



**SLAED**

Scottish Local Authorities  
Economic Development Group



# Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Group 3 Year Strategic Plan 2019/2022

*Providing a national voice for local economic development*

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# About SLAED

The Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development (SLAED) Group is the professional network for economic development officers from across Scotland's 32 local authorities.

The work of local authorities in economic development is extensive. It covers a range of core areas including wide-ranging support for individuals, businesses and the development of place-making and regeneration. This includes a significant contribution to the economy by helping build better places, improving quality of life, and making areas more attractive to investors. In this way, councils provide economic leadership and act as a key link across government (local and national), businesses and knowledge institutions.

This includes the central role that councils play in working with local, regional and national partners and in engaging the private sector, universities and colleges in order to strengthen the economy and ensure local areas and populations benefit from economic growth.

In addition to traditional economic development services, the work of SLAED is also increasingly focused on a broader agenda, making linkages with colleagues across professions to maximise the impact of the full range of economic levers available to councils and to ensure holistic, joined-up service design and delivery.

At the heart of the SLAED agenda, is a central focus on promoting and delivering economic wellbeing for all citizens and communities.

## SLAED's Aim

SLAED exists to provide an effective forum for representing, supporting, promoting and further developing the vital role played by local authorities in contributing to the development of Scotland's economy. It does this by reflecting the work of the 32 councils and providing a national voice for local economic development.

# SLAED's Objectives

The specific objectives of SLAED are to:

- 1. Promote sustainable economic development, inclusive growth and economic wellbeing.**  
As lead partners for local economic development, councils make a major contribution to Scotland's economy - locally, regionally and nationally. Through their wider roles as democratically accountable anchor institutions and as deliverers of a broad range of services, they play a central role in helping advance economic wellbeing for all of Scotland's citizens and communities.
- 2. Develop and promote** the key role of local authorities, as the lead partners for local economic development - and a central plank of Scotland's national economic development system. This links closely with the shared priorities set out within the National Performance Framework<sup>1</sup> and the contribution made to the four priorities – Investment, Innovation, Inclusive Growth and Internationalisation – set out within Scotland's Economic Strategy.<sup>2</sup> In particular, it focuses on the vital contribution and leadership that councils provide in economic development locally, regionally and nationally.
- 3.** Provide a dynamic **forum** for local government economic development colleagues to work together on common issues, share information and expertise, encourage best practice, innovation and continuous improvement. This includes actively embracing the public sector reform agenda of continuous improvement, prevention, value for money and the achievement of better and more sustainable outcomes. SLAED will continue to foster collaborative working across councils, share learning and best practice – both from within and beyond Scotland - and support the ongoing development and delivery of economic policy and programmes. Known challenges that SLAED will work on over the coming years include declining resources, and rising demand for services arising from a range of external factors including ongoing welfare reform, automation and Brexit.
- 4. Represent** local authority economic development interests at national level by developing professionally-informed policy responses, responding to consultations and helping **lead the agenda** through effective, pro-active engagement with other key public and private sector stakeholders that have a role in economic development. This will include SLAED members supporting the work of local government politicians, by providing briefings to local spokespersons and other members, and by working closely with COSLA, at the national level to support policy development.
- 5.** Work in close **partnership** with other local government groupings – including SOLACE, COSLA and the Improvement Service, as well as other local government professional groupings such as Procurement, Planning, Roads & Transportation – in order to maximise collective impact and ensure a joined-up, holistic approach across local government. SLAED has an important role to play in ensuring that the voice of local government is effectively represented in national discussions pertaining to funding, pathways and other key decisions that impact on Scotland's economic development network. It will work closely with the local government partners and other stakeholders to achieve this.

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1 <https://www2.gov.scot/About/Performance/scotPerforms>

2 <https://www2.gov.scot/economicstrategy>

6. Analyse and **report** on the contribution made by local authorities to economic development via the annual *SLAED Indicators Report*,<sup>3</sup> which summarises the collective inputs, activities, outputs and impacts delivered by councils;
7. Inform, influence and support the ongoing development of **professional standards** and **continuous improvement** in economic development practice.

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3 <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/slaed-indicators-framework.html>

# Context

With the devolution to Scotland of responsibility for increased taxation revenue,<sup>4</sup> the need for a robust, well-functioning, sustainable economy is of growing importance. A vibrant, competitive economy is a necessary precursor to the creation of social policy, distribution of opportunity and wealth, effective community place-making and helping facilitate properly funded public services.

As the lead bodies for local economic development, deliverers of a wide range of vital services and major economic actors in their own right, local authorities make a significant contribution to the economy of Scotland.<sup>5</sup>

Evidence presented by SLAED to the Enterprise & Skills Review<sup>6</sup> highlighted that councils make a significant collective investment in local economic development, co-investing alongside the resources available via the national agencies.

The annual SLAED Indicators report demonstrates the collective weight of councils' contribution to the sector - employing some 1,200 economic development staff, supporting over 14,000 businesses each year and assisting around 16,500 people into jobs annually.<sup>7</sup>

Councils also have a substantial economic footprint themselves employing over 240,000 individuals, spending £7bn per annum on procurement and managing some 40,000 physical assets.<sup>8</sup> In addition to direct economic development, councils are also responsible for a wider range of services - such as roads & transportation, planning, education and regulatory services – all of which are essential to a vibrant economy.

Nevertheless, whilst economic development is a priority for every local authority, the scale and nature of public service cuts over a sustained period<sup>9</sup> means that the service remains fragile.

For all of these reasons, SLAED has a key role to play in continuing to promote the importance of councils' economic development function as part of the range of critical local authority-wide services deployed to address local challenges and deliver the outcomes set out in each area's Local Outcomes Improvement Plans (LOIPs). It is also important to ensure that the extensive local authority experience is engaged effectively to help shape the development of Scotland's economic development priorities and network in order to advance economic wellbeing across all communities.

Alongside a declining resource base, councils require to respond effectively to a wide range of new challenges and opportunities. These include:

- the opportunity to apply in practical terms the concept of inclusive growth, as set out in Scotland's Economic Strategy<sup>10</sup> – and economic wellbeing more generally, thereby helping

4 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-agreement-between-the-scottish-government-and-the-united-kingdom-government-on-the-scottish-governments-fiscal-framework>

5 <http://www.cosla.gov.uk/system/files/private/fairfundingfoessentialservices2019-20.pdf>

6 <http://www.slaed.org.uk/documents/SLAED-response-to-enterprise-skills-and-review-final.pdf>

7 <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/new-report-highlights-extent-of-councils%E2%80%99-economic-development-activities.html>

8 <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/economic-development.html>

9 <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/local-government-in-scotland-challenges-and-performance-2019>

10 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-economic-strategy/>



ensure that all of Scotland's communities can benefit from economic success;

- the delivery of City and Growth Deals and the development of broader regional economic partnerships in a manner that will genuinely add value and enhance inclusive growth;
- responding effectively to the economic situation arising from the 2016 referendum decision for the UK to leave the EU; and
- developing strong linkages between economic development and wider priorities in Scotland at national and local levels such as addressing inequalities, child poverty, connectivity, climate change and improving outcomes.
- Contributing to the delivery of a range of national performance framework outcomes, including 'globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy; thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone'.

A significant area of work for SLAED over the next few years will be to form ever closer working relationships across local government partners, including SOLACE, COSLA, the Improvement Service and various professional groupings in order to address these kinds of opportunities and challenges. Through identifying shared priorities and agreeing collective action, local government will deliver a better integrated and aligned contribution to meet emerging challenges and opportunities.

Indeed, it is also the case that many of these challenges and opportunities represent collective priorities that are shared across local and national government.<sup>11</sup> A collaborative and co-operative partnership with national government(s) will enable effective partnership approaches that draw upon complementary skills and resources essential in ensuring optimal impact. SLAED has a role to play in this by providing a forum to exchange information and ideas and forge innovative, collaborative and forward-thinking solutions.

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.cosla.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/19-03\\_29\\_item\\_02\\_national\\_performance\\_framework.pdf](http://www.cosla.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/19-03_29_item_02_national_performance_framework.pdf)

# SLAED's Priority Actions 2019-22

In delivering its strategic Aim and Objectives over the next three years, SLAED will require to undertake a number of activities, many of which will link with one another. These will be continually reviewed and refreshed to ensure delivery of a resilient, robust and relevant action plan.

## 1. SLAED Executive Group and Sub-Groups

The mainstay of SLAED's work is carried out by its network of strategic and thematic groups. Reporting into the SLAED Executive Group, these groups comprise Place, People, Business, EU Funding, Performance, Rural and Tourism. (see Fig. 1)

Fig. 1 – SLAED Group Structure



The work of the groups will be key to contributing to the full range of SLAED's Aim and Objectives by providing opportunities for discussion, policy development, responding to consultations, supporting professional development and overseeing the delivery of key outputs, such as the annual SLAED Indicators Report.

Each group has recently updated its respective remit & action plan. These are set out within a separate Annexe to the Strategic Plan, which will be updated on an annual basis. Progress against these group action plans will be reported on a regular basis to the SLAED Executive.

The SLAED Executive Group includes the Chairs of each sub-group. It will continue to act as the key strategic group, with oversight responsibility for co-ordinating SLAED activities; developing relationships; responding to requests for input; organising the annual conference, AGM and other events; as well as maintaining and developing SLAED's membership.

## 2. Local Government – Scottish Government Employability Partnership Agreement

Whilst the work of the SLAED Employability Group is covered within the previous action, the fact that a landmark Partnership Agreement<sup>12</sup> has recently been signed by senior Scottish Government and local government politicians is of major significance. Its successful implementation is, therefore, a key priority for SLAED in its own right. This is an initiative that

12 [http://www.employabilityinScotland.com/media/1198170/signed\\_partnership\\_agreement.pdf](http://www.employabilityinScotland.com/media/1198170/signed_partnership_agreement.pdf)



SLAED has been at the forefront of developing and it is a collaborative approach that has potential applicability as a model that could be applied across a much wider range of policy areas.

SLAED – and the other local government partners – will require to ensure that they themselves now deliver on the expectations set out within the partnership agreement. They will also need to ensure a collaborative approach with Scottish Government and that the joint action plan is co-produced with equality of input. In contrast with other partners, the service delivery-focused nature of the vast bulk of local government’s resources, will mean that this is likely to be a major challenge for SLAED to resource. This issue requires to be recognised and addressed to fully realise the potential of the partnership.

### 3. SLAED Membership Development

The vast majority of SLAED’s work is carried out on a voluntary basis by SLAED members. For this to be sustainable, a significant increase in the number of economic development colleagues is required to help develop and deliver on the work plan. Input is required at all levels of seniority - with active engagement and commitment essential for future success.

A **short life working group** will develop a series of proposals for expanding the number of economic development staff actively contributing to the work of SLAED. This work will include highlighting the range of benefits that accrue from engaging with SLAED. The SOLACE leads will be invited to lend their support to this workstream by encouraging Chief Executives and other senior colleagues to give active encouragement within their councils. The Working Group will bring recommendations on SLAED Membership development to the SLAED Executive Group.

### 4. SLAED Communications

A recent survey of members highlighted a range of opportunities for SLAED to enhance, modernise and streamline the way that it engages economic development colleagues. Whilst there are 1,200 officers working in council economic development, the SLAED mailing list currently only reaches a quarter of this base. There are also potential opportunities to develop a range of mechanisms to engage colleagues, as well as to promote the work of SLAED to a wider audience, both within and beyond local government.

A **short life working group** will also be formed to take this workstream forward. The key output will be a new and updated communications plan, which will be implemented and kept under revision. The Working Group will bring its recommendations on SLAED Communications to the SLAED Executive Group.

### 5. Regional Working and Inclusive Growth

SLAED is currently involved in co-leading work that is examining experiences to date of regional economy working in Scotland, exploring how regional approaches are contributing to inclusive growth and how potential challenges of regional working are being managed.

Whilst this work is still actively underway, it is likely that there will be a requirement for SLAED to help take forward agreed recommendations arising from this work.

## 6. Economic Outcomes Programme

SLAED has been instrumental in the development and delivery of the Economic Outcomes Programme,<sup>13</sup> which has produced an Economic Footprint Report for each council, alongside the EOP Overview Report, setting out a range of ways that councils could further enhance the positive impact they have on the economy. The work highlights the enhanced contribution that can be made by the public sector in advancing economic wellbeing for citizens and communities. Importantly, the potential to add considerable enhanced impact via public sector economic levers is not necessarily even contingent on growth taking place within the economy. The focus of this work is now on ongoing implementation within individual councils, developing common approaches and good practice and undertaking self-assessment to drive further improvement.

SLAED will continue to **promote and support** the EOP work, including via engaging with other professional groups to take forward areas such as improving the positive impact gained from councils' roles as an employer, procurer and asset manager. More generally, this will include ensuring a corporate-wide approach to improving economic outcomes by utilising the full range of economic levers.

## 7. Joint Working across Local Government

Allied to encouraging corporate-wide approaches, the work of SLAED will be enhanced by seeking to build on recent work undertaken to strengthen joint working within local government. This includes closer alignment across a range of national local government bodies that have a contribution to make to economic development.

This includes COSLA, SOLACE and the Improvement Service, where each partner has respective strengths and roles, and where, by working together, the partners can achieve more than would be achieved by working separately.

This applies equally to other relevant local government professional groups, such as Procurement, HOPS and SCOTS that have a particular locus in issues of relevance to economic development, including the 'place' agenda.

Similarly, by developing strong linkages with complementary policy areas such as tackling child poverty, advice services and housing, SLAED will seek to act in an outward-looking and opportunities-driven manner to achieve its Aim and Objectives.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/econdev/eop-overview-report-aug18.pdf>

# Conclusion

This Strategic Plan sets out the Aim and Objectives for SLAED over the three-year period 2019–2022.

The new Strategic Plan is launched at a time of immense challenges for the economic development profession within local government.

Whilst delivering on the Priority Actions will undoubtedly be challenging, doing so will deliver significant benefits for the economy of Scotland and for the thousands of citizens and businesses that utilise the economic development services of Scotland's councils each year.

The success of SLAED in being able to deliver on the ambitions set out within this document is contingent on colleagues seeing value in this work; making time to share their experiences, engage in discussion and learn from others; embracing the opportunity to help shape the future direction of economic development and, in so doing, enhance the impact of their work - both within and beyond their own local authority area.

In short, full and successful implementation of SLAED's Strategic Plan will only be possible if economic development professionals from across the 32 local authorities accept the invitation to play an active role in helping deliver against this important agenda. Economic development is a priority for all local authorities and the local government partners will work to ensure that this challenge is met head-on.

## Next Steps

Following publication of this Strategic Plan, a workshop will be organised by the SLAED Executive Group to put in place the necessary mechanisms to ensure that the Aim, Objectives and Priority Actions set out within this document will be taken forward effectively and reflected in an overall SLAED action plan. That action plan will include detailed actions, ownership, deliverables and timescales.

Progress in delivering the Strategic Plan will be kept under regular review by the SLAED Executive Group and reported to the SLAED membership on an annual basis.



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