



Halls Seminar  
Strathpeffer Community Centre  
13 March 2010



**Background :**

This seminar was organised jointly by CVS Inverness and Ross-shire Voluntary Action to address the needs voiced by the community groups which are currently taking over former council run premises. The topics covered were lined up in answer to previous straw polls from work done with the groups. All of the transfer halls were invited along and the majority of them were represented.

**Hugh Mackay** : Chair of RVA welcomed the representatives and thanked them for giving up their Saturday. He spoke of the importance of the work which they were embarking upon and the importance their buildings had played in community life since the days of the crannogs



He recognised the importance of the village halls as the hubs within the community they served and acknowledged the initiative which would be required for the groups to take this forward. This day had been set up in recognition of their concerns and hoped that all the advice offered during the course of the day would be beneficial.

**Jeannie Graham : External Funding Manager for Highland Council**

Jeannie introduced her role within the Education, Culture & Sport Service. This was partly about dealing with grants to voluntary organisations including local facilities, sports councils and village halls and partly about providing information and advice on external funding opportunities. Over the years she had also been involved with around 50 capital projects involving halls. In thanking the CVS's for arranging the seminar she also acknowledged their help and advice with individual groups in assisting the transfer.

Setting the scene for the handover she spoke of the budget saving and equalisation process which Highland Council had embarked upon two years ago. Across the Highlands there are about 170 halls of which almost 160 are run on an independent basis. Two years ago when the process started inequalities existed in council support for halls because the council provided grants of up to £1k to

independent halls but continued to run halls itself in a small number of communities. The need to make budget savings and to address this inequality came before the current financial imperative.

The council decided that it would no longer run halls and communities were asked if they wished to take on their halls and run them. There had been a mixed reaction from communities and various issues have needed to be worked through since that time. The original intention was that the transfer process would be completed by the end of March 2010 but there have been some delays which have resulted in the original timescale slipping. At the moment there were two further parts of the legal process to be undergone.



1. The proposed transfers would need to go before the Resources Committee in April for formal approval as the halls are being passed on at less than market value.
2. After that agreement from Scottish Ministers was also required for the transfers and this was likely take a couple of months at least.

One of the most recent issues which has emerged following discussions with Highland Council lawyers and the Housing & Property Service was that it would be necessary to include an Economic Development Burden (EDB) clause in the transfers. A letter had been sent very recently to hall committees to explain what the ramifications of this were.

In earlier discussions with community groups the view was that there would be no burdens placed on the title of halls transferring from the council. However, since that time concern has been growing that assets previously owned by councils could be sold for non-community purposes without there being any financial return to the public purse. This had resulted in criticisms that councils had not protected their assets or achieved best value. The council is trying to adopt an even handed approach to the process and the EDB is seen as way of protecting both council and community interests.

All halls will be valued initially and this would establish the level of the EDB. The halls transfer with an EDB. If the hall is sold on at a later date for non community purposes the council would require the value of the hall (at the time of transfer plus any inflationary increases) to be repaid. If the purpose of the sale is to fund another community project, however, that sum could be returned to the community with another EDB being placed on the new project for the same amount. The community would therefore benefit from the full value of the sale. If the hall is sold for non-community purposes and there is no other community project the council retains the sum paid back and the community retains the balance from the proceeds of the sale.

Several issues have arisen. The first of which is what does Highland Council mean by community development project and discussions are taking place within the council to see if a clear definition can be provided.

Jeannie added that halls could benefit from Procurement Scotland arrangements to achieve lower energy costs and would circulate an info sheet.

## **Jennifer Macleod : West- End Community Centre, Alness**

A little bit of background to set this story in context. In Alness 5 separate estates were built to house a new population which came in to the area at the boom time of the smelter, Nigg and MK Shand. Around 1000 new houses in all .Shops were built in the areas distant to the centre of Alness and in their area of the west end 2 of these shops were never let.

As time went by a need was recognised by west Alness Residents for an amenity to bring people together as most people came from outside the area. They needed a way of encouraging people to mix.

A building was identified, Coul Cottage. Plans were drawn up, funds were raised and permissions sought and granted. However due to a social work intervention the building was demolished leaving the group back at the drawing board.

The 2 empty shop shells were then used as an alternative and were knocked into 1 community centre. Jennifer declared openly that this was the ugliest building in the area with no insulation and grim dangerous heaters, however it was a starting point and over the years the hall has evolved and was then run by a hall committee. Never daunted by setbacks the group were inventive in their solution seeking and at one point renamed themselves to break their lease in order to have necessary repair work done.

Jennifer spoke of the constant battle by the group not to go into debt, the continuous fundraising required and the willingness of the group to roll up their sleeves and assist with most of the maintenance and repair work themselves.

In the late 90's funding was sought to renovate the building and include the area which was formerly the Chinese takeaway next door. This funding of £300K was finally secured in 2006 with the assistance of the then CED officer Helen Houston. The sources were Big Lottery, Community Energy Scotland and CED funding. The initial plan which was for 5 months in effect took 1 year and 5 months. They incorporated funding for a post which was 50% admin and 50% development and opened the door to a series of Pilot projects. Jennifer encourages the use of the phrase, "*pilot*" in her funding applications.

Currently they are operating in conjunction with Highland Council youth services, working with young people who have really stamped their Identity on their drop in area and taken ownership. This is a far cry from the early days when the group worked very hard with the community wardens, the police and youth services to combat negative stories about the hall.

Two of the hurdles that Jennifer predicts the Halls groups will have are the reporting for OSCR if they have charitable status and also the process of disclosing their volunteers. They had a variety of conflicting advice and eventually spoke directly to CRBS and OSCR who she has found to be very

helpful and not giving the major clampdown expected. Now they are registered to do their own disclosures and have included an allowance for accrued accountancy in their budget.

However Jennifer advised that all groups keep a profit and loss account for explanation and understanding of the committee. They no longer employ an admin worker but still allocate some sessional time for bookkeeping to fulfil all their reporting requirements.

The young people in their area are very loyal to the centre which is to be understood as many of them started attending in toddler groups and are now attending the youth club. Their confidence levels are variable and West End C.C. takes care to make sure that they deliver everything in a way that continues to boost self confidence. While there is another youth venue in the town, some youngsters prefer to attend only the West End as they feel secure there.

Getting and keeping volunteers is always going to be an issue for halls so expect difficulties. The West End Hall has a dedicated core of hard working volunteers and Jennifer stresses that it is very important that they get some fun and satisfaction in being involved. Decisions are never taken by just one person even if they are required to be taken urgently, take time out to phone around and keep key people in the loop.

A key contact phonebook is shared by all the committee which gives all the numbers for essential people, key holders, plumbers, electricians etc.

Be misers! Jennifer has learned that they will not take on anything big unless they have all the money to run it, not worth the worry.

Rates of Hire are variable in line with OSCR recommendations. There is a community rate, a one off hire rate which is twice that price, and a statutory body hire price which offsets the cost of the children's activities.

They have built up a core of children's equipment which can be hired for parties creating additional income.

The hall is committed to using renewable energy sources and has installed a ground source heat pump to cope with their enlarged space. They also encourage recycling by having the bins located in their car park. The Alness Transition town project is housed in their building.

### **Other Nuggets from Jennifer ;**

Create a good website as a marketing and booking tool, but keep a close eye on bookings. Jennifer has had one booking from a group in Portsmouth googling the wrong West End Hall

Balance noisy bookings with care so that you keep all your customers happy

Ensure all groups who cater have food certificates.

Encourage regular long term hires by offering incentives.

Keep a close eye on your policies to avoid mission drift.



Everyone has enemies, try to turn your into friends  
Everything takes far longer than anticipated  
Finally Jennifer stressed that despite all the hard work involved, the benefit of pulling your community together and seeing it work really is worth it.

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**Ramsay McGhee** : Licensing legislation for community halls

Power point attached

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**Clifford Smith & Carole Rattenbury** : Highland Council Environmental Health : gave a presentation with accompanying notes on the environmental Health issues for community buildings.

Notes to follow contact Clifford Smith. [Clifford.Smith@highland.gov.uk]

**Melanie Macrae from Community Energy Scotland:**

CES help community groups to develop energy efficiency solutions to cut consumption and costs

Melanie's Power point is attached.

Contact details

Melanie.macrae@communityenergyscotland.org.uk

Melanie advised all groups to start recording energy usage and asked that where possible could a history of consumption be provided by Highland Council.



**Barbara Love: SCVO**

SCVO have set up a village Hall website to assist with all topical issues check out [here](#)

<http://www.scvo.org.uk/VillageHalls/Home/Home.aspx>

SCVO are also negotiating favourable insurance rates

A favourable energy rate can be found for community groups who are charities by going through Utility Aid

<http://www.utility-aid.co.uk>

**Questions and Answer Session: Chaired By Ann Angus of Inverness CVS**

**Addressed to Jeannie Graham**

**\* Subsequent information received from HC in red**

*Q What if we have a go at it and it fails will the council take it back? Who sells it on?*

**Jeannie G:** No the council wouldn't take it back. The hall would be owned by the community group and it would be their responsibility to sell it.

*Q. What would happen if the value of the hall had fallen since the time it was transferred – would the council want all the money in the EDB back?*

**Jeannie G:** We will ask the council lawyers for clarification about what happens in the case of a loss.

*(The council would still be entitled to the sum stated in the EDB. However, it could at its discretion, accept the price obtained in exchange for discharging the EDB)*

*Q. Does the letter have any timescales attached, for instance 5 or 10 years on the sale of the building or does this burden go on indefinitely.*

**Jeannie G:** Indefinitely I think as I don't think there are any timescales for the EDB. However, we will check this with council lawyers. *(Indefinitely)*

**Q:** We used to own our hall. Highland Council took it over, let it decrease in value and are now wanting to hand it back to us in a state of disrepair and are placing a financial burden on it. If you transfer ownership on a set date surely it means ownership?

**Jeannie G:** The letter must be seen as a starting point. The eventual details will vary depending upon who will own the hall and will take into account individual circumstances. The EDB is something that the council has to do due to criticism in the past when former council facilities were sold on for non community purposes. I can understand your view and the need for clarification.

*Q. Who has imposed this economic development burden – is it Scottish Ministers or is it the Council?*

**Jeannie G:** It is the Council.

**Q** Could we lobby for this to be changed?

**Jeannie G:** Currently we are in a position where £900k of council assets, at a conservative estimate, are about to



be passed on for £1 each. The Council has a duty to protect the public purse in this situation.

*Q When can we expect to take over the hall – at the moment we are having difficulty gaining access?*

**Jeannie G:** The timetable is looking like the earliest date will be late summer as we still have to go through the steps outlined earlier. It is a valid point though as groups are moving at different paces - some are very keen to get started and some are not yet at that stage.

#### **Questions to Clifford Smith relating to Environmental Health Issues :**

*Q In the case of a lunch clubs where food is prepared out- with the premises, who is liable?*

**Clifford:** The people preparing the food are liable and in the event of any ensuing problems their own kitchens could be under scrutiny.

**Culduthel Hall :**The category of commercial gain includes donations of food so we have taken the route of cooking everything in the Hall using a nominated person who becomes the supervisor. That person has their elementary food hygiene certificate

*Q How do you get an elementary food hygiene certificate?*

**Clifford :** The REHIS or CIEH or RIPHH certificates can be gained from a variety of sources , North Highland College and Inverness College to name only two providers. Some of your halls volunteers may be eligible for an Individual Learning Account to complete it.

*Q How long does it last?*

**Clifford** The legislation is vague and refers only to suitable training commensurate with work in hand. All halls should be aware that under health and safety legislation, if you are registered for the provision of food, you may be inspected and these are usually unannounced.

*Q Do you expect halls committees to carry out cooksafe or would that be down to the individual groups?*

**Clifford :** It is down to the person who carries out the food preparation to conduct the related preparation. When you work out the parts relating to the equipment offered e.g. the overall state of the kitchen or the efficiency of the oven. Then that part would be down to the Hall Committee who are the providers.

*Q; Could the Kitchens be assessed prior to handover or use? Could we have an equivalent of a kitchen MOT for each hall ?*

**Clifford** : The committee who are going to take it on can ask for a routine inspection of the premises. They can check that it complies with regulations.



**Questions to Jennifer Macleod, West End Community Centre :**

*Q We were really impressed with your talk. Would you be willing to come along and visit our committee and inspire them similarly?.*

**Jennifer M:** Happy to help. Contact details are [info@westendcommunitycentre.org.uk](mailto:info@westendcommunitycentre.org.uk)

*Q: How much of a problem is it getting volunteers?*

**Jennifer M** : We have a core of regulars and also friends of friends. All now have to undergo a recruitment process but we find that the level of commitment is very high. We take people with us through the organisations using the hall. Some came in as play group leaders and now help the youth club. The people we use will depend on the bookings we get, for instance if we need someone with food hygiene qualifications or child protection disclosure issues.



*Q How do you work the key holder system? Do long term users get their own key?*

**Jennifer** : We have three remote controls and members of the committee hold them. We cannot afford to lose them. From that point we make arrangements to suit every individual group.

*Q Jennifer, you mentioned that you get free rubbish uplift. Is that available to all community groups?*

**Jeannie G** : Has checked out on our behalf and advises that each hall checks with its local area Tec services to find out as this varies in different places . 01349868440

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### **Feedback Forms :**

Information gleaned from the feedback forms indicate that 100% of those attending can see a value in further seminars and workshop sessions.

Many of the requests of further information could be covered on an individual group basis by either RVA for Ross-shire Groups [rva@rossvolact.org.uk](mailto:rva@rossvolact.org.uk) or Inverness CVS: [anne@cvsinverness.org.uk](mailto:anne@cvsinverness.org.uk). for those south of Kessock

However given the positive feedback from the groups on the format of the seminar and the amount that you all appear to be learning from each other, we will look to organise another one when the legal questions have been answered. Please keep in touch with ourselves and Anne on content and for individual training courses.

The request list from feedback forms so far is as follows

- Further information on the legal transfer
- Renewable energy efficiency and community energy schemes
- In depth information on accrued accounting procedures specific for charities / hall committees
- Coverage of other licencing requirements PPL. PRS etc
- Further workshops with existing hall organisations on successful operation.
- Funding information & access to grants
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Attracting, Recruiting and Retaining Volunteers
- Disability legislation
- Governance
- Maintenance programming

**Attendance List.**

Alan Gartshore	Ross shire Voluntary Action
Marion Rhind	Ross-shire voluntary Action
Jeannie Graham	Highland Council
Clifford Smith	Environmental Health H.C.
Carole Rattenbury	Environmental Health H.C.
Hugh Mackay	Chair RVA
Ramsay McGhee	Ramsay McGhee Training Consultant ( licencing )
Anne Angus	Inverness CVS
Melanie MacRae	Community Energy Scotland
Jennifer Macleod	West - End Community Centre
Alister Ferguson	Perrins Centre Group
Emily Murdoch	Fearn Amenities
Beth Smith	Fearn Amenities Association
Isobel Ross	Fearn Amenities Association
Jan Culshaw	Feis Leann Albainn
Sarah Millar	Smithton & Culloden Community
Lee T Millar	Smithton & Culloden Community
Brian Nairne	Milnafua Hall
Alex Ross	Milnafua Hall
Donald Macleod	Smithton & Culloden Hall
Margaret Macleod	Smithton & Culloden hall
Peter Agate	Milnafua Hall
Freda Connell	Perrins centre
Marie Rogers	Perrins centre
Roddy Dyce	Green drive ( Culduthel Hall )
Pat Cameron	Polnicol Hall
Marc Pendergrast	Polnicol Hall
Elizabeth Ross	Polnicol hall