

SLAED EXECUTIVE MEETING

MS Teams

Tuesday 24th September 2024

Attendance

Ishabel Bremner, Argyll & Bute Council (CHAIR)
Rory Young, Dundee City Council (VICE CHAIR)
Pamela Stevenson, Fife Council (VICE CHAIR)
Allan Conry, North Lanarkshire Council
Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council
Diane Milne, Dundee City Council
Andrew McKean, Renfrewshire
Robert Nicol, COSLA
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA
Hannah Brown, Improvement Service
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service
Rhona Allison, Scottish Enterprise
Martin Johnson, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Garry Legg, South of Scotland Enterprise

Apologies

David Boyle, Glasgow City Council
Kenny Lean, South Lanarkshire Council
Calum Lindsay, COSLA
Lesley Walker, Angus Council

Action

1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed members to the meeting and noted attendance from colleagues from the three Enterprise Agencies.

2. Minute of Previous Meeting

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

IB mentioned the response received from the Rt Hon Ian Murray MP, Secretary of State for Scotland to the SLAED letter on the future of UKSPF. This didn't provide much clarification on the key points raised, with limited reassurance for local authorities funding staff through UKSPF. It was suggested further clarity will be received in spring 2025, but there may be an update in the Autumn Budget.

All local authorities received a survey on the impact of RCGF over the years, requiring significant input to respond. It is hoped responses will help push SG for funding for 2025/26.

IB noted that an updated schedule of EDAS events will be circulated with the minute of this meeting. The EDAS 25-year celebration event has been moved to early 2025, and details of SLAED's involvement are to be discussed with EDAS.

IB confirmed her intent to step down as Chair of SLAED at the AGM in January, following completion of a four-year term, and there will be a nomination process for appointing the next Chair.

3. Enterprise Agencies Discussion

Representatives from each enterprise agency were invited to give an overview of their strategic direction and opportunities for joint working with SLAED. IB highlighted the timeliness of the discussion as the SLAED Strategic Plan is due to be refreshed and it is important to ensure this is complementary to partners' priorities, as well as aligning closely with NSET.

Martin Johnson gave an overview of HIE's strategy that was launched in 2023 and focuses on developing a greener, fairer, and more resilient region. The four priority areas are People, Place, Planet, and Prosperity, with several cross-cutting themes including fair and inclusive growth, and net zero. The strategy was informed by NSET and other national policies and strategies, and HIE is working closely with partners, including local authorities, to explore place-based delivery and thematic opportunities. Across the region, HIE is focusing on things that matter to local authorities, including housing, childcare, and transport, and seeking to enhance the regional voice. Participation in the Convention of the Highlands and Islands also helps to strengthen alignment with SG, as well as responding to consultations and feeding in key priorities.

Garry Legg noted SOSE is relatively new in comparison to the other agencies after launching in 2020. The South of Scotland region is mainly comprised of small and micro businesses, particularly in key sectors such as agriculture and fishing, and a very dispersed population. Developing a strong regional economic strategy was the initial focus to ensure all partners have common aims and clarity around contribution. Skills, housing, and transport are the three big issues impacting on the regional economy and focus is on addressing these. There are six key priorities: supporting the transition to net zero and building resilience; fair work and equality; empowering enterprising communities; attracting ambitious investment; entrepreneurial talent; and advancing innovation and improving productivity. It was highlighted that innovation in a rural context can look quite different to other areas, and there is a need for consistency in enhancing and promoting inward investment opportunities and maximising collective strengths.

Rhona Allison gave an overview of SE's work and highlighted that 35% is at the national level, incorporating SDI, with focus on building strong partnerships. Priorities are around investment, innovation, and internationalisation, with focus on where there is crossover and potential for businesses to innovate and scale up to transform the economy. Three new missions have been developed to drive the priorities within the context of financial constraints. These are: recognising the importance of energy transition; scaling the

impacts of innovation and encouraging growing businesses to stay in Scotland; and driving capital investment to deliver step change in productivity. There is a need to ensure Scotland is on the map for energy companies as a critical location, and to ensure supply chains are strengthened to support growth in this sector. This includes supporting businesses to diversify and recognise opportunities for energy transition. Focus is also on creating an environment to attract investment to Scotland and this will require areas to work together to create propositions that are attractive to investors. This is being driven through BSP, but this work needs to be accelerated to drive efficiencies and cohesion in the business support offer across Scotland.

IB noted the rurality issue, and that the scale of offers might not be as big as in other areas but are still hugely important. GL noted that this was why SOSE was created to reflect the needs of rural areas with different economies, that need a different response. There is recognition of place and the need to do things differently in different areas. Rural areas have huge potential to attract inward investment around energy transition that will have positive impacts across Scotland as a whole.

RC noted the focus on place that SOSE and HIE have, and the wider remit SE has with its missions. There is a need for local authorities to highlight regional disparities and make the case for different approaches. Regional growth deals are aligned to national priorities and are good examples of joint working, but there needs to be a review of whether the landscape now is more joined up than ten years ago from business perspective. The landscape is still very crowded, and the employability pipeline could be used as a template to build a more seamless business support landscape.

MJ highlighted that the agencies are disciplined in how they approach partners to work together, and a lot of the clutter comes from SG in the form of various policies, funding streams, etc. GL noted how policies in England differ from Scotland, requiring cross-border engagement when looking at wider economic regions. Differences in policy can mean opportunities in English authorities are more attractive to businesses, and there is a need to convince them to stay in Scotland. More emphasis should be put on looking south of the border for opportunities to learn and develop relationships.

It is challenging to engage with SG in relation to the clutter as officers are continually moving around. More consideration should be given to capital investment and ownership of depleted industrial stock across Scotland. Consultancy and mapping are needed to identify owners, with a capital injection to get people into local authority employment land, and digital connectivity to allow manufacturing to relocate. It was agreed that one solution will not fix this, and partners need to be up for having conversations around what can be pulled together to attract investment. BSP has made great progress, but SG hasn't cracked coordination and needs to engage with delivery partners and strengthen the collective voice. There is a drive to develop a forum through which all proposals are taken to ensure nothing new is introduced without being considered by this.

RC highlighted that Renfrewshire has adopted the approach used by employability, with all partners around the table and commissioning collectively, and good information sharing. It was noted that the SOSE strategy and approach is positive and aligns closely with Renfrewshire's own Economic Development Plan. It was queried whether SE funds are used to develop smaller projects with local authorities to support local priorities. RA confirmed that SE is looking to attract money into Scotland from the private sector to do more of this, and it is important for partners to develop more strategic business cases and focus on retaining big companies in Scotland.

AM queried the best ways for the Tourism Group to engage with the enterprise agencies collectively and noted that if tourism is not explicitly mentioned in strategies, it can drop off the radar. MJ confirmed that tourism makes up a key part of the economy in the highlands and islands and HIE is supporting tourism businesses to achieve mutual objectives. RA noted that tourism is not an area of focus for SE moving forward, with collective engagement with VisitScotland but less with individual tourism companies. GL confirmed SOSE views tourism as fundamentally important to the south of Scotland economy and has an in-house tourism lead which is working well.

IB confirmed there are opportunities for continuous improvement and the Executive needs to have a further discussion around what some of the solutions are. Members agreed it would be useful to have ongoing discussions with the enterprise agencies. Developing a collaborative and collective voice in engaging with SG is key to removing clutter. This will be added to the agenda for the next meeting and HB will share the presentations with Executive members.

HB
HB

4. Visitor Levy Update

AM noted guidance has not yet been published and it's now looking like this will be in October. The Digital Office has produced a paper around creating a Visitor Levy forum, but it was highlighted that there needs to be clarity around terminology as the legislation suggests each local authority needs to set up a forum. To date, representation has been from COSLA and the finance side of local authorities, rather than the business side. Focus has been very internalised and there hasn't been engagement with VisitScotland yet.

It was agreed that the early adopter's group should lead the forum to avoid duplication of existing work. City of Edinburgh Council formally published a board paper that estimates £50m will be raised through a 5% levy. This is significantly different to the SG estimate, highlighting a challenge around data accuracy. Most local authorities are waiting until the guidance has been published before making decisions, as running the scheme and collecting the levy is a complex process. University of Edinburgh carried out some analysis on this for City of Edinburgh Council and it is hoped this can be shared with other local authorities.

AM confirmed that someone from the Tourism Group will attend the Cruise Ship Levy consultation session on behalf of SLAED at the start of October.

AM

5. People Group Update

SG launched the Employability Strategic Plan in partnership with local authorities. This has been long awaited and, although the content is not new, is well written and useful. This is a 15-point plan with short, medium, and long-term objectives. The People Group is identifying what the most critical elements are, what is new, and what the timelines are.

SG is going through a governance review under the NSET refresh which identified some groups that don't report anywhere. The Employability Steering Group has had one meeting under the new structure and is much improved with broader representation.

Local authorities are going through another LEP maturity self-assessment which is being piloted in West Lothian and led by Susie Donkin at Improvement Service. This will provide assurance to wider partners that LEPs are working well, and plans are in place to address any issues. Some LEPs are more advanced than others, with some mainly for information sharing, and others focused on decision-making.

6. Business Group Update

AC noted the Pathways Pre-start 2 fund has been hugely oversubscribed, so the funding announcement has been delayed. Despite this, funding needs to be spent by March 2025.

Only two local authorities committed to further contributions to the BSP Master Customer Record, but AC continues to receive updates, and this is moving into a very technical stage. SE will cover additional financial risk in the absence of more local authority contributions and is looking for the SG Digital Directorate to take on the technical burden and some aspects of governance.

7. AOB

Members agreed communications are needed to ensure stakeholders know that SLAED is not a funding body and cannot take requests for collective local authority funding. SLAED funds are focused on enhancing collaboration through member events and workshops.

Actions

#	Action	Lead
1.	Circulate updated EDAS schedule of events	Hannah Brown
2.	Include further discussion on enterprise agency engagement on agenda for next meeting	Hannah Brown
3.	Share enterprise agency presentations with Exec members	Hannah Brown
4.	Confirm a member of the Tourism Group to attend Cruise Ship Levy consultation	Andrew McKean