

Agenda Item	8
Report No	DSA/005/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee

Date: 7 February 2022

Report Title: Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Funding Allocations

Report By: Interim Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Following on from the budget agreed by the 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 Early discussions with Local Members at Ward level identified initial priority areas for spend against the Place Based Investment Fund for the Ward. At Area Committee on 9 November 2021 Members agreed to (a) invest £10,000 in play parks, (b) invest £10,000 to support the business community to investigate establishing formal representative groups and (c) to invest £80,000 in Village and Town Amenities and Maintenance by creating a grant scheme for community groups to apply to.
- 1.3 This report asks the Committee to note the budget allocations agreed at previous Area Committee and, in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation for grants over £10,000, asks the Committee to consider and agree two grant applications received for the Village and Town Amenities fund. The report also asks the committee to agree priorities for the remaining spend.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider and agree the proposed allocations of Place Based Investment Funds as follows:

- (a) **Muir of Ord Development Trust in collaboration with Maryburgh Amenities Company – The Clean and Green Initiative: £35,000.**
- (b) **Dingwall Community Development Company – The Clean and Green Initiative: £30,000.**
- (c) **The remaining funds of £15,000 to be used to support any further applications received for Village and Town Amenities and Maintenance.**

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource – The resource implications are set out in the report. The proposals outlined would allocate the remaining monies from the Dingwall and Seaforth Place Based Investment Fund.
- 3.2 Legal – there are no legal implications. It is required that the companies awarded funding will follow legal procurement process and or can demonstrate current, legal, financial and employment practices.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – The allocation of funds to support local communities will enable activities and services to be directed in ways that promote improved use of outdoor and public spaces, supporting local economies and improved mental wellbeing.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – Investment in open spaces and environment both rural and urban will go some way to enjoying the outdoors and encouraging walking and cycling rather than car travel.
- 3.5 Risks - risks are mitigated as the projects will be delivered by established experienced community organisations using the Highland Council's standard grant criteria/process.
- 3.6 Gaelic – There are no specific Gaelic implications.

4. Background

- 4.1 As part of the budget setting process, a Place Based Investment Fund was created for 2021/22 allocating £100,000 to each Ward across Highland. The aim of this Fund is to address the four harms of Covid:
 - Direct health harms; to people's health through contracting the virus.
 - Health impacts not directly related to Covid; a wider impact on health and social care due to the impact on services and how people can or maybe cannot use these services.
 - Societal impacts - as a result of the measures put in place to slow the spread of the virus this could lead to increased feelings of isolation or anxiety and impact on the wellbeing of individuals. It is also noted how different groups of the population have been adversely impacted by the pandemic – younger people and older people.
 - Economic impacts – how the economy has been impacted by the pandemic including employment and income for individuals.

4.2 **Investment in Village and Town Amenities and Maintenance Improvement - £80,000**

4.2.1 The Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee on 9 November 2021 approved an allocation of £80,000 to create a grant fund to improve the amenities of a local area. This fund could be applied for by formally constituted and established community groups, charities or Development Trusts/Companies and could consider carrying out identified repairs, replacements and seasonal maintenance. This work could be delivered directly by the group or managed through direct employment of suitably experienced Village/Town Operatives (either on PAYE or self-employed basis) Groups were required to demonstrate their ability to directly employ, manage or contract the necessary relevant service. Posts could be full or part time for maximum of 6 months. The Management Group would be expected to work together in a co-ordinated way with already established community volunteer groups and the Highland Council's Amenities Manager to ensure scope of works required is reflected in the commissioning such as paths, grass cutting, grounds maintenance.

4.2.2 The aim of any project would be to improve the amenity of areas in villages and towns which in turn would have a wider impact on health and wellbeing of the community. This has been highlighted through Community Councils, Mid Ross Community Partnership and Housing Rate Your Estate engagement to Members as a priority. Any project would also improve economic impacts through civic pride and encouraging locals and visitors to take time out to enjoy both urban and rural path networks and parks and the stunning scenery. Bringing an expected increased footfall, this would generate more business opportunities in the areas and sense of pride.

4.2.3 It was agreed that the funds would be managed by the Ward Manager in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, with grants awarded of £10,000 or over being considered at the Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee.

5. **Project Applications**

5.1 **Muir of Ord Community Development Company in collaboration with Maryburgh Amenities Company - £35,000**

5.1.1 The aim of this project is to create an increased sense of civic pride in Muir of Ord and Maryburgh for the residents, visitors and local businesses who will experience a noticeable improvement in the upkeep and cleanliness of the streets, paths, amenities and public spaces. These will be kept free from litter, weeds, obstructions so that people can move around safely and on good quality, attractive and pleasant walking and cycle routes and in scenic parks, whatever their age or mobility.

5.1.2 A visible presence of the Village/Town Operative will help to bring about positive attitudes and behaviours in local residents, young people, visitors towards the natural green spaces and built environments, encouraged by local leadership that support behavioural changes within the community. The collaborative working of the Village Operative along with local volunteering groups and organisations will lead to an increased sense of health and wellbeing as more people enjoy the benefits of walking and cycling on our rural paths networks and visiting local parks. The project will also help to raise awareness of the benefits of social and environmental movements throughout a promotional campaign and educational programmes with primary schools leading to improved relationships within the community and increased sense of social, emotional and psychological wellbeing among residents and communities.

5.1.3 Muir of Ord Community Company who will lead on employment are an experienced community company and have indicated they will recruit and employ a Village/Town Operative who will work flexibly throughout Spring, Summer and Autumn seasons. A collaborative application for funding was encouraged and Muir of Ord Community Company and Muir of Ord Amenities Company have jointly submitted the application and these two companies will work closely together to manage the Operative and budget.

5.1.4 **The cost of the project is £35,000.**

5.2 **Dingwall Community Development Company – The Clean and Green Initiative - £30,000**

5.2.1 The Clean and Green Initiative will focus on general improvements of Dingwall streets and public places – for the benefit of all.

5.2.2 Dingwall Community Development Company will issue tender documents inviting companies/contractors to deliver a range of clean and green projects in co-ordination with, and where possible in collaboration with, other volunteer organisations within the Dingwall area such as the Men’s Shed, the Community Council, Dingwall in Bloom, Schools, Dingwall HLH Youth Group, Highland Youth Voice and many more partners.

5.2.3 The initiative will raise civic pride in local residents by providing a cleaner, greener environment. Projects will include tasks such as weed clearing Dingwall High Street, collecting and recycling litter, grass cutting and cleaning areas of vandalism. Completing these projects will encourage local residents to spend more time in the Town Centre and near by green areas. This is of particular importance in the present climate where studies have shown increased green space during moments of stress such as the COVID 19 pandemic has the potential to mitigate some of the negative effects of the stressor.

5.2.4 In addition to the significant benefits to local residents, a cleaner greener space will go some way to boosting footfall and subsequently sales figures for local businesses. Clean, attractive Towns attract more tourists and encourage them to extend their stay.

5.2.5 **The total project cost is £30,000.**

5.3 **Remaining Funds - £15,000**

Should the funding proposals be agreed, there would remain £15,000 from the original funding allocated by committee for Village and Town Amenities. The remaining funds of £15,000 would be used to support any further applications received for Village and Town Amenities and Maintenance projects.

6. Management of Funds

6.1 The funds allocated in accordance with the report will be managed by the Ward Manager in accordance with the Council’s grant scheme. Any future awards will be managed by the Ward Manager, with any grants awarded of £10,000 or over being considered by a future Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee.

Designation: Interim Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 26 January 2022

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Back ground papers: Place Based Investment Fund Operational Guidance April 2021