

Agenda Item	9
Report No	ERA-06-21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Easter Ross Area Committee

Date: 17 February 2021

Report Title: Use of Cromarty Firth Covid Response Funds

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Community and Places

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following on from the decisions made at Highland Council on 7 January 2021 Cromarty Firth Ward Members have requested that a portion of the Ward's remaining Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds be used to support local play areas as outlined in the report. This is in line with the decision taken at a meeting of the Highland Council on 7 January 2021. As this will repurpose the funding, approval at Area Committee is required.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- Consider the proposal to allocate £15,000 from the remaining Cromarty Firth Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to support the provision of play equipment in the Cromarty Firth Ward in consultation with amenities staff and local communities.
 - Note that next steps to progress this work will include confirmation of any match funding available, the type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed. This will involve the amenities team and communities.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Legal: whilst the Council has no legal duty to provide playparks, the Council does have a legal duty in relation to the health and safety of playparks under its ownership. This means that checks must be undertaken annually.

The Management of Health & Safety at Work Act 1992 requires a regular risk assessment of play areas. This entails examination of the equipment, the site and the surrounding area

for any/all potential hazards that may be encountered by the playground user. This involves checking site layout, access points and all equipment meeting current standards. High risk safety defects must be actioned to maintain the site safe for use. Any maintenance costs or replacing end of life items must be met from the existing service budget.

- 3.2 Resource: the report asks Members to consider a proposal to allocate a portion of the remaining covid-19 ward discretionary budget for the Cromarty Firth Ward on play equipment for existing sites within the ward. This is in line with the Council decision on 7 January 2021, enabling Members to decide to set aside existing covid monies for spend on projects to assist children and adults post Covid, such as contributing to play parks. The proposal will retain a portion of the covid Ward Budget for direct covid/resilience needs. It is also anticipated that the funds allocated for play equipment will be augmented by local wind farm funding, where this is available, in order to grow the resource available for play area investment.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications – reallocating covid ward funds will result in a reduced sum being available to support vulnerable communities within the ward on resilience related support. The repurposed Covid ward funds will however support communities in deprived areas and help local families to enjoy good quality play equipment. Proposals for play parks should identify, through screening for impact, if there are any potential barriers for people protected under the equality act, for example children and families affected by disability.
- 3.4 Risk – there is a risk that allocating covid-19 funds at this point for other purposes may result in the ward running out of budget to support local resilience activity, depending upon how long the pandemic and response lasts for.

Maintenance budgets are insufficient to inspect, maintain and retain the number of play areas currently in use. Additional new equipment puts further pressure on this budget. Many sites contain older equipment that does not comply with current standards, items nearing end of life and with insufficient safety surfacing therefore, when considering how to spend the new allocation, consideration should be given to replacing end of life equipment which would mitigate safety issues, rather than purchasing additional equipment which carries a cost for inspection and maintenance in future years.

- 3.5 Climate Change/Gaelic – there are no implications

4. Background

- 4.1 It was agreed at a meeting of the Highland Council on 7 January 2021 that wards with unspent covid-19 funds to spend this on projects to assist children and adults post covid, especially within deprived areas. This was to include contributing to play park equipment and a process was agreed for progressing this. Should Members within a ward wish to set aside a portion of their remaining covid-19 ward discretionary fund for other purposes than originally intended, then this would be agreed at a meeting of the appropriate Area Committee. This report seeks consideration of a proposal from the Cromarty Firth Members

to set aside a proportion of their covid funds for spend on play areas within their communities.

5. Current Covid-19 Ward Discretionary Budget Position

5.1 All wards across Highland were awarded a sum of £16,000 in April 2020 to support covid resilience activity. This was augmented by £10,000 in 20 covid-vulnerable communities across the area, including Alness and Invergordon. The total available covid-19 ward discretionary funds for Cromarty Firth were £36,000. It was agreed at Council on 7 January 2021 that to increase flexibility, there was no requirement to spend the additional monies on the covid-vulnerable communities originally identified and that the sums available per ward could be deployed across the area as appropriate. A summary of the funds available, spent and those remaining are summarised in table 1.

Table 1

Area	Budget	Spend to 1.2.21	Balance
Ward wide	£36,000	£10,230*	£25,670

**There are a number of pending applications totalling £1,200*

6. Cromarty Firth Members' Proposal

6.1 Following discussion at a Ward Business Meeting on 11 January 2021, Cromarty Firth Members agreed to pursue a proposal to set aside a proportion of their covid-19 ward discretionary budget for the purpose of play equipment in the ward. It is proposed:

- To retain £10,000 of covid-19 funds to allow for further support around the provision of resilience support including food.
- To allocate £15,000 to be used to support play equipment across the area, recognising the importance of play to children generally and particularly at the current time.

It is anticipated that where wind farm monies are available to communities these funds could provide match funding and so increase the level of resource available to support play areas in the community.

6.2 Work is required, in consultation with the amenities team and communities, on how best to take forward the spend of the funds identified. This will include confirmation of any match funding available, the type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of the ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed.

Designation: Carron McDiarmid, ECO, Community & Places

Date: 4 February 2021

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