

SLAED EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE CALL

Tuesday 26th September 2023

Attendance

Ishabel Bremner, Argyll & Bute Council (CHAIR)
Pamela Stevenson, Fife Council (VICE CHAIR)
Rory Young, Dundee City Council (VICE CHAIR)
Allan Conry, North Lanarkshire Council
Andrew McKean, Renfrewshire Council
Gary Hughes, Aberdeenshire Council
Kenny Lean, South Lanarkshire Council
Diane Milne, Dundee City Council
Robert Nicol, COSLA
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service
Rachel Gwyon, Director of UK Nations, Department of Business and Trade
Iseabail MacTaggart, Deputy Director, Department of Business and Trade
Stewart Dee, Stakeholder Engagement Lead, Department of Business and Trade
Gemma Connelly, Head of Trade and Investment Services, SDI
Lorraine Anderson, Stakeholder Engagement Manager, SDI

Apologies

Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council
Hannah Brown, Improvement Service
Calum Lindsay, COSLA

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed members to the meeting, including Diane Milne as the new Chair of the UK Funding Group, following Malcolm Leitch's retirement.

2. Minute of Previous Meeting

Members agreed that this was an accurate record of discussions at the previous meeting.

MM noted there is no update on funding from SG for a post to support the development of a community wealth building network.

AC surveyed some officers on how they are implementing the Fair Work First requirements, and this is on the agenda for the next Business Group meeting. James Fowlie at COSLA also confirmed no update from SG regarding the proposition to engage with COSLA Leaders around how it will be implemented.

Discussions with ONS Local are ongoing and the contacts for Scotland are Ian Dwyer (Ian.Dwyer@ons.gov.uk) and Millie Brown (millie.brown@ons.gov.uk).

3. Department for Business and Trade: Exporting for Growth

Colleagues from DBT and SDI gave a presentation on exporting for growth. They highlighted that DBT opened an office in Scotland in 2021 to bring services closer to businesses on the ground and help them get more value out of free trade agreements. Funding has been secured to expand the services and introduce International Trade Advisors, and DBT is consulting on this to make sure the service is designed in the best way for businesses. DBT's export strategy includes a race to £1trillion value of exports by 2030 and addressing barriers to exporting. They are working closely with SDI to make sure what is put in place complements Scotland: A Trading Nation.

SDI highlighted the case for export in Scotland is very strong and outlined the fit with A Trading Nation. Focus is on priority markets and sectors, including science and technology, food and drink, consumer industries, and energy and low carbon. SDI is keen to hear the views of stakeholders, including the BG perspective. It was noted that the graphic setting out Export Support Services Comparison for Scotland sets out the SDI and DBT offering, but doesn't include the offer from the Chambers of Commerce or BG.

The questions they are interested in answers to are:

- Mapping– what is useful? Should it be a geography first approach?
- Is it useful to group businesses e.g. a cohort, at similar stage or market?
- Is it useful to have a limited duration of support and when should criteria be for cut offs?
- What are the greatest barriers?

IB noted that SLAED tends to do collective responses, which can then inform local responses, and highlighted geographic issues for different areas e.g. rural and island areas.

GH queried how to advise businesses approaching BG looking for 1-1 support. DBT anticipate that International Trade Advisers will expand the pipeline to support early exporters or those new to it. This will be complementary to the SDI support and the aim is to ensure there is 'no wrong door'. It was noted that BG could be useful in signposting businesses to this support, and a referral system could be incorporated into BG.

PS highlighted that BSP was formed to try to declutter the environment in Scotland, and this might add further confusion. The offer and content are good but these need to be joined up with the existing provisions, and the difference between SDI and DBT made clear for businesses and advisers. DBT noted these points and are keen to run an awareness raising session for local authorities.

AC will add DBT and SDI to the next Business Group meeting on 26th October and promote the engagement opportunity beforehand. IB suggested that colleagues could also come back to the October Executive meeting as it is important for SLAED to feed in and clarify how businesses can access support. PS noted there is a need to link with the principles of CWB and shortening supply chains, as well as the added value of exporting.

AC

HB

HL will work to get SME's involved in the engagement and will share the QR code through the BG newsletter.

HL

4. Fair Work First Principle

Members noted that feedback from businesses suggests they can't access funding, often because organisations or local authorities are not fully signed up to FWF or can't pay apprenticeships at Real Living Wage (RLW). This can impact negatively on businesses trying to meet grant criteria and local authorities as employers. Councils will have to employ less people, resulting in a negative impact on young people.

Some funding sources have noted that grant offers are contingent on FWF being signed off. Examples of funds affected so far include Transport Scotland/SUSTRANS, Place Based Investment Programme Fund, RCGF, Affordable Housing Supply, Climate Engagement Fund, Recycling Improvement Fund, Employability Programme, Coastal Climate Adaptation Fund, Nature Restoration Fund and Public Sector Heat Decarbonisation fund.

DM noted that it will cost Dundee City Council an additional £900k to pay apprentices RLW, and this will also cause those in posts already being paid RLW to want to be paid more. It would be useful to know what other local authorities are doing in relation to paying RLW to apprentices.

AC noted that BSP met the FWF team in Scottish Government in February and presented some of these issues, and the enterprise agencies and SDS also presented compelling evidence of the impacts on big employers in FTSE 100. However, feedback was that this would be published anyway. COSLA Directors of Finance have gone back to SG and asked for changes, but these have not been actioned. It was confirmed that FWF does not apply to the General Revenue Grant, but it will apply to all other local authority funding. HL will ask for an update from the Directors of Finance on whether they are continuing to chase this.

HL

COSLA is seeking exemption for apprenticeships, but the issues go deeper than this in terms of suppliers delivering services and the impacts on local authorities. The FWF team has confirmed that they do not have resources to carry out spot checks and monitoring of implementation. AC noted there has been no consultation with local government and each council is responsible for coming up with their own position and monitoring of employers etc.

The Living Wage Foundation did not call for apprenticeships to be included in FWF. COSLA raised the issues with Gregor Irwin, DG Economy at SG and it was acknowledged that this is a problem but there is no clarity on how to get around this and develop a suitable solution. It was agreed that there should be a collective correspondence from SLAED to Gregor Irwin, setting out the main issues. This will need to be submitted in this calendar year and reflect the points of view of all SLAED groups. This should be added as a standing issue on the October agenda.

IB/HB

HB

5. SLAED AGM 2024

Members discussed potential themes and speakers for the AGM 2024. IB suggested asking Colin Cook to discuss progress made against NSET, as this has gone quiet. The NSET Delivery Group has been cancelled and there is a frustration around the lack of communications from SG, and engagement with the Programme Boards.

HL confirmed that COSLA has seen the new SG structure but is still waiting on the Vision as discussed at the previous meeting. Members queried how a restructure can be implemented without an agreed vision. HL will share the new structure for information.

HL

All members were asked to put forward ideas for speakers for the AGM. It was suggested that Gregor Irwin could be invited as the new DG Economy at SG to cover FWF, the New Deal for Businesses and NSET together, along with how the new structure is bedding in.

ALL

HB

PS noted that it would be useful to compile a SLAED response to the New Deal for Business Group, as the consultation does not make any reference to local government and there is potential for this to add more clutter to the landscape.

PS/HB

6. Pathways Pre-start Fund

HL raised concerns with this fund and one that came out the previous week, in that they are both aimed at capacity building in the same underrepresented groups. This is likely to cause more clutter and HL has raised this with SG.

It was agreed that there needs to be partnership and engagement with businesses regarding interventions, otherwise these funds are not useful. PS raised concerns around lack of SG engagement with local government and the enterprise agencies, particularly in relation to the NSET annual report, and bringing in new groups and initiatives that don't fit with existing work or duplicate what is already being done. Capacity building is eroded by small amounts of short-term funding, similar to what happened with the CLLD work. KL highlighted that the Rural Group is drafting a letter to SG regarding the partnership co-operation money which can't be spent well in the time given and therefore looks like it is not needed. Local Authorities were originally told that this was purely revenue funding, but this was changed to include capital at short notice and local authorities were unable to spend it, therefore it went back to SG. The Rural Group intend to make the point that the programme delivers well in local areas if given a chance and criteria isn't changed at short notice.

7. IS Transformation Work

Gerard McCormack, Head of Transformation, Performance, and Improvement at Improvement Service gave an update on the Transformation Work highlighted at the recent SOLACE Scotland conference. This included a reference to a [report](#) on the IS website. He outlined the process of development, the anchors, and key areas for action. The programme came from discussions with a small number of council Chief Executives over the last 18 months and is a collaboration between SOLACE and the Improvement Service. There are three calls for action which each have a workstream.

Workstream 1

Call to Action for officer-led, whole system dialogue on public service reform. Looking at partnerships and outcomes and inequality, and how to bring all partner organisations into the conversation to drive forward the narrative about collaboration at a local level, in an officers' space. Keen to work with COSLA if there are any political implications or decisions to be made. Radical reform aligned with Verity House Agreement.

Workstream 2

Call to Action within local government for participation in transformation projects over the next 12 – 18 months. Developing projects to look for efficiencies, and it is expected that most of the resources will come into this. Projects are still being prioritised, but opportunities for others, such as SLAED, to engage. Also working with Scotland Excel re procurement savings, considering the context of logistics for island and rural authorities and their supplier markets. Any solutions around procurement can't be detrimental to wellbeing and tackling inequalities. Will do an analysis of local government statutory and discretionary services, thinking about different delivery of statutory services. Linked to this will be the full implementation of Crerar and working with audit and inspection bodies. Work been done with IS technology partners and will progress with the Digital Office and Digital Partnership Board to look at IS digital services that could be rolled out. Will also look at skill shortages and difficulties with recruitment and how these might be tackled across several authorities.

Workstream 3

Call to Action within local government for capacity to lead and deliver the transformation work. Recognising we can't do this on our own and will need assistance from elsewhere. Leadership development is also part of this, including asking people to come forward to be at forefront of collaboration and transformation. SLAED could put someone forward for this. The Leadership practitioner forum is for aspiring CEOs, Directors and Heads of Service and there will be a series of events to capitalise on ideas and build collective solutions.

The programme is building involvement and ways to engage and contribute, and is looking for people to put themselves forward, promote this, and share case studies. Key contacts are Gerard, Clare Sherry for volunteering for workstreams, and Amanda Spark for the Leadership Practitioner forum. A Programme Management Office has been set up at the IS, and SOLACE is focusing on governance.

HL is keen to be involved and noted that FSB recently highlighted only 8% of businesses in Scotland are registered on Public Contracts Scotland. Feedback from the private sector is that PCS is not good to work with and there could be opportunities to develop this, working with businesses and service users. AC noted that North Lanarkshire is the only council using BisAccount operationally across Scotland and he is happy to contribute and engage with the forum. GM will pick this up with AC.

GM/AC

It was agreed that there will be lots of interest across SLAED groups and it would be good to get the local government economic development officer voice in this mix.

8. Future Delivery Model for FindBusinessSupport

AC gave an update on a paper that went to the Operational Assurance Group, a subgroup of BSP, with a significant ask in terms of looking for a new funding model. AC went back to BSP to say the timescale wasn't sufficient to get a response from all 32 Local Authorities and did a quick poll to Business Group contacts. Most suggested SG should pay (option 4), or BSP partners funding jointly (option 2). It was noted that the costs for things like the website and staffing seem very expensive. Members also noted that BG, COSLA and SLAED are all local government, so we are being asked to pay more than any other sector. This will be added to the Business Group agenda for further discussion.

AC highlighted the recent difficulties of getting funding from all 32 councils for the Master Customer Record work. It was agreed that a radical change in the environment is needed over the next six months, including rationalisation of public sector bodies. AC confirmed the Business Group will take forward a response.

AC

9. AOB

IB noted that the Levelling up Fund has had an application for the Jura Ferry, and there had been a query about this. She thought this might have something to do with round 3 of the funding but hasn't heard anything. DM noted a recent meeting with a CLG representative, but they had no information about round 3.

RN shared that COSLA received a letter from Gregor Irwin about the Structural Funds claim deadlines, with SG stressing the urgency of councils getting claims in by 31st January 2024. This will be shared with the full SLAED mailing list for information.

RN /HB

IB asked for the recently finalised 10-year SLAED Indicators Trend infographic to be included in the SLAED newsletter. MM confirmed this has also featured in the IS Newsletter.

HB

Actions

#	Action	Lead
1.	Get update from Alan Webster on RCGF Investment Panel	Hannah Brown
2.	Share the SLAED Visitor Levy response with note of meeting	Hannah Brown
3.	Add DBT and SDI to the next Business Group meeting and promote the engagement opportunity	Allan Conry
4.	Invite DBT and SDI back to the October Executive meeting	Hannah Brown
5.	Share DBT engagement QR code through the BG newsletter	Hugh Lightbody
6.	Get update from COSLA colleagues re FWF engagement with SG	Hugh Lightbody
7.	Draft letter to SG regarding the issues around Fair Work First Criteria	Ishabel Bremner/ Hannah Brown
8.	Include FWF as an agenda item at next Exec meeting	Hannah Brown
9.	Share the new SG Economy Structure	Hugh Lightbody
10.	Ask Gregor Irwin to speak at the AGM around FWF and New Deal for Business and connection with NSET.	Hannah Brown
11.	Suggest any other speakers for AGM and send to Hannah, cc'ing Ishabel, Rory and Pammy in	All
12.	Compile SLAED response to the New Deal for Business Group	Pamela Stevenson / Hannah Brown
13.	Engage with IS Transformation work around BisAccount experiences	Allan Conry / Gerard McCormack
14.	Circulate IS Transformation Work slides	Hannah Brown
15.	Business Group to respond re Find Business Support engagement	Allan Conry
16.	Share the letter received from Gregor Irwin re Structural Fund Claims	Robert Nicol / Hannah Brown
17.	Include the 10-year SLAED indicators infographic in the SLAED newsletter	Hannah Brown