**Black Isle Partnership (BIP) – Black Isle Communities Meeting**

**Zoom Meeting 1000 31 August 2021**

**Present:** Cllr**.** Gordon Adam (Highland Council and BIP),Jon Palmer (BIP), Helena Macleod (Minute taker, RANK and Kessock Kindness), Ann Jefferson (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council), Nigel Shapcott (Cromarty Development Trust and Cromarty Care Project), Anne Phillips (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council), Vanessa Hallhead (BIP), Megan Mackenzie (Black Isle Cares), Neil Cameron (Resolis Community Council), Sheila Currie (Transition Black Isle), Peter Ratcliffe (Cromarty Community Council), Becky Richmond (BITT), Helen Robinson (Rosemarkie and Fortrose Trust), Cllr. Craig Fraser (Highland Council), Cai MacIver (Policy & Reform, Highland Council) Ewen McIntosh (Policy Team, Highland Council), Susan Rae (Leith Chooses)

**Agenda 1: Minutes of the BIP - Black Isle Communities Meeting on 24 August 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting on 24 August 2021 were approved.

**Agenda 2: Strengthening local democracy on the Black Isle – discussion on participatory budgeting (Susan Rae)**

**Gordon Adam** introduced Ewen McIntosh from The Highland Council and mentioned that Susan Rae from Leith Chooses hoped to join the meeting shortly.

**Ewen McIntosh** mentioned that Di Agnew had invited him at 7pm the night before. He is a member of the Policy Team and involved in Empowerment work, community asset transfers, localism, engagement coordinator and participation requests. (Susan Rae joined the meeting at 10.15am).

Ewen was glad that Susan had joined the meeting as he is interested in participatory budgetary learning and reinvigorating it. It’s been an area that has been ‘furloughed’ due to Covid. Council funds can address local needs creating partnerships between communities and agencies to ensure that local needs are met.

There are 3 different models:

1. Small grants for participatory budgeting – Inverness Merkinch have a dedicated budget of £1,500 - £2,000
2. Community Cash Back - Caithness is one approach. Local knowledge can identify local strengths, needs and aspirations in a community
3. Mainstream PB - This is the direction being taken nationally and internationally involving citizen participation in service design (Pablo Mascarenhas not available to speak)

**Gordon Adam** thanked Ewen for his introduction then thanked Susan for joining the meeting. He asked Susan what she had been focusing on at Leith Chooses.

**Susan Rae** What we do – we spend a proportion of money from the Community Grant Fund. The Government has committed to 1% and we push on that 1% each year. We’ve also brought in other stakeholders within the Leith Chooses boundary, engaging with the Port of Leith Housing Association and Trams for Leith. Trams to Newhaven have partly funded the projects. We’ve concentrated on grants up to £5,000 and focus on innovation. These are restricted to organisations with a constitution for grants up to £5,000. We managed to get money from the Big Lottery for grants up to £500 as there is a big appetite for small projects, for example gorilla gardening or a painting project. They only need a small amount of money and we grant 10 to 15 smaller bodies.

It’s the community participation part that’s important to us. Normally we have an Events Day where all the organisations that apply for funding come along and host a stall. We vote for who we want on the day and they are all voluntary projects. Added value comes from new projects on that day with conversations taking place through networking that doesn’t happen online.

**Gordon Adam** asked about the problem of voting for projects. Often people only vote for projects in their area rather than the best project

**Susan Rae** replied that we had a lot of applications from schools to pay for play equipment which should be paid by the Education budget, so we now have themes. The theme of Leith Chooses is “*Bringing People Together*” as the last thing we wanted was to keep people apart. We ended up with food growing projects and kids getting involved with intergenerational cookbooks.

There is a *Booster Vote* system for Ethnic projects as we weren’t getting them coming through. This has worked effectively for BAME projects. Everyone gets 3 votes plus 3 booster votes. You can’t use them all on the same project and can only use the booster votes on a booster project.

There are strict qualifications for booster votes. We also provide support:

* Forms for small grants
* Sessions to help people filling in the forms
* Feedback sessions
* Come for advice at anytime
* Drop in to help fill in a form for eligibility
* Have to be precise

(please see their full definition of PB and the fair voting system on <http://www.leithchooses.net/fair>)

**Gordon Adam** asked about form filling - is this a lot of work and administration?

**Susan Rae** They don’t do a verbal presentation. They turn up on the day on their stands. We also have a website where people can go and look at projects <http://www.leithchooses.net/>. There is a dedicated member of staff for Leith Chooses called Caroline Lamond. It’s a big job.

(email caroline.lamond@edinburgh.gov.uk)

**Jon Palmer** asked a constitutional question around how they bring representative groups together. The Black Isle group has Community Councils and interest groups. How does Leith Chooses manage representation?

**Susan Rae** The Mandate comes from the Board. Susan is the Chair, there are 3 members from community councils on the Board, 2 from Newhaven Trams, 1 from the Housing Association, 1 Minute taker that covers 5 Community Councils in Leith, 1 Council Officer and Caroline.

The one time when the Council put up the budget to £120k, lots of people wanted to go on the Board (15). Meetings tripled in length; it was hard to get people to make decisions. Too many cooks spoil the broth. Other interests come into play but it should be community-led and not based on outside interests. We were scared to get the Housing Association on board, but they’ve been a great asset. We’re looking to become a Trust. If we wait for the Council to commit to 1% we’ll be waiting all day.

**Jon Palmer** Do you work out what the 1% would be in financial terms, then go back to communities with that as a figure?

**Susan Rae** We’ve been allocated £56,000, so we’re not even getting one quarter of what we should.

**Gordon Adam** We haveplace based funding for coastal communities. We could make it part of a PB process.

**Susan Rae** Potentially you could pull in funding from different pots into the communities

**Craig Fraser** There are opportunities for up to £500. This would take away the anxiety of people who would not have applied for funding. The Ward funding budget in 2007 was £60k, over the years this has dwindled away. We could generate up to £3k to £5k for amounts wanted. Keep the process simple for what people are applying for - £200 to £300 for forks and spades. Do individuals come to a participatory budgeting group?

**Susan Rae** We’ve simplified lower grants for up to £500. Help them to get the form filled in, capture the enthusiasm. That’s been easy. The Event Voter Day has over 1,000 members of the public coming to the event to vote. One year we did voting for children. They got distressed because they couldn’t vote, so we introduced them to the democratic process early. They got a stamp on their hand and got excited for voting the best stall.

**Sheila Currie** How do you stop the loudest shouters? Use the Booster Vote. Shift decisions so the communities have chosen and it’s got nothing to do with us. Councils will say they are strapped for cash and use a sticking plaster approach with small amounts of money. If we were starting from scratch, would you start small and work our way up or push for the Council to provide 1%?

**Susan Rae** The first start would need to be successful. Do you want to go for big grants or small to medium sized and make it a bigger event? Bring in other PB people like we’ve tried. Keep it churning over by making it successful. Regarding Councils saying they are strapped for cash – it’s not a responsibility issue, it’s a choice issue!

*Leith Chooses* used to be about arts-based and education-based projects (the nice things to have), but its stopped being that and has to be needs based now. Covid is about feeding people and providing electronic smart phones, but mainly keeping people fed. The people voted for this year’s theme which is “Reconnection” based on food. The thing about PB, we won’t say – they won’t say ‘it’s our responsibility’ because the amounts they’re giving away are so small. The decisions being made by communities are better than what the Council are making.

**Vanessa Hallhead** What about the lesser heard voices – poverty and exclusion – not coming forward with projects?

**Susan Rae** We have a different constituency base than Highland. My area is the most built up are in Scotland. You have rurality. In Leith everyone knows everyone with tight based groups. Its unlikely that people would get missed. We advertise online with Instagram, Twitter and Councils promote it.

**Gordon Adam** Who is we?

**Susan Rae** Leith Chooses Steering Group promotes. We’re not a Trust yet.

We go into a community centre and everyone submits applications and photos. There is a massive event in February where people set out a stall about their project. Everyone can come into the hall and cast votes. Small projects do it too. There are 3 different halls and there are 3 grants – the big grant, medium grant and the tiny grant. There is one big day of voting. It’s where the community oomph comes from!

**Nigel Shapcott** Black Isle as an example – Are recurring funds available? If a community wants to provide employment opportunities for grass cutting, could we get it for 3 years?

**Susan Rae** No, 1 year. It’s a PB rule – the budget is allocated annually. It’s because of the allocation of Community Grant Fund. They are still dithering about whether they’re going to pull it. The Council should be paying for that [grass cutting] based on wants and needs.

**Ewen McIntosh** PB has 3 approaches:

1. **Participatory requests**
2. **Community Asset transfer requests**
3. (…small grants is one way….) but **Mainstream** is preferred and we’re seeing it in the Black Isle. Ferintosh has grass cutting in the community. How the community can better inform about potholes. Set out the boundaries from the start.

If the £200k budget is to be ringfenced. The Ward might have important decisions to make to deliver vital services. Its already happening but not on a formal basis. It needs a formal process. Collaboration between authorities and communities. Work out what the local priorities are. Identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), work together on the allocation of funds for small scale projects, employ staff. Come to some vision of what we want to spend together.

There is a degree of tokenism in PB. Some examples of PB include Rotterdam which is famous for getting 10% of the Infrastructure budget. Its questions of scale. Digital literacy and access, lots to think about. I would like to hear more about what is happening in Leith.

**Jon Palmer** Do you start small or go big? Going back to Nige’s point of service delivery. For the Black Isle, we have an opportunity to be ambitious. Grants are hand-me-downs from the powers that be! Set out the criteria from the outset for local people to decide n services that are better that what they are already being provided. Get people to take responsibility and deliver locally better. It could be that, having compared a proposal with what THC currently do, that THC proves more efficient. But at least people can see that.

**Susan Rae** Its about getting a bunch of money and getting people excited about how to spend it.

**Gordon Adam** At our Area Committee level, we have roads, maintenance, place-based funding, coastal communities which comes to £300k to £400k. This could be subject to a PB process.

1. The issue is the amount of administration
2. Who would want to be involved, providing voluntary time for dealing with applications, making decisions?
3. What is the responsibility of the Council and Communities? Feeding people – that is a Council responsibility

**Susan Rae** In Conclusion. Feeding people – the people of Leith have voted unanimously to give £5k which is an indication of poverty in the area. People are aware of how difficult things have got. It’s important on how people look at things. Its not just about money, but how we spend it. I’ll send you documentation of How Leith Chooses.

**Ewen McIntosh** It’s been a pleasure. This is a fantastic opportunity. There are funds available!

**Agenda 3: Update from the Communities**

**Becky Richmond** (BITT) The BITT meeting is on Thursday re the Chanonry meeting. I’ll fill in Community Councils on any tourism issues.

**Neil Cameron** (Resolis CC) Nothing new from Resolis

**Peter Ratcliffe** (Cromarty CC) Cromarty moves on

**Helen Robinson** (Rosemarkie & Fortrose Toilets) The toilets are being cleaned by George and his mum. Willie Gray still waiting to complete. Not impressed. Electricity in Fortrose toilets a long uphill struggle, but it’s looking better than it was.

**Helena Macleod** (North Kessock) Highland Hospice abseiling this weekend, supported by businesses and NKTOP providing bacon rolls/coffee. Quite a logistical set up arriving in the village. The Kessock Kindness cafes are doing well bringing people together. The mediation process will be taking place face to face in the village hall, with the registered mediator. It’s being planned using a Doodle Poll issued by HTSI and we’re trying to get consensus on a suitable date.

**Anne Phillips** (Fortrose & Rosemarkie CC) Ewen was great, I know him from LEADER. Making the beach wheelchair friendly with beach bollards and safe to walk. To push a buggy to Chanonry Point is a huge problem. I’ve been speaking to Iain Moncrieff, the engineer for the bollards and I was speaking to Shane Manning who does the lines. Roads gave permission for the planters, seats and verges. Tackled undergrowth, chopping branches.

**Ann Jefferson** (Fortrose & Rosemarkie CC) Steep learning curve to capture community need. Positive comments about bollards from horse riders and swimmers. Hard to take everyone’s news and comments to keep everyone happy. Not easy to get together. Something given to us by Shane Manning. The workmanship of the bollards is very much appreciated. Double lining of the roads will come soon. Better if it came together.

**Action**: **Gordon Adam** said he would chase up

**Helen Robinson** (RAFT) At the same time as doing the yellow lines could they do white lines at my house for a disabled bay? Could someone do white disabled spaces with a sign above them please? “Disabled” has been completely rubbed off the road.

**Gordon Adam** said he would do this

**Action: Craig Fraser** I’ve just done an email to Shane Manning. Gordon thanked Craig for doing this.

**Cai MacIver** (Policy & Reform, Highland Council) I’m about community resilience, please get in touch, looking at what’s available in communities. I come from a CAB background and join up the dots to get things moving in a positive direction.

**Helena Macleod** (North Kessock) As the Third Sector rep for HTSI on the CLD Delivery Group I mentioned to the new Engagement and Participation Development Officer, Hannah Burrows, that we might have an opportunity for the Third Sector reps to meet with the 10 new Community Coordinators at the Council to work together on the mapping process as HTS have 1,800 members and the Council has 350 organisations on their register for the Covid response. It would be good to liaise together on this to make best use of resources.

**Cai MacIver** (Policy & Reform, Highland Council) Yes I’m happy to do this. Its what’s best for Communities and not a push and pull. We will work together with Council and the Third Sector reps and I have spoken to Hannah.

**Agenda 4: Any other business**

**Jon Palmer** Black Isle Gathering is taking place on Saturday 9th October in 3 separate venues this year as Fortrose Academy not available. BIP has an ideal opportunity to broadcast what this group is talking about. What we see in terms of more participation. It’s the best way to have a presence as well in excess of 1,000 people attend.

The meeting closed at 11:15am