

SLAED EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE CALL

Tuesday 1st February 2022

Attendance

Ishabel Bremner (Chair), Argyll & Bute Council (IB)
Pamela Stevenson (Vice Chair), Fife Council (PSt)
Rory Young (Vice Chair), Dundee City Council (RY)
Allan Conry, North Lanarkshire Council (AC)
Graham Smith, Glasgow City Council (GS)
Pamela Smith, Improvement Service (PSm)
Malcolm Leitch, Glasgow City Council (ML)
Tracey Martin, Falkirk Council (TM)
Juliette Cooke, Dumfries & Galloway Council (JC)
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA (HL)
Sara Thiam, SCDI (ST)
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service (MM)
Hannah Young, Improvement Service (HY)

Apologies

Robert Nicol, COSLA
Gary Hughes, Aberdeenshire Council

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed all members to the meeting, as well as Sara Thiam from SCDI who is attending the meeting to discuss closer working with SLAED.

2. Partnership Working with SCDI

ST gave an update on the recent work of SCDI and asked SLAED members how the team could better connect with local authorities. She highlighted that social and environmental issues are becoming increasingly important in relation to economic development, and there is a need to bring partners together to share knowledge and expertise. SCDI has been taking a thought leadership approach to these, focusing on being ambitious for Scotland, and learning from success elsewhere. ST also noted that there is a focus on place.

Members agreed that the main ask of SCDI would be timely communication and sharing of information. Local authorities need to be engaged and at the table for important discussions at the national level, and SLAED has a strong, collective and non-political voice for economic development officers across Scotland. There is also a lot of expertise across the network that SCDI can tap into.

It was agreed that SCDI will continue to link into individual SLAED sub groups, and members will feed back on where things are working well, where there are gaps etc. Members discussed the similarities and differences between SCDI and other business support agencies and agreed that there should be greater alignment between these.

ALL

3. Business Support Partnership

PSt gave an update on the Business Support Partnership and noted that an update paper will be circulated with the minute of the meeting. The BSP five-year strategy received positive feedback with support for the partnership approach from HIE, SE, COSLA/BG, SOSE, SDS and Creative Scotland. It was agreed that there is a need to declutter the business support landscape, and that local authorities should have a stronger voice in this process through SLAED and SOLACE. Members discussed developing communications through SLAED, and getting key messages out to Chief Executives, Leaders etc. This will require all local authorities to be engaged.

HY

4. Update on Business Gateway Review

HL gave an update on the BG Review and noted that this is now entering the validation phase and a road map has been developed to consider the areas to be taken forward and developed. Current estimates are that this will run throughout 2022 and into 2023. Some of the actions identified are short term wins, whereas others will have longer term outcomes. It was agreed that the profile of Business Gateway needs to be raised in terms of the important role it plays, and there needs to be a collective consideration of branding, messaging and networking.

5. Covid Grants Update

PSt gave an update on the status of Covid-19 support grants, which are being administered by local authorities. This is ongoing but should be completed by mid-end February. Local authorities are seeking agreement from Scottish Government that funds can be carried forward into next financial year as there have been delays in allocation of some of the funds.

6. SLAED Indicators Report Update

HY gave an update on the SLAED Indicators Report for 2020/21 and confirmed that it will be ready for publication within the next 1-2 weeks. It was noted that the quality of the report is reduced due to limited capacity of some officers to supply data as a result of Covid-19 related pressures, resulting in a number of gaps in the report. Some of the publicly available data was also delayed for similar reasons. There are ongoing issues around how individual council officers have interpreted certain indicators which has led to some inconsistencies. To address this, the Performance Group, with support from the Improvement Service, will carry out a review of the framework to identify where some of the indicator definitions have become out of date and make any necessary updates for the 2021/22 framework. It was also noted that the introduction of the TargetDashboard will help to mitigate

against the issue of a delay in getting data for some indicators causing a delay in the publication of all information.

Members agreed that all local authorities should ensure that their final data is signed off by senior managers or Heads of Service to help ensure its accuracy. This is particularly important as a number of the indicators in the SLAED Framework are also included in the Local Government Benchmarking Framework, for which the audience is council Chief Executives. It was agreed that a short paper should be drafted for the SOLACE meeting on 17th February to highlight some of the issues with the SLAED Indicators Framework and how these will be addressed going forward.

HY

7. Themes for Schedule of Events

Members discussed potential topics for thematic events throughout the year. It was previously agreed that these would be held instead of an annual conference. This is partly due to the Covid-19 restrictions on travel and large events. IB noted that ML intends to hold an event around the UK Levelling Up White Paper, but the date and agenda cannot be set until after publication of the paper. He has put together a paper summarising this and the implications for local government, which will be circulated after the meeting.

IB

Members agreed that other potential themes for workshops or events could include Fair Work, Rural issues, and the STERG Recovery Plan. All Chairs will discuss this with their individual groups and feed back to the Executive.

ALL

8. People Group Chair

PSm confirmed that the People Group has sought nominations for a new Chair, as she will be leaving to take up a new position with Public Health Scotland. It was noted that Ruth Cooper at Renfrewshire Council received the highest number of nominations, and Pamela will discuss this with her and feedback. Members agreed that Chairing a SLAED Group has to be voluntary and will not be a paid role. However, it was noted that there are a number of benefits to Chairing a SLAED group and being a member of the Executive, and these may need to be highlighted more to members and potential future Chairs. PSm will discuss this with the wider People Group and other nominees and feedback.

PSm

9. AOB & Close

IB fed back on the Executive's previous ask to COSLA for resources to look at how the impacts of Brexit on food and drink supply chains is linked with other issues such as rising fuel and energy costs. She noted that COSLA have agreed to prepare a short paper on these issues to be raised at an officer level in the first instance, and IB will keep the Executive updated as this progresses.