

Argyll and Bute Council's Covid-19 Micro Grants

Evaluation Report

June 2023



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Image courtesy of Fun First, Gibson Hall,
Garelochhead,

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Males Tales

£500 for a community wellbeing and activity day with archery and pizza-making

'This fund helped us bring organisations, volunteers and members of the community together to help build our support networks in the area.'

Project Overview

The Covid-19 Micro Grants Fund was created to support the impacts of Covid-19 on community groups and in particular village halls.

The fund was launched in July 2021. The process was developed and funding awarded within an 11 week period to support urgent needs arising from communities recovering from the impacts of the pandemic. These needs were identified by Argyll and Bute Council's Community Development Team through ongoing engagement with Covid-19 community response groups.

Eligible organisations could apply for up to £500 to help community facilities to re-open safely and support community-led recovery activities. Applicants seeking an award demonstrated how their project would help their community to recover and bring people together after the pandemic.

64 applications were received from across Argyll and Bute. Activities the fund supported included provision of cleaning materials, Personal Protective Equipment, training of staff and volunteers and events delivery to bring the community together within the Scottish Government guidelines.

Applicants completed an online feedback form to evaluate their project and to demonstrate how the funds aided recovery.

Background

At Council on 24 June 2021 it was agreed that an amount of £30,400 be made available to support the impacts of Covid-19 on community organisations and in particular village halls. This amount was allocated to run a fast track micro grants scheme focused on Covid-19 recovery.

Argyll and Bute Council's Community Development Team used their experience of delivering a small grants scheme to develop a streamlined process in response to the urgent needs identified through ongoing engagement and interaction with groups supporting their communities throughout the pandemic.

The fund launched on 28th July 2021 and was promoted through social media, Argyll and Bute Council website and Community Development bulletins. The closing date for applications was 31st August 2021. There followed a robust assessment to confirm application eligibility and fit with Covid-19 recovery criteria. 63 out of 64 organisations were awarded the full funding requested, up to the value of £500 per project totalling £28,478.84. Applicants demonstrated how their project would help communities recover from the impacts of Covid-19, bringing people together after the pandemic.

Funding awards were approved on 12th October 2021 and awardees were given until the end of October 2022 to spend the grant.

All were asked to complete an online end of project monitoring form before 31st December 2022 to submit their feedback and report on spend. This was extended to 31st January 2023 due to a low response rate and the web form closed with 60 responses received.

Grants Process

Argyll and Bute Council's Community Development Team used their knowledge, skills and experience of delivering a small grants scheme to create a streamlined application and assessment process.

The application form asked for minimal information and scoring was developed to specifically assess pandemic impacts. The categories assessed as part of the scoring process were as follows:

- financial impact from Covid-19 pandemic
- projects that support vulnerable groups particularly affected by Covid-19
- health and wellbeing (including loneliness and social isolation)
- capacity building to improve access to community facilities
- skills and resources to deliver the project
- reserves or match funding to support delivery of the project

The process was similar to other Argyll and Bute Council's small grants which were adapted to make it quick and simple in order to meet the emergency needs.

A web form was developed consistent with application questions to enable capture of accurate information for end of project monitoring.

Applications Information

In total 64 applications were received and of these, 63 were awarded funds totalling £28,478.84. The table below shows details of the number of applications received from the different areas of Argyll and Bute.

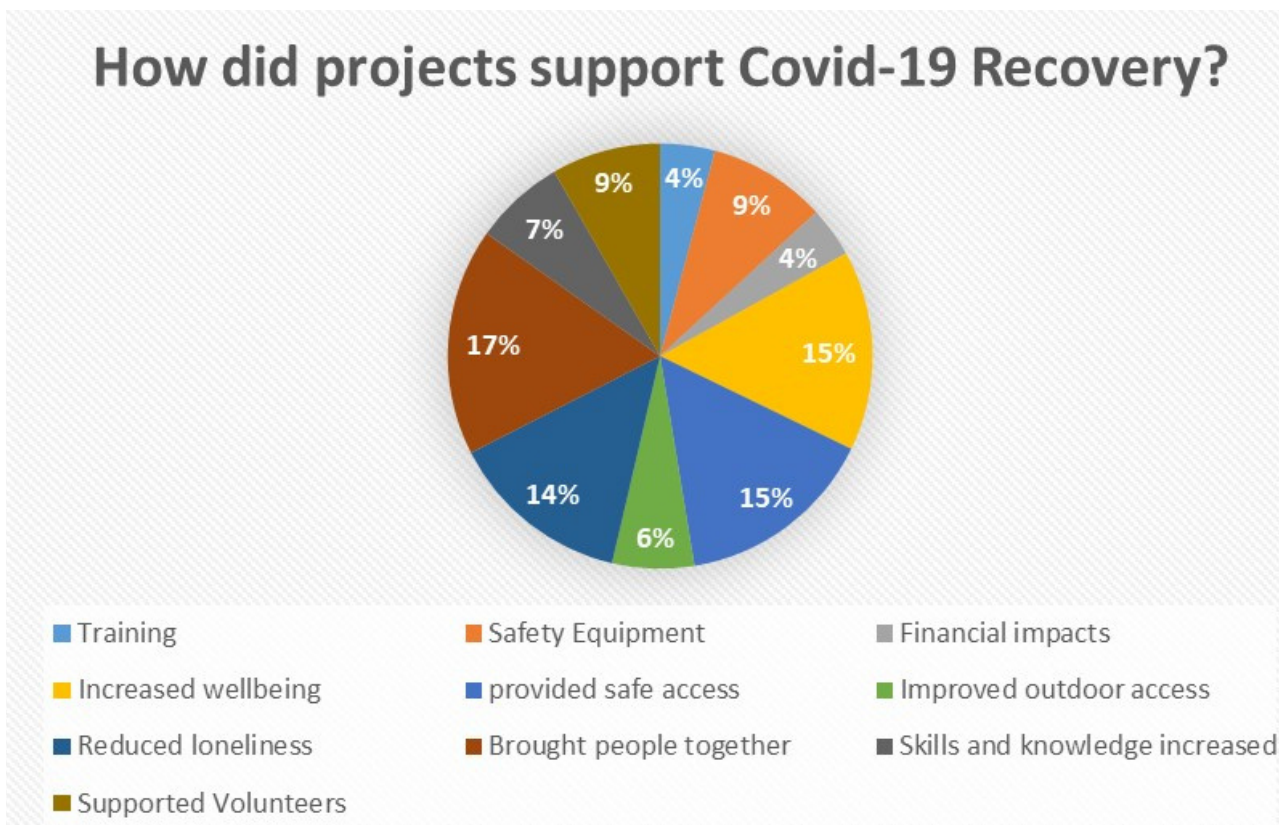
Area	Number of applications received
Bute and Cowal	7
Helensburgh and Lomond	13
Mid Argyll, Kintyre and the Islands	22
Oban, Lorn and the Isles	22
Total	64

One application received did not meet the criteria and the applicant was offered alternative funding support.

Island communities were well represented with 11 applications received. A number of applications were received from Gaelic-speaking communities including from Bunessan, the Isle of Mull and Bowmore.

Project Information and Highlights

Applicants were asked how their project supported Covid-19 recovery. Popular answers included bringing people together, providing safe access and reducing loneliness. The pie chart below demonstrates the different activities and spend supported.



Detailed below are some of the examples of the excellent project activities supported by the fund, with images and quotes showing some of the successes.



Highland Parish Badminton Club

£500 for Badminton coaching with Sarah Sidebottom , International player and Scotland coach

'All my son wants to do is play badminton - these coaching sessions have been of great benefit'



Inveraray Senior Citizens Committee

£300 For fogging machine and cleaning equipment.

'It puts my mind at ease knowing that you have done everything you could to make the hall safe. The hall is always beautifully clean and tidy'.



West Kintyre Canoe Club

£279.40 towards First Aid and Leadership training and cleaning materials
'The Covid-19 recovery micro grant has helped us maintain and increase the number of qualified leaders and coaches involved in kayaking so that there are more opportunities for members of the community to engage in a health-enhancing activity like kayaking.'



West Kintyre Promotions CIC

£500 for a contract phone
'This allowed us to move to online sales safely and securely and to help pay for hall hire so we could reduce capacity and keep ticket prices affordable. The funding was integral to our organisation getting back on our feet. Moving to a contactless, ticketless process for our events has made event organisation more streamlined and future proofed.'

Additional Project Impacts

- **Increase in independence and confidence for the community**

Elderly people nervous about leaving their homes were reassured to join community activities after cleaning had taken place. Repairs and cleanliness gave hall users the confidence to visit buildings safely .

- **Meaningful social activities**

Unpaid carers were able to join activities and improved their wellbeing.

- **Better networks and new connections**

Improved networks and connections were developed with the project being a reason to come together. Relationships formed as new residents were welcomed and old friendships rekindled.

- **Civic pride**

A new appreciation of the village hall as a music venue. A sense of civic pride due to hall improvements.

- **Opportunities for community development**

Additional groups formed thanks to the grant, for example a junior music section and new activities arose from buying new games equipment. There are now opportunities for newly-trained volunteers and staff. A community cinema is enabled thanks to new audio equipment.

- **Financial boost**

The grant supported those who had not budgeted for a crisis to make up the shortfall in funds.

- **Returning to normal**

Returning to 'normal' activities was speeded up.

Needs Arising

Community organisations were asked, '**Does your organisation require any further Covid-19 support?**' The following table shows a summary of the responses received.

Further support required in relation to Covid-19	Number of responses
Hall income depleted due to lack of users, low footfall	11
Energy costs for community building are restrictive	9
Community cohesion and wellbeing – groups feel responsible for providing a safe meeting place, reducing isolation.	7
Volunteer and staff recruitment	5
The cost of living pressure	5
Maintenance costs and repairs for buildings, technology upgrades or smaller costs such as Covid-19 test kits.	5

Organisations identified a need for support with their overheads and noted a feeling of responsibility for community wellbeing by providing a safe meeting place. This is challenging due to the impact of the cost of living on community facilities and volunteer shortages.

Of the 16 respondents who said they require further Covid-19 support, depleted hall income and energy costs to heat community buildings were the top concerns. Respondents reported that under-use of halls, community cohesion and wellbeing are still impacting their organisations. Examples of some of the feedback received is shared below:

'Our rental income from users of the hall that pays for its upkeep is still about half of that pre-Covid - Some organisations that used the hall have folded.'

'We'd welcome further support to continue to encourage more community members to use the Village Hall and to socialise. People are reluctant to socialise since Covid.'

'Clearly Covid has affected the numbers attending - it has been difficult to get people to come back and join things - both in terms of members and volunteers. This has a knock-on effect on the finances.'

'In relation to Covid-19 our organisation was severely impacted. Now with the Cost of Living Crisis we are being impacted financially once again. We are doing our best to support the local community as a warm space and supporting other groups and partners by not raising hire costs, but this is proving challenging.'

'Numbers attending our sessions remain lower than pre-Covid levels. We need additional support to help promote and encourage more people to attend. Volunteer numbers are still low and we need additional support in promoting and identifying new people.'

End of Project Monitoring

The end of project monitoring data demonstrates how organisations benefited from the grant, buying equipment and offering activities to help them recover after the pandemic. Community groups returned quotes and photographs illustrating the difference the grant made. The average award was £500, popular grant expenditure featured wellbeing events, such as open days and music events, outdoor activities, sports and games, music equipment, hygiene and cleaning products and building improvements.

95% of applicants completed an online end of project monitoring report detailing the grant spend, how projects helped recovery and the difference it made plus additional and unexpected impacts. This was the first time an online form has been used by Community Development for this purpose. Some key findings from the reports are detailed below:

- 95% of respondents found the Covid-19 Micro grants application form 'easy' or 'very easy' to complete.
- 16 respondents said they would benefit from additional Covid-19 funding
- Community organisations reported that local people, including elderly, isolated and vulnerable people, could confidently access clean safe community venues, resulting in an expedited return to social normality.

Three organisations were unable to spend the full funding and returned all or some of the grant received. Returned funds totalled £843.07 and were incorporated into Argyll and Bute Council's Supporting Communities Fund for allocation in 2023/2024.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This reports outlines the success of the Covid-19 Micro Grants scheme in supporting recovery from pandemic impacts for community organisations and village halls. In addition to this success, the end of project monitoring process has identified a number of needs still outstanding.

Argyll and Bute Council's Community Planning and Development Team continues to provide a range of support and services to community organisations, including:

- A free to use funding portal and monthly Funding Alert, as well as bespoke funding support if needed.
- Access to information, support and resources through our regular Community Development Bulletin and website
- One to one support with local Community Development Officer
- Support with partnership working, networking and signposting to other services

The need for targeted funding to address improvements to community facilities, and support rising energy costs remains. These points are being raised to the Community Planning Partnership for support and consideration to address.



Monthly Funding Alert



Get started with your community-led action plan using this online toolkit:



1. Finding out
Find out what's happening in your local community
2. Reaching out
Get people involved to develop a vision for your community
3. Planning ahead
Set out what you want to achieve and how you'll do it
4. Keeping on track
Review your progress and see what you've learned so far



GRANTnet
an idox solution



Bute COUNCIL

Community Development

We provide support, information and training for community organisations across Argyll and Bute.



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Community Development Bulletin



Welcome to this month's Community Development Bulletin.

Spring is in full swing and so are our communities. We hope you all find something interesting and useful in this May edition.



Further Project Highlights

Port Appin Village Hall

£500 for replacement handrail for external steps down to main entrance of hall

'This encouraged older members of the community to join functions in the Village Hall, particularly during the winter. After Covid-19, people were reluctant to come together even for a funeral tea and being able to give assurances around cleanliness and safe movement around the building really helped.'



Grey Matters

£500 for chairs tables and a large gazebo so outdoor events could be held, making those shielding feel included.

'It's allowed us to reach more people.

We have also been able to take part in wider community events and the gazebo is a community resource if any partner organisations would like to use it.'

Achnamara Village Hall -

£500 for Covid safe cleaner and hand sanitiser, food hygiene equipment, PAT Test to reopen and a Music Licence.

'This vital funding enabled us to equip the Hall properly so that we could re-open with Covid measures in place. We were able to start running Cafe Connect, pop up suppers and other local activities once more, bringing the community together safely, which was so important at that time. We are now open and fully running fully again, with more activities planned into the Autumn. Thank you!'



Ardrihaig Community Trust

£456 for 4 electric automatic sensor wall fixed hand dryers, automatic gel dispensers, hand sanitizer gel and disposable face masks.

'With the ongoing fear of the Covid-19 infection, the Trust worked hard to assure the community that the Public Hall was a clean and safe environment to come and use for various activities which were gradually being re-established after the series of pandemic lock downs. The impact of the project has led to the Trust maintaining a policy of hall space cleaning over and above pre-Covid standards.'

Garelochhead Station Trust,

£385 for promotional pens with logo, hand sanitizer and roll up banners. Without the funding we would not have been able to advertise our services as widely as we have, thus not being able to support more members of the community.



Route 81 Volunteering

£459.95 for two gazebos

'Covid-19 severely impacted our ability to offer youth and community services. Whilst things have improved over the past year, at times, caution has still prevailed and the Gazebos have proven to be a valuable asset in enabling continuity and alternative options not only to Route 81 but to Centre 81 and partner organisations.'





Shrimps Tarbert Playgroup
£500 towards venue hire

'The project allowed Tarbert Playgroup to restart again after the pandemic closures. This allowed caregivers and children to play and socialise again. We know how isolating lockdown was for families with young children and are delighted the playgroup will bring people together again.'

Kerrera Development Trust

£500 towards folding tables, new bins and marquee repair

'With our new community venue in the marquee and equipment, we were able to host community events enjoyed both by island residents and mainland friends. After the isolation of Covid- it was really wonderful to see families and friends gathering for music, dancing, art and crafts and family bbq's.

We are very grateful for the support from A & B Council to enable our community to thrive.'





Gigha Village Hall

£500 towards pneumatic cleaner

A difficult time brought about extra thorough cleaning.. to one and all!

'With help from our Covid 19 recovery grant it brought confidence and our community back to our hall.'



Carradale Hall

£500 for curtains and lining for the Main Hall windows

'The funds have allowed us to brighten up the hall. A deep clean and the curtains make the building much more attractive to the community and visitors.'



Campbeltown Sailing Club

£500 for safety boat training and cleaning materials

'The Covid recovery grant has helped Campbeltown Sailing Club stay active and get people sailing again. Local school students joined the sailing club in the summer of 2022 because of the regular opportunity to sail being offered.'

Quotes

Lorn Organic Growers - 'The Argyll and Bute Council Covid-19 micro grant provided support for a project we would have had to postpone because of decreased revenue. It gave us a reason to come together as a community when people were reluctant to participate.'

Tayvallich Community Hall SCIO - 'The Covid - 19 micro grant that we received really helped us to restart activities in the hall at a time when Covid restrictions were easing. It helped us feel more confident about re opening and using the hall for social events.'

Sandbank Village Hall - 'We appreciate receiving the grant which helped us to complete the work, it is so much better for the users with the lighting and flooring.'

Taynuilt Village Hall- 'It's just great to see everyone enjoying themselves again and we love to sing along with the kids.'

Dochas Carers Centre - 'So good to meet face-to-face and talk to people as my mental health was bad during lockdowns. The group has acquired many new volunteers during Covid lockdowns and it was great to see new and old faces.'

Arrochar and Tarbet Community Development Trust - "It was so good to see so many residents of all ages come along to our 'Welcome Back' event. They enjoyed great craic and rekindled social networks - many of them hadn't seen each other for well over a year! It really brought the village hall back to life and began to bring our community back together. It felt like this event stimulated a process of rebuilding and re-engagement".

References

Argyll and Bute Council's supporting Communities Fund

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/council-and-government/third-sector-grants>

Council meeting of 24th June 2021

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s175880/Flexible%20Fund%20Council%2024-6-21%20-%20Final%20Version.pdf>

Grant Net

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/grantnet>