

Agenda Item	5
Report No	CP/36/21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: **Communities and Place**

Date: 10 November 2021

Report Title: **Community Participation and Involvement Update**

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 One of the Council's core strategic commitments is to improve our working with communities and encourage greater involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery. As part of the Recovery Plan, this Committee agreed a [framework for engagement and involvement](#) with our communities in August 2020. The aim was to help us to better understand the impact of covid on our communities and individual groups; to understand the learning from the response efforts; to understand need and actions required to mitigate impacts on specific groups and to serve as a basis for establishing priorities for communities moving forwards.
- 1.2 This work is moving into the next phase with the employment of 10 temporary Community Support Co-ordinators across Highland in August 2021, who will engage directly with communities at a local level in order to understand how groups wish to move forward following the pandemic and how the Council can support them to take forward priorities within their communities. This will contribute and support community involvement and participation in several key strands of work including developing the Council's approach to place and place planning within our communities but also the development of an overall engagement framework for the organisation.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on the initial work of the community support co-ordinators, including engagement with over 660 groups since August 2021, and the key themes emerging from their initial engagement with groups. It also considers a further and related strand of work through the Community Food Growing Co-ordinator, whose role also includes working directly with community bodies to support them in their aims and work.
- 1.4 The final section of the report summarises the Council's annual report to the Scottish Government on Participation Requests. The annual report can be found at **Appendix 1** and provides details of the three participation requests received over the 2020/21 period,

the ongoing work with two Community Councils involved and the wider work undertaken to promote participation.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Consider the update on the work of the Community Support Co-ordinators, and noting the key themes and issues emerging from their work with groups including volunteering capacity, access to funding, assets to deliver local priorities, ongoing covid impacts including financial concerns and mental health and wellbeing impacts;
- Note the initial work of the Community Food Growing Co-ordinator in relation to the support and engagement with community bodies and that the Community Food Growing Strategy will be presented to the next meeting of this committee;
- Agree the Council's Annual Participation Request report to the Scottish Government which is found at Appendix 1; and
- Note the areas of work under development as outlined in section 9.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications

There are no new resource implications arising from this report. The temporary Community Support Co-ordinators, funded by Covid grant to Summer 2022, are providing a valuable resource in relation to community development activity. The learning from their work will support place-based planning and the development of our engagement approaches.

3.2 Legal implications

The Council has a legal duty to meet the terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act. This includes duties to better empower and involve communities. The Council has statutory resilience duties and the Co-ordinators support this requirement.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) implications

The Council has ongoing statutory duties to take account of the Public Sector Duty to consider eliminating discrimination, advancing equality and fostering good relations. Additionally, the Fairer Scotland Duty requires the Council to take socio-economic disadvantage into account when making strategic decisions.

3.4 One of the Council's Equality Outcomes includes a specific priority to improve engagement and involvement with individuals with protected characteristics. As we move forward, it is crucial that the engagement framework considers how to include and embed the views of equality groups.

3.5 Climate Change implications

There are potential opportunities to develop community approaches to food support including community food growing which has wider positive environmental impacts. The developing Community Food Growing strategy will support this as particularly will the

roles of the Community Food Growing Co-ordinator and Community Support Co-ordinators.

3.6 Gaelic implications

There are no Gaelic implications arising from this report.

3.7 Risk implications

There are no new risk implications identified in the report.

4. Background

4.1 One of the Council's key strategic priorities within its Corporate Plan is to:

Deliver meaningful engagement with Highland communities, listening and responding to what we hear and encourage more community activity and community run services (outcome 6.1).

The empowerment theme of the Council's Recovery Plan focused on developing this priority further but within the context of the ongoing pandemic and with a view to recovery and renewal.

4.2 Over the course of the last year, there has been considerable engagement with communities and groups, through the lens of the pandemic, with a focus on providing support within our communities and directly to groups who have been playing a lead role over this period. Resilience networks continue to be supported in some communities, whilst in others they have merged with existing bodies. A weekly community briefing to the network continues as an opportunity to share funding opportunities, further Government or local advice related to community testing and vaccination, welfare advice and guidance and other relevant community focused information.

4.3 As the pandemic moves into a new phase, and services and community work moves beyond a resilience focus, this provides an opportunity to build on the engagement and networks through the covid period to establish a stronger relationship with communities and community bodies. This will support taking forward our placed based approach to planning, designing and delivering services which would include new ways of working with communities, including whether there are new ways of running services locally; new ways of supporting community groups and bodies; and greater involvement of communities in service design, priority setting and delivery. A further aim alongside this is to also support groups to realise their aims and local priorities, and the new Community Support Co-ordinators will support taking forward these crucial work strands.

4.4 This report provides an update on the work of the Community Support Co-ordinators and the key themes emerging from their initial engagement with groups. It also considers a further and related strand of work through the Community Food Growing Co-ordinator, whose role also includes working directly with community bodies to support them in their aims and work.

4.5 The final section of the report summarises the Council's Annual report to the Scottish Government on Participation Requests. The annual report can be found at appendix 1 and provides details of the participation requests received over the 2020/21 period and the wider work undertaken to promote participation.

5. Community Support Co-ordinator Update

5.1 Background

Emerging from our understanding of the pandemic and the need to support working with communities, it was agreed at Council last year to develop the role of Community Support Co-ordinator (CSCs). The aim of these roles is to co-ordinate and deliver humanitarian and resilience support, building community capacity and resilience through active engagement with a range of bodies including community and public sector organisations. Following a delay as a result of the need to identify an appropriate funding source, the 10 strong CSC team began on 2 August. Working as part of the broader Community Support and Ward Management team, the posts are temporary for 12 months.

5.2 The role of the CSC is to focus on the needs of communities and community bodies, taking a community development role to support groups to take forward their plans and priorities. The role therefore links strongly to the Council's place-based approach but also a broader community learning and development approach.

5.3 Whilst the resilience focus is not as strong as last year, many communities are maintaining some element of support and therefore a key role of the CSC remains on humanitarian support. Working flexibly across Highland, the role of the CSCs is to lead a partnership based and community centred approach to co-ordinate this assistance and resilience across Council and community bodies and the co-ordinators will themselves deliver food requests received through the Council's welfare team or helpline. The CSCs will also support groups to develop their resilience activity into longer term projects such as food larders/community fridges and sustainable models of food support including links to food growing.

5.4 Their role aims to build on the stronger relationships established with community bodies over the covid period, sustaining engagement and communication with groups and supporting groups to be more involved in service design and delivery.

5.5 The CSC Team has been integrated into the Community Support and Ward Management Team, making best use of existing collaborative arrangements and developing new working relationships with services and partners in supporting effective service delivery and community resilience. Senior Ward Managers are ensuring that strong links exist with Ward Managers and that Member priorities are understood with the wider skills base of the CSC Team being used to best effect.

5.6 Initial Activity

The CSCs began on 2 August and initial activity has focused on making direct connections with local groups and organisations and raising awareness of their role and how they can provide support. This includes a mapping activity of groups that are operating within communities but also those that are continuing to provide resilience support, in recognition that many groups have ceased to operate. This mapping work aims to identify:

- Groups that are operating across communities

- Where there may be gaps within an area with little community-based activity with a view to building capacity
- Identification of the challenges facing community groups and bodies
- Identification of areas for potential support and development
- How the Council can best engage and communicate with groups

5.7 Further initial work has included supporting existing networks, such as resilience groups, and linking with Community Partnership and Community Learning and Development networks.

5.8 A monitoring framework has been designed to record the activity of CSCs and build the understanding of areas for support and shared learning. Weekly performance reports are supplemented by detailed monthly reporting of issues, challenges and outcomes. Monitoring began at the beginning of September and across Highland, the first 6 weeks of activity have included:

- 661 groups engaged with – this is high at present given the initial focus is on reaching out and making connections
- Of the groups engaged with, the group's main activity(s) were:
 - Tackling Mental Health and Wellbeing (19% of all groups)
 - Social Inclusion (18%)
 - Sign Posting and Information (18%)
 - Food support (11%)
 - Other groups engaged with also had a focus on: climate change, sport, community events, digital inclusion

Note: groups could have several key activities

- The majority of groups engaged with were Community Bodies/Community organisations but this also included Community Councils, Development Trusts and Unincorporated community bodies
- A number of enquiries were received from groups: 42% of all enquiries related to networking, followed by funding (22%) and general advice (18%)
- 45% of potential projects discussed with groups were at the exploratory stage whilst 38% had moved into development

5.9 ***Key themes emerging from early work***

Engagement over the first two months of operation has identified several common themes. Not all are priorities or areas of focus across Highland but represent matters which are relevant in several areas:

- Volunteering – recruitment and retention of volunteers. At times hindering project development and ability to progress local priorities. CSCs seeking to support volunteer development and capacity building.

- Mental health and wellbeing – a key priority for many groups across Highland and linked to ongoing challenges of social isolation. CSCs linking to wider community wellbeing projects but opportunity to support groups to develop projects and apply to new Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund.
- Capacity building – identification of areas where there are few or no groups operating. CSCs seeking to build wider community capacity and support communities to progress priorities.
- Access to assets – to support project development. CSC to raise awareness take a pro-active development approach to asset transfer. This includes supporting groups wishing to engage around wider discussions on play areas and how they can support play area development and sustainability within communities.
- Financial worries – ongoing concerns within communities regarding access to food and fuel and targeting support to those who need it most. CSCs to work with groups to raise awareness of supports available – local and pan-Highland – supporting groups develop ongoing food supports in the form of food larders/community fridges.
- Networking and building connections – limited knowledge of certain groups locally and the role they are playing and conversely, groups not connected into wider support networks and opportunities for sharing learning. CSCs building wider connections.

5.10 In addition to the above, the following are specific examples of some of the initial projects CSCs are supporting. Local updates will be provided to Members in ward business meetings.

- **Food Growing Project Development** - supporting a community group wishing to make use of planters and waste ground areas around a housing estate. Seeking advice on funding options through food growing coordinator and use of the land for this purpose. Exploring partnership opportunity with local development trust to support the project and jointly apply for funding.
- **Disabled Ramblers Group** - Supporting a disabled ramblers group to access funding to purchase equipment and become a SCIO. Link to expert organisation regarding practical technical advice and support around governance. Supporting to seek new memberships and volunteers to support sustainability of the organisation.
- **Identifying Need** - working in response to a group concern and explore whether those in greatest need are aware of and able to access support. Working with a Community Council to help identify levels of deprivation in area, considering need, representation and disengagement.
- **Developing a nature reserve** – working with a local nature project to consider issues around governance, volunteering and local term sustainability. Looking into new ways to use the space and consider revenue generating activities.
- **Play Park development** – working with local group and amenities staff to develop local play area. Concerns regarding youth vandalism involvement of youth club in design of project. Exploring option of natural play and examples of where this has worked elsewhere.

5.11 **Supporting other areas of work**

In addition to the work outlined about, the CSCs will be, and already are in some areas, supporting other key areas of Council and partnership activity. This includes:

- Play Areas - engagement and support to groups through the Play Area review. Direct engagement with groups wishing to become more involved in developing their play area but considering the sustainability of this. As noted at item 13 on the agenda, the CSCs will support the proposed Play Engagement Co-ordinator to undertake wider engagement across communities on the longer-term approach to play in Highland.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund – this is already an issue and is a theme that has emerged from the initial engagement a number of the CSCs have had with groups. CSCs will pro-actively link with groups to support them to develop proposals to the new Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund. This fund aims to support community-based initiatives that promote and develop good adult mental health and wellbeing caused by social isolation and loneliness; to mitigate and protect against the impact of distress and mental ill health within the adult population, as well as addressing the mental health inequalities exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Place Planning – CSCs will take a key role in supporting the involvement and participation of communities and group in any place planning or service place-based activity taking place in their area. Where place-based plans have been developed – including Fort William 2040, Skye & Raasay Future and North West 2045 – CSC's can play an enabling role supporting the ongoing development of these plans. The CSC in Easter Ross is already engaged in the place planning work being led in Alness and Invergordon which is focused on Climate Adaptation. Climate Action Towns, led by Architecture and Design Scotland (A&DS), has selected Alness and Invergordon as one of six project areas in Scotland. A&DS, in partnership with Highland Adapts and the North Highland & Islands Climate Hub, will work with key stakeholders to engage the community using a place-based approach to form the foundation of a climate action plan.
- Community Planning – whilst the CSCs are not community planning development officers, they do have a role in supporting groups to contribute towards partnership outcomes that align with the priorities of the group e.g. food insecurity/mental health and wellbeing. The nature of their role is to support, develop and build capacity and therefore their work aligns well and supports the CLD activity happening within local areas and they will contribute to the CLD networks developing across Highland.

5.12 A further update on the work of the CSCs will be provided to the February committee.

6. **Community Food Growing Co-ordinator**

6.1 As part of the transformation programme, funding was agreed to employ a Community Food Growing Co-ordinator (CFGC) for two years to support the development and implementation of the Council's Food Growing Strategy and engage directly with communities and groups to enable food growing projects across Highland. Key actions within the strategy will focus on supporting groups to take forward community food growing projects.

6.2 The CFGC also started on 2 August and has been reviewing the feedback from the consultation on the draft Food Growing Strategy, including considering key learning from the pandemic and taking forward additional engagement with key groups highlighted through the consultation e.g. young people and schools.

6.3 The co-ordinator has also been taking forward the other key strand to the role and working directly with community groups and individuals to support community growing projects across the area:

- Working with the Highland Good Food Partnership to help support the structure for the partnership and the network of groups and projects to become established. This partnership will be a useful mechanism for enabling a network of food growers to support each other to develop.
- Responding to enquiries to the Council from groups and individuals at early stages of their projects to help identify land, understand Council processes and to give advice as to the steps to take to progress. For example, working with a group in Inverness who have plans for a community garden. The CFGC has met with them and given advice on business planning so that they can apply for the Ward Place Based Investment Fund to take forward their project. The CFGC will be available to them while they build their plan to give feedback and support.
- Working with Community Support Coordinators (CSCs) to gain support in understanding the local situation, helping groups to connect with others locally and in building their group.
- Working to support CSCs on key projects to best coordinate advice and support tailored to the group's needs. For example, to support a group in Lochaber who are considering both a play park renovation project and starting a food growing social enterprise. Advice is being provided jointly on their group's structure, developing plans and objectives, group member motivation and practicalities around starting a CIC and food enterprise.

6.4 The draft strategy will be considered at the Climate Change Working group in December and subsequently at this Committee in February.

7. Annual Report on Participation Requests

7.1 As part of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act, community groups have the right to talk with public authorities about local issues and services called a participation request. The participation request must detail where a community body believes it could help to improve an outcome and it will be able to ask that the public body to take part in a process to improve that outcome.

7.2 Under the terms of the Act, each public body must submit an annual report to the Scottish Government outlining the number, and detail, of the participation requests it has received. For 2020/21, the Scottish Government have asked for information not just on the number and detail of any participation requests, but also wider participation and engagement processes undertaken by the Council. This reflects that whilst participation requests are important and provide an important avenue for community bodies who

believe they are not having their voices heard, building participation and involvement into service engagement and process, should be the clear goal.

7.3 This year's annual report is set out at Appendix 1. It notes that there were three participation requests received over the 2020/21 period. One was refused on the grounds that it did not specify improving an outcome and that there was an existing consultation process underway. The two that were accepted are still ongoing and focused on improving traffic management within a local community and on how to consider community priorities in the course of road and outdoor spaces maintenance and repairs. The report goes on to highlight wider engagement work including the development of the participation and engagement framework, the resilience engagement work, the development of a place-based approach and local community partnership engagement and involvement.

8. **Next Steps**

8.1 There are several areas of work for Members to note that are currently being progressed:

8.2 ***Approach to Community Planning***

Local community planning, is a key way through which to involve and engage communities on addressing local priorities related to socio-economic inequality. A Member seminar prior to the last Communities and Place Committee provided an update on the role and purpose of community planning in Highland and also detailed work on the current review of locality planning and the approach to resourcing Community Planning. In addition to resourcing, key areas for change include ensuring greater involvement and participation from communities, embedding understanding of community planning throughout an organisation ensuring that it represents the 'day job' for staff within agencies and delivering on actions.

8.3 Strong feedback from Members was the need to strengthen the resourcing of community planning at a local level in order to better support and deliver local outcomes and priorities. A Community Planning Partnership Board workshop on resourcing took place on 22 September, senior officers across the partnership subsequently met on 22nd October to develop proposals for the CPP Board meetings in November and December 2021, with a view to establishing an approach to resourcing and focusing partnership working going forward.

8.4 ***Developing a Place Based Approach***

Strategic Partnership Priority 4 of the Council's Health and Prosperity Partnership Plan is Place – Place-based Planning and Investment in Communities. This reflects the commitment of the organisation to taking forward a place-based approach to guide collaborative working with communities and identification of shared priorities and outcomes that takes place and people into account. Several place planning initiatives have already been established, including Fort William 2040, Skye and Raasay Futures and North West 2045. The latter has been a community led programme. All these have supported wider community participation and engagement in the development and creation of local priorities. Community involvement is also central to ongoing delivery.

- 8.5 In addition to specific place planning initiatives, our place based approach also represents our commitment as an organisation to greater planning, designing and delivering services which take account of our places and the people living, working, visiting and investing in them. Examples of where this is currently being progressed includes the Council's review of play areas, the visitor management plan and the amenities review.
- 8.6 A framework to support taking forward a place-based approach is currently being developed and will be considered as part of theme 4 of the Health and Prosperity Strategy at a future meeting of the Council.
- 8.7 ***Engagement and Involvement Framework***
As noted in section 4, with less of a focus on resilience activity, there is a need to develop our participation and involvement framework into a longer term Engagement and Involvement Strategy for the organisation. This needs to reflect how the organisation will engage and involve our communities in how we operate, and help support developing and improving our involvement and relationships with communities across Highland and their involvement in service design, planning and delivery.
- 8.8 A core element of any strategy is how we ensure that we are taking an inclusive approach to involving our communities. One of the new Equality Outcomes agreed by this Committee in May was:
Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making.
Inclusive approaches to engagement and ensuring that we are including and involving all members of our community, must be central to any engagement strategy.
- 8.9 The development of the strategy will be supported by a graduate intern and by the wider Community Support and Ward Management Team. It will be informed by the learning gathered through engagement with communities of the last 18 months but also the current work of the Community Support Co-ordinators.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date: 18-10-21

Author: Alison Clark, Head of Service (Community Support and Engagement)

Appendix 1: Participation Requests Annual Report

Section 32 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 requires public service authorities to produce an annual report on Participation Request activity and publish this no later than 30 June each year. This template has been created to gather participation request data for the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. Information provided will help inform policy and practice at local and national level as the data will be collated and shared by the Scottish Government's Community Empowerment Team. However, it is for each public service authority to make their own annual report publicly available by 30 June 2021, whether using this template or not.

Section One – Public Service Authority Information

Organisation: Highland Council

Address: Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX

Completed by: Alison Clark Role: Head of Service (Community Support and Engagement)

Email: alison.clark@highland.gov.uk Telephone: 01463 702 512

Date of completion: August 2021

Are you the Participation Request Lead Contact for the organisation: No

If not please provide the name, job title and email address for the lead contact for any queries:

Pablo Mascarenhas,

Communities & Democratic Engagement Manager,

Pablo.Mascarenhas@highland.gov.uk

Section 2: Participation Request Data for 2020/21

Please complete following overview table:

Total new applications received in 2020/21	Total applications received prior to 1 April 2020 which were still to be determined at 1 April 2020	Number of accepted applications in 2020/21	Number of applications agreed in 2020/21	Number of applications refused in 2020/21
3	0	2	2	1

2.1 Please provide details of Participation Requests received using the legislation and outwith the legislation in 2020/21 which resulted in changes to public services provided by or on behalf of your public service authority and tell us about those changes:

Name of Community Participation Body	Was the Participation Request successful? (Y/N)	Previous way of working	Way of working following changes	What difference did those changes make for the users of the service? Did they improve service user experiences or outcomes?	Details of any participation requests considered outwith the formal process e.g. agreements reached that resulted in changes to services.
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The outcome improvement process for the above two agreed PRs is still underway.

2.2 Please use this space to provide any further comments relating to the above data, such as describing the outcome improvement process (whether or not it resulted from a formal participation request) and how the community participation body was involved in it, or details of any wider benefits, such as improved community engagement and ongoing participation.

Participation request 1: Nairn West & Suburban Community Council

Summary of request: Management of Nairn Common Good Fund: proposed disposal of Common Good Fund land at Sandown, Nairn

Why it was not successful and alternative: no clear outcome as defined by the terms of the Community Empowerment Act. A direct opportunity to engage through the existing consultation in relation to the proposed disposal of Nairn Common Good Sandown Lands. The Community Council was encouraged to engage and respond.

Participation request 2: Plockton & District Community Council

Summary of request: improved management of vehicular traffic and car parking in Plockton, and traffic calming measures in Duirinish.

Actions Underway:

- Two structured online workshop sessions were held with representatives of the Community Council and other key community stakeholders, along with Council officers representing Ward Management and Policy, Roads and Traffic Management officers: firstly, scoping out issues from the perspective of those living in the area; secondly, looking at relevant information and regulatory and developmental approaches that could be used.
- Highland Council traffic management officers met with community representatives in Plockton and Duirinish to inspect numerous traffic and parking concerns and discuss potential interventions.
- Production of a traffic management report by HC Traffic Management, reflecting insights from the above local engagement. This summarises a variety of identified remedial actions, including enforcement, refreshed signage, lining and disabled parking; as well as longer-term options for community consideration of introduction of pay and display, enforceable parking charges, and potential location of short-term motorhome provision.

Participation request 3: Ferintosh Community Council

Summary of request: Community engagement on local priorities for maintenance and upkeep of roads, amenity and other outdoor spaces.

Actions underway:

- Structured online workshop session held with representatives of the Community Council, along with Council officers from Ward Management and Policy, Roads and Amenities and the Area Committee Chair (at the Community Council's request). This focused on sharing understanding of local concerns and the Council's approach to maintenance and upkeep of roads and outdoor spaces.
- The Community Council and Council Roads officers are now co-creating a framework for appropriately trained community representatives to monitor and report information on local pot-holes to the Council's Roads team through the Community Council. This is intended to support more efficient and timely batching of road repairs.
- The approach to collaborative inspection of roads builds upon an existing agreement with Council Amenities, where the Community Council undertakes some voluntary grass cutting.

The outcome improvement process for the above two agreed PRs is still underway.

Section Three – Partnership Working & Promotion of Participation Requests

3.1 Please provide details of any engagement with support organisations such as local Third Sector Interfaces and public sector Community Learning and Development staff or national organisations such as the Scottish Community Development Centre.

The Council works closely with the Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI) on a number of projects and activities, including community planning related work. During the pandemic, the Council and HTSI shared resources and intelligence to develop a mapping resource and database of key third sector groups. The Council's helpline included an option for recruiting volunteers which was linked through to HTSI who vetted and maintained a database of volunteers for local groups.

The Highland Community Planning Partnership has a network of 9 local Community Partnership bodies comprised of public, third and community sector partners that lead on locality planning at a local level. Our approach to community learning and development is embedded in this structure, with local CLD plans and locality plans being aligned. CLD networks sit alongside each Community Partnership and Community Partnership Work to support shared learning and development.

During the pandemic, Resilience Networks were established across Highland, some led by third sector partners and others, where there were gaps, facilitated by the Council. Over 300 community groups were involved. The Council and HTSI partners liaised closely on these networks to provide advice and support to groups. A weekly written and virtual briefing was established to go to all community resilience groups across Highland. The written briefing continues at present.

3.2 Please provide details of action taken to promote the use of Participation Requests or support Community Participation Bodies in making a Participation Request.

The Council currently promotes the opportunity of participation requests through its website and groups indicating they wish to engage in this process, are guided on what qualifies as an outcome through the central Community Support team. A single point of contact has been established for all requests to be considered.

The Council has taken a broader approach to participation and involvement and is seeking to encourage greater community involvement in service design, planning and delivery through local engagement through Area Committees, Community Partnerships and its developing Place Based Approach.

From August 2021, the Council has employed 10 temporary Community Support Co-ordinators whose role it is to engage and support communities to engage and get involved in service priority planning and delivery. CSCs will also support the increased promotion of Participation Requests as one method of engaging with the Council.

Going forward, the Council intends to build on the learning from other Local Authorities and intends to run annual workshops in order to promote awareness and understanding of participation requests but also the broader approach promoted by the Council which focuses on building involvement and participation into day-to-day processes.

3.3 Please let us know what actions you have been taking to ensure that your processes are inclusive.

The Council recognises the importance of building inclusive approaches to engagement into its service planning and engagement approaches. A newly agreed equality outcome is that:
Identified groups have improved experiences of access to services and greater involvement in service planning, design and decision making.

From August 2021, the Council has employed 10 temporary Community Support Co-ordinators whose role it is to engage and support communities to engage and get involved in service priority planning and delivery. CSCs have a key role in encouraging inclusive approaches to involvement and participation across communities through the course of their activity.

3.4 Please outline any plans you have to continue involving local people and local groups in outcome improvement processes as a result of your Participation Request policies (and also outwith formal participation requests).

Highland Council Framework for Participation and Involvement

One of the Council's key strategic priorities within its Corporate Plan is to:

Deliver meaningful engagement with Highland communities, listening and responding to what we hear and encourage more community activity and community run services (outcome 6.1).

The aim is to improve the Council's working with communities and encourage greater involvement in service design, priority setting and delivery. This is reflected in the Council's Recovery Plan, with Community Empowerment a key priority. As part of the Recovery Plan, a framework for engagement and involvement with our communities in August 2020. The aim was to help better understand the impact of covid on our communities and individual groups; to understand the learning from the response efforts; to understand need and actions required to mitigate impacts on specific groups and to serve as a basis for establishing priorities for communities moving forwards.

A Resilience Group Support Programme was developed to monitor the ongoing support to resilience groups through the January to April lockdown period. This included weekly written and virtual briefings to go to all community resilience groups across Highland. The written briefing continues at present. Resilience Networks were established across Highland, some led by third sector partners and others, where there were gaps, facilitated by the Council to support engagement, advice and learning with community resilience groups.

Updates on progress against this Participation and Involvement framework have been provided at each meeting of the Communities and Place Committee. As the pandemic moves into a new phase, and services and community work moves beyond the resilience focus, this provides an opportunity to build on the engagement and networks through the covid period to establish a stronger relationship with communities and community bodies. The move is towards embedding the Engagement Framework, with a particular focus on inclusive approaches to engagement and involvement. This will support the delivery of one of the Council's Equality Outcomes which includes a specific priority to improve engagement and involvement with individuals with protected characteristics.

Place Based Approach

The Council and its wider partners are currently developing a Place Based Approach to guide collaborative working with communities and identification of shared priorities and outcomes taking place and people into account. The underpinning principle of any place

based approach is the engagement and involvement of communities in the process and delivery.

A good example of this work already underway is the development of the Skye and Raasay Future Place Plan. Community participation was critical to the development of the priorities and vision contained within the Plan and Strengthening Communities is a core outcome. This includes a particular focus on building strong and resilient communities that directly contribute to the development and improvement of new services, core infrastructure and realisation of local priorities [Preparation of the new Skye and Raasay Investment Plan](#)

Community Partnerships

As noted at 3.1, the approach to community planning in Highland recognises the considerable geographical size of the area and has established 9 local Community Partnership to lead on local planning to address inequality. Each local partnership is comprised of public, third and community sector partners that lead on locality planning at a local level. The aim is to directly involve communities and community bodies in the planning and delivery of partnership priorities. Our approach to community learning and development is embedded in this structure, with local CLD plans and locality plans being aligned. CLD networks sit alongside each Community Partnership and Community Partnership Work to support shared learning and development.

3.5 Please provide details about any work undertaken to consider wider reviews of participation practice, and any such methods used to engage with communities.

The CPP has recently reviewed its approach to locality planning in response to several challenges which have been identified, including that of engagement and participation of communities and groups in local planning. This follows learning through the pandemic which highlighted the success of taking a broader approach to engagement and on a thematic basis which involves the wider community but still enables targeting within. It should be noted the positive practical partnership working that has taken place over the last year where there has been a clear focus and direction. A new approach is proposed that provides for the development of area priorities in order to encourage greater participation and buy-in from communities.

Section Four – Additional Information

4.1 Please use this space to provide any further feedback not covered in the above sections.