

Cairngorms Tourism Emergency Response Group
Monday 27th April 2020
Note of meeting

1. Welcome and introductions. Attending: Janet, Grant, Murray, Heather, Pete, Rhona, Alistair, Colin, Chris T, Chris F. Apologies: Laurie, Belinda, Geva.

2. Stabilize

SG Framework for Decision-making. Grant has a meeting on Thursday of the government policy officers and countryside / environment agency CEOs to discuss a range of Covid-19 issues including land management guidance (there has been a bit of confusion between English / UK-wide advice); sectoral guidance as countryside access restrictions ease on eg. physical distancing, staff safety, PPE requirements; and a 'green recovery' plan. He will report back at next Monday's meeting.

Pete has a meeting on Monday afternoon with the ENFOR access group to discuss appropriate responsible access messages. As access authority, CNPA have received a few enquiries about both irresponsible access and also inappropriate signage from land managers. Scottish Government have made clear that they do not expect to change the SOAC legislation. CNPA will draft a visitor management plan for the first few weekends after lockdown (considering key sites, signage, PPE etc) and will support ranger services with grants as soon as furlough is ended.

Travel to the countryside and community support. Mark has drafted a joint letter from CBP, CNPA and possibly local communities setting out positive messages thanking people for responsible behaviour so far, guidance on responsible access going forward and clarification that where there are people staying in holiday accommodation, they are very likely to be key workers. CNPA to comment on draft, agree signatories and release in the next few days.

Discussions with local police inspector Vince Tough confirmed that there have been very few access or tourism issues, and where there were concerns about occupied holiday accommodation, it was in most cases by key workers. Murray will be attending meetings of the Highland Council Emergency Response Group meetings from now on, which will also be an opportunity to liaise with the police on ongoing issues.

Business Support Scheme roll-out. By Fri 24th April, Highland Council had paid over 2,300 grants and had largely worked through the backlog of early applications. There are still a few ongoing issues with non-submission of supporting evidence, and some more complicated issues eg. change of ownership. There had been nearly 650 applications to the new self-catering scheme of which 87% had been processed straight away. A few applications need extra assessment where there are special circumstances around the occupancy level requirement. New upcoming schemes will help fill gaps in provision, including for the newly self-employed and for businesses with multiple premises. There are also a handful of scam applications coming through.

By Friday, Aberdeenshire Council had paid around £25 million pounds to almost 2,200 businesses and had also cleared the early backlog. Around 200 applications are on hold for further clarification. There is a bit of concern around perceived inconsistencies between local authorities' levels of flexibility.

HIE, and other enterprise agencies, are working with SG on a scheme to support SMEs and microbusinesses who fall between the gaps of other schemes, but confirmed details are not yet

available. HIE have also given a community support grant of over £123k to VABS for Covid19 community support.

Mark flagged up a few areas of business support that remain concerning. The 'cliff-edge' nature of the grant scheme is an issue, with businesses whose rateable value is over £50k receiving no support, and a sharp rise from £10k-£25k grant at a rateable value of £18k. He would prefer to see more of a taper in both instances, but it may be too late to change as grants have been paid. Initial results for the business operational capacity survey highlight cash flow and staffing as being barriers to speedy re-opening. The furlough scheme is currently open until end June, but hospitality businesses in particular are likely to require longer-term support if redundancies are to be avoided. There also remain issues around lack of support from banks and insurance companies.

The national STERG group is also looking to get better insights into the labour market issues and Chris T will ask that any such research can be subdivided to the CNP boundary if possible.

Other key current issues from DMOs. VisitAberdeenshire are working with just their senior team, having furloughed some staff. The budget will going to board for sign-off on Monday afternoon, but is expected to change. Comms continue to focus on stay home messages and virtual experiences, including sharing CBP content.

Murray will catch-up with Laurie separately on Moray Speyside issues, but in the park, the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership has requested an extension to the project and the development trust should be the key community support body. *Update: Moray Speyside continue to work on setting up a Board and IT systems for the organisation, and have some concerns that Moray Council are not processing grant payments as speedily as Highland / Aberdeenshire.*

VisitScotland overview. VS continue to develop an action plan based around the 4 stages of Respond, Reset, Restart and Recover. It will include indicative best-case timescales, but these are very likely to change and may need to accept a cyclical rather than linear change in restrictions. A virtual platform to promote to international trade has now been set-up to allow businesses and destinations to give an online pitch to Expo buyers. Information will be circulated to those who had planned to attend Expo. The STERG will meet tomorrow and will be discussing how best to involve destinations in recovery planning.

3. Communicate and Inspire

Last week's CNPA comms focused largely on wildfire risk in the dry weather. The Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend has been expanded to 10 days of virtual activity in May and Pete will circulate the draft programme when it is available.

4. Prepare for Return

CBP member discussions. Data from the business capacity survey will be analysed this week, and a survey of visitors who had planned to visit the CNP is planned. CBP are running independently-facilitated workshops with around 30 businesses to tease out issues around recovery and re-opening. Results should be available late next week, and will feed into discussion with government about the need to avoid a 'one size fits all' approach to restriction easing. Where businesses can demonstrate safe operation they should be allowed to open.

Recovery Plan. The draft CNP recovery plan will be discussed informally by CNPA board on 8th May and formally on June 12th, but will obviously not be a static document.

5. Updates from each organisation relevant to Cairngorms National Park

HIE / CML update. Themes from the latest stage of consultation are being shared with the HIE board, and the next stage of online consultation will be taking place in May. The Audit Scotland review is ongoing, and an options appraisal for CML is underway. There has been some negative press about the funicular re-instatement and HIE has released a statement in response.

CNP Economic Steering Group. The group met for a planned meeting last week and issues raised about the wider economy will be picked up in the recovery plan.

6. Date of next meeting.

Meetings will continue to be scheduled for Monday mornings, at the usual time of 11am. An invitation will be sent for the next few weeks, and they can be cancelled if the group feel there is not enough new information to make a discussion worthwhile.

Remit of Group: The group has been set up to provide consistent and comprehensive analysis of the implications of Covid-19 for tourism, to coordinate communications with the tourism industry, ensure close working between key agencies and the private sector, to gather, share, facilitate, interpret and disseminate information and agree relevant actions and delivery plans.

Membership: The Group consists of representatives from Cairngorms Business Partnership, VisitAberdeenshire, MoraySpeyside, VisitScotland, Aberdeenshire Council, The Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and CNPA (Chair).