

Agenda Item	8
Report No	WRSL/006/22

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh Area Committee

Date: 9 February 2022

Report Title: Place Based Investment Funds – Proposed Allocations

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 It was agreed at Area Committee on 19 August 2021 that £40,000 would be invested in improving footpaths and £60,000 would be offered to communities through a grant scheme for projects which helped to offset the harms of Covid. To date fourteen applications have been received and £47,353 awarded, leaving a balance of £12,647. This report proposes how to commit the remaining funds.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i) Consider the proposal to allocate £12,647 from the remaining Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh (WRSL) Place-Based Investment Fund as follows:
 - a) £6,323 to support the provision of play equipment in the WRSL Ward in consultation with amenities staff.
 - b) £6,323 to support the provision of public toilet facilities in the ward.
- ii) Note that next steps to progress the play provision work will include confirmation of any other funding available, identification of play priorities across the area, scale of repairs required or type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed. This will involve the amenities team and communities.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource implications: The Council agreed in January 2021 that the budget and decision-making for play areas are devolved to Area Committees. The Council also agreed that unspent Covid budget and any place-based investment funds could be allocated to support the four harms of Covid. This report asks Members to consider a proposal to allocate the remaining Place-based Investment Fund (PBIF) for the WRSL ward on play provision for existing sites within the ward as well as support for public toilet provision.

3.2 Legal implications: 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. 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, play surfaces 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 resources available; otherwise items are removed for health and safety compliance. This includes the need to have sufficient play bark in place.

The Council has no legal duty to provide public toilets but understands the importance the public places on the availability of these facilities. This is particularly important since the Covid 19 pandemic which has placed a much greater emphasis on the need for higher standards of hygiene, availability of hand-washing facilities etc.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) impacts: allocating PBIF funds for play will support communities in very rural areas 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. The availability of public toilets is essential for the welfare of local people and visitors alike.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications – There are no specific climate change implications.

3.5 Risk implications – Maintenance budgets are insufficient to inspect, maintain and retain the number of play areas currently in use. Additional new equipment puts further pressure on this budget. The Scottish Government announced a Play Park Renewal Programme with investment for the next four years. The first tranche of funding has been announced with £234,000 allocated to Highland Council. The backlog in replacement and repairs reported to the Council in January 2021 was estimated at £3.4m. This programme supported by local funds will help to reduce risks and provide investment in play areas over the next four years. The proposed funding allocation from the PBIF for the ward will complement this funding stream.

3.6 Gaelic implications – There are no specific Gaelic implications. However, where there is an opportunity the Gaelic language will be promoted.

4. Proposals for Investment

4.1 **Investment in play provision - £6,323**

The availability of good-quality play provision in communities is essential for the physical and mental well-being of children, particularly after such an extended period of lockdown, when the ability to play in parks was severely restricted. It is considered that this investment will significantly help to offset some of the harms of covid and increase the health and confidence of children again.

4.2 Next steps to progress this work will include confirmation of any other funding available, identification of priorities across the area, scale of repairs required, the type of equipment to be installed based on the budget available and consideration of ongoing maintenance associated with any equipment installed. This will involve the amenities team and communities.

4.3 **Investment in public toilet provision - £6,323**

The availability of public toilets is an essential feature of all areas and supports both residents in and visitors to an area. In addition to the Council's own toilets, many toilets are run as part of the Highland Comfort Scheme, where commercial or community sector toilets are made available to the public in return for a grant from Highland Council. In a widespread, rural area such as the Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh ward, where there can be long distances between toilets, their availability is increasingly important, particularly since the Covid 19 pandemic. This funding will be used to support toilet provision across the area.

5. Management of Funds

5.1 The funds allocated in accordance with this report will be delegated to the Amenities Manager for spent in consultation with local Members. Funds may be awarded to community partners to deliver key against the priorities identified. This will be managed through the normal grant process.

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

Date: 24 January 2022

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

Background Papers: