

Agenda Item	<b>8.</b>
Report No	<b>SCC/15/21</b>

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Sutherland County Committee

**Date:** 16 August 2021

**Report Title:** Place Based Investment Funds - Sutherland

**Report By:** ECO Communities and Place

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following on from the budget agreed by Highland Council in March 2021, a £100,000 Place Based Investment Fund was allocated to each ward for the 2021/22 financial year. This fund is intended to enable a flexible local response to address the 4 harms of Covid which are identified as direct health harms; health impacts not directly related to Covid; societal impacts and economic impacts.
- 1.2 Early discussions with local Members at ward level have identified two key priority areas for spend. It is proposed that the £100,000 Place Based Investment Fund allocated to Ward 4 East Sutherland and Edderton is used to fund playpark improvements and initiatives that support mental wellbeing.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider and agree the proposed allocations of the Place Based Investment Fund for Ward 4 as follows:
- Support for playparks £80,000
  - Support for mental wellbeing initiatives £20,000.

### 3. Implications

#### 3.1 Resource implications

The resource implications are set out in the report.

#### Legal implications

- 3.2 Funding will be made to external groups and/or other Council services in line with the Scheme of Delegation, meaning that grants of up to £10,000 can be administered locally by the Ward Manager in consultation with Members, and grants larger than £10,000 will require to be reported to Sutherland County Committee for approval.

### 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) impacts

Support for projects that improve the quality of community outdoor space and that address the mental wellbeing impacts of COVID will deliver positive impacts on communities and working through local groups helps build community capacity.

### 3.4 Risk implications

Grants will be made following established grant making procedures to minimise the risk of project failure, funding shortfall or funding being used for other purposes.

New play equipment will in time require maintenance and repairs and at present resources are extremely limited for this. The future maintenance burden can be mitigated, if not entirely eliminated, by Amenities staff working with communities to help ensure that any new equipment is low maintenance and uses standard parts; and by encouraging community groups to purchase service packages from manufacturers/ installers when they buy new equipment. Additionally, a broader approach to play is being promoted, including regarding play areas as social spaces for all age groups with less focus on play equipment, and promoting natural play around existing features or features constructed out of standard materials (timber etc).

### Climate Change, Gaelic implications

There are no Climate Change or Gaelic implications.

## **4. Background**

4.1 As part of the Health and Prosperity Strategy agreed through the 2021/22 budget process, £2.1m was approved for distribution through Area Committees to support local responses to address the four harms of COVID (direct harm caused by COVID; other health impacts; societal impacts and economic impacts) and consider local investments to support recovery. £100,000 per ward was agreed.

4.2 Discussions with communities and partners have highlighted two key priority areas for potential spend of this funding allocation:

- Play areas
- Initiatives to promote mental health and wellbeing.

## **5. Playparks**

5.1 Communities in East Sutherland and Edderton have identified playparks as key community infrastructure in need of investment. It is noted that this would have a positive impact on the mental wellbeing of children and young people but also the potential for wider benefits for the whole community. Communities across the ward have established groups to help fundraise to refurbish playparks and/or provide new equipment.

5.2 Members have also been briefed by the Amenities Service on the condition of playparks in the ward and it is clear that significant investment is required. Given this, and the limited funds available, Members are also interested in a broader approach to playparks – perhaps considering them as community spaces for all age groups with benches, trees and open space for play rather than limited to play equipment.

5.3 A funding contribution from Highland Council to community fundraising efforts will strengthen the community bids to external funders and enable the Council funding to assist as many communities as possible. Community groups will be expected to work

closely with the Council's Amenities Service to ensure that any proposal considers sustainability and maintenance going forward. Criteria for applying, which will include sustainability and alternative approaches to playparks, will be developed in conjunction with the amenities team and funding bids will be assessed with assistance of Amenities staff. It is also proposed that the Amenities service is able to access the funding where appropriate and in consultation with Members.

- 5.4 It is proposed to allocate £80,000 to projects relating to playparks.
- 5.5 Projects which bring an element of match-funding will be prioritised over those seeking 100% funding. However, 100% grant award could be made available for exceptional projects. Organisations and groups will be asked to apply within an agreed timescale. All projects must be completed by December 2022. Applications will be made via the established process for Ward Discretionary Grants.
- 5.6 The funds would be managed by the Ward Manager in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, with any grants awarded of £10,000 or over being reported to a future Sutherland County Committee for approval.

## **6 Mental Wellbeing**

- 6.1 Mental wellbeing has emerged as a major impact of COVID. Members were recently briefed at a Ward Business Meeting by colleagues from NHS Highland on the impact of COVID on older people, in particular how isolation during lockdown has affected people's confidence to go out and socialise or even go shopping. This is further exacerbating their isolation and the associated impact on their wellbeing. Groups that work with older people are facing additional costs as they are now having to provide outreach to people at home in addition to the more traditional services offered through lunch clubs and other social activities usually held in community centres or similar venues.
- 6.2 At the same meeting Members were briefed by members of the Sutherland Community Partnership Mental Wellbeing Group which, building on the experience from Caithness, is planning workshops in September to identify initiatives that support and build mental wellbeing across all age groups, but particularly amongst young people.
- 6.3 It is proposed to allocate £20,000 to support these and other initiatives relating to improving mental wellbeing in the wake of COVID.
- 6.4 Organisations and groups will be asked to apply within an agreed timescale and all projects must be completed by December 2022. Applications will be made via the established process for Ward Discretionary Grants.
- 6.5 The funds would be managed by the Ward Manager in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, with any grants awarded of £10,000 or over being reported to a future Sutherland County Committee for approval.

## **7 Ward 1 Place Based Investment Fund**

- 7.1 Members are asked to note the Ward 1 Members are reviewing evidence to support how to allocate the Place Based Investment Fund in North, West and Central Sutherland. A report will be brought to a future meeting of Sutherland County Committee.

Designation: ECO Communities and Place

Date: 4 August 2021

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