



VOLUNTEER CENTRE WESTERN ISLES FUNDING

Report by Chief Officer, Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to seek approval for the payment of grant for 2024/2025 to Volunteer Centre Western Isles (VCWI).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is a partner in the local Third Sector Interface, TSIWI (Third Sector Interface Western Isles), and they currently employ seven members of staff covering the whole of the Western Isles. The Centre works closely with the Comhairle's Community Learning and Development Service and local Councillors to promote volunteering and to support volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers.
- 2.2 The Volunteer Centre produces an annual workplan, in consultation with Comhairle staff, focusing on how outcomes, both short and medium-term, will be achieved. The activities to support volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are broken into the following categories, as defined by Scottish Government:

Building Intelligence; Connect; Voice; Build Capacity

Underpinning all activities are actions ensuring that the Volunteer Centre Western Isles is committed to excellence in all that they do and sound governance.

- 2.3 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles receives Scottish Government funding through the interface partnership TSIWI, and this has been supplemented by financial support from the Comhairle. Payment of grant is subject to production of a satisfactory workplan. Provision of this core funding of £22,000 has been made within the Departmental cash planning limits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle:

- (a) **extend the Service Level Agreement between Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and Volunteer Centre Western Isles to 31 March 2025; and**
- (b) **approve the payment of grant to Volunteer Centre Western Isles of £22,000 for 2024/25.**

Contact Officer: Fiona MacInnes-Begg Telephone: 07917243238
Appendix: Service Level Agreement
Background Papers: None

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	Provision for the grant is included in departmental budgets.
Legal	None
Staffing	None
Assets and Property	None
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	None
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	Support for Volunteer Development/Voluntary Groups
Environmental Impact	None undertaken
Consultation	None

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is a partner in the local Third Sector Interface, TSIWI (Third Sector Interface Western Isles), and they work closely with the Comhairle's Community Learning and Development Service to promote volunteering and to support volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers.
- 5.2 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles receives Scottish Government funding through the interface partnership TSIWI, and this has been supplemented by financial support from the Comhairle. Payment of grant is subject to production of a satisfactory workplan. Provision of this core funding of £22,000 has been made within the Departmental cash planning limits.

DETAIL

NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING NETWORK

- 6.1 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles is part of the national Network of Third Sector Interfaces, which is supported by the Third Sector Unit of the Scottish Government. The role of the Volunteer Centre was defined by the Scottish Government as ". working at local authority level the length and breadth of Scotland, acting as one-stop shops providing information, guidance and support to enable people from all walks of life to volunteer. Their functions include working with volunteer involving organisations in the public and voluntary sectors to improve the practices of those working with volunteers."

VOLUNTEER CENTRE WESTERN ISLES

- 6.2 The Volunteer Centre Western Isles currently employs seven members of staff in the following locations:
- Barra – Part-time Development Worker (including youth work).
 - Uist – Part-time Development Worker (including youth work).
 - Harris – Part-time Development Worker (including youth work); and
 - Lewis – Full-time Manager and 2 part-time Development Workers (including youth work); 1 part-time Administrator.
- 6.3 The Volunteer Centre have made the following submission on relation to the service they deliver.
- 6.4 Highlights of the last year are:

- Staff registered 97 volunteer opportunities across the Western Isles registered on MILO and marketed through www.volunteercentrewi.org search and Volunteer Scotland
- 64 volunteers placed with volunteering opportunities.
- 21 new organisations registered for support from the Volunteer Centre
- 95 organisations provided with volunteer guidance, one to one training or support on volunteer management and developing placements over 1,250 interactions.
- Youth volunteering developed and supported.
- Working in partnership with schools, colleges and other educational settings across the islands.
- Various schools have been signed up for Saltire and Callanish award schemes island wide.
- 290 Volunteer Centre Callanish Youth Awards issued.
- 60 new Saltire registrations
- 134 Saltire Awards
- The Volunteer Centre has run five awards ceremonies with a further 11 ceremonies being directly supported.
- 1 new Saltire award eligible organisations have been registered.
- We continue to facilitate the YPI programme on behalf of the Wood Foundation with each of the 4 secondary schools this term.
- Intergenerational work continued and further developed within primary schools and community groups.
- Short term volunteering opportunities developed with various craft projects to support charity appeals.

6.5 Over the past five years the world has seen unprecedented change. While in many ways people have returned to a pre-pandemic life, the repercussions of lockdown continue to impact communities and on volunteering as we see the cost-of-living crisis emerge into a cost of giving crisis. We are seeing widening inequalities and deepening societal need for some of the most marginalised groups. We strongly believe that taking time to fully support volunteers is essential in order to ensure the most isolated and vulnerable people are supported. This is time intensive and requires staff time to develop and invest in volunteers and their potential.

6.6 What this means for volunteering remains, largely, to be seen but there is no doubt that the requirement for volunteers to come forward and support their communities is now greater than ever. However, coupled with this is the fact that the current cost of living crisis means that this is getting more difficult with volunteering under considerable threat. The impact of the ongoing crises can be clearly seen in recent data. The latest Scottish Household Survey results for 2022 revealed a worrying decline in volunteer participation among Scotland's adults. The seismic societal events of recent years have taken their toll on volunteers and the organisations that involve them. Given the contribution of volunteers to a range of essential services, this is a significant concern for our community and for policymakers. The headline finding from the Scottish Household survey is that the adult formal volunteer participation rate has fallen to 22%, a significant difference to the rate of 26% in 2019. This also represents a 9-percentage point fall from the 30% high in 2011, and the first time since at least 2007 that the number of adult volunteers has fallen below 1 million in Scotland.

6.7 The reasons behind the sharp decline in volunteering in Scotland are multi-faceted. The Covid-19 pandemic caused many volunteers to step down because they were shielding, and those who remained reported feelings of stress and fatigue. This strain experienced by volunteers was likely exacerbated by demands presented by the subsequent cost of living crisis, as well as other world events including the climate emergency and the war in Ukraine. The many challenges that have contributed to the decline in volunteer participation include:

- Individuals experiencing practical barriers to volunteering, including having less time to volunteer due to other competing commitments.
- Individuals having less mental capacity to volunteer because of anxiety, apathy and fatigue caused by personal and societal challenges.

- A decline in the quality of volunteer experiences, likely as a result of financial challenges and increasing demand for services facing the public and third sectors in recent years.

- 6.8 Despite these challenges, the past four years have also contributed to a shift in volunteer motivations and behaviours. Volunteering has become more local or hyperlocal in nature, with many volunteers preferring to help organisations focused on their community or neighbourhood. This is likely a result of the focus on community that emerged during the pandemic, with people spending more time in their homes and neighbourhoods. We should also note that, whilst the statistics above show some cause for concern, volunteering in rural parts of Scotland are 9% above the national average suggesting this move to increased community volunteering is something to capitalise on. From our current work in Volunteering, we have evidence that it provides reciprocal benefits for people of all ages and aids social cohesion and builds community capacity and resilience. Volunteering helps to bridge social divides, forms bonds of trust and solidarity and combats ageism and inequality. We would like to expand our work in this area through our intergenerational work with schools and care homes, ensuring we continue to improve our geographic spread across the islands.
- 6.9 We currently work with approximately 200 volunteers per year and 90 volunteer involving organisations per year across the Western Isles. The demand for service is increasing each year. Post covid lockdown, people want to volunteer to have social contact and build skills and confidence. We regularly hold Volunteer Network meetings to discuss emerging issues affecting local volunteer organisers and service users. We link to local care homes, elderly groups, the NHS and youth networks, listening to volunteers and responding to their needs.
- 6.10 Volunteering practice is also changing as people have learned through the covid pandemic to interact in different ways and we observe how technology has played an increasingly important role in volunteering since 2020. Volunteering online or over the phone is now the third most common place to volunteer. 31% of those who volunteered in the last 12 months did at least some of it online or over the phone.
- 6.11 Whilst we welcome the return of face-to-face contact, we have also seen how the technology can aid us in much of what we do as an organisation and how our community has quickly adapted to make sure virtual volunteering was safe and rewarding. The team have also reported that the technology has bound them together as a closer team as they have used ways of communicating that hadn't been used before. These results are testament to their hard work over a very difficult period. We mustn't lose sight of these positive factors as we move to a more hybrid model of working and begin to think in different and more innovative ways.
- 6.12 As we do this, we are developing more up to date volunteering opportunities to meet a wide range of needs, ages and interests. Over the last year Volunteer Centre Staff have supported organisations to develop new volunteer opportunities, actively promoted volunteering roles, registered new volunteers and matched volunteers into suitable opportunities. We are keen to continue to proactively engage with volunteers and other organisations throughout the islands to promote our services and ensure organisations are aware of the services the Volunteer Centre can offer. Significant time has gone into developing youth volunteering and raising awareness of volunteering by having a voice on local strategic forums in order to heighten its profile and ensure it is supported and developed in the coming years by local partners. As mentioned above, we are also keen to develop our intergenerational work with the community as we see this strand of our work already producing dividends for both the young and the elderly.

- 6.13 The work undertaken through the Volunteer Centre across the Western Isle makes direct links to the Western Isles LOIP and directly addresses some of the key priorities, in particular "the islands offer attractive opportunities that improves the quality of life, well-being and health for all our people" We also work in direct partnerships with Community Learning and development and have a good working relationship with the Stornoway North and South Development Workers as well as having close links with a range of professionals across all our islands. In addition, we have direct links to the local area plan for Stornoway North where we are responsible for delivering on several of the KPIs (Key Performance indicators). It is our desire to be more intricately linked with area plans spanning the Western Isles and it is hoped that 2024/25 will see us making greater inroads to ensure this happens.
- 6.14 To promote volunteering opportunities, our website www.volunteercentrewi.org is being constantly updated and refreshed, with all volunteer opportunities listed in the searchable database. We are also increasing our use of social media such as Instagram and Facebook to try to get our message out and raise our profile.
- 6.15 As we now look forward, we are aware that there are significant challenges ahead as we try to regain some of the ground lost over the last five years but we remain optimistic as we see how technology can aid us in new and innovative ways and how the lessons learned throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has equipped us with new skills and made us more agile in our approach to volunteering. We look forward to working with the Comhairle, the TSIs, local businesses and the community in the years ahead as we engage and encourage the community in this valuable and essential service.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The Report seeks to extend the Service Level Agreement with the Volunteer Centre Western Isles to 31 March 2025 and to approve the payment of grant funding.

APPENDIX 1



SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT
between
COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR
And
VOLUNTEER CENTRE – WESTERN ISLES

PREAMBLE

1.1 This is a service level agreement (SLA) between:

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, having its principal offices at Sandwick Road, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis HS1 2BW ("the Comhairle") and the Volunteer Centre Western Isles, ("the Provider").

1.2 In consideration of the payment by the Comhairle of the sum £22,000 per annum the Provider shall provide the service as specified in this document.

PERIOD OF SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

2.1 This SLA shall commence on 1 April 2024 and shall subsist until 31 March 2025, unless terminated earlier in accordance with the provisions of Clause 7 below.

PROVIDER'S OBLIGATIONS

3.1 The Provider shall consult with the Comhairle in the preparation of its annual Workplan and the Plan shall seek to work towards local priorities as well as national priorities.

3.2 The Provider shall ensure that adequate insurance is held for employer's liability, public liability, any buildings and building contents in connection with the Service provided under this SLA. The provider shall provide evidence to the Comhairle that such cover has been affected and all due premium payments have been paid.

3.3 The Provider shall operate an equal opportunities policy in respect of users of the Service and its own personnel.

3.4 The Provider shall comply with all legal requirements, including those imposed by the Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

3.5 The Provider shall ensure that personnel are trained, qualified and experienced, to provide the Service efficiently in accordance with the terms of this SLA. For the avoidance of doubt the Provider's personnel shall not be deemed to be employees of the Comhairle and the Provider shall at all times be liable for their actions and shall indemnify the Comhairle in respect thereof.

3.6 All documents and information received by the Provider during and in connection with the performance of this SLA from the Comhairle or from any person employed by the Comhairle shall be held in confidence. Such documents and information relating to the provision of the Service shall not be disclosed by the Provider or his agent to any other person without the consent of the Comhairle unless a duty to disclose to that person is imposed by statute or court order. The provisions of this Clause shall survive termination of this SLA.

3.7 The Provider may not assign or sub-contract the Service or any part thereof without the prior written approval of the Comhairle.

- 3.8 The Provider shall co-operate with any inspection, monitoring or evaluation process reasonably required by the Comhairle to ensure satisfactory standards of service are provided under this SLA.
- 3.9 The Provider shall submit its Audited Accounts to the Comhairle's responsible officer not later than 1 October each year. The Provider shall submit an annual Evaluation of Outcomes report along with an application for future Funding in writing to the Comhairle's responsible officer, following approval by the Volunteer Centre Board of Directors.

SERVICE PROVISION

- 4.1 The Provider shall provide the Service during the period of this SLA as specified in their Workplan. The aim of the service is to actively encourage, support and promote volunteering.

QUALITY STANDARDS

- 5.1 The Provider shall observe, and operate to, the Third Sector Interface Common Values, Approaches and Services.
- 5.2 The services shall be performed in a timely and efficient manner and to a professional standard.
- 5.3 The services shall be performed by sufficient number of suitably trained and qualified personnel of the Provider.
- 5.4 The Provider is expected to monitor and review the standard of the service provided and revise as appropriate.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

- 6.1 The service shall develop a formal complaints procedure that will be freely available and easily accessible to all users. A grievance procedure consistent for staff shall be operated at all times.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 7.1 The service shall be subject to regular monitoring and review in order to assure service quality and will arrange quarterly review meetings with the Comhairle.

SELF MONITORING

- 7.2 The Manager of the Volunteer Centre Western Isles shall be responsible for the overall monitoring of the quality of services provided, and for overcoming any difficulties, which are identified.
- 7.3 The Manager shall actively involve staff and users in self-monitoring exercises, recording and acting upon their views where appropriate.
- 7.4 All complaints made in respect of the service shall be recorded, together with their content and action taken, by whom and when. These shall form part of the self-monitoring process.
- 7.5 The Manager shall ensure that adequate records are kept ensuring that quarterly reports outline progress towards achieving Key Outcome and Output Indicators can be completed.

EXTERNAL MONITORING AND REVIEW

- 7.6 The Provider shall complete and submit to the Comhairle's Responsible Officer, throughout the period of this SLA, a copy of the Manager's Quarterly Report.
- 7.7 The Comhairle's Responsible Officer and/or any of the Comhairle's internal auditors shall be permitted to undertake any inspection, audit or evaluation process reasonably necessary to ensure satisfactory standards of service are provided under this SLA. Client confidentiality shall not be compromised by any such inspection, audit or evaluation process.

COMHAIRLE'S AND PROVIDER'S RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS

- 8.1 The Comhairle shall provide the services of a named contact person, the "responsible officer", who shall assist the Provider and shall be responsible for monitoring this SLA on behalf of the Comhairle.
- 8.2 The Board of Directors shall be responsible for administering the provisions of this SLA.

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

- 9.1 If any dispute shall arise between the parties in respect of the implementation of this SLA the parties shall use their best endeavours to resolve such dispute by negotiation within four weeks of notification of the dispute by one party to the other.
- 9.2 If either party considers the other party to be in default of any of their obligations under this SLA and the matter cannot be resolved by mutual agreement, the parties shall refer the matter to a mutually agreed independent arbiter. Failing agreement an arbiter shall be nominated by a Sheriff at Stornoway on the application of either party, and the decision of such arbiter shall be final and binding on both parties. Payment of costs incurred in taking, or defending, any such action shall be determined by the arbiter.

TERMINATION

- 10.1 This SLA may be terminated by either party on the giving of three months' notice in writing.
- 10.2 The Comhairle may immediately terminate this SLA if the Provider:
 - a) commits a serious breach of its obligations under this SLA.
 - b) persistently fails, after a reasonable period of notice has been given, to provide the Service in accordance with the terms of this SLA.
 - c) becomes "apparently insolvent."
 - d) passes a resolution for voluntary dissolution.
- 10.3 In the event of termination of this SLA the Comhairle shall be entitled to recover a proportionate amount of any payment already made which relates to any period during which the Service has not been provided in accordance with the provisions of this SLA.

NOTICES

- 11.1 Any notice from either party to the other party shall only have validity under this SLA if made in writing on behalf of the Comhairle, or the Provider as the case may be. Any notice which either party is required to give or make to the other party shall be given or made in writing by recorded delivery post addressed to the other party at the address specified in this SLA, or to any other address as the parties hereto may from time to time specify.

WAIVER

- 12.1 Failure by the Comhairle at any time to enforce the provisions of the SLA or to require performance by the Provider of any of the provisions of the SLA shall not be construed as a waiver of any of such provisions and shall not affect the validity of the SLA or any part thereof or the right of the Comhairle to enforce any provision in accordance with its terms.

JURISDICTION

- 13.1 This SLA is entered into under and shall be subject to the law of Scotland.

On behalf of
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Volunteer Centre Western Isles