

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

Life in lockdown has highlighted the importance of community-based radio. The ability to circulate vital information about health, food and transport to people who are isolated and potentially vulnerable has allowed Two Lochs Radio and Lochbroom FM to serve their communities effectively during the various stages of lockdown. More than that, the ability to bring music, stories, information, news, worship and entertainment into people's homes, at a time when visits have been banned or severely restricted, means healthy and stimulating social interaction has continued in ways that would have been impossible otherwise.

In response to the challenge, we modified our ways of working in the office and studio, so that this essential service could operate safely; increased our output, adding locally produced midday shows to our regular morning, evening and weekend productions during lockdowns; added to our capacity, by equipping presenters to work from home; and developed new skills, with Board members and others meeting by videoconference instead of in-person.

As a result, in response to a global pandemic with all its limitations, we believe Wester Ross Radio has done more and better than before. For that we are grateful to our listeners, donors, funders, advertisers, volunteer presenters and backroom staff, and especially to our ubiquitous Station Manager Alex Gray, who has developed and displayed new talents, even greater initiative, and considerable ingenuity to keep things going and make them better in these testing times.

We continued the process of analysing roles, responsibilities and tasks, and filled the unpaid post of Volunteer Co-ordinator. This takes responsibility for recruiting, inducting, supporting and retaining volunteers, to make provision of our service enjoyable and fulfilling. Two of our existing Directors – Liz Forest and Stan Miller – are now sharing this job between them.

Following the resolution passed at our 2019 AGM, the company adopted an updated constitution, which allowed it to apply successfully for charitable status early in 2020.

One project that saw little progress in the year was the search for new premises. The Board continues to inquire, but one potential solution – the old Schoolhouse in Gairloch – is now not available, and others have simply been impossible to progress in the current climate.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Early in the year we feared lockdown might be financial challenging, with businesses not able or needing to advertise, and fewer opportunities for community fundraising events such as the Gairloch Gathering, Autumn Market in the Hall, nor the Golden Notes Lottery through local retail outlets. However, the loyalty of existing sponsors, and support of new ones, coupled with extensive government public information campaigns, and good opportunities to make grant applications to funds enhanced or established in response to Covid19, considerably boosted our turnover and allowed us to increase our reserves. This has been highly gratifying, because this time last year we faced a difficult financial situation, with the prospect of increased costs – especially the need to fund an overlap period of Station Managers and technical support/engineering costs after Alex Gray retires (see "Plans for Future Periods").

Of course, prudence dictates that we still need to maximise revenue opportunities and manage our costs, as there could be lean post-pandemic years. With hard work, and continued community generosity, we aim to maintain a sound financial footing.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

As already alluded to, our major change planned for the coming year is to find and appoint a replacement for our Station Manager. Alex has been in post for about 18 years, and has tremendous experience in all aspects of managing our core business, including technical management and practical work. In 2019 he indicated his desire to retire in 2021, which gave us considerable time through which to plan for a future with a new Station Manager, and perhaps have to find a way of transferring to a more conventional split of duties, some of which may have to be paid for in addition to the Station Manager employments costs. Fortunately, Alex does not plan to leave us entirely or immediately, and we expect there to be a substantial period of handover. Our increased turnover during the Covid-19 pandemic has provided additional financial security for the immediate period of planned handover, and we aim to complete the recruitment process and, hopefully, the initial handover period, during 2021.

As mentioned earlier, the hunt for suitable alternative premises to replace the cramped and decaying building we presently occupy was put on hold after a potential solution we were pursuing was removed from the table at the start of the pandemic. However, the eventual need to relocate remains, so we will continue to keep a watch for suitable premises that might become available.

One of our strategies to maintain service under pandemic restrictions was to press into service the one undeveloped room at the radio station as a second studio, but this was done in a very ad hoc fashion and just for one contributor, without any additional acoustic treatment or production facilities. Having seen its value and other potential uses if it were a more properly finished and equipped room, our future plans include the interim conversion of that room into a more fully fledged studio.