

**SLAED ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
**Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2026 2.00pm**  
**MS Teams**

**MINUTE**

**1. Welcome & Introductions**

Ishabel Bremner, Chair of the SLAED Executive welcomed SLAED members to the meeting and introduced John Ireland, CEO of the Scottish Fiscal Commission.

**2. Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Outlook – John Ireland, Chief Executive, Scottish Fiscal Commission**

Slides from John's presentation will be circulated, his presentation included the following points:

- In January this year, it looked like the Scottish economy had settled down, but things have changed with the conflict in the Middle East, which the presentation will consider.
- Growth in GDP of around 1 to 1.5% was predicted in January 2026 for the next 5 years, similar to the December 2024 forecast. This hasn't recovered from the 2007 financial crash.
- Growth in Scottish Living Standards (measured by real disposable income per person) is very low. People used to expect about a 3% in living standards every year. This fell to 0.75% after the financial crash, but then dropped to 0.1% where it remains in 2025/26. Predicted to increase gradually to 0.7% by 2030-31.
- This explains people's frustration, in feeling that the economy isn't delivering for them. In addition, there's evidence that the quality of public services has not recovered from the financial crash and the pandemic, and do not meet people's expectations.
- This obviously has political consequences, and also economic consequences – as people push for higher wages. There is pressure on public sector pay in Scotland. Scottish Government set a 5-year target of 9% wage growth, which was practically achieved in the first two years.

Middle East:

- Energy prices have been impacted by the war in the Middle East. Chart shows Brent crude oil spot price US\$ - when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 it shot up to \$110 per barrel. This is now happening again due to the war in Iran.
- As of 8<sup>th</sup> March, the Brent crude oil price was around 25% higher than on 27<sup>th</sup> February, before the start of the conflict and it has also affected the UK Natural gas price, which was around 75% higher than on 27<sup>th</sup> February.
- Ofgem's household energy price cap is expected to rise to £1,800 in July, an increase by 10%.
- The longer the conflict goes on the longer the impacts will go on.

Inflation:

- Consumer Prices Index inflation in the UK had dropped during COVID then sharply rose and the Russian invasion of Ukraine also caused an increase.
- Growth in Scottish Living Standards (measured by real disposable income per person) has been going up and down over the last 7 years. In 2023/24 it went up about 5.5% and 3% in 24/25 making up the previous downturn during Covid to the end of 2023.
- People on lower incomes, have been impacted most. Others have gained, but it's not everyone.
- The energy and food sectors have really suffered, which impacts on income distribution, for example, transport, holidays and food are all more expensive. The less income you have the more transport, food and fuel will impact you as these make up a greater percentage of expenditure.

Nominal average earnings growth:

- The Scottish Fiscal Commission is forecasting that wage growth will be around 3% which will be the same as inflation, so no real increase.
- The trend in productivity growth has fallen down to 0.7% and John thinks it will remain about 0.9% until 2030 – 31. This provides surplus for the economy which can go into labour, or capital, but most is going to the government through higher taxes.
- Wage growth and labour demand is slowing across Scotland, but more so in Aberdeen, linked to changes in the oil market and jobs. Parts of the Highlands are doing relatively better (perhaps linked to green freeport and renewable energy).
- The softening of the labour market is more focused on young people, partly due to higher employer costs and lower hiring in hospitality and retail (UK wide). The change in ENIC (Employer National Insurance Contribution) and dropping the threshold has been a retrograde effect. Costs employers have to meet are rising, especially at the lower end of the jobs spectrum.
- NEET (not in education, employment or training) rates have been rising in recent years at the UK level, due to persistently high unemployment and rising health related inactivity. The rise in sick or disabled people started increasing before the pandemic but it accelerated after this. This affects take home pay and living standards.
- There is a real problem given that productivity is not growing and living standards are not increasing. We're not getting economic development right, and this needs to change.

### **3. Q&A Session**

John Ireland answered several follow-up questions from SLAED members:

**Q.** Ishabel Bremner – some of the stats skew the growth outlines, e.g. Highlands' data is positive largely due to the Green Freeport, but the positive impact is not evenly spread across the region. Do you have any views on the regional approaches to economic development coming from government?

**A.** John – there definitely seems to be a regional approach being followed. It's hard to get local data for Scotland now in terms of labour markets statistics.

**Q.** Rory Young – What are John's reflections on the productivity gap, structural shifts in the economy and the impact of AI? Do these offer any opportunities to improve productivity?

**A.** John replied that it is a structural problem. There are lots of different discussions about AI and where it complements labour it's good and can increase productivity, but where it replaces jobs, then the labour force contracts, with a negative impact for people. We are starting to see and impact on entry level jobs.

He suggested that to increase productivity we must invest in skills, invest in capital (machinery or research and development) and public sector investment in infrastructure which should all improve productivity, but getting it right is hard. No one has solved this problem.

**Q.** Caroline Morgan - 'What is the issue about not being able to get labour data in Scotland?'

**A.** John replied that during the pandemic it was hard to get survey data as this was previously done through visiting houses. ONS moved over to doing computer-based surveys with a lower response rate, having invested a lot of money in automating the surveys. They have a recovery programme in place and have Scotland wide data, but it will be a while before we can get more detailed information at a more local level.

**Q.** Diane Milne was interested in the comment that things are 'not right in economic development'. What can we do to 'get it right', and do you have any thoughts on funding from the Local Growth Fund, which is focusing on capital funding rather than revenue to support projects and implementation?

**A.** John responded that he thinks people try very hard, doing lots of things, lots of strategies are produced, but despite the fact we know roughly how to do economic development, we don't quite know how to get results. Is it because it's difficult and we don't know what we need to do sometimes? But we do need to be able to learn and develop.

He thinks that there is not enough evaluation, so we don't measure what we did and don't know why things work or don't. Without this evidential feedback loop we can't make the changes we need.

**Q.** Michaela Sullivan – would regional devolution make a difference to success?

**A.** John is sceptical about restructuring e.g. into mayoral structure and remarked that it could be seen as rearranging the deckchairs.

**Q.** Lesley Sloan - Is investment in 'place' a way forward (e.g. Borderlands) in terms of structural change. i.e. capital and skills hand in hand via a community wealth building approach?

**A.** John responded that we have tried a lot of this before, so we need to be careful.

#### **4. Chairperson's Update on Business Since Previous AGM**

Ishabel gave a presentation on the challenges for economic development and SLAED priorities for 2026/27 (slides attached).

All attendees were asked to rank 8 themes/ actions for 2026/27 in order of priority using menti.com. 61 people took part and the results were as follows:



**5. Finance Update**

Miriam McKenna (SLAED Secretariat) gave an overview of the annual accounts for 2024/25 and 2025/26. It was noted that the income for 2025/26 was £114,182.32, which included £49,342.32 carried forward from 2024/25. Expenditure for 2025/26 was £72,692, leaving a balance of £41,490.20.

A 5% increase in member subscriptions was proposed for 2026/27. This is the first increase in fees in over five years. The additional funding will be used to fund a future increase in the IS Secretariat support fee, the ongoing costs for maintenance and any future development of the SLAED Indicators Dashboard, and to hold more in person events for SLAED members.

Over 50% of attendees supported the proposal (54 hands out of 73 present were raised), so in line with the SLAED constitution, this proposal was agreed.

Ishabel spoke about setting up in person SLAED events and how useful these can be. The Employability conference is coming up on 11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> May 2026, and the Business Group is keen to have a conference this year too.

**6. Election of Executive Officers**

The following Chairs for each subgroup were confirmed by the membership for 2026/27, and Chairs of each subgroup are automatically members of the SLAED Executive:

- Chairperson: Ishabel Bremner, Argyll & Bute Council (agreed by James Paterson seconded by David Boyle)
- Deputy Chairperson: Pamela Stevenson, Fife Council (agreed by Kenny Lean, seconded by Mark Hynds)
- Deputy Chairperson: Rory Young, Dundee City Council (agreed by Carron Smith, seconded by David Boyle)

- People Group Chair: Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council (agreed by Sarah McCully, seconded by Philip Ritchie)
- Business Group Chair: Alison Davidson, Clackmannanshire Council & Paul Morris, Clackmannanshire Council (agreed by Rory Young, seconded by David Boyle)
- Tourism Group Chair: Andrew McKean, Renfrewshire Council (agreed by Kenny Lean, seconded by Diane Milne)
- Funding Group Chair: Diane Milne, Dundee City Council & Sharon Douglas, North Lanarkshire Council (agreed by Sally Spence, seconded by Ishabel Bremner)
- Rural Group Chair: Kenny Lean, South Lanarkshire Council (agreed by Paul Morris, seconded by Diane Milne)
- Performance Group Chair: David Boyle, GCR Intelligence Hub (agreed by Mark Hynds, seconded by Paul Morris).

Ishabel Bremner thanked all members involved in the Executive and subgroups who continue to ensure the strength of the officers' voice at the national level.

**7. AOB**

No further items were raised.

**8. Close**

Ishabel Bremner thanked all members for attending and closed the AGM.

**Attendance List**

| Name               | Organisation                | Name                    | Organisation               |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Al Bryce           | City of Edinburgh Council   | Ewan Eccleston          | Glasgow City Council       |
| Alan Farnington    | Perth & Kinross Council     | Fergus Murray           | Argyll & Bute              |
| Alison Davidson    | Clackmannanshire Council    | Fiona Paterson          | East Ayrshire Council      |
| Alison Laughlin    | Fife Council                | Georgios Gkintziris     | Glasgow City Council       |
| Alison Reith       | North Lanarkshire Council   | Gordon Forbes           | Aberdeenshire Council      |
| Allan Conry        | Stirling Council            | Grant Wilson            | Glasgow City Council       |
| Amanda Edwards     | City of Edinburgh Council   | Gregor Docherty         | Dumfries & Galloway        |
| Andrew Mackenzie   | East Lothian Council        | Heather Anderson        | South Ayrshire Council     |
| Andy Smith         | Dundee City Council         | Horn Arnarsdottir       | Dundee City Council        |
| Annie Watt         | Midlothian Council          | Iain Kennedy            | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar  |
| Arlene Cullum      | Argyll & Bute               | Iain Ross               | South Lanarkshire Council  |
| Bill Cameron       | Glasgow City Council        | Ishabel Bremner (Chair) | Argyll & Bute              |
| Bruce McClure      | North Ayrshire Council      | Ivor Johnson            | Shetland Islands Council   |
| Calum Lindsay      | COSLA                       | James Paterson          | Argyll & Bute              |
| Carol Coleman      | Orkney Islands Council      | Jen Lawie               | Aberdeen City Council      |
| Carol McKelvie     | Dundee City Council         | Joanne Scobie           | Dundee City Council        |
| Caroline Brown     | North Lanarkshire Council   | John Ireland            | Scottish Fiscal Commission |
| Caroline Clark     | Improvement Service         | Jonathan Janes          | Perth & Kinross Council    |
| Caroline Morgan    | Dundee City Council         | Julia Whitaker          | East Renfrewshire Council  |
| Carron Smith       | Falkirk Council             | June Dobie              | Perth & Kinross Council    |
| Chris Churms       | Dumfries & Galloway         | Karen Eskdale           | Falkirk Council            |
| Christina Morrison | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar   | Kelly Wiltshire         | Aberdeenshire Council      |
| Colin Love         | South Ayrshire Council      | Kenny Lean              | South Lanarkshire Council  |
| Connor McNicol-Day | Glasgow City Council        | Kyle Drummond           | City of Edinburgh Council  |
| Danny Gallagher    | Highland Council            | Lesley Sloan            | Dumfries & Galloway        |
| David Boyle        | Glasgow City Council        | Linzi Winton            | West Lothian Council       |
| David Gear         | East Dunbartonshire Council | Lisa Macmillan          | East Ayrshire Council      |
| Diane Milne        | Dundee City Council         | Lisa Macmillan          | East Ayrshire Council      |
| Dominic Griffith   | Glasgow City Council        | Loren Wilson            | Aberdeenshire Council      |
| Doug Young         | Dundee City Council         | Lorna Wallace           | East Renfrewshire Council  |
| Douglas Chisholm   | Highland Council            | Louise Cox              | Scottish Borders Council   |
| Eddie Percy        | Glasgow City Council        | Lynn Couper             | West Lothian Council       |
| Elizabeth Hendry   | West Dunbartonshire Council | Lynne Burgess           | Dumfries & Galloway        |
| Elizabeth Hendry   | West Dunbartonshire Council | Marek Styczen           | Perth & Kinross Council    |
| Erin Johnson       | Dundee City Council         | Mark Hynds              | North Lanarkshire Council  |

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|-------------------------|---------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Martin Skinner          | Moray Council             | Sally Spence     | Shetland Islands Council    |
| Michaela Sullivan       | East Renfrewshire Council | Sarah Baird      | North Ayrshire Council      |
| Michelle Hardie         | Highland Council          | Sarah Mcculley   | Falkirk Council             |
| Miriam McKenna          | Improvement Service       | Sharon Douglas   | North Lanarkshire Council   |
| Neil Henderson          | Shetland Islands Council  | Shona Haddow     | Scottish Borders Council    |
| Neil Ramsay             | Clackmannanshire Council  | Shona Haddow     | Scottish Borders Council    |
| Oliver Shimell          | Dumfries & Galloway       | Suzanne Bruce    | East Dunbartonshire Council |
| Olivia Brown            | Argyll & Bute             | Thomas Coutts    | Shetland Islands Council    |
| Paul Morris             | Clackmannanshire Council  | Tracy Blake      | Glasgow City Council        |
| Paula Hainey            | Dumfries & Galloway       | Wendy Grant      | Shetland Islands Council    |
| Pauline Mitchell        | Dundee City Council       | Wendy Hardie     | Inverclyde Council          |
| Philip Ritchie          | City of Edinburgh Council | Wendy McFarland  | North Ayrshire Council      |
| Rory Young (Vice Chair) | Dundee City Council       | Yvonne Weir      | North Lanarkshire Council   |
| Ross Martin             | Perth & Kinross Council   | Zalina Dzhatieva | Argyll & Bute               |