

SLAED EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE CALL

Tuesday 13th June 2023

Attendance

Ishabel Bremner, Argyll & Bute Council (IB) (CHAIR)
Rory Young, Dundee City Council (RY) (VICE CHAIR)
Allan Conry, North Lanarkshire Council (AC)
Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council (RC)
Malcolm Leitch, Glasgow City Council (ML)
Gary Hughes, Aberdeenshire Council (GH)
Andrew McKean, Renfrewshire Council (AM)
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA (HL)
Hannah Brown, Improvement Service (HB)
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service (MM)

Apologies

Pamela Stevenson, Fife Council
Kenny Lean, South Lanarkshire Council
Robert Nicol, COSLA
Calum Lindsay, COSLA

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed members to the first in-person meeting since 2020 and noted apologies. She informed members that Sharon Thomson has indicated that she intends to step down from the SLAED Executive as a non-portfolio member.

2. Minute of Previous Meeting

Members agreed this was an accurate record of discussions. AC confirmed that Donna Ness attended the last Business Group meeting and SDI is planning a pan-Scotland event around inward investment. Business Group members are assisting in scoping this through a collaborative approach.

AM confirmed that CPT will attend the next Tourism Group meeting to discuss the Coach Friendly scheme in more detail. AC will also follow up on his previous communication with SELAG.

AC

MM noted a recent meeting with SG colleagues on the proposed CWB Practitioners Network and highlighted that a paper was drafted but there is no further update on funding. HB will give another update after the next meeting at the end of June.

HB

3. UK Funding

ML gave an update and noted that all councils are working on submitting six-monthly reports to UKG for UKSPF. Councils with an underspend from 2022/23

were asked to put forward a credible plan for carrying this into 2023/24, and ML is interested in hearing about the nature of feedback from councils who have started to receive this. Focus to date has been about in-year management of finances but more focus is needed on implementation to plan and deliver effectively.

ML has asked UKG for more information on how round 3 of Levelling-up Funding will look, but no details have yet been provided. A deadline of March 2025 will not provide enough time for delivery of large-scale capital projects, therefore either the timescales or the project types will need to be changed.

ML gave an overview of UKG Scotland Team workshop sessions held on 31st May which focused on three elements: Multiply; monitoring and reporting; and subsidy control. The Multiply session did not meet expectations due to focusing primarily on economic inactivity, and ML has fed this back. The presentations have been circulated, and ML will share these with Executive members, as well as any information received on the next planned sessions.

ML

ML's final meeting Chairing the UK Funding Group will be on 22nd June and will cover UKSPF and Levelling-up. The UKG Scotland Team is working on an analysis of LUF round 2 bids as these did not meet the same quality level as Welsh applications, but there hasn't been any update on when this will be finalised. MM queried whether there would be merit in Green Book training for officers and it was agreed that this would be challenging as training tends to be theory, whereas officers need experience of practical application. The House of Commons Levelling up, Housing and Communities Select Committee has published a report that criticises the UK-wide competitive bidding process at project level and UKG is due to respond in mid-July. ML will share the report for circulating.

ML

ML is seeking nominations for a new Chair to lead the UK Funding group. It was noted that this could be done on a shared basis, like the previous approach taken by the Business Group. ML Chaired his final meeting of the EU Funding Group on 12th May, but members would like to continue meeting throughout the closure process. Andy Hamilton at Highland Council will coordinate this. ML attended a PMC meeting on 9th May where it was highlighted that a significant proportion of EU funding will not be drawn down due to a range of errors in design and delivery.

It was agreed that the Executive needs to consider the groups ML is involved in and put suitable replacements in place to ensure SLAED remains at the table for discussions on what will happen after March 2025. ML highlighted that SG has asked for a replacement champion for subsidy control and it was agreed that this should be the new Chair and Vice Chair of the funding group.

4. REPAG

ML noted that this has been quiet over the last two years. It was agreed that the Executive will be the point of contact going forward, with delegation as required. ML will feed this back to his REPAG contacts.

ML

5. 2023/24 Employability Funding / Fair Work First Guidance

RC gave an update and noted councils' concerns around funding for 2023/24. Funding for parental unemployment, which make up 20% of employability clients, has increased by 500% on last year, whereas funding for everyone else, who make up 80% of clients, has decreased by 50-60%. RC has highlighted to SG that this process should be more about partnership working and planning for subsequent years, as there is significant pressure on councils to spend the allocated funding.

The SLAED Employability Conference took place in May for the first time in three years with over 90 attendees. Funding has since been approved with an extra £10m for NOLB which was not anticipated. This comes with a caveat from SG that in receiving this upfront, councils need to be honest towards the end of the year about what hasn't been spent and this needs to be returned. The funding grant offer letter includes Fair Work First requirements and councils are concerned about how this applies. This means that all council grant recipients would require to be Fair Work employers, including paying the Real Living Wage to all apprentices. There is significant variety across Scotland in what apprentices are paid. SG has advised all councils to accept the grant offer by the end of June, missing the 1st July deadline and resulting in councils having to adopt the FWF requirements from next year. This will have a significant impact on the businesses that councils work with, that tend to be SMEs and less likely to have the resources to offer the Real Living Wage. It will also disproportionately impact on some areas more than others depending on local business bases. There are several issues that councils need clarified in terms of the type of evidence required, whether it applies to discretionary funds and UKSPF, and whether it applies retrospectively. HL confirmed that COSLA were not approached by SG, and it was suggested that this should go through COSLA Leaders.

HL confirmed that Business Gateway is continuing to run webinars for Digital Boost and he is looking for information on what councils are doing and plan to do going forward to replace the wider provision. It was agreed that it can be challenging to design a replacement due to BG boundaries not aligning with other funding sources e.g. UKSPF.

RC and AC will continue to communicate and feedback as updates are received.

RC/AC

6. Rural Group Support

IB gave an overview in Kenny's absence. The Rural Group has been reinvigorated recently agreed that better engagement with Rural Policy staff within SG is needed. This is an expanding agenda and councils have several concerns around funding in terms of the short-term nature, late grant letters, and the proportion of key funding streams that reaches rural areas. Councils want to develop a collective voice at the national level and a platform to do things more effectively, like other SLAED groups. Better data collection around rural issues is needed, and this could be picked up via the Performance Group.

HB previously advised the group that the most effective route into SG at this stage is via the Executive. It was agreed that the group needs to be engaging with the SG Rural Action Plan, as well as developing a rural response to NSET. This is most likely to get the attention of SG colleagues as these are current priorities. AM highlighted the significant crossover with the Tourism point of view and will pass on key contact details to Kenny for follow-up.

AM

7. SLAED Constitution / Strategic Action Plan

It was agreed that most of the constitution is still relevant and only minor updates are required. IB will work with HB to amend this and present an updated version to members for sign-off. Key points for clarification and update include:

IB/HB

- Aligning the mission statement with the updated SLAED Strategic Plan.
- Is there still a need for the Place Group?
- Is the role of Treasurer required?
- Reference the role of COSLA on the SLAED Executive.
- New ways of working in terms of virtual meetings.
- Conference and AGM arrangements.
- Roles of non-portfolio members and past Chairs.

MM confirmed that the refreshed Strategic Plan is on the SLAED and IS websites. She noted that the SLAED website needs to be updated and members are encouraged to put forward ideas for developing this. HB noted that Sharepoints on Teams have been effective for a number of the subgroups.

ALL

8. High-End Manufacturing Employment Land

Pamela Stevenson will provide more information after the meeting. She has been asked to join a working group looking at accelerating employment land, and attended a strategy workshop with SE and partners around market failure in shovel ready employment land.

9. AOB

HB noted that Calum Lindsay is keen to get a replacement representative in place for the RCGF Investment Panel. Members queried whether there is a need for the Place Group to be reinstated to take forward issues like this, particularly as council Place Teams are growing. It was agreed that the opportunity should be circulated to the full SLAED network.

HB

MM noted that IS colleagues are in the process of developing a Climate Change 'masterclass' in partnership with Scotland Excel, targeted at procurement and economic development colleagues. More information will be shared in due course.

HB

Actions

| # | Action | Lead |
|-----|---|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Follow-up on previous engagement with SELAG | Allan Conry |
| 2. | Update on CWB Practitioners Network | Hannah Brown |
| 3. | Share presentations from UKG Scotland Team workshops | Malcolm Leitch |
| 4. | Share report by House of Commons Levelling up, Housing and Communities Select Committee | Malcolm Leitch |
| 5. | Inform REPAG that SLAED Executive will be point of contact going forward | Malcolm Leitch |
| 6. | Provide update on Fair Work First requirements | Ruth Cooper / Allan Conry |
| 7. | Share key tourism contacts with Kenny Lean | Andrew McKean |
| 8. | Update and refresh the SLAED Constitution | Ishabel Bremner / Hannah Brown |
| 9. | Share ideas on how to improve the SLAED website | ALL |
| 10. | Circulate opportunity for new replacement RCGF Investment Panel rep to full SLAED network | Hannah Brown |
| 11. | Share information on Improvement Service / Scotland Excel Climate Change Masterclass | Hannah Brown |