

Agenda Item	10
Report No	LA/8/22

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Lochaber Area Committee

**Date:** 7 February 2022

**Report Title:** Place Based Investment Funds – Funding application

**Report By:** Executive Chief Officer, 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 four harms of Covid which are identified as direct health harms; health impacts not directly related to Covid; societal impacts and economic impacts.
- 1.2 At Area Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021, allocations from this fund for the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward were agreed. Within these, it was agreed to allocate £30,000 to established community groups delivering successfully in the provision of mental health and well-being services. Projects which aid recovery from the harms of Covid were to be prioritised. An application from Lochaber Hope for £15,000 was approved at Committee on 8 November 2021
- 1.3 An application from Ewen's Room for £15,000 has now been received for consideration.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
- Consider and agree a grant of £15,000 to Ewen's Room to support their Community Resilience and Wellbeing Support Services within the Fort William and Ardnamurchan ward.

### 3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource implications – the allocation of funding for this purpose was confirmed at Lochaber Area Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021.
- 3.2 Legal implications – under the Scheme of Delegation, any funding awards for a sum greater than £10,000 will be considered at Area Committee.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) impacts – The allocation of funding to support mental health and well-being across local communities will enable activities to be directed in ways that promote equality and tackle inequalities.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications – There are no specific climate change implications.
- 3.5 Risk implications – there are no identified risks as the project is being delivered by a long-established community group.
- 3.6 Gaelic implications – There are no specific Gaelic implications.

### 4. Project proposal – Community Resilience and Wellbeing Support Services

- 4.1 ***Ewen's Room*** is a well-established and respected Lochaber based mental health and wellbeing charity, which supports good mental health and wellbeing in local communities and works to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health issues. They offer drop-in sessions (currently on-line) as well as a free Text Helpline and a volunteer staffed telephone befriending service. They also provide resources and activities to help young and old to manage their mental fitness and wellbeing. Services for young people include provision of mental health awareness lessons in local schools. Ewen's Room is also a Council approved supplier of counselling for Young People in the five high school clusters in Lochaber, and additionally offers free access to counselling for those out of school up to the age of 25.
- 4.2 The proposal from Ewen's Room is a request for funding to contribute towards the delivery of three key projects it leads on:
  - Telephone and Online Community Support
  - Employability Pilot Project
  - Wellbeing Champions Project

The following summarises each of the projects and focus for the funding.

- 4.3 **Telephone and Online Community Support – ongoing project.**  
The Highland Council has previously contributed to the staff and facility costs of running these services which include EwenMe befriending for those affected by loneliness or social isolation, weekly Zoom meetings to encourage wellbeing fitness, and craft and themed workshops to encourage involvement in shared group activity to improve individual mental fitness and mood. These projects provide benefit for a range of people, mostly middle aged to elderly from within our local scattered communities, from Fort William out to our more remote rural settlements.

#### 4.4 **Employability Pilot Programme – New project**

4.4.1 Ewen's Room proposes to launch a new employability service, for people who are currently unemployed, and who have experienced difficulties with their mental health. This would run in partnership with local businesses, colleges, and training providers. The aim is to provide a mentorship scheme, giving support from the start of a job search, all the way through to the early stages of new employment. The hope is to improve the confidence and wellbeing of service users by supporting them to be more connected within the community and achieve further independence. The pilot would run for a trial period of four months over the summer of 2022 and would be reviewed over that period to inform the decision to continue or not.

4.4.2 Benefits to service users would be:

- Potential for increased independence and confidence
- Support throughout the stressful process of job hunting – benefits to wellbeing
- Support with CV writing
- Access to employability courses via UHI West Highland College
- Potential for increased financial stability
- Mentoring during the early stages of new employment

4.4.3 This service would differ from others available as it will provide a specific focus on the requirements of the client, allocation of a mentor, identification of any relevant courses/schemes which would be of use to the individual and weekly mentoring zoom calls up to one hour in length, for a period of up to 12 weeks, depending on needs of individual

#### 4.5 **Wellbeing Champions – Expansion of Pilot Project**

4.5.1 The Increasing Need - the disruption to everyone's lives, and particularly young people, due to the global pandemic has contributed to deepening mental and emotional health issues for more and more people. And in turn, of course, this has negatively impacted on availability and access to the range and variety of services needed to help and support youngsters. This applies especially to older teens and young adults (18 to 25 years old) who have moved from children's to adult services which is also under pressure. Very sadly, the attempts at and completions of suicide have increased, which highlights the tip of the mental health crisis which is unfolding.

4.5.2 With funding from the Highland LEADER programme in place until March 2022, and support from Highlife Highland's Youth Development Team, Ewen's Room is delivering a pilot project which aims to design, run and evaluate the setting up of a peer support network of young WellBeing Champions (WBCs). Based in their 'communities' of school, college and workplace, they will be recruited, trained, and empowered to support each other and their community peers, leading to improved levels of emotional and mental health of individuals, and of general wellbeing within the communities as a whole. Five part time qualified teaching staff have been recruited and two HighLife Highland Youth Development Officers have been allocated part time to the project. An important element of the project will be to create an understanding and empathetic culture within which the WBCs can operate. This will be achieved by providing mental

health awareness presentations for the young people in the three target communities involved in the pilot and imparting a broad understanding of the issues surrounding mental health to teachers and other staff or managers involved.

- 4.5.3 The intention is that progress made through this pilot programme will result in WellBeing Champions being in place in school, college and workplace communities across Lochaber by the end of 2022, and that the learning and knowledge gained, and processes tested, will be used to introduce, support and expand the model to other areas of Highland. Financial support for expansion and extension of this project beyond March 2022 is one element of the current funding request.
- 4.5.4 The aim is to deliver 6 WellBeing Champion training programmes across Lochaber, starting with development pilot schemes in Ardnamurchan High School and West Highland College where there are existing good relationships and a track record of mental health awareness input. Two programme designs will be developed with collaboration and input from young people and staff in these two organisations: one tailored for young people in High School; and one aimed at meeting the needs of 18 - 25s in College, and potentially also the larger workplaces in the area.
- 4.5.5 Each programme will aim for between 5 and 10 young people, based on the Scottish Mental Health First Aid for Young People, a comprehensive and well tested programme. In addition, WBCs will have resilience and self-care training sessions which will be an ongoing element of the support provided by Ewen's Room staff – thus providing a forum for clarification and skills development for WBCs. Training materials will be provided each session so that WBCs can build a portfolio of resources. Being a WBC will in itself offer a volunteering opportunity within each school, college or workplace community, and there will be further options to volunteer in other ways through Ewen's Room and/or with partners, and ongoing support will be provided. Volunteering hours will be recorded and used towards gaining one or more achievement awards such as: Saltire, Duke of Edinburgh (sectional or complete), Youth Achievement; Recognition of achievement via relevant SQA modules will be explored e.g. Health and Wellbeing award, personal skills based award.
- 4.5.6 The expected outcomes from this extended programme are as follows:
- The creation and maintenance of a network of young WellBeing Champions aged 18 to 25 across Ward 21 and the rest of Lochaber who are confident, trained, skilled and supported to help each other and their peers with issues around mental and emotional health
  - Young people are empowered to take on these roles to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic throughout their social settings and communities.
  - More volunteering opportunities for young people to enhance their personal and social skills and to improve their prospects for employment
  - Creation of an environment characterised by empathy and understanding of the emotional wellbeing challenges faced by young people in their schools, college and workplaces

- Identifying pathways for young people to carry on personal learning and development
- Promoting conduits for young people in need to seek out appropriate help/next steps
- Continue to facilitate conversations and forums to de-stigmatise talking about mental health and wellbeing
- Provide mental health awareness presentations, including stress busting and other self-help, personal resilience strategies for the young people
- Develop training packs for use beyond 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022
- Ensure young people are at the heart of the project's strategy and operational delivery

## 5 **Project Costs**

- 5.1 Staffing and admin costs for the three project elements outlined total £42,590 and travel and resources (including well-being packs) total £8,350. This gives an overall project cost of £50,940.
- 5.2 Match-funding is being identified from a number of sources. A funding application has been made to the Highland Mental Health Support fund and work is ongoing with Highlife Highland to assist with seeking additional funding for the ongoing WellBeing Champions project. Ewen's Room also has reserves to contribute to the project.

A contribution of £15,000 is requested.

## 6. **Management of Funds**

- 6.1 The funds allocated in accordance with this report will be managed by the Senior Ward Manager as per the usual process for all ward discretionary budget grants. The funding will be released once the majority of the match-funding is secured.

Designation: Allan Gunn, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 20 January 2022

Author: Dot Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager, Ross, Skye and Lochaber

Background Papers: Lochaber Area Committee – 9 August 2021 - Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations