

Agenda Item	<b>7.</b>
Report No	<b>CC/09/21</b>

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Caithness Committee

**Date:** 22 April 2021

**Report Title:** Use of Thurso and North West Caithness (Ward 2) and Wick and East Caithness (Ward 3) Covid Response Funds

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

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following the decisions made at Highland Council on 7 January 2021 (report carried over from meeting of 17 December 2020) Ward 2 and Ward 3 Members have requested that a portion of their Wards remaining Covid -19 Ward Discretionary funds be used to supplement the current agreed funding from their mainstream Ward Discretionary Budget towards the Caithness Village Officer Scheme 2021 and also to assist local Christmas Lights Groups with the costs of repairing lights damaged due to prolonged exposure to the elements.
- 1.2 This is in line with the decision taken at a meeting of the Highland Council on 7 January 2021 (17 December 2020) as this will repurpose the funding so approval at Area Committee is required.

### 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Consider and agree the proposal to allocate £6,000.00 (£3,000.00 from each Ward) to assist the 12 local Community Councils (now including Wick and Thurso) who are part of the Village Officer Scheme to apply for up to £500.00 to assist with their village officers' duties for 2021/2022.
- Consider and agree the proposal to allocate £6,000.00 (£3,000.00 from each Ward) to assist local Christmas Lights Groups with repairs to lights damaged due to prolonged exposure to the elements. A maximum of £1,500.00 for Wick and Thurso and £300 for other identified groups. Closing date for applications to be 30 June 2021

### **3. Implications**

- 3.1 Resource : the report asks the Members of Wards 2 and 3 to consider a proposal to allocate a portion of their remaining covid-19 ward discretionary budgets, which have been carried forward from 2020/21, to supplement the funds already agreed from their 2021/22 mainstream ward discretionary budget towards the village officer scheme which is run by the Association of Caithness Community Councils (ACCC).

Also, a proposal to allocate a further portion of these funds towards the repair costs that local Christmas Lights Groups will have attracted due to the prolonged period of time that their lights would have been exposed to the elements due to covid-19 gatherings guidance.

These proposals would repurpose £12,000.00 covid-19 ward discretionary funds and leave £17,539.53 covid funds for Ward 2 and £15,258.74 for Ward 3.

- 3.2 Legal: no implications.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island): reallocating covid ward funds will result in a reduced sum being available to support vulnerable communities within each ward on resilience related support. The repurposed covid ward funds will however support all communities in Caithness including those in deprived areas.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: there are no implications.
- 3.5 Risk: there is a risk that allocating covid-19 funds at this time for other purposes may result in both wards running out of budget to support resilience activity, depending upon how long the pandemic and response lasts for.
- 3.6 Gaelic: there are no implications

### **4. Background**

- 4.1 It was agreed at a meeting of the Highland Council on 7 January 2021 (report carried forward from meeting of 17 December 2020) that wards with unspent covid-19 funds may wish to set aside a portion of their remaining funds for other purposes than originally intended and that this would need to be agreed at a meeting of the appropriate Area Committee. This report seeks consideration of joint proposals from the Thurso and North West Caithness Members and the Wick and East Caithness Members to set aside a proportion of their covid funds for spend on supplementing the Caithness village officer scheme and to assist with repairs to lights and fittings suffered by Christmas lights groups

### **5. Current Covid-19 Ward 2 and 3 Discretionary Budget Position**

- 5.1 All wards across Highland were awarded a sum of £16,000.00 in April 2020 to support covid resilience activity. This was augmented by £10,000.00 in 20 covid-vulnerable communities across the area, including Wick and Thurso. The total available covid-19 ward discretionary funds for both wards were £36,000.00.
- 5.2 It was agreed at Highland Council on 7 January 2021 (17 December 2020) 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

<b>Area</b>	<b>Budget</b>	<b>Spend to 31.3.21</b>	<b>Balance remaining</b>
Ward 2	£36,000.00	£12,460.47	£23,539.53
Ward 3	£36,000.00	£14,741,26	£21,258.74

## 6. Ward 2 and Ward 3 Members' Proposal

6.1 Following discussion at a Joint Ward Business Meeting on 15 March 2021 Members agreed to pursue a proposal to set aside £12,000.00 (£6,000.00 per Ward) of their covid-19 ward discretionary budget for the undernoted purposes.

- **Village Officer Scheme** funding (this is in addition to the funding agreed from the mainstream Ward Discretionary Budget by Members on 15 March 2021) of £6,000.00 (£3,000 per Ward) to be available to support the existing Village Officer Scheme.
- each of the 12 Community Councils in Caithness (includes Thurso CC and Wick CC) can apply for up to £500.00.
- Funds to be used as a top up to the current Village Officer Scheme but to be applied for via Ward Manager and not the ACCC.
- One application per Community Council would be allowable until 31 March 2022.
- **Christmas Lights** funding - £6,000.00 (£3,000.00) per Ward to be allocated to cover the costs of repairs to community Christmas lights and fittings damaged due to the prolonged exposure to the elements brought about by Covid regulations.
- The £6,000.00 to be determined as £1,500.00 each to Thurso and Wick with a further £3,000.00 being allocated as £300.00 to 10 recognised community Christmas light groups.
- Groups would be required to submit an application with closing date being set as 30 June 2021

Designation: Carron McDiarmid, ECO, Communities and Place

Date: 5 April 2021

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