

SLAED EXECUTIVE MEETING

MS Teams

Tuesday 9th April 2024

Attendance

Ishabel Bremner, Argyll & Bute Council (CHAIR)
Allan Conry, North Lanarkshire Council
Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council
Andrew McKean, Renfrewshire Council
Kenny Lean, South Lanarkshire Council
Diane Milne, Dundee City Council
Lesley Walker, Angus Council
Calum Lindsay, COSLA
Hannah Brown, Improvement Service
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service
Lucy O'Carroll, Scottish Government
Katie Graham, Scottish Government
James Messis, Scottish Government

Apologies

Pamela Stevenson, Fife Council
Rory Young, Dundee City Council
David Boyle, Glasgow City Region
Robert Nicol, COSLA
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed members to the meeting and introductions were made to colleagues joining the meeting from SG.

2. Minute of Previous Meeting

Members agreed this was an accurate record of discussions at the previous meeting. A meeting with the enterprise agencies is still to be scheduled and HB will arrange a pre-meeting with IB, PS and RY to determine what this should focus on. There was discussion around whether SLAED should be proactive in pushing SG for engagement around the NSET refresh and IB highlighted a scheduled meeting of the Chairs with Monica Patterson next week. A key question will be what information she has around the Productive Business Regions workstream. RC noted a recent update from Lewis Hedge via the All-age Employability subgroup of NSET and highlighted the focus of the refresh appears to be quite different from the original. It was suggested that the refresh is quite advanced despite limited engagement with councils. AC will raise this at the BSP pre-Board meeting tomorrow. It was agreed that SG should be invited to provide an update to a future SLAED Executive meeting.

**HB/IB/
PS/RY**

**AC
HB**

HB will hold a space on the May meeting agenda for Iseabail MacTaggart at DBT, and IB will check whether this is suitable at her next catch-up with Iseabail.

HB
IB

HB will add the Chairs of all SLAED subgroups to the Inward Investment Teams Group and give ownership to AC and SDI colleagues.

HB

3. Scottish Government – Tax Strategy

Lucy O’Carroll gave a presentation on the planned reform and improvement of tax strategy. SG is taking a strategic approach to tax policy, focusing on the medium to longer term. Recent taxation changes have been very visible in Scotland due to policy choices and the need to fund public services but are limited by the devolution settlement. Revenues available to SG are closely linked to economic performance, and decisions around taxation have significant impacts on the performance of the economy.

An update on the strategy reform will be published on 30th May and followed by a consultation period. SLAED is invited to respond to the consultation and provide expertise around the structure and objectives of the strategy. The strategy will not set out details of specific taxes but rather take a longer-term strategic view of taxation and involve stakeholders. The final version of the tax strategy will be published in December.

It was noted that business tax is not devolved to Scotland and the challenges around Non-Domestic Rates are well publicised. This is a big issue for retail, leisure and hospitality businesses and it is important to ensure these sectors are engaged in the consultation. The nature of these sectors means margins are tight with limited disposal income, so changes in taxation disproportionately impact on these businesses. SLAED can tap into the business landscape and promote engagement, as well as collating the views of businesses that councils are working with. Businesses can provide feedback on the impacts of taxation as well as the opportunity costs for things that have not been done. These can be difficult to capture and measure but are often more impactful than the actions that are taken.

IB noted that Gregor Irwin spoke at the SLAED AGM in January and SLAED had been keen to be involved in the NSET refresh work, but no updates have been received since. The national tax strategy team at SG works closely with the local government finance team and economy team to streamline issues and ensure strong links between the economy and taxation. It was highlighted that engagement with the business community should include SMEs and businesses that are less high-profile. Businesses want meaningful engagement, with predictability on the medium-long term direction of travel and no surprises. A period of stability is needed around taxation following the turbulence caused by Covid-19 and the Cost of Living and Cost of Doing Business crises, to encourage growth in the economy. The existing taxation agenda has not helped to remove uncertainties.

RC highlighted there are calls from local authorities for clarity on what the Apprenticeship Levy is being used for, as it is a substantial amount of money, but businesses are not seeing anything back. Local authorities would like more information on how this is

supporting apprenticeships, as local knowledge suggests businesses are not investing in apprenticeships currently. Links to things like this need to be made as clear as possible within the tax strategy.

Members queried the extent to which policy decisions in other areas of SG are analysed for impacts on taxation and Lucy confirmed that the new strategy will underline the importance of making these links. Good stakeholder engagement will help to enhance this. IB confirmed SLAED will submit a collective response to the consultation and encourage individual responses from local authorities. She highlighted that SLAED represents a non-political officers' voice. The team was invited to attend a future meeting of the Executive during the consultation period if that would be useful. Lucy's slides will be shared with the note of the meeting.

HB

4. EDAS Events Update

IB, PS, RY and HB previously met with EDAS colleagues to discuss opportunities for collaboration around events. It was agreed both organisations would include an update on joint working as a standing agenda item for Executive group meetings going forward. IB is a Director of EDAS and can assist in developing the working links between the two organisations. The minute of the last SLAED Executive meeting was shared with EDAS colleagues for information and IB will share the minute of the last EDAS Policy Group meeting with Executive colleagues.

HB

IB

It was agreed that a joint conference will not be held unless there is a very specific topic and agenda. Instead, the two organisations will develop one-off events on key topical issues of relevance to the economic development community. These are likely to be face to face and take place a couple of times per year. The EDAS Policy Group will lead on development of topics and sessions, and IB already sits on this group. One further member of the SLAED Executive is invited to join this group to represent SLAED, and members were asked to put themselves forward if interested in this role. Suggested areas of focus include the use of AI and its impact on productivity and skills, and the levelling-up agenda. The next meeting of the Policy Group is on 10th May, 11.30-12.30.

ALL

5. UKSPF

DM and IB previously met with DLUHC colleagues to discuss the future of UKSPF. Following this, a survey was circulated around the SLAED Funding Group to seek input on what councils would like to ask for. This collated information on what roles are dependent on UKSPF, what levels of funding are relied on, and what the impacts would be without it. Members also highlighted impacts of delays in funding announcements. A draft paper was circulated to Funding Group members for feedback, based on responses from 12 local authorities. The final draft will be shared with Executive members for comments by the end of this week. Members are encouraged to respond, even if just to confirm they are satisfied with the content. IB will send the final version to the Secretary of State on Tuesday, 16th April.

**ALL
IB**

The Scotland Team at DLUHC is carrying out engagement sessions across the UK and speaking to similar groupings, including COSLA, about the challenges faced and future

needs. Two options are being considered in terms of a time-only extension, or a funding extension. DLUHC is seeking clarity on when councils need certainty by for future funding, including impacts on spend for 2024/25 if confirmation is not received immediately, and what levels of underspend are forecasted if there is not an extension. DM noted that she is looking to collate this information from any councils that did not respond to the initial survey. It was agreed there is a need for a transition period as councils have not had time to assess what did and didn't work in relation to UKSPF, and there was not a full three-year programme due to delays in funding. Members agreed that clarity is needed by the end of June, before councils start to end services and make redundancies. RN noted that COSLA met with the DLUHC team and provided similar feedback, as well as pushing the importance of SLAED's view and the need for certainty.

6. People Group Update

RC gave an update and noted that Susie Donkin's contract at Improvement Service has been extended, providing more certainty and longevity to the important Employability Partnership work. Councils are hoping to get confirmation from SG that grant offer letters have been signed off later today. If this doesn't happen, SG will send a letter to RC with details on when to expect sign-off. SG has committed to looking at multi-year funding in the future, with a proper discussion on this planned prior to the Autumn budget.

A Strategic Plan for employability has been in development for a year and councils received a draft copy with a one-week turn around. Officers pushed back on these timescales, and this has now been given two months to allow time for consultation. It is also going to the COSLA Wellbeing Board this week.

Following the closure of Fair Start Scotland, clients with disabilities and health concerns are now coming through the NOLB pipeline but there is no additional money to fund this. SG has highlighted that up to 15% of a budget can be moved into another budget area, so some councils have moved funds from parental employability into disability employability funding. This will be a significant focus of the SLAED and SG Employability Conference taking place in May.

7. Business Group Update

AC gave an update and noted that the SELAG representative will provide updates to the Business Group on a quarterly basis going forward. Some members highlighted that not all councils are involved with SELAG therefore it does not have a national remit. However, AC has encouraged all councils to engage with the group as it has an operational focus, rather than strategic.

Following the ask from BSP for councils to contribute funding to the development of the Master Customer Record pilot project, a presentation was made to demonstrate the work done to date and what some of the functionality will be. The MCR pulls datasets from several public sources and restricted databases into a single user-friendly interface to provide meaningful analytics. Conversations are ongoing with SG around who will own this and where it will sit, and this is complicated by the various data protection requirements across organisations. Feedback from the Business Group has been very

positive, and it was agreed the visual display of data and mapping is very useful and likely of interest to Elected Members. AC will share the presentation with Executive members when it has been received.

AC

8. AOB

It was noted that no formal letter has been received regarding the Tourism Infrastructure Fund and projects in some areas are therefore not going ahead. This is a particular issue for rural areas. AM confirmed that the Tourism Group has been discussing this and the possibility to still apply for the Design element. It was noted that certain levels of funding can still be applied for but not others.

IB noted that the Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) Annual Conference is being held on 20th June in Galashiels and the SLAED Executive has received a complimentary invite. All members were asked to let HB know as soon as possible if they would like to take the place.

ALL

Actions

#	Action	Lead
1.	Arrange meeting to discuss focus of discussion with enterprise agencies.	Hannah Brown / Ishabel Bremner
2.	Raise NSET engagement at BSP pre-Board meeting.	Allan Conry
3.	Invite SG to future Executive meeting to provide an update on NSET refresh.	Hannah Brown
4.	Hold space on the May meeting for Iseabail MacTaggart at DBT.	Hannah Brown
5.	Check Iseabail MacTaggart's availability for attendance at the Executive at catch-up meeting.	Ishabel Bremner
6.	Add the Chairs of all SLAED subgroups to the Inward Investment Teams Group and give ownership to AC and SDI colleagues.	Hannah Brown
7.	Share Lucy's slides with the note of the meeting.	Hannah Brown
8.	Include EDAS update on Executive meeting agendas going forward.	Hannah Brown
9.	Share the minute of the last EDAS Policy Group meeting with Executive members.	Ishabel Bremner
10.	Consider membership of EDAS Policy Group.	All
11.	Provide comments on draft paper on UKSPF for DLUHC.	All
12.	Send UKSPF paper to Secretary of State on Tuesday, 16 th April.	Ishabel Bremner
13.	Share BSP presentation on MCR with Executive members.	Allan Conry
14.	Confirm interest in complimentary SLAED place at HOPS Conference.	All