

Agenda Item	9
Report No	ERA-27-21

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Easter Ross Area Committee

Date: 18 November 2021

Report Title: Use of Tain & Easter Ross Covid Response Funds

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following on from the decisions made at Highland Council on 7 January 2021 Tain & Easter Ross Ward Members have requested that the majority 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 and agree the proposal to allocate £10,000 from the remaining Tain & Easter Ross Covid-19 Ward Discretionary funds to support investment in play in the Tain & Easter Ross Ward in consultation with amenities staff and local communities.
 - Note that next steps to progress this work will follow on from upcoming play equipment inspection reports and local communities will require to be involved in discussions around future provision along with amenities staff.

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.
- 3.2 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.

- 3.3 Resource: the report asks Members to consider a proposal to allocate a portion of the remaining covid-19 ward discretionary budget for the Tain & Easter Ross 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. .
- 3.4 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 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.
- 3.5 Risk – there is a risk that allocating covid-19 funds for other purposes may result in the ward being unable to support future local resilience activity.
- 3.6 Maintenance budgets are insufficient to, maintain and retain the number of play areas currently in use. Additional new equipment puts further pressure on this budget. 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. Additionally, a broader approach to play could potentially be promoted, including regarding play areas as social spaces for all age groups with less play equipment, and promoting natural play around existing features or features constructed out of standard materials (timber etc in order to minimise the ongoing maintenance costs.
- 3.7 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. 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 Tain & Easter Ross Ward to set aside a proportion of their remaining covid funds for spend on play areas within their communities.

5. Current Covid-19 Ward Discretionary Budget Position

- 5.1 Member will recall that in 2020/21 a total of £36,000 was allocated to each ward to support covid resilience activity – this was made up of an initial allocation of £16,000 augmented by a further £10,000 in relation to Tain due to the level of deprivation and then a further £10,000 in January 2021, so that all wards received the same level of funding. It was also 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. Funds unspent at the end of 2020/21 were carried forward to 2021/22.

5.2 The Tain & Easter Ross Ward carried forward a budget of £15,956 of which a further £4,892 has been spent and £1,000 committed. This leaves an uncommitted balance of £10,066 and it is proposed to allocate this to supporting play areas.

6. Tain & Easter Ross Members' Proposal

6.1 Following discussion at a Ward Business Meeting on 20 September 2021, Tain & Easter Ross Members agreed to pursue a proposal to set aside a proportion of their covid-19 ward discretionary budget to support play in the ward. This in response to the issues surrounding play areas and the importance communities place on having viable play areas supporting children and young families to enjoy play opportunities.

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, Communities & Place

Date: 14 October 2021

Author: Helen Ross, Senior Ward Manager, CSER