

SLAED EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE CALL

Tuesday 19th April 2022

Attendance

Ishabel Bremner (Chair), Argyll & Bute Council (IB)
Rory Young (Vice Chair), Dundee City Council (RY)
Pamela Stevenson (Vice Chair), Fife Council (PS)
Allan Conry, North Lanarkshire Council (AC)
Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council (RC)
Malcolm Leitch, Glasgow City Council (ML)
Juliette Cooke, Dumfries & Galloway Council (JC)
Gary Hughes, Aberdeenshire Council (GH)
Calum Lindsay, COSLA (CL)
Robert Nicol, COSLA (RN)
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA (HL)
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service (MM)
Hannah Young, Improvement Service (HY)
Gillian Cameron, South Lanarkshire Council (GC)
David Smart, Smart Consultancy (DS)

Apologies

Graham Smith, Glasgow City Council
Tracey Martin, Falkirk Council

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed members to the meeting. She noted the recent SOLACE seminar on 6th April which included a presentation around Business Support. This will be added as an item for further discussion at the next meeting.

HY

2. Minute of Previous Meeting

Members agreed that this was an accurate record of discussions at the previous meeting, and that all actions had been addressed or are in progress.

GH noted that he will be attending the first meeting of the SUII Just Transition Group as agreed previously, and will feed back any key points at the next meeting.

3. Business Gateway Review

The final report from Hellon has been circulated to the BG Board, but no feedback has been received yet. BGNU budget resources have been allocated against the three key elements of the service design work – onboarding, enhancing products, and enablers, as well as support for national webinars. A paper will be issued to the

BG Board on 22nd April, including the budget, for sign-off and agreement to start progressing.

Effective communication will be important to ensure that people are comfortable with what is happening. It will also be important to raise awareness of the programme and engage with wider networks and stakeholders to get their input. Hellon has been asked to support this and have developed an implementation plan which includes a matrix of complex vs radical for initiatives. This will help to determine how long initiatives will take to implement, and how easy it will be to implement changes. In developing an online portal, Hellon have been working with HIE to determine whether their existing MyHIE could be adapted for BG purposes, but this will need further development.

Members agreed that SLAED should produce communications around this for members to get local authority teams ready for the rollout of changes and encourage them to engage in planned sessions. A consistent SLAED communication will ensure effective messaging across local authorities. It was agreed that some of the terminology should be revised to ensure this is not confused with work in other areas. Currently, agencies are using the same word to describe different things e.g. the Business Support Portal being discussed through the BSP, which is different to the proposed portal for BG. RY will support this through his role on the BG Board.

HL gave an update on Digital Boost Funding and the confirmation from SG that funding is coming, although this is not in writing. However, he noted that SG have warned that funding could be cut by up to 30% due to financial pressures resulting from the response to the Covid-19 crisis. Members agreed that it will be important to mitigate against this, as it is a key element of the new NSET, as well as the UKSPF. HL will continue to engage with SG colleagues around this and feedback.

Members agreed that the first joined-up and consistent messages from SLAED around BG should be issued at the end of April.

4. UKSPF Update

ML gave an update on recent progress and noted that the Prospectus was published on 13th April. SLAED discussions with SG around shaping eligibility for Scotland's portion of the funding have been effective e.g. there is now a greater focus on net zero and just transition. However, there are still a lot of issues to be addressed. The scope of the Employability and Business Support elements appear to be similar to what was previously covered under ESF and ERDF, but expectations will need to be managed around the Communities and Place element.

Investment Plans need to be submitted by the end of July, but members noted it will be difficult to get political sign-off due to the summer recess. The £212m or 8.5% share for Scotland is broadly in line with what was allocated under the previous EU funding model. However, SG has indicated dissatisfaction with this.

There has been engagement with local government through COSLA on the formula for distributing the funds throughout Scotland. It had been agreed that this did not need to be done in the same way as it is in other parts of the UK. Allocation formula was 60% based on population, 30% on indicators used for the Community Renewal Fund, and 10% on low population density. Funding had been expressed at both local authority and regional levels. UK Government is encouraging a regional approach although this is not mandatory. Members agreed that there are a number of questions to be answered, including what the degree of flexibility will be between financial years, and what the capital vs revenue split will be.

RN noted that an update will be given to COSLA's Environment & Economy Board on 22nd April. At the moment there are some concerns around whether Scotland's share of the funding is enough. The interventions covered are very wide ranging, and some are already covered by other agencies, such as SE. Agreement is therefore needed around who will do what, ensuring that focus is on economic development and growth. There is also a need to ensure that interventions add value and don't cut across what already exists. Open and ongoing dialogue with the agencies will be key to this.

Under the previous EU Structural Funds, around 27% of funding was channelled through local authorities, whereas this will be 100% under the UKSPF. This will provide greater opportunities to do things better, but will also be a significant challenge. The timescales for submitting Investment Plans are very tight and will be challenging, and the decision-making process is not yet clear. SG and UKG are putting emphasis on regional working, but there is significant variation in the maturity of partnerships across Scotland, and funding can be taken locally. However, there are concerns around how the funding will be used within individual areas, which could result in a postcode lottery in terms of support available for individuals and businesses.

It was agreed that dialogue with SG should be continued, and IB, ML and RN will seek to set up a meeting at the beginning of May once everyone has had time to digest the Prospectus. Dialogue will also be continued with UKG contacts. It will also be important for SLAED to communicate effectively with local authorities regularly, and ML can provide updates to individual SLAED sub groups as required.

5. SDP Strategy 2021-24

Gillian Cameron, Programme Manager, at the Supplier Development Programme, and David Smart, Strategic Advisor to the Programme, gave an update on the SDP Strategy. This demonstrated where SDP sits within the wider context, with a focus on CWB, which is currently high on the political agenda. The SDP Board wants to ensure that it is engaging effectively with key mechanisms, of which SLAED is one, to raise awareness of what the programme is delivering. This will assist in the ability of the programme to successfully bid for funding. GC delivered a presentation which highlighted how the programme seeks to connect suppliers with contract

opportunities, using a Team Scotland approach. This also involves supporting the procurement pillar of CWB, and working with CLES to share best practice and capture data from across council areas. CWB provides a key mechanism to align economic development and procurement. SDP has been responsive to change and is working with anchor institutions to identify future contract opportunities and get local suppliers ready to bid for these.

Members agreed that Food & Drink is a key sector in which local government is looking to shorten supply chains, reduce carbon footprints, and encourage the use of local suppliers. This is linked into existing SLAED concerns around the impact of Brexit on food supply and security, and the rising costs of food and drink. It was agreed that it would be useful for GC and DS to continue these discussions with the People and Business Groups, and the Chairs will make the relevant arrangements.

ALL

The presentation will be circulated to members following this meeting.

HY

6. In-Person Export Support

IB attends an SG/DIT/PSB (Public Sector Bodies: SLAED, HIE, SE & SoSE reps) meeting on behalf of SLAED, and was asked for feedback on a number of questions around a Trade Advisor service for Scotland. The questions were previously circulated to Executive members, and DIT is looking for written comments by the end of April. The focus is ensuring that Scottish companies, wherever they are based, will get comparable export support to companies based across the rest of the UK.

It was noted that a lot of similar work was carried out in 2018/19 around Trading Nations, and this could be updated for this purpose. SE and SDI also have a large Trade and Investment Team and it was agreed that this should be engaged with for assistance. Greater consistency is needed across Scotland, including more advisors and experts in this export support. IB noted that the Enterprise and Skills agencies were referencing work from other export fora discussions, out with this group, where there has been no local authority involvement. Richard Rollison noted this issue. It was agreed that representatives should be invited to a future meeting of the Business Group to discuss this in more detail.

AC

PS will contact Richard Rollison to set up a meeting to discuss this. PS and AC will identify a small group of representatives from the Business Group to attend the meeting to get a better understanding of scope and remit of the group in the first instance. IB will circulate the papers from the last meeting to Executive members.

PS/AC

IB

7. AOB

No further business was raised.