

## SLAED EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE CALL

Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024

### 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  
Kenny Lean, South Lanarkshire Council  
Diane Milne, Dundee City Council  
Robert Nicol, COSLA  
Calum Lindsay, COSLA  
Hugh Lightbody, COSLA  
Hannah Brown, Improvement Service  
Miriam McKenna, Improvement Service

### Apologies

Ruth Cooper, Renfrewshire Council

### Action

#### 1. Welcome and Introductions

IB welcomed members to the meeting and noted an upcoming discussion with Aidan Grisewood, Director of Jobs and Wellbeing Economy at Scottish Government, to discuss his response to the letter sent by SLAED in December in relation to concerns around Fair Work First. She noted that RC may wish to join this meeting due to the relevance to her role.

#### 2. Minute of Previous Meeting

AM confirmed that he will invite Ian at ONS to a future meeting of the Tourism Group. HB will circulate comments received to date from ONS on the data asks discussed at the previous meeting.

AM

HB

No volunteers have come forward in relation to the invitation from SDS for SLAED to be involved in a benchmarking exercise. HB will follow up with David Boyle and the Performance Group.

HB

PS gave an update on ongoing discussions with Scotland House re the potential for a collective SLAED membership. This requires further discussion with the Business Group to determine whether it would be beneficial to Scottish local authorities.

IB, RN and CL fed into discussion with SG around Scottish guidance for the Towns Fund, but this was last minute and there has been no follow-up. Councils have requested better and more timely engagement from SG in advance of future funding discussions.

IB had initial discussions with EDAS who are supportive of a joint event in 2024 and further discussion is needed around what the focus and format would be. The EDAS Board will discuss this further and come back to IB with suggestions.

### **3. AGM Preparation**

IB requested updates from the Chair of each group for the Chair's Report, summarising each subgroup's activities and achievements throughout 2023. All members should send these to IB by Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> January.

**ALL**

Gregor Irwin will present at the AGM and the key message for SLAED to get across will be the need for local government to align with NSET and other national strategies, and the difficulties experienced by councils in ensuring complementarity with these without regular direction from SG. This is an opportunity to lobby SG and discuss what national policies and strategies mean at the local level, ensuring local government is engaged in national policy making.

It was agreed that the Executive needs to make key points in a positive and productive manner, including the request for councils to be engaged in key discussions from the outset, rather than being brought in at the last minute. Economic development should be seen as an important preventative spend area and there is a need to ensure the service is adequately funded and protected in a time of ongoing cuts.

Members should be reminded of the critical importance of SLAED in representing the collective officers voice for economic development across Scotland, as well as demonstrating the deliverables from this non-statutory service area. There is a need for greater recognition of the role of SLAED in providing a mechanism for officers to be at the table for key discussions nationally.

It was agreed that David Boyle will be put forward as Interim Chair of the Performance Group at the AGM to allow time for the group to meet and agree Chair arrangements following the departure of Gary Hughes.

The finance update is short as there has been very little spend this financial year due to most meetings taking place online. However, a key focus for the year ahead will be doing more events in partnership with other agencies.

### **4. SE New Missions**

HB circulated the update email to all SLAED members on behalf of PS, who highlighted that there was no awareness that these were being published. SE suggested that changes had been trailed at BSP, but this was not the case, and changes are minimal. AC noted a pre-meet about this in December, where SE said they would review the strategic approach in the new year, but no further details were provided.

The key issue is engagement was encouraged but did not happen, and there is no evidence of a change in mindset and culture around engagement, despite time and

resources invested in BSP. It was highlighted that HIE published a new strategy last year and ran a range of consultation events, but SE are not replicating this approach.

There is no detail around what the missions mean at the local level or the implications for other partners, including local authorities. There are also questions around the role of SG which can be discussed further at the AGM.

#### **5. Scottish Government Budget Announcements**

It is thought that UKSPF and Levelling-up will be safe until 2025, but there is concern around what funding will be available after this, demonstrating a need for succession planning. Councils are still waiting for employability offer letters after requesting these in September 2023, but it looks like these will be delayed, causing challenges around planning programmes. Councils need to trust that funding will follow before taking programmes forward, and the delays in funding result in very short windows in which to deliver these.

RN noted that COSLA has established positions on where UKSPF and LUF should go in future which incorporate SLAED's previous inputs on these topics and therefore represent a similar viewpoint. Any updates received will be shared with the SLAED Executive. It was agreed that there is a need to consider options and potential scenarios if funding is changed or removed.

DM noted a recent conversation with the Scotland Office where it was suggested that there might be an interim year of UKSPF for 2025/26 to ensure continuity. Some councils have been following up and pushing for this with the Scotland Office. It was suggested there is a role for SLAED in highlighting that it is becoming operationally crucial for councils to understand what funding is coming and how it will impact employment, procurement etc. Timescales for spending funding once it has been confirmed are too short which impacts on project delivery and it is likely that SLAED will need to write an official position on this.

PS noted that the future of BLS is not clear after it was not awarded any contracts with the British Business Bank who deemed it was not of benefit to have a Scotland-wide fund. There is now a need to look at a potential exit strategy or transition to a different type of fund. However, plans need to be in place for continuity of existing loans over the next five years.

#### **6. Economic Outcomes/NSET Contribution to Tackling Child Poverty**

MM noted that SG will be looking at the role of economic outcomes and NSET in tackling Child Poverty at the next Board meeting in February. It would be useful to get an officer view on this beyond just the impact of parental employability, and MM will also engage with COSLA and SOLACE on this.

It was noted that NSET is very broad, and it can be difficult to identify how it delivers on tackling child poverty specifically. Economic development officers feed into Local Child Poverty Action Plans, but mostly on the employability side. Argyll & Bute Council delivers

parental budgeting courses and supports in-work training. There are also lots of indirect linkages at the socio-economic level that will have economic outcomes when people get into jobs.

Hanna McCulloch, National Coordinator for Local Action on Child Poverty at Improvement Service has requested to meet with the Business Group and AC will follow up on this. Although a lot of the interventions come from the employability side, there are also programmes such as Fair Start Scotland and employment incentives for businesses, fair work placements etc.

**AC**

**7. AOB**

A meeting of the Funding Group will be held on 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb and the agenda is broad to ensure focus is wider than just UKSPF. DM noted the intention to widen the remit to include other funding sources, relationships, influencing policy etc. There have been several queries in relation to legacy schemes for subsidy control and it will be useful to look at how people are reporting on these. DM listed councils that currently do not have a representative on the Funding Group and AC will ask Business Group members to assist in identifying who the reps should be.

**AC**

AM noted the Housing Team at SG has requested a discussion around Short Term Lets and all members were invited to let AM know of any key points they would like to feed into this discussion. It was noted there are some challenges around guidance being interpreted differently, as well as differences in cost. CL noted that COSLA's Community Wellbeing Team is leading on this, and it is an opportunity to make changes to primary legislation. He will share the relevant contact details.

**ALL**

**CL**

**Actions**

#	Action	Lead
1.	Invite Ian at ONS to a future meeting of the Tourism Group.	AM
2.	Circulate comments received from ONS on previous data asks	HB
3.	Follow up with Performance Group on SDS Benchmarking invite	HB
4.	Send group updates to IB for AGM Chair's Report by 18 <sup>th</sup> January	ALL
5.	Follow up on child poverty meeting request from Hanna McCulloch at Improvement Service	AC
6.	Ask Business Group members to identify colleagues to fill gaps in Funding Group membership	AC
7.	Let AM know of any points to feed into discussion with SG around Short Term Lets	ALL
8.	Share contact details for COSLA's Community Wellbeing Team	CL