 November 2020 which considered potential areas of focus around poverty, wellbeing and employability. On the basis of the work and feedback to date, the report presents recommendations for Members on the use of the Inverness Common Good Budget underspend for 2020/21.

5. Update on Events and Festivals

- 5.1 The events and festivals programme, funded by the Common Good Fund, has worked effectively to support and enhance City vibrancy since 2009. However, the events programme, in line with all other mass gathering events, has been cancelled for 2020/21. On 27 August 2020, the CIAC considered a paper with support of the Events

and Festivals Working Group, on whether there were other areas that could be taken forward to encourage footfall into the City. Two potential projects were outlined:

1. Riverlights
2. Making the Northern Meeting Part a covid-safe space for events.

5.2 Following discussion, Members agreed to defer the item noting that more detailed information on the proposals was required and whether what was proposed was feasible during a pandemic situation.

5.3 Officers, in conjunction with the Events and Festivals working group, reviewed the position following the committee meeting and the comments and feedback from Members. It was agreed a new direction was required. Work is now underway with partners in the arts, cultural and events sector, principally Eden Court and Highlife Highland, to review and develop a format which will provide for a new programme of events and general support for arts and cultural activity in the City and Area in the post - Covid world.

5.4 Whilst the Common Good Fund has provided resources to date, the review will also look at options to broaden the spectrum of funding sources and will also consider operational and co-ordination options, noting the recent retiral of the Inverness Events Manager. The overall objective will be for the new format to support and enhance the recovery plan for the City and Area. Members and other stakeholders will be engaged in the development of the new format and a report is intended to be presented on options, to the next City Area Committee set for 18th February 2021.

5.5 It is therefore not proposed at this time to bring forward projects related to events, arts or cultural activity to be funded from the underspend but to present sustainable options for Members to consider at the February committee that would be part of the 2021/22 budget setting process.

6. Short Term Infrastructure Projects

6.1 There has been strong support from Members for infrastructure related projects to support wider City recovery. The update provided to the August meeting of the CIAC outlined a range of large scale and short-term infrastructure projects. Those larger scale projects are generally dependent on accessing external funding and work is progressing to ensure projects are near 'shovel' ready to enable applications to be made if funding opportunities arise. A good example of this was the Farraline Park Bus Project reported in detail to the last meeting of this committee. Regular updates are provided to the CARG on progress and are being led by the Head of Development and Regeneration.

6.2 Also reported to the August meeting were a number of potential short term projects which could potentially have a positive impact on recovery of the City. It was agreed that officers would go and explore these in further detail, scoping what work would be involved and the potential costs. This would be with a view to coming forward with proposals to this committee for potential funding from the Common Good underspend.

6.3 A short update on each of the projects is provided below:

- 6.3.1
- **Reconfiguration of Academy Street** – the Council are currently working with Sustrans on this project which will not be progressed until 2021/22. Funding at this stage is therefore not required.

- 6.3.2 • **Regeneration of Barron Taylor Street** – this will be a significant development for the City but the wider development of the Union Street building requires to be progressed first prior to pursuing regeneration of Barron Taylor Street. It is anticipated that works will start in early 2021 with completion late 2022.
- 6.3.3 • **Bringing back Eden Court** – Members will be aware that Eden Court has recently reopened its café and cinema spaces and has also been successful in securing investment of £750,000 from Scottish Government and Creative Scotland as part of the Performing Arts Venue Relief Fund. Eden Court are a core partner in exploring how to develop a new programme for events and cultural activities outlined in section 5 which will be considered by this Committee in February.
- 6.3.4 • **Developing the Northern Meeting Park as a covid-safe space for events/performance** – as outlined in section 5, following discussion at the last CIAC it was agreed a more general review and new approach to events and cultural activities was required and this will be considered by this Committee in February.
- 6.3.5 • **Development of Torvean Park and Park Run** – as verbally reported to the August meeting, all funding for this project is now in place, work has begun and the park is anticipated to open in March 2021.
- 6.3.6 • **Decluttering of the High Street** – Officers have met to review the layout of street furniture in the High Street. The plan is to improve the ability of the High Street to accommodate pedestrian and wheeling and in particular, cyclists whilst retaining its capacity to allow people to spend time and enjoy the space. Officers are working up a plan which will reduce the number of lighting columns and bollards to provide for space to improve pedestrian and cycle flows whilst providing better space for other uses which would help promote footfall. A draft plan will be prepared and consultation will take place with stakeholders including members, Inverness Bid and representatives of the Access Panel and other relevant access groups. At this stage it is not proposed to recommend allocating funding from the underspend to take this forward but that it would be more appropriate for further work to be completed and for this to progress as part of the new Town Centre Regeneration Fund.
- 6.3.7 • **Developing a Brand for the Old Town** – research work on developing an approach on branding has been completed with the aim of driving up footfall and creating a destination focus for the Old Town. However, the workshop with Inverness Members on 5 November 2020 had highlighted the importance of potential projects of programmes to drive up footfall across the whole City – including the Longman and Carse areas – in order to benefit all City businesses.

Members were clear about the importance of supporting business. Different suggestions were proposed including whether there should be a particular focus on supporting Common Good tenants/businesses and whether there could/should be financial support for business, again with a focus on Common Good tenants. The importance of supporting all business within the City was noted.

Officers have explored different options and have concluded:

- It would not be appropriate to support only one section of the business community within Inverness – supporting only Common Good tenants/business would place other businesses at a disadvantage.
- The Common Good Fund does not have the financial resources to develop a hardship scheme for all business, in addition, Scottish Government schemes already exist in addition to the extension of the furlough scheme to support business.
- The purpose of Common Good funding is to provide ‘clear benefit for the wider residents of the Burgh’ of Inverness. It would be difficult to argue that supporting individual businesses would support this purpose.

Based on feedback from Members and the strong wish to support business overall within the City, it is proposed to refocus this original work to develop a marketing and branding campaign for across the City, including targeted approaches for the retail locations outwith the main City Centre. This would benefit all City businesses. This would work in tandem with the wider opportunities to market the City in collaboration with the City Bid and the Lochness and Inverness T Bid. The City Branding Plan would be developed in consultation with other key stakeholders such as HIE, Inverness Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. The opportunity to link in with the Castle Project will also be a key consideration. It is recommended that this is overseen by the CARG and progress reported back to this committee through the CARG minutes.

Recommendation: to allocate £20,000 from the Inverness Common Good underspend 2020/21 towards developing a City-wide branding and marketing campaign in order to increase footfall and support City businesses.

7. Community Wellbeing

7.1 As outlined above, Members had indicated a desire to better understand poverty and wellbeing issues facing communities with a view to considering whether the Common Good underspend could be targeted at projects or activities to address immediate covid impacts.

7.2 As agreed at the last CIAC, a workshop was held with a range of Inverness based organisations to explore issues facing the City in more detail. This was reported back to Members during the workshop on 5 November 2020. Key issues identified included:

Employment/employability

- Lack of digital access for disabled people/employability purposes
- Lack of work placements with many offices operating digitally
- Low wages/part time employment
- Concern increase in unemployment

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Concerns at impact on mental health and wellbeing of individuals and staff
- Increases in social isolation as a result of move online
- Gaps in services with some unable to operate due to covid measures
- Increase in discrimination/hate incidents targeted at individuals unable to wear face coverings and increase anxiety and social isolation

Poverty

- Increasing unemployment and increase in financial/food and fuel insecurity

- Challenges for individuals unfamiliar with benefits system
- Individuals not qualifying for emergency payments
- Exacerbation of existing inequalities and vulnerabilities

7.3 Based on the feedback received a series of proposals were developed to help address a number of the issues identified and were shared with Members. However, it was noted to Members at the workshop:

- Inverness Common Good Fund cannot resolve all of these challenges – it is about what can be achieved at this point in time
- There are national schemes in place to address some challenges and recent funding awarded by Scottish Government to address areas such as individuals not qualifying
- Not all the issues identified require additional funding – the importance of working together across sectors is key but also information sharing and awareness crucial.
- Proposals have been identified to provide immediate support and where they will add value

7.4 It was also noted that there were several areas of potential support which could be explored in the future: These included:

- Support around care experienced young people
- Common Good Grant Budget – ringfencing next year's budget for priorities related to poverty, mental and wellbeing and employability and skills
- Developing Living Wage City status as a way of progressing in-work poverty
- Working with Common Good business to develop e.g. work-based placements for young/disabled people.

With the latter two, it was proposed that these were areas for potentially progressing next year, when there was not the same pressure on business, incomes and wage levels.

7.5 Overall Member feedback was positive on the potential areas for support but also highlighted:

- Concerns regarding food poverty
- The importance of supporting arts/cultural activities and exploring new ways of delivering online events and activities (*this feedback has been captured as part of the wider events and cultural approach at section 5*)
- The importance of supporting business
- Simplifying support for third sector organisations – one grant scheme with a range of criteria
- Importance of ensuring signposting and awareness raising of where support is available
- Importance of people being able to seek advice through a designated point
- Importance of understanding that the Common Good Fund cannot be responsible for addressing mental health issues
- The importance of adding value to activities
- Importance of focusing efforts in key areas

7.6 Should Members decide to allocate the underspend rather than retaining it for Common Good Fund reserves, then based upon the feedback received, there are four areas for potential targeting.

1. **Support for Business** – as outlined at para 6.3.7, up to £20,000 to develop a City marketing/branding campaign in order to increase footfall into the City Centre and surrounding areas to support local business.

Rationale: this would address Member wishes to provide support to businesses across the City.

- 7.7
2. **Tackling Discrimination** – up to £10,000 to develop an awareness raising campaign and associated digital training to tackle discriminatory/hate activity targeted at disabled people unable to wear face coverings. This would involve a poster campaign for retail/hospitality premises with a view to promoting awareness of the issues facing individuals but also to promote confidence for individuals affected to return to the City Centre; addressing anxiety and isolation. This would also include developing an online training package for retail/hospitality staff to raise awareness of the issues facing individuals and promote better understanding.

Rationale: this would address the concerns raised about the impact new covid rules and regulations are having on disabled individuals and promote better awareness and understanding.

- 7.8
3. **Third Sector Grant Fund** – up to £40,000 grant fund for third sector organisations to support projects and activities to:
 - a. Support employability through provision of digital devices
 - b. Address social isolation through digital inclusion projects
 - c. Develop training programmes to support wellbeing, managing anxiety and social isolation
 - d. Support food/fuel related programmes providing targeted support to individuals
 - e. Develop covid safe arrangements to enable them to provide support/peer support/direct service provision to vulnerable groups

Rationale: this would address a range of key issues identified by third sector organisations particularly related to social isolation and wellbeing but provide criteria to focus priorities. This would be administered and run through the existing grant scheme process with no additional overheads.

- 7.9
4. **MFR Mission Christmas** – up to £30,000 to provide direct support to children and families this Christmas through provision of Christmas gifts. This would be administered directly through the Mission Christmas campaign.

Rationale: this would address direct concerns regarding increasing financial insecurity and challenges facing families by providing direct support to children for Christmas.

- 7.10
- If approved, this would allocate up to £100,000 from the remaining £258,000 underspend enabling the balance to be retained for Common Good Fund reserves. This would still enable funds to be identified and agreed for future project priorities if they were to arise in the coming months and allow Members, and the Inverness Common Good Fund, to be responsive to recovery or wellbeing related issues. City Branding and Tackling Discrimination would be to provide budgets and the full amounts may not be required. Grant fund expenditure would be dependent upon applications coming forward, however based upon applications to the core scheme to date, it is likely to be utilised.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment
Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 10 November 2020

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