

Mull and Iona Community Trust Review

31 May 2016

1. Context

Mull and Iona Community Trust (MICT) is an independent, membership based, community charity. It was set up as a social enterprise by local residents in 1997 to combat rural disadvantage by supporting community initiatives and promoting sustainable development.

MICT is run by a board of 12 volunteer directors, two representing the community councils of Mull and Iona and the rest elected from its membership. Directors represent the geographic spread of the islands and have a broad range of skills and experience. The board meet monthly with interim steering group meetings.

The islands of Mull and Iona are in the Inner Hebrides and cover an area of around 920 square km. With a population of just over 2,800 the density of three people per square km compares with the UK average of 245 people per square km. The islanders are typically employed in crofting, farming, fishing, crafts or tourism related businesses, in many cases with several sources of income in order to make a living. Mull, in particular the Ross of Mull and Iona, experience geographical isolation.

2. How has the Trust impacted on the lives of people it works with?

Building community cohesion and reducing social isolation is a strong feature of MICT's activities. For example, the *Ulva Ferry Community Bus* is helping local people access services and opportunities across the islands and connecting people socially. A majority of the local community are currently using the service. As a result, children from the primary school are going on more school trips including regular swimming lessons and older people are able to attend hospital, respite care and community events for little or no cost.

Musical Minds, a partnership between MICT and Alzheimer's Scotland, supports older people living with dementia or Parkinson's disease, people suffering from a stroke or those experiencing social isolation. Learners are gaining therapeutic benefits to their health, wellbeing and self-esteem and this helps to maintain their dignity. The service is increasing social interaction between learners and their carers and improving communication skills. Carers highly value the service and are improving or sustaining confidence. They also benefit from some respite.

MICT also directly and indirectly benefits the people living on Mull and Iona through support to a wide range of local causes and activities including music workshops, school trips and social events for vulnerable people. Since 2007, they have reinvested a total of £43,124 of income generated through its three charity shops *Island Castaways* giving grants of up to £500. Community groups also benefit from the *Sea Eagle Partnership* small grant funding distributing around £7,000 to local causes each year. Lochdonhead Primary School have benefitted from both funding sources, creating a conservation garden that contributes helpfully to its experiential outdoor learning programme.

Local people are extending their skills through a wide range of training and adult learning short courses to meet local needs and industry. For example, in 2015, 29 people completed one-day emergency first aid at work courses. A mindfulness course supported the wellbeing of participants and the furniture upcycling workshop is encouraging people to reuse and repurpose existing resources.

There are high levels of community involvement in decision making across the wide range of MICT's projects and activities. The voice of the community is well represented on steering groups and the MICT board also includes representatives from both Mull and Iona Community Councils. More than 10% of the population of Mull and Iona actively support MICT through more than 300 individual and some group memberships.

MICT are an active and responsive organisation supporting local need. They have achieved much over the last 19 years. However, MICT rarely take time to recognise and celebrate their achievements and their 20th Anniversary in 2017 may be a good opportunity to reflect. A better understanding of the difference the Trust is making to individuals and groups could also inform future priorities and help to further strengthen applications for funding.

3. How has the Trust impacted on the local economy?

MICT is a growing organisation, business and local employer. In January 2016 their staff complement included 7 full-time and 18 part-time staff or a total of 13 full-time equivalent. For some of the team their post is key to enabling them to stay on the islands and the majority of posts are sustained through the winter period when the job market on Mull reduces. MICT also attract and retain a high number of volunteers across their projects including around 40 in its charity shops. In the ranger service the number of volunteers is more than 150 during the summer months. Directors, staff and volunteers are highly motivated, contributing both paid and voluntary time, energy and expertise to developing the long term sustainability of their community.

Local infrastructure across the islands is being significantly strengthened by the work of MICT and its partners. *Garmony Hydro* is the first community owned hydro-electric generating station on Mull and a major community asset generating renewable electricity and additional funding for community initiatives through its *Waterfall Fund*. The £1.5 million purpose built *An Roth* building is providing a high quality headquarters for MICT and one of its charity shops. The building is also providing affordable accommodation for growing local businesses, such as *MDive* and access to modern, well-equipped desk and meeting space to a range of island and off-islands businesses and organisations.

MICT is contributing to attracting high numbers of visitors to the islands. The *Ranger Service* is helping to attract cruise ship visits to the island. Reports by service users show consistently high levels of visitor customer care and ranger specialist knowledge. The service also contributes to infrastructure developments including

the Long Distance Pathway, the Tobermory Pathway development and improving access for people with disabilities. MICT also administers the eagle viewing hide and employs a seasonal ranger as part of *Mull Eagle Watch*. This is generating a tourist spend of between three and five million pounds annually and coverage by the BBC is promoting the island to a wide audience of potential visitors.

There is a strong and effective focus on supporting and sustaining the environment through various activities. *Mull and Iona Environmentally Sensitive Solutions* (MESS) who operate MICT's three charity shops are reducing negative environmental impacts. MESS generated a profit of nearly £24,000 between April and December 2015 and are enabling businesses across Mull to recycle cans and glass bottles. MESS sell over a tonne of textiles each month to Blythswood and have achieved *Revolve* quality standard status from Zero Waste Scotland for their recycling work at the Craignure Island Castaway shop. *Mull and Iona Sustainable Transport* (MIST) set up by MICT, is also benefiting the environment by promoting and developing a range of sustainable public and community transport. Mull and Iona *Lift-share* has over 350 members using electric vehicles saving people money and reducing carbon emissions. *Assisting Communities to Connect to Electrical Sustainable Sources* (ACCESS) is addressing issues of fuel poverty by installing Quantum heaters to replace out of date storage heaters benefitting 70 households and businesses across the island.

Regular meetings of the Board of Directors, project steering groups and clear detailed project plans are helping to ensure that MICT has a significant and sustainable impact on the local economy. However, there is a gap between the vision and high level outcomes of the organisation and its operational and business plans. Given the growth of MICT, in both reach and complexity, the Board need to consider whether its structures are still fit for purpose and flexible enough to meet changing demands and the organisation's priorities.

4. How has the Trust improved outcomes through partnership working?

MICT are particularly strong at initiating, developing and supporting formal and informal networks and partnerships. They are providing a very stable platform for effective partnership development, sharing their experience and expertise to build capacity. These partnerships are significantly transforming the local economy and environment. As a result of the strong foundation provided by MICT, partners are better able to identify and respond to community needs. The coordination, collaboration and coproduction of ideas and projects is resulting in achievable and sustainable responses that would be challenging for a single service or organisation.

The *Sea Eagle Partnership* (SEP) is a mature partnership between MICT, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Scottish Natural Heritage, Police Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland. A clear robust memorandum of understanding ensures that the partnership works effectively on individual and collective objectives relating to media cover, infrastructure management, environmental protection services and governance. SEP supports 110 jobs and is benefiting the local economy by £1.4 million annually.

Communities of interest work alongside MICT staff and partner organisations to develop projects across the islands. For example, the *Tobermory Light Industrial Park Steering Group*, which includes local business people, is addressing a storage facility shortfall on the island with support from a MICT staff member. The need for this was identified by local business people and confirmed through a survey and feasibility study facilitated by MICT. Following a successful campaign to save Ulva Primary School, *Ulva School Community Association* worked effectively with MICT to secure funding for a local development officer post. This is leading to positive local improvements including the *Ulva Ferry Community Bus*, *Pontoon development and Housing Project*. Each project is contributing to the shared aim of increasing the sustainability of the local school and its community.

MICT are responsible for initiating partnerships that grow into organisations in their own right such as *South West Mull and Iona Development*. They were formed in 2014 as a result of effective community engagement by MICT through partnership working with the Highlands and Islands Enterprise's *Growth at the Edge* programme. MICT also help drive local improvements that develop a wider reach. For example, MICT has provided the leadership and built confidence for *GigaPlus Argyll Ltd* to formulate a bold plan aiming to introduce superfast broadband across seven islands. The Project Manager has been seconded from MICT to help realise the anticipated direct and sustainable positive impacts for residents and businesses on Mull and Iona, Lismore, Luing, Colonsay, the Craginish peninsula and parts of Islay and Jura.

The complex range of partnerships and networks supported by MICT staff and directors can be confusing to external stakeholders and is potentially unsustainable in the longer term. Care is needed to ensure that MICT does not become overstretched as an organisation placing a degree of risk on its projects, priorities and ultimately its impact.

The review of Mull and Iona Community Trust found the following key strengths.

- Highly committed staff, board members and large numbers of volunteers improving the lives of Mull and Iona residents.
- Valued community anchor organisation and a strong contributor to improving the islands' infrastructure, environment and economy.
- Improving community connections, reducing social isolation and contributing to learning and wellbeing.
- High levels of community engagement and involvement in decision making.
- Positive ethos and approach to initiating and developing partnerships adding value to community life.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- Develop clear strategic priorities and review organisational structures to ensure that Mull and Iona Community Trust can continue to grow and thrive.

5. What happens at the end of the review?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that Mull and Iona Community Trust and partners can build on and take forward the key recommendations of this report. We will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this review.

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