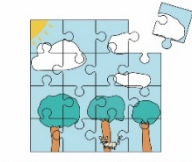


Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust



University of the  
Highlands and Islands  
Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd  
agus nan Eilean

# Community Perspectives on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Lochalsh

Annie Chalmers<sup>1</sup>, Fiona Wellings<sup>1</sup>, Steve Taylor<sup>2</sup> and Rosalind Bryce<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust

<sup>2</sup> Centre for Recreation and Tourism Research, West Highland College, University of the Highlands and Islands

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Mountain Studies, Perth College, University of the Highlands and Islands



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The UHI team would like to thank Fiona and, in particular, Annie at the Community Trust for taking on the role of study co-ordinators, their willingness to share ideas, and their commitment to helping complete the study and this attendant report.

## Introduction

This is one of the four case studies carried out in qualitative research across the Highlands and Islands to examine the experiences for some of the hardest hit people in the region. The project is led by Vicky Johnson from Inverness College UHI and Ros Bryce from Perth College UHI in collaboration with Donna Heddle from Orkney College UHI, Steve Taylor from West Highlands UHI and Magnus Davidson from North Highlands UHI. It has been funded through generous support from the Scottish Funding Council.

The research has been co-constructed in each of the four sites, in Inverness, Wester Ross, Caithness and Orkney, with local partners embedded in the sites selected. These local partners have then worked with academic leads from UHI and voluntary teams where possible. In Lochalsh the research was undertaken by the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust with support from the team based at both Perth College and West Highland College UHI.

The aim of the project was to understand the impacts of Covid-19 on local communities in the Lochalsh area, and influence strategies for recovery through systematic community-driven research, including understanding individual/group support and actions raised in communities and providing evidence to consider future options and change policy and practice regionally.

The team in Lochalsh worked from March to July 2021 to achieve the following objectives, to:

- Implement community-driven research which seeks to understand landscapes of change and the actions taken in response to the global coronavirus pandemic, principally examining:
  - Challenges

- Positive actions or opportunities
- Coping strategies
- Future actions
- Capture this experience as a case study for that area/ site.
- Influence policy and practice locally and regionally with community perspectives/ evidence about landscapes of change and covid recovery.

This report is intended for use locally and regionally to sit alongside a cross-case report that will provide analysis across the highlands and islands through the voices of local residents. This in-depth qualitative research can help to understand the complexity of the negative and positive experiences, how these differ with geographies, inequalities and support, and what actions are prioritised by local people who are hardest hit and local volunteers and service providers as we emerge from the pandemic.

This report sets the scene with a description of the Lochalsh context, drawing upon a wider-ranging, predominantly quantitative community survey . That research showed a strong sense of community resilience but that this study sought to explore Covid-19 coping and recovery measures more fully through in-depth research to understand the everyday lived realities of the hardest hit during the pandemic.

## Summary of findings

- The local team at Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust felt that some really penetrating and useful findings resulted from the study, which it will use to help inform the development of its community plan. The UHI team members meanwhile felt that they had real insight into the value of new, co-created methodologies.
- As a result of the lockdown restrictions some of the anticipated research methods were not able to be employed, while elements of community fatigue meant other proposed activities weren't used. Nonetheless, the technology used proved effective and still enabled successful interaction with community members.
- In terms of findings, negative impacts on younger people (under 30) were corroborated by a number of participants. Impacts were apparent for young adults struggling with changes to their employment but also in terms of isolation and anxiety brought about by the lock down restrictions.

- Many participants spoke of the emotional toll of being separated from friends and family. Older respondents didn't tend to report this so much as a personal issue, some mentioning that they were used to being quite isolated.
- For respondents of working age, many respondents faced employment challenges. The area is heavily dependent on the tourism industry and the lockdowns precluded employment opportunities for many workers. A few participants suggested that the demands of home-schooling were an issue that impacted people's ability to work.
- With regards to the more positive elements of lockdown, almost all participants expressed the value of the outdoor environment to help them cope with the pandemic, having natural areas on the doorstep and being able to exercise.
- Children interviewed each other in schools and also revealed that nature and using the outdoor environment was an important way of dealing with lockdown. They did, however, discuss feelings of boredom resulting from not being able to see friends and being restricted to online interaction.
- There was widespread sentiment that the community was lucky in some respects, feeling that the community was sheltered from the worst of the crisis and acknowledging the more difficult situation faced by those living in urban areas.
- Almost all respondents felt that there is a greater sense of community cohesion now, facilitated by a high level of activity coordinated by the Covid response group. A telephone help line, community newsletter, inline activities and 'blessing boxes' - through which people could share food and other supplies - were all cited.
- This sense of self-sufficiency was evident, with a perception that the community needs to mobilise its own response, as resources aren't available from elsewhere.
- Overall there was a great sense of positivity among the participants, following what they considered a great effort by their community to respond to the pandemic. This was tempered by ongoing uncertainty and therefore a lack of clarity over future actions, recognising that the pandemic is not yet over.

## The Lochalsh setting

Lochalsh is a geographically large area with a population of just 2600 (2100 adults), with around 2.6 people per square kilometer, and SMID places Lochalsh with areas of deprivation scales of 5 (Kyle of Lochalsh), 6 & 7.

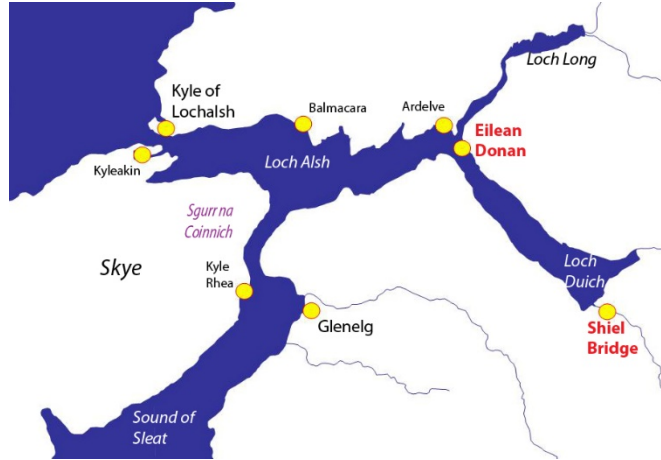
The area has seven Community Councils and is amalgamated with Skye for most agencies although Lochalsh residents find it harder to access services and are less likely to be consulted by service providers than Skye residents due to the Geographical spread and low population.

Lochalsh also used to be a destination in its own right and Kyle the stopping-off place for catching the ferry to Skye. Once the Skye bridge was open, people going to Skye had no need to stop, so the village was bypassed and Lochalsh has suffered the consequences.

In order to try and benefit the locality, the Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust was established in August 2012. As a Community Trust we aim to achieve the sustainable regeneration of our community which, despite its magnificent geographic setting, has been identified as one of the most economically fragile in the Highlands. We work to generate income through enterprise and the ownership of assets. As a not-for-profit organisation, all our trading surpluses are reinvested in the community. We are owned and managed by the local community and organised on democratic principles. We are independent but seek to work in partnership with other public, private and voluntary organisations.

As is the case for many community initiatives across Scotland, the Collaboration's work in 2020 has focused largely on the emergency response to Covid-19. Having an effective place-based partnership in existence has, in turn, helped to establish a strong cross-community response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

On the ground the response to Covid was a lot of spontaneous volunteering, where people helped their neighbours with their shopping or collected their prescriptions or generally just made sure they were OK. Everyone wanted to make sure that vulnerable people in their community were looked after. The feeling was that in each of the seven Lochalsh areas there was a huge amount of local knowledge, which meant that volunteers there knew exactly what was needed. The Trust felt that our role would be best served by trying to coordinate that



voluntary activity. The established trust amongst the existing Lochalsh Collaboration members proved to be a strong base, making it easier to launch our community-wide response.

A great example of our collaboration in action has been the CommUnity newsletter. When the West Highland Free Press decided not to publish the local newspaper, we filled the gap by issuing a newsletter to keep people up to date, give information about where they could get advice and so on. The first one was hand delivered by volunteers to every household, about 1,600 in total. It has been really popular; we've had a lot of good feedback and great contributions from people all over the area.



We also set up our own Telephone Helpline and a Food Voucher scheme, both run by volunteers, and publicised in the newsletter. Another initiative saw us taking over the redistribution of surplus food from the Coop, which the Local Youth Trust had previously used in cooking lessons. This was prompted by a shortage of food and rationing measures put in place by the only local supermarket. The surplus food was made available in the local blessings box, or outside the village hall. More recently this has become much more organised as a Community Fridge, where people are asked to 'take what you need, leave what you can'. We have found that emphasising the benefits of reducing food waste encourages people to use the scheme.



All these activities are reviewed regularly by a network via weekly video conferences, which considers the progress of projects, local need and what additional support may be required. The calls are attended by a local councilor and a member of the local TSI to ensure that local volunteer effort was linked to wider support from public and other services.

After the lockdown was ended and things slowly began to return to some degree of normal business, the Lochalsh Collaboration was able to turn once again to the consultation. The newsletter took on more significance because we were able to use it to let people know about the consultation. It kind of prepared the ground and following some really detailed community profiling done by volunteers, we had a good basis to launch the questionnaire, which was posted out with the January 2021 edition. The newsletter will carry on, certainly for the foreseeable future.

There were things we thought we could do that proved difficult; we talked a lot about whether we could have a Meals-on-Wheel's service to deliver hot meal's but it was not a practical possibility.

One of the supportive things was that we were already quite closely involved with the Skye & Lochalsh Council for Voluntary Organisations, the third-sector Interface. They have been very supportive and helpful, they share ideas with us, and we have been able to sense check things with them, on both the Covid response and the consultation. That is a useful collaboration; it is an existing relationship, but it's got stronger. It is interesting that, despite the challenges, or maybe even because of the challenges, these links and connections have got stronger.

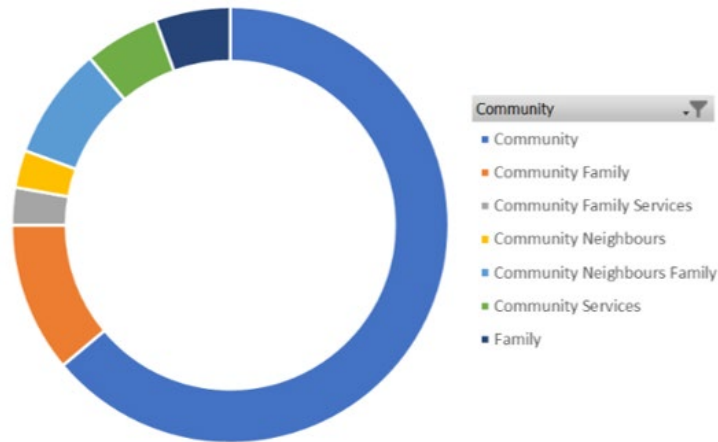
The Lochalsh Collaborates Community survey which went out to all 1,600 households with 600 returns contained two specific questions on Covid19:

*'How supported have you felt, or do you feel during Covid?'*

The community response and support had a real effect, with well over three quarters of the responses received showing they had received support from the community.



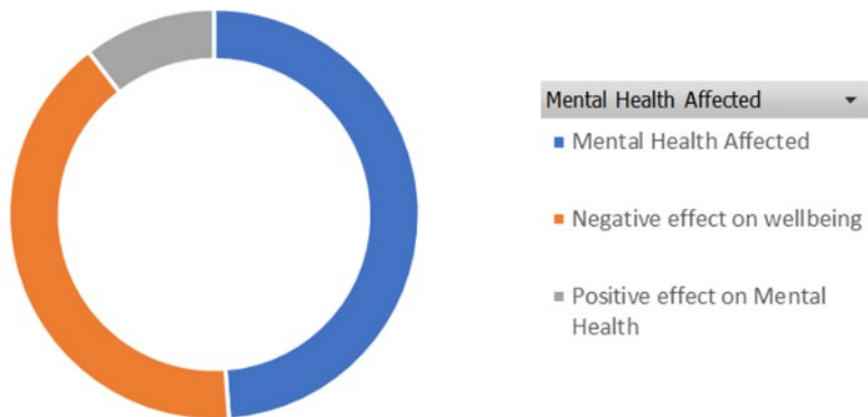
Who supported residents during Covid19



*'Has the pandemic affected your mental health and wellbeing?'*

Whilst 55% said there had been no impact, of those who said it had an impact under 30's experienced the most negative impact– two thirds of those under 30 felt that it had been affected.

Effect on Mental Health or Wellbeing



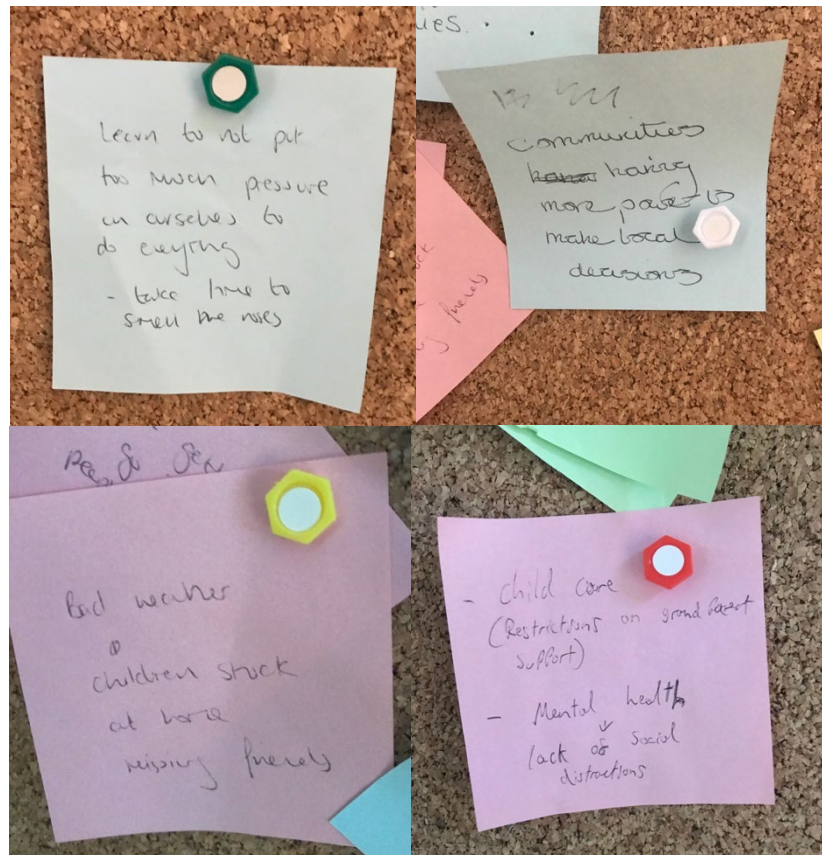
## Methodology

The first stage of this project was spent in advertising for volunteers to participate in the research. We initially had a few people who were interested and who agreed to come along to our initial meetings with the UHI team. Due to the continuing Covid restrictions, all of these meetings were required to be held online rather than in person. During these initial meetings, the group came up with a few ideas for artistic based projects that would be used to help collect data such as a sidewalk chalk art event, and working with a local girl's group to create Tik-tok videos of their favourite things about lockdown. We started with a small group of 4 volunteers who were to take on some of these projects. These volunteers had some ideas of what people in the community would be good to interview regarding their experiences, and it seemed that initial thoughts were that the elderly were most affected by the pandemic.



The next stage of the project was attempting to carry out some of our artistic methods in order to engage with the community which was initiated with our sidewalk chalk art and mood board event. We advertised the event in our local newsletter and in local shops and hoped to have many families with children come by to draw their favourite lockdown memories. We also set-up our Covid Mood Board and asked people to pick one of 4 colours of post-it note which each related to one of the themes of this project, and write their thoughts related to that theme and

pin it to our board. We did have a few participants for the chalk art, but unfortunately the cooler weather may have deterred a lot of people. We had quite a good number of participants for our Covid Mood Board and some good notes put on the board. Each of the people who participated were coded and were interviewed after the fact.



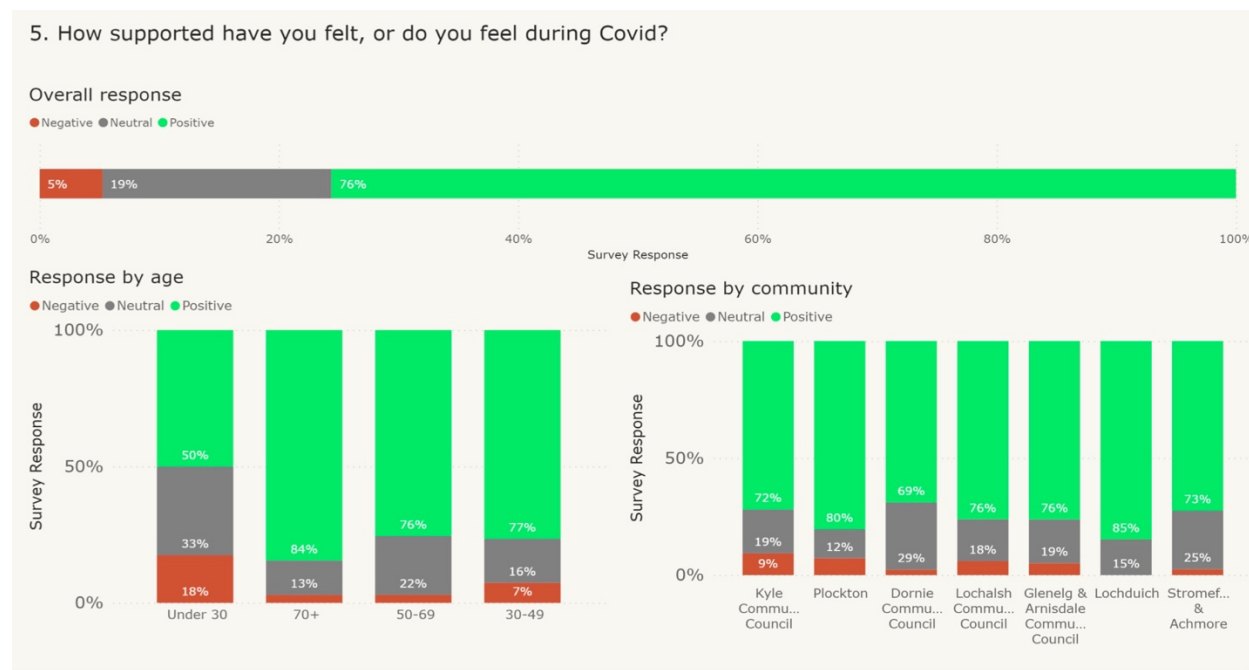
We found in the following weeks after these initial sessions, that our volunteers were unable to continue with the project for various reasons. The timing for recruiting volunteers was unfortunate as this was a time when our community was just beginning to open up again to the outside world and many volunteers were returning to work. It seems that there was a bit of stress involved with juggling this project and returning to a 'normal' pace of life as people in the area were living a much more relaxed and slower pace of life during the lockdowns. One of volunteers mentioned that the stress of managing this project as well as her other commitments was too much for her at the time. Another had a new baby during the project time frame and was unable to manage dealing with both. Another aspect of the difficulty had to do with having to have all of communication online. It was hard to keep people engaged and excited in the project when they were all a bit burned out on having online meetings after a year.

## Interview protocol

After the initial stages of trying to engage with the volunteers and not being successful, we moved on to the interview stage, with the project facilitator taking over responsibility for interviewing. The initial interviews were conducted with people who had contributed to the chalk event and had written notes on the Covid Mood Board. The interviews were conducted using four 'big questions' to guide the discursive flow, using the following interview template:

<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What challenges have you and your family experienced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic?</li> <li>○ What challenges do you think have been experienced by the wider community or other parts of the community?</li> <li>○ In what ways is community life different now, compared to before the pandemic?</li> <li>○ Who in the community/ which parts of the community do you think have been most affected by the pandemic?</li> </ul>	<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In what ways did you overcome the challenges you experienced?</li> <li>○ What parts of life have got better during the pandemic and which have got worse? - how has this changed/fluctuated over the last 14 months?</li> <li>○ Have there been positive changes to your life, or to the community, as a result of the pandemic, that you would like to remain in the future?</li> <li>○ What positive memories do you think you will have from the events of the last 14 months or so?</li> <li>○ Did you learn any new skills or activities during the pandemic?</li> <li>○ Has the pandemic caused you to think differently about your future e.g., what you might do next, or how you would like to live?</li> <li>○ Do you think that living through the pandemic in the Lochalsh area has been different from what people have experienced in other places?</li> </ul>
<p>Coping strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What has helped you and your family cope with COVID?</li> <li>○ Are there things that you think would have helped, but which you did not have access to?</li> <li>○ Were there any community actions or activities that you think helped other parts of the community cope with the crisis?</li> <li>○ What do you think worked best, and what things did you or others try that worked less well?</li> <li>○ Have you heard of things that have happened in other places or communities that have been good ways of dealing with the impacts of the pandemic and that you think might work here?</li> </ul>	<p>Future actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are there lessons that have been learned from the pandemic that might be used to improve community life in Lochalsh in the future?</li> <li>○ What actions do you think need to be taken to help the community recover from the pandemic?</li> <li>○ What do you think are the priorities for helping those parts of the community that have been hardest hit by the pandemic?</li> <li>○ Are there people in the community whose voices you think should be specifically included in this study?</li> <li>○ What are the best ways to involve people in a discussion about future actions?</li> </ul>

At the same time as this project, the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust was carrying out a large community wide survey which was completed around mid-April and has been in the process of analysis throughout. This survey was given to every household in Lochalsh and had 593 responses out of the 1,700 surveys given out. This survey included questions about how people felt they were supported during Covid and through the responses to these questions, we found that the people who felt the least supported were not the elderly, as we had expected, but young people under 40.



Due to these responses to the survey, we then tried to focus on completing interviews with younger people in the community and people with young children, as home schooling was also an issue raised by the survey. We then interviewed members of the local Lochalsh Collaboration group, who were responsible for creating the local action survey, and who will create a local action plan in the autumn based on the responses. They are those best placed to give impressions of how people in the area have been affected and give ideas of what steps they think we need to take moving forward. We went to the local high school and gave a few of the kids an opportunity to video interview each other about their Covid experiences. We also attended a local baby playgroup and held a focus group with the parents present at the group as to their experiences with Covid while having very young children, as that experience was different than those that had school age children.



## Ethical Issues

The cross-case research applied for ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Highlands and Islands. In accordance with this, the research team developed local protocols so that the team and participants were safe and the evidence produced according to the agreed data management for the project and the university. Participant information sheets were developed in order to make the purpose and use of the research clear and so that participants could then provide informed consent through signing a consent form or providing verbal informed consent to the partner organisation of one of the UHI team members. (See Appendix 1 for details of forms and protocols).

## Coding

A coding system was devised to ensure anonymity in the research whilst also allowing analysis of the in-depth qualitative research by issues of difference, such as by gender, age and participant situation. At the beginning or end of the interview the coding questions were asked and completed to ensure that the profile of the participant could be used alongside their qualitative interview for analysis.

<b>Coding analysis</b>		<b>Employment</b>		<b>Have you been tested for Covid?</b>	
		Employed part time	7	Yes	15
<b>Total people coded</b>	39	Employed full time	2	No	18
		Unemployed	1	Not answered	6
<b>Gender</b>		Self-employed	10		
Male	8	Retired	8	<b>Was it positive or negative?</b>	
Female	31	In education	6	Positive	0
		Full time employment/in education	2	Negative	15
<b>Age</b>		Self employed/in education	2		
Under 16	5	Other	1	<b>Family member tested positive?</b>	
16-29	3			Yes	1
30-49	20	<b>Have you been furloughed?</b>		No	32
50-64	3	Yes	6	Not answered	6
65+	8	No	27		
		Not answered	6	<b>Have you had to self isolate?</b>	
<b>Ethnicity</b>				Yes	4
White (all backgrounds)	39	<b>Housing situation</b>		No	29
		Owned	24	Not answered	6
<b>Disability</b>		Private rented	7		
Yes	1	Living rent free	1	<b>Have you been shielding?</b>	
No	38	Not answered	7	Yes	1
				No	32
				Not answered	6

## Findings

### Challenges

Participants discussed a wide range of challenges related the pandemic and the impacts of lock down and restrictions in the area. There was a feeling among some that there was insufficient response and guidance from local authorities and Scottish Government and further support would have been welcomed from these sources in terms of dealing with employment issues and managing the negative impacts of restrictions.

*And I don't think the local authority were particularly good, Highland Council, but I don't know. I think they tried, but it was all a bit global with them. And it meant it meant local initiative, like the collaboration (31 Retired Male, aged over 65).*

There was evidence that while support both nationally and locally was generally targeted at older age groups, that this was lacking for younger people and a feeling that younger people were presumed to be more resilient.

*We did have a group of volunteers, that if anybody needed anything, you know, you could go to them, but it was more sort of directed at the older ones (29 Adult Female 30-39).*

The negative impacts on younger people in the community (under 30) was corroborated by a number of participants. Impacts were apparent for young adults struggling with changes to their employment but also in terms of isolation and anxiety. Children and teenagers were also thought to be adversely affected by the lock down restrictions.

*there's some there's real learning in that for us because before we always think the old are vulnerable, and the younger, resilient, but actually, maybe not as resilient as we think (22 Female aged 16-29)*

### Money

Money worries were only mentioned by a few respondents. There was a view expressed by some that 'someone else is usually worse off – others need help more than me'. This feeling applied to the food waste programme as well as other aid; people were initially reluctant to use it as they felt it others should have access first. However, some people felt that they weren't able to adequately access food from the shops, while there were shortages of basics such as pasta and



flour. Online shopping was naturally in high demand – this was a big issue in a rural area, with difficulties, initially, finding time slots for deliveries.

Some of the older generation recognised that retirees were comparatively less affected than those in employment facing furlough or suspension of business activity:

*I have to say that we, pensioners have done it all right out of you know, because we're not spending the money that we would have spent. So, you know, no, I wouldn't say we're cruising, but we're not struggling at all. (31 retired male aged over 65)*

For respondents of working age, while some were in a fortunate position and their work employment, if not their work patterns, had continued unchanged, many respondents did face employment challenges. As one young person stated: *"Struggling for money to pay the bills. Usually, we would get a job with a hotel or waitressing or everything was cool to get a job. It's impossible to make money"* (35 Adult female aged 30-49). The area is heavily dependent on the tourism industry and the lockdowns precluded employment opportunities for many workers.

Another respondent was disadvantaged as she didn't qualify for government aid due to the relatively recent start-up of her business: *"On a personal level we missed out on the self-employment and stuff cos I got self-employed too late. So I fell through that crack... So that made life more difficult* (32 Female Business owner, aged 30-49). Some individuals with creative roles were also badly affected: *"Trying to keep all the threads of my work afloat. Sales went down. Missed out on sales, missed out on teaching work"* (15 –Female aged 30-49).

A few participants suggested that the demands of home-schooling were an issue that prevented people from working or impacted their ability to work, as one young mother lamented:

*Home schooling and trying to work was a massive challenge. I couldn't do it. So I had to turn down consultant work. I turned down a lot of work to be able to look after my daughter and parents. And so that had a pretty big impact on family income finances. (36 Female aged 30-49)*

The participants themselves did not report experiences of hardship and poverty but one participant says the experience had made the community aware of poverty in the area

*We're aware of poverty in the area. Maybe none of us have realised before..(8 Female aged 30-49)*

*I definitely did see people that would never approach the food bank before. That just felt they had no option Finally, and they were the kind of people that would go on it and were super appreciative. And then as soon as they had their work came back, or they had income again, they would stop, they'd say, No, thanks. That was great. Thank you. So that I did see, I don't think people realise that there were people in that situation who really did not work because tourism was shut down (41 Service Provider)*

### **Case Study**

We summarise here the experiences of one participant – a working mother with a young family. As someone living in the area with young children, she found it difficult to be separated for a long period of time from her extended family and also experienced challenges when managing the demands of home schooling alongside her employment. At the same time she appreciated being able to spend more time with her children. She spoke with enthusiasm about the way in which the community came together during the pandemic to provide one another with support and the readiness to volunteer, help out and develop new initiatives. She also spoke of the need to come to terms with carrying out her job online and how she was pleasantly surprised with how effective this this was. Her professional role involves teaching arts skills and she believed this was helpful for supporting the mental health of those she works with during the pandemic. She raised the issue that there is a barrier, particularly for older people, to the use of the technology which has become commonplace for many during the crisis. She raised the point that all groups (children, teenagers, adults and the elderly) have experienced negative mental health impacts during the pandemic and that a priority for recovery will be making sure that social groups, activities and community spaces are supported and valued to help people connect with one another and access both support and activities that are meaningful to them.

### **Isolation**

Feelings of isolation seemed to be principally experienced by younger participants (under 30) though a majority spoke of the emotional toll of being separated from friends and family. Older respondents didn't tend to report this so much as a personal challenge, some mentioning that as they were used to being quite isolated and the pandemic didn't represent so much of a change in that respect, as one respondent opined:

*We're also more used to being separate from each other. And, you know, not going to the shops and pubs every day, especially if you live in a more isolated area. So I think though, that was just easier because people were more used to living in that kind of way, as well (41 Service Provider)*

However, older participants did talk of the grandchildren that they missed seeing over the course of the pandemic. There were also perceived benefits of living in an isolated area, as people felt more detached from the pandemic due this location (see Location section)

*Others however, did miss that community interaction: "The biggest challenges that I faced, which I don't think I'm alone with this, the lack of communication and interaction with other members of the community that I was normally involved with" (24 Adult Male aged 30-49). The first lockdown coincided with an extended period of good weather, but when the third lockdown was imposed towards the end of 2020, it was recognised that "over the winter it was really hard for a lot of people (29 Adult Female aged 30-49).*

Younger age groups, however, more generally struggled with the lack of interaction during lockdown, as there were unable to meet up physically with friends, as one respondent stated:

*There was absolutely nothing for the younger generation to do, except online school. And that was the only constant they had. So I know my children, especially missed activities, group activities, We couldn't travel. So there was no meeting up with friends and stuff like that. So I think that was difficult for the younger ones. (14 Adult Female aged 30-49)*

*The rural location and local topography create internet connectivity issues which exacerbated the issue: "Lots of internet issues – lots of kids who can't get on and can't participate as well. I worry that children spend lots of time on screen" (15 Adult Female aged 30-49).*

Isolation was also linked to the issue of people not knowing what was going on. The local newspaper 'West Highland Free Press' ceased to run and due to the geographic dispersion of communities along with poor internet connectivity, people struggled to access information, increasing the sense of isolation.

*when everything got locked down, the newspapers stopped running. That's the Highland Free Press. And people, you know, because there's a very bad internet connection here. And we're so you know, geographically spread out, when we had a sort of five-mile limit. That meant that, you know, you couldn't, you couldn't go very far. So the communities were split. So, yeah, people, people no longer knew what was going on (4 Service Provider)*

## Children/parents

Children interviewed each other in schools and revealed that nature and using the outdoor environment was an important way of dealing with lockdown. They also discussed feelings of boredom resulting from not being able to see friends and being restricted to online interaction. They also expressed concern for the financial difficulties experienced by their parents

*My mum used to be a chef.... She lost her job after lockdown hit... We had to borrow money from my aunt (29 Male aged under 16)*

A number of adult participants raised the issue of challenges related to learning online, both for children and knock-on effects for their parents: *"It's been really hard for parents, especially those working from home. The home schooling has been difficult, and worrying that we are doing it wrong and worrying if the kids are going to be ok in terms of their education and their mental health"* (15 Female aged 30-49). Another respondent reinforced this, expressing that: *"Moving to online learning has been a massive culture shock to students who had to rapidly learn how to use the technology low attendance at online classroom meetings, low completion of work set"* (34 Female aged 30-49).

Several people have raised the issue of mental health impacts on children. There is a lot of anxiety about the potential long-term impacts, in terms of what the children have experienced and the continuing uncertainty of what may happen in the future. Families struggled with balancing home-schooling with working from home.

*It's been really hard for parents, especially those working from home. The home school has been difficult and worrying that we are doing it wrong and worrying if the kids are going to be ok in terms of their education and their mental health (15 Female aged 30-49)*

*I think younger people have really, far more, really struggled. I think mums and dads with children that have new developmental problems through school that are waiting for assessment for ADHD from autism, really unsupported because that service all stopped (39 Female aged 30-49)*

A focus group with parents at a local play group agreed that it was harder for the young kids because they didn't really understand that they couldn't go to the playgroups and other activities that they were used to participating in. The parents wished that they had been able to have more activities with the kids meeting up during the lockdowns because they feel that the young

kids did suffer from not seeing other children. They mentioned that the kids would say that they were sad, and that boredom and frustration at not meeting up with other kids would result in the kids lashing out and behaving badly. They felt that some more openness should have been allowed in the area because of the relatively lower risk of catching the virus in the area due to its relative isolation.

A mother of a playgroup age child observed signs of sadness in her child

*He's been saying "I'm sad", "I'm sad". You know, it's unusual for them to necessarily be able to recognise and express emotions. And he says, "I'm happy and I feel better" and things like that but the amount of times he said, "I'm sad"..(18 Female aged 30-49)*

That said, one respondent considered that *"the younger kids, you'd think are, they're very resilient, and it won't really affect them"* (15 Female, aged 30-49), while another felt that come the second lockdown the schools were better prepared and the children were less affected than their parents:

*I think, mostly adults suffered for the second time. But I think the reason why the children didn't suffer the same amount the second time is that they were all then linked up with their Chromebooks. And they were actually meeting with their classmates every day and with their teachers. (16 Female, aged 30-49)*

## **Anxiety**

Anxiety, depression and mental health issues were raised by many participants. One participant highlighted an increased level of anxiety in the community

*People were, were more anxious, I seen, there's more anxiety in the community than there was as normal. That's that was definitely more prevalent. Caution, anxiety (24 Male, aged 30-49)*

A few respondents mentioned worries around anxiety and depression, some expressing concern for family members both locally (*"Worry about husband because he's on immunosuppressant drugs"* (15 Female, aged 30-49) and in other parts of the country, for example:

*My sister lives on the east coast and she's got very severe mental health problems. And she couldn't get face to face appointments with her community nurse who would normally*

*visit her once a week or once every two weeks. And so she just got sicker and sicker.*  
(Female, aged 30-49)

Others voiced concern about going to shops and generally experienced anxiety associated with the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic: *“Personally, anxiety and depression, in business, anxiety. It's been really major and affected my health. financial loss, uncertainty”* (20 Female, aged 30-49). This was recognised both personally and as a more widespread feeling: *“People were more anxious. There's more anxiety in the community than there was as normal”* (24 Male aged 30-49). While some community members turned to online shopping, even that brought its own anxieties, as supermarkets struggled to keep up with demand:

*We didn't want to go to any shops, we didn't go to any shops we used and Tesco click and collect and a bit later on we managed to get a permanent slot with ASDA but that was that was very difficult to start off with. I was staying up at midnight waiting to get a slot. That was that was quite traumatic, really.* (31 Retired Male aged over 65)



One participant pointed out that the pandemic exacerbated existing mental health issues due to the lack of availability of services that were already hard to access.

*People with mental health issues are the ones that have suffered probably the most, because they normally battle to reach out anyway. And their support to the conventional support networks or now not as available* (36 Female, aged 30-39)

## Opportunities

There was a sentiment that the community were lucky in terms of the situation in which they found themselves during the pandemic. There was a feeling expressed that the community was sheltered from the worst of the crisis and many participants made reference to the more difficult situation faced by those living in more populated or urban areas where restrictions were having more an impact on peoples' daily lives, for example people living in city flats and without accessible green space

*For us, we haven't really had to deal with it in the same way. I think that we've got natural spaces that we can go to, and I think a lot of people have taken advantage of that. We don't have a lot of crowded places. So you can go to the shops and you feel relatively safe (16 Female, aged 30-49).*

*Living in a rural area, we've had things a little bit easier than the rest of country certainly Glasgow, Edinburgh, and that they're still knocked down to a certain degree. And we've had a wee bit more freedom to kind of explore and do what we want a bit more I think (11 Male, aged 30-49).*

Participants spoke of the benefits of being able to spend more time with family, and the opportunities to enjoy different activities – many of these were outdoor activities such as enjoying walking and cycling locally. Many also turned to gardening and vegetable growing during lock down.

*We did a lot more cooking from scratch, and I grew lots of vegetables. I just went into growing mode and grew lots of stuff.. and that was quite nice even though wouldn't have kept us fed but it still was quite cathartic or therapeutic (38 Adult Female Aged 30-49)*

*We kind of bubbled ourselves from the rest of the world (4 Service Provider)*

## Location

Almost all participants expressed the value of the outdoor environment to help them cope with the pandemic impacts. They highlighted to importance of having natural areas on the doorstep and being able to exercise:



*“We're really lucky in that we can get outdoors and go for walks and go swimming and you know, get up hills. And we've got a lot of natural space, which is fantastic for just being able to do things either by yourself or with family and friends” (36 Female,).*

This opinion was reinforced by another local, who also recognised that in this respect people living in Lochalsh were very fortunate, granted physical freedoms denied those in larger towns and cities:

*“We had the ability to go out and walk and exercise literally from our front doors. We are free into the open wilderness, you know, literally within two or three minutes. People that are enclosed in cities, environments didn't have that” (24 Male, aged 30-49).*

One respondent even moved up to the area to start a new life after the first lockdown.

## **Community**

Almost all respondents felt that there is a greater sense of community cohesion than prior to the pandemic, facilitated by a high level of activity coordinated by the Covid response group. For example a telephone help line by volunteers was set up which had good uptake by the community and a community newsletter was widely referenced as providing an invaluable source of information about developments in the wider Lochalsh area. :

*I would say in terms of the help line, in terms of the community newsletter, and what we're beginning to see from the questionnaires, it's very clear that actually the great positive about this was community, that the community kind of responded quickly, positively and helpfully (22 retired Female, aged over 65).*

One participant succinctly encapsulated this cohesive feeling:

*I think it's really brought people together. It's shown what a very good supportive community we have here. I think maybe some neighbours have become paradoxically a bit closer. We've got to know one of our neighbours a lot more, who we've been getting shopping for because they were properly shielding. And you know, just going and waving to them and that kind of thing. So I think more people have been volunteering and helping out. (15 Female, aged 30-49)*

A sense of self-sufficiency is evident in the participant responses where it is perceived that the community needs to mobilise its own response, as resources aren't available from elsewhere.

People felt a sense of responsibility towards one another, checking on neighbours for example. As one participant stated, *"it's become more normal to just say, hey, do you want me to pick something up for you in town or kind of, you know, kind of help out with whatever around the house or with the kids"* (36 Female, aged 30-49).

Early in the pandemic, there was a high level of motivation for volunteering to aid the local covid response which helped people to get to know each other better than before. Local people were quick to join the effort to help others, and there was widespread appreciation of some of the community initiatives set up: *"I think that the way that the community has developed some of their initiatives, like the food fridge and all that, I think that's great. That's really positive. I think that we got back to a bit of that sense of the need to check on your neighbours"* (16 Female, aged 30-49)

Local shops became local hubs for the community, and the Lochalsh newsletter became a very important means of disseminating local information about Covid and other local activities, as reported by several people.

*What the Kyle (KLCT) trust had been doing has been like, amazing. And that you're pulling everybody together with the newsletter and all those bits and pieces. It was really good keeping everybody up to date of what was happening and stuff like that* (29 Female, aged 30-49)

As a result, some participants reported having greater knowledge about where to go for services compared to before the pandemic.

There was a feeling that during the lockdown when tourism was absent from the area, that people had greater opportunities to connect as a community.

*you were out for a walk, having a socially distanced chat with whoever was walking down the street, because you knew you knew they were going to be from here. So you could talk about local area and what was happening. Whereas now you walk down the street, and you just assume most people that are walking about are tourists. Yeah, it does, it does change the community dynamic a little bit. So I think the opportunity for that for really connecting it with the community was oddly, really good and really beneficial* (41 Service Provider).

One service provider reflected on how the increased collaboration between the geographically dispersed communities of Lochalsh will give the area a stronger unified voice which can be harnessed to seek access to better service provision in the future

*Lochalsh won't just sit back and just be rolled over anymore. It will raise its voice. Things like connection to health services, we're always last on the line. Everything points to Skye because it's a larger community. But there's never any sort of provision or thoughts for provision for Lochalsh (4 Service Provider)*

## **Work**

Some participants commented that the lockdowns created opportunities for work, one local setting up a new business in response to the pandemic:

*I did set up a new business in the middle of the pandemic to try and introduce another form of sustainable livelihood into a community that was entirely dominated either by exports, exports of prawns or tourism. So that was quite challenging and exciting thing to have done. And I'm not sure I would have had the opportunity to do that if it wasn't for Covid. (36 Adult Female aged 30-49)*

Other new initiatives have appeared in the area which was linked in some cases to people using this period as a time to reflect on their lives and makes changes to their future work plans.

*I have seen, you know, new businesses cropping up and people discussing their ways of doing things. It's, I mean, there's new cafes that are popped up, there's new art galleries, you know, there's, there's these things that didn't really exist before COVID (41 Service Provider)*

Another respondent appreciated the opportunity to study a course online and from home, rather than having to move away from the area: *"Before the pandemic, my plan was to maybe move to Paris to do a course. And then pandemic happened and the university decided to do the course online. So I could stay at home and still study. That was pretty life changing"* (35 Female, aged 30-49).

Other people recognised that the lockdowns forced new working patterns on those fortunate enough to continue working, being able to attend meetings from home rather than have to

travel. There was also a sense that people were able to work more flexibly hence achieving a better work life balance

*I think there's been a much better work life balance. And I think a lot more people are taking back control of that a lot of people are saying no, I'm not working then. And we're This is the business hours. And only work comes in that timeframe. And it's more socially acceptable (32 Female, aged 30-49)*

## Coping Strategies

A variety of coping strategies were raised by participants. There was quite a diversity of activities that helped including gardening, baking and maintaining contact with friends, family and activity providers through the use of online platforms such as Zoom.

The Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust organised a range of online activities which were well received in the community

*We did all these online courses that were really well received. And they're still on YouTube. But they're all these zoom gardening courses and beekeeping courses and things on your compost.. During the first lockdown, they really helped. I know lots of people participated in those classes from the beginning (41 Service Provider)*

The community newsletter has been an important source of information for the community

*I still think the newsletter was a great thing to come out of that. I think it's just brought a lot of people in the community together (31 Retired Male, aged over 65)*

Volunteering was also an important coping mechanism in the area as was evidenced by the rapid and enthusiastic approach by groups of volunteers at the onset of the pandemic

*And I think the volunteering definitely helped me get through the pandemic, because when I was in the community fridge, I was seeing people, I was chatting to people and realising, actually, some people are struggling massively, and it kind of makes you realise as I'm doing, I'm making a difference. (14 Adult female Aged 30-49)*

In terms of other activities, members of the community embraced what the local outdoor environment had to offer in terms walking and particular places such as The Plock, an area of woodland which has come into community ownership in 2018 and is being managed as a focal natural area for providing multiple community benefits.

Participants were appreciative of other local schemes such as 'blessing boxes' through which people could share food and other supplies. The community fridge was mentioned by many as an excellent scheme that not only provided food for people struggling financially, but which also provided a way of tackling food waste locally.

*The blessing box sort of initiative and the foodshare probably made a huge difference. And certainly things like prescription pickups and stuff for people who didn't have family that could go and get them, I think, probably made a huge difference (32 Adult Female Aged 30-49)*

The community came together to support the elderly in various ways. As a result, the older population are reported to have felt very well supported

*The elderly community were really well supported by the more sort of able bodied and those with transport...things like picking up groceries and medication from the pharmacy. And there was a little WhatsApp group that the elderly folk used to, you know, sort of request a pick up from Kyle. And that worked really well..(36 Female, aged 30-49).*

Less support was available for younger people as is evident from the apparent negative impacts on both younger adults and children in the area. An important support for school age children was the provision of devices which allowed them to fully participate in online learning during the second lock down.

*By the second lockdown all the school kids had Chromebooks here. So that was, and they had internet dongles that were provided by the school if they didn't have internet, at home. So those things I think were great. And I don't think that happened everywhere, I think, because we're a more isolated area. And because some, again, some places don't have great internet connectivity (41 Service Provider).*

## The Future

Overall, there was a great sense of positivity among the participants, following what they considered a great effort by their community to respond to the pandemic. These sentiments were expressed by the majority of participants. However, this was also tempered by ongoing uncertainty and therefore a lack of clarity over what concrete next steps or actions should be taken as a community

*Unfortunately, I don't think it finding that people are that willing to commit themselves at the moment? Because I think there is that thing, but we actually, it hasn't hit its worst point. And also, people don't know, you know, just feel like the sand keeps moving underneath their feet. (40 Adult Female aged 50-64)*

It was emphasised that the pandemic is ongoing and that its impacts will be evident for some time to come.

*There are people who've been hit financially, there are people who've been hit, by their health, you know, sort of limited access to services, and also, mental health issues. So I suppose it depends on what you think is the hardest hit, but in some ways, I don't, I really don't think we're anywhere near the end of it yet. And we know that there's already a backlog of cases waiting to go to hospital or to see specialist services (4 Service provider)*

While the crisis and associated uncertainty continues, an immediate measure will be to keep the popular community newsletter running

*I know that people want the newsletter to continue. And so I think, I think we've probably got enough funding that we can find from areas to keep that going for another year, but it wouldn't be good to just sort of keep it going indefinitely, particularly whilst things are in flux (4 Service provider)*

## Lifestyle

Participants readily reflected on how the pandemic has influenced their thinking about the future. Several emphasised the need to learn from the changes in lifestyle that the restrictions necessitated. Some of this reflected a renewed importance attached to achieving a healthy work life balance.

*I think that we need to step back, and we need to think about what's really important and not just go about doing things how we've done it before. (16 Female, aged 30-49)*

Online working as well as providing flexibility has created an environment where workers can be vulnerable to stress and burn out.

*I think we have to be careful because all of that instant email, instant messages, incentives that will add to the feeling of anxiety. feeling of anxiousness. Yeah, I think the feeling of you feel like you always have to be available (16 Female, aged 30-49)*

## **Mental health**

The pandemic has clearly influenced how the community view the future of Lochalsh. While very specific actions were not necessarily forthcoming, there were a number of priority areas of service provision that were felt deserved particular focus during recovery from the crisis. As evidenced in the 'Challenges' section above, mental health issues were considered to need specific attention – particularly strategies and services for younger people.

*I think mental health provisions. I used to help out at a children's charity. It provided counselling for children up to 18. So some sort of provision for things like that and kids that have struggled over this last year (12 Male, aged 30-49)*

*I think that the seniors, maybe people that are single, just need some help. There's going to be a lot of anxiety. symptoms, to think that people need support and need places where they can go and seek help. Even just somebody to chat to (Female, aged 16-29)*

The responses from participants suggest a need for children's mental health to be urgently prioritised.

*It's not enough just to say we're focusing on mental health, resources need to be there. And from an education point of view, I know that they're not because I am dealing with young people and families where their mental health is not in a good place (39 Female, aged 30-49)*

Looking beyond the need for services that will directly aid people in recovery from the pandemic, the crisis has also highlighted a more general need for groups and activities for younger parts of the local population. While there are activities suitable for older adults and the very young, there is an apparent lack of provision for teenagers and younger adults.



## Community spaces and activities

The results indicate that community spaces will be very important during recovery from the pandemic. Community centres and libraries can be a life line in terms of providing social contact for those who living alone and physically far apart from others. There is currently no Community Centre and only a mobile library provision in Lochalsh. Similarly the need for social activities was raised as an important strategy to recover from the pandemic as well as addressing existing needs in the community. This was raised by several participants. Considering the lack of support for younger people (under 40), one participant explained that it difficult for newer members of the community to engage socially unless linked to school networks or a member of other established social networks. There are a range of activities available for older people but little for younger age groups, including young adults but also teenagers, so this could prove a helpful support in the future and contribute towards improved mental health among the young.

*If you've moved up recently, and you and you don't have that social network, then you know, from the school environment, it's very, very hard to meet others and get involved in that I think that there could be more organised activities and groups to try and try and get those groups involved and things (36 Female, aged 30-49)*

Plans for a Community Hub in the area were ongoing prior to Covid-19, but the pandemic has influenced plans for how this will be developed, accounting for a renewed interest in volunteering and growing food for example.

*Something we're working on now, actually, at the Plock with the trust is we've, we've set up a forest garden up there. So strawberry plants, raspberry canes, apple trees, trying to get people engaged and just going up there and taking care of them. And we're planning to try to get funding for a poly grow there as well. So we can grow things out there. And the whole idea with that, and that's something that has come out of this is to have volunteers taking care of this and growing local food that you can just go up there and take some, it's open to the community. So you can just go up and grab the cucumbers you need things like that. And it'd be nice as well. If we could have kind of a farmers market type thing. That's something I would be very keen on myself, especially coming into these late summer months people have an overabundance of produce that that's don't necessarily use (41 Service Provider)*

The community hub itself will be developed partly in response to the issues and needs in the area raised by the pandemic. This will be a new centre which will house a range of activities, an exhibition room, a café, shop and starter units for young arts, crafts and food entrepreneurs.

*We're having to do a re-consultation on what we're planning to build as a community hub building. Because what people want has changed. And that is to the last year, so we will be doing a new consultation and thinking of thinking of things like putting the community fridge in the community hub building, having growing spaces up there for people (41 Service Provider)*

### **Local food and self sufficiency**

The view of a local service provider is that local food is a real future opportunity for the community.

*I think a lot more people are interested in local production of food again, in a way that, you know, we haven't been in 50 years (41 Service Provider)*

There are therefore opportunities to build in the very successful community fridge initiative and the harness community interest to invest in more sustainable future food production. The lack of availability of supplies available during the pandemic and the relatively small number of shops in the area were also mentioned by participants and can be linked to a growing interest in local production. Some participants also considered these ideas in the context of a wider shift towards a more local economy which would engender greater self sufficiency

*Keeping money circulating within the local economy, and how can we as local areas, sort of think a bit more about that and look after sort of people in urban area and rural food and be much more focused on those sorts of things, and just really sort of living locally with a sort of via this global approach (38 Female, aged 30-49)*

*I did also think about how sort of we could proof ourselves a bit more against these types of knocks. And it came back to the sort of self-sufficiency idea and thinking, you know, if we did see nice poly tunnels up put, for example, and people had allotments (38 Female, aged 30-49)*

The response to the pandemic has given the community a sense of confidence that it has the capacity to mobilise in response to crisis and has the potential to generate further positive change. This is reflected in a statement by a local service provider

*I think it really drove home the point to people that we, we are a local community, and especially the way we stepped up and took care of ourselves. I think everyone says, we need to be more self-sufficient, we need to not rely on bigger is to help us out in terms of food, in terms of jobs, in terms of all of those things...But I do think that's the change in mentality, I do think people have come to appreciate a sense of self sufficiency that has died out last 30 years (41 Service Provider)*

*I mean, it's kind of really exposed the fragility of supply chains, and the just-in-time sort of delivery system, hasn't it? And when something like this happens, you think, how secure is the food supply? So I think absolutely reducing food miles and moving food production closer to consumers? Absolutely. Yeah, definitely. I mean, we've started shopping more locally as a result of it. (9 Adult Male 30-49)*

An increasing issue with food supply to shops in the area at the time of writing this report has reemphasised the issue of food supply and how our supply chain has been affected. At this time, the Covid pandemic is continuing to have an impact of food supply as shop workers and delivery drivers across the country are still being required to isolate due to Covid contact. The local Co-ops have experience severe shortages of even basic supplies, which is also exacerbated by the large amount of tourists who are currently in the area.

### **Economic diversification**

The dependence of the area on the tourism industry was a theme recognised by a number of participants and there was some discussion pointing to the need for business diversification to reduce this reliance on a volatile industry. Concern was raised about the lack of jobs available outside an industry that is suffering severe ongoing impacts due to the pandemic.

*I think the whole sort of economy thing needs to be looked at. Better broadband so people can have different kinds of jobs, rather than relying so much on the tourist industry (4 Service Provider)*

*A lot of people's lives were based in tourism in B&Bs and cleaning jobs and they then haven't had any income. Whereas I think in in Glasgow in the bigger areas, if your job wasn't working, you could go be a delivery driver for something there was there's more opportunities to do something in the meantime. Whereas out here, we've got a very small amount of jobs available. And I think now it's probably going to be even more difficult*

*because the small jobs available are already taken. So I set back unemployment at this side. is going to be higher than unemployment in the cities (39 Female 30-39)*

There was also a need expressed for a wider variety of jobs that would satisfying career options for younger working people in the area that would have a role in maintaining and supporting this demographic

*It'd be good to have a fresh look at what industries we could bring to the high levels that provide employment interesting, really Setting employment for sort of school leaving age and want them to stay and, and live and work in the area (36 Female, aged 30-49)*

### **Sustainable transport**

The pandemic also raised the issue of sustainable transport options in the area which address both issues of health and wellbeing and also climate change. While these are issues that were both under consideration prior to the pandemic, experiences during the pandemic have heightened their importance.

*It made me think about, you know, how we should be really prioritising cycling and things like that, whereas we don't, and didn't make me more aware of that type of a sustainable transport. Safety, and how can we, you know, should COVID have given us a bit of a stepping stone to prioritising, you know, climate change and other bigger issues (38 Female, aged 30-49).*

*One of the big things that I really think needs to be looked at is public transportation. There isn't a great service between each of the communities and Kyle of Lochalsh and I think that's something that really, really needs to be looked at, because there's plenty of people that don't right. And, you know, then during COVID, they couldn't easily get to the shops, and well, taxis weren't necessarily running at the beginning of lockdown. And so I do think our local transportation needs to be addressed (41 Service Provider)*

### **Future actions**

This project has concluded at a time where the community and the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust feel that the impacts of Covid-19 are still being strongly experienced. Due to the easing of

restrictions over the early summer, the region is experiencing its most significant outbreaks yet. A combination of the prevalence of the virus and recent ongoing restrictions has meant that many businesses have had to remain shut, the tourism industry is still operating at a much-reduced level and the community feels it is still in the midst of the pandemic and does not yet see itself as navigating a path to recovery. As such, participants did not feel in a position to propose specific next steps and actions related to recovery with any degree of certainty. The actions below were agreed between the academic team and community partners as way of sharing and discussing the findings with the community and using them to inform upcoming community planning and projects.

- The results of the study will be presented to the Lochalsh Collaborate group which brings together the seven community councils and council representatives across the Lochalsh region. The group will discuss the findings and consider their implications for a range of projects and initiatives in the area.
- The report will be published on the website of the Kyle and Lochalsh Community Trust and the link will be disseminated news about the project and link to the report will be disseminated in the community newsletter
- The report will be disseminated to the NHS Sustainability sub group so that recommendations for future priorities and services can be discussed.
- The report will inform the pre-consultation phase for a new community hub in Kyle of Lochalsh. Plans for this precede Covid-19 but this report provides evidence of how the pandemic has changed priorities and this will influence how the hub will be developed.
- A community plan for Lochalsh is due for publication in September 2021. This report will form one strand of evidence for the development of the plan to specifically consider how experiences of Covid-19 will influence planning in the area.
- The report will also be used as evidence for a fundraising bid in November for the Hub building on the Plock which will strive to provide education and the achievement of economic diversification, local food and community space & activities for Lochalsh residents.

# Appendix

## ETHICS

### **Ethics agreements – how to make it safe**

There was a full application to the ethics committee of the University of the Highlands and Islands that included the information sheet and informed consent sheet so that participants could be briefed on what the research is about and how their information would be used and provide their informed consent. The coding that is described below also provides a mechanism for keeping the research confidential whilst also allowing the data to be traced and analysed by difference in participant identities and situation. The following protocols were also agreed with the community panel so that the community partner and any team partners could adhere to this guidance throughout the project:

- Make sure participants aware of the process – Info sheet
- Informed consent – permission
- Anonymise – not using name/ pseudonym or nick name
- Using the coding to show who we talked to
- Names by agreement e.g. for service providers, winner of competition...
- No lone working so in pairs or stick to public places
- Know where people are – contact no. for other team
- Issues of concern – tell Anne
- Sheet for signposting to other services
- Debriefing for team members
- Making people feel respected, listening, non-judgemental, allowing people space to talk, waiting for them
- Document and storage of evidence
- Safe storage of informed consent forms or contact numbers and names for coding – Anne – includes recording interviews, storing and access to photos etc.
- Try not to take photos with identifiable faces – action shots

## Participant Information Sheet



### Community COVID 19 Recovery:

We would like to invite you to take part in this study.

### What is the project about?

It's about working with the community to understand your experiences of COVID and ideas for recovery.

The results will inform strategies, services and funding proposals.

### How you can help?

Take part by having a conversation with one of our volunteer team and/or submitting Words, Drawings, Photos with words, Songs... that describe your experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you'd like to take part in an interview just leave your contact details with one of our volunteers or contact Merkinch Partnership below.

### Are there any risks in taking part?

Any concerns please be in touch with Anne Sutherland - see contact details below.

You are under no obligation to share any information or take part in any activities which you are not comfortable with. You are free to change your mind and drop out at any point.

We will be sticking to COVID-19 regulations, meeting online and social distancing.

Information about local support services will be available from the Merkinch Partnership and the team.

### What is going to happen with the information you share?

We will write a local report and Highlands and Islands-wide report which will include your words and photos. These will be shown to community organisations and public agencies to help guide how they work to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Any information you share will be kept anonymous and it will not be possible to identify you as an individual in anything created as part of the project, unless there is a particular situation where you agree with the project that names will be used.

### What are benefits of participating?

You will help everyone to deepen our understanding of the impact of COVID-19 by providing voices from people who have direct experience and have felt the impact of the pandemic on their lives.

Please get in touch if there is anything else you want to ask or if you are interested in getting involved.

The research activities will be conducted in South Kessock and Merkinch between April and June 2021.

### Contact details: Anne Sutherland, Merkinch Partnership, 07872 014520

If you want to know more about the broader project contact: Matt Curran or Vicky Johnson at the Centre for Remote and Sustainable Communities at Inverness College UHI  
#covidchangescapes

This project is funded by a Research Uplift Grant from the Scottish Funding Council administered by the University of the Highlands and Islands

This project was granted ethical approval by the University of Highlands and Islands Research Ethics Committee in February 2021.



## Participant Consent Form

Academic Partner  
Logo



### Community-Determined Change-scapes of Recovery: Case studies across the Highlands and Islands of the impact and strategies for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

1. I confirm that I have read the Participant Information Sheet dated..... for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw participation and the data and information gathered about me at any time without giving any reason until the results are being published on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021 ☐
3. I understand that the information collected about me will be used to support other research in the future and may be shared anonymously with other researchers of UHI ☐
4. I agree to being voice/video recorded during interviews and focus groups for the purpose of data analysis ☐
5. I agree to being video recorded at outdoor meetings for the purpose of data analysis ☐
6. I consent to my data including textualized quotes and excerpts being used (in anonymized form) for the specific research outlined in the Participant Information Sheet and for further relevant and related research ☐
7. I consent to pictures being taken during focus groups/outdoor meetings and understand that I can either remove myself when such a situation occurs, or the researchers will make my face unidentifiable. ☐
8. I waive any rights to intellectual property over the data generated through my participation and understand that I will not benefit commercially or financially ☐

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent/Guardian  
(for participants under 18)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature