

HIE/Business Gateway Meeting

Council Chamber, Council Offices, Dingwall

6th May 2009

<p>PRESENT:</p> <p>Councillor Peter Cairns</p> <p>Councillor David Chisholm</p> <p>Councillor Angela MacLean</p> <p>Liz Cowie</p> <p>Robbie Bain</p> <p>Diane Agnew</p> <p>Archie McCreevy</p> <p>Kenny Macinnes</p> <p>Kenny MacKay</p> <p>IN ATTENDANCE</p>	<p>PC</p> <p>DC</p> <p>AM</p> <p>LC</p> <p>RB</p> <p>DA</p> <p>AMcC</p> <p>KM</p> <p>KMcK</p>	<p>SERVICE/ORGANISATION</p> <p>The Highland Council</p> <p>The Highland Council</p> <p>The Highland Council</p> <p>Ward Manager, The Highland Council</p> <p>Ward Manager, The Highland Council</p> <p>Ward Manager, The Highland Council</p> <p>HIE</p> <p>Planning & Development, The Highland Council</p> <p>Business Gateway</p>
<p>Distribution: All those listed above.</p>		

<u>Item</u>	<u>Discussion</u>
1	<p>HIE/Business Gateway/Economic Development</p> <p>Cllr. David Chisholm chaired the meeting and began by asking Archie MacCreevy to give an overview of HIE operations. DC also posed questions on Dingwall Business Park status and it being determined for white collar industry only; what the current position is with regard to Muir of Ord Industrial Estate expansion and how HIE is moving forward in the current economic climate.</p> <p>Archie McCreevy, HIE, advised that the direction for the agency had significantly changed and that this had been determined by the Scottish Government. HIE were now moving to a process of "account management" whereby longer term account relationships would be developed between businesses with significant growth potential and HIE. HIE would only provide support to businesses trading and exporting outwith Highland. If business is not trading outwith Highland, this would fall within the remit of Business Gateway. HIE's focus is on building up account managed lists and approaching known large businesses for sign up to be account managed. Scottish Government has made it clear that Highland has been lagging behind the rest of the country in looking outward in terms of business development and expansion. AMcC clarified that there was also pressure on development agencies across Scotland to focus on this broader expansion. Local businesses serving local markets will be the focus of Business Gateway. What HIE had been providing in terms of support to local</p>

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Action	<p>business and social enterprise has now gone through Government directives. Previously 70% to 80% of support went into small local businesses.</p> <p>DC - question on Dingwall Business Park. Have had it reported that blue collar industry is not being encouraged. AMcC responded that phase 1 was developed by Ross & Cromarty District Council purposely for “cleaner” businesses. Phase 2 was developed as a business park with a “clean” emphasis. “Export” businesses including call centre operations were encouraged. In the last few months a number of businesses have approached HIE, including a local tractor firm. These have been deemed to be unsuitable. The fish processing business is essentially landlocked. Planning has been refused for expansion of the fish factory. The only expansion would be back through the bund. AMcC advised that the Local Plan has no engineering type industry zoned so the town is left with a business park and no industrial estate provision. It is difficult in Dingwall to find ground to fulfil the needs of “industrial land use”. There are currently no plans to extend the business park. The Peffery extension scheme is a factor. Adjacent owner believes that the site will be zoned eventually for housing. This constraint it makes future expansion of the Dingwall Business Park very unlikely. PC asked if there was a danger of non white-collar, smaller-scale business affecting larger business investment. AMcC responded that process operations can sit beside office facilities but there are issues with heavy transport servicing process operations. Parking is always a key factor. Companies are required to be able to drive heavy goods vehicles into and out of, any Business Park unit in forward gear. Configurations of the site constrain this at present. What could be considered is creation of a road through the tree belt and reconfiguration of the site to allow a turning head or entrance/exit. Beyond the expansion of the fish factory there is no expansion for industry on site.</p> <p>DC highlighted the issues affecting the Muir of Ord Industrial Estate and SGL, and the recent planning issue concerning HIE. SGL now have nowhere to go in terms of land expansion. Muir of Ord is hamstrung in terms of expansion due to the difficulty in finding land. DC posed the question of how to progress this issue and asked those present what Members could do to help and support. AMcC advised that the closest areas for industrial land are Evanton followed by Alness Point and then Invergordon and beyond out to the Nigg yard. DC advised that Members do not know what proposals are in the short or long term and need to be kept apprised of this. Action Point: Kenny MacInnes (KM) stated that he would highlight issues raised to the local plans team. However he had spoken to staff before coming to the meeting and they were well aware of the constraints and problems. DC asked if landowners should be approached again. KM acknowledged that in terms of economic development there are huge frustrations. Nigg could be viewed as one of the last large industrial areas in the area if not the Highlands. Most of the land identified in the February 2007 Local Plan was now built on. DC advised that the Local Plan was out of date almost before it was passed. There is no industrial land growth but more and more houses (and affordable housing) are being built. There is an available workforce, but no planning around job provision for local communities. DC stated that he felt the area was basically “capped” in terms of business growth. AMcC advised there are areas identified within the Ward but these could be viewed as gap sites presenting their own problems. Evanton has development potential. The site behind Mackay’s Garage can be developed but there are major issues with electricity relocation. Land at Teaninich and Alness Point is zoned as brown field, has planning and is ‘ready to go’. Easter Ross is within “travel to” distance for the Ward 9 communities. Invergordon has land linked to the Port which makes it advantageous. There are definitely and clearly problems to overcome in terms of zoning. Zoning housing up close to industrial sites is not desirable.</p> <p>DC referred to the footpath linking Dingwall Business Park to Dochcarty Road. A request had come from the Area Roads and Community Works Manager for HIE to ask to have this adopted. AMcC advised that this was not HIE land and that the site was developed by Ross and Cromarty District Council around 1983. Question mark over who owns. This to be established and progressed from there. Housing and Property</p>

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Action	<p>contact is Ian Hunter. Action Point. LC to Action.</p> <p>Re Business Gateway, KMcK advised that it is an advice and information service, but can direct individuals to sources of funding and support. There is a linked relationship between Business Gateway and HIE and a protocol has been developed. What did not come to Business Gateway was finance. Highland Opportunity (who manages Business Gateway) has applied for ERDF Business Growth Funding. Two year no interest loans should be available. Up to £20K for start-up. Hopefully this will plug the gap. Robbie Bain, Ward Manager, asked how long this arrangement will last for. KM advised until funds run out. PC asked if the fund would be topped up through repaid loans. KM advised that this should happen. Highland Opportunity also has funds available and this would be part of information given by Business Gateway to new enquirers. AMcC referred to funds being available from banks in the past. However latterly have been looking at providing loans again due to ongoing issues with bank lending. There had been more of a focus on grants as opposed to loans in recent times.</p> <p>Councillor Angela MacLean (AM) asked if the companies referred to in the Account Management Scheme were companies who export only abroad. AMcC clarified that "export" referred generically to 'outwith' the Highland area. PC asked about large scale construction and raised concerns about the displacement effect. He said that he would not like to see one business in another area of Scotland being put out of business due to a push from Highland. The assumption is that grants are now unlikely to be under 25K. Previously a high proportion of grants were in the region of 15-20K in start-up and support.</p> <p>AMcC then outlined the function of the new HIE office in Dingwall. In response to a question from AM, AMcC said that the benefits that would be brought to the town are through HIE being based in the local area. This would have the usual impact on local trade. HIE's aim was to actively relocate staff around Highland and reduce the huge presence in Inverness. Essentially decentralisation. Example given of the large administrative presence in Benbecula and the office base in Kyle. Earl Thorfinn House is a direct satellite of Cowan House in Inverness. The second office proposed for Dingwall at Drumchatt View is for the Inner Moray Firth Team (Invergordon, Aviemore and Inverness offices will relocate). The relocation is aimed to take place in June or July. This will bring 30+ staff to Dingwall. This will be public caller office. Benefits for HIE are having the team under one roof. The Invergordon office will be made available for 'incubator' use. Skill Development Scotland will remain. HIE may sell off some office space.</p> <p>DC then raised the issue of community enterprise and benefits. He enquired what support there was for social enterprise and was there a budget for this. KM said that Business Gateway would be the first point of contact to provide support and advice. DC felt that there was a problem with branding in that it would not be obvious to the Social Enterprise sector to approach Business Gateway. There was also an issue of how communities access support. AMcC advised that HIE offer advice and support for this in partnership with Business Gateway. In response a question from AM, AMcC advised that HIE used to be involved in High Street type projects but not now. He did state that they can get involved to a limited extent in projects such as cycle paths etc. HIE does have a social remit but it is not clear yet how budgets will be allocated. PC asked if Business Gateway would filter any enquiries that came in and AMcC responded that this was the intention. The Business Gateway Development Officer would have this remit. Business Gateway is a national service with a nationally branded website and generic contact number. AMcC advised that the target was to have 30 account managed businesses signed up this year. There was also a target for 5 social enterprise businesses to be signed up and initially this would target large scale enterprises such as ILM Highland, Spa Pavilion and the Childhood Museum in Strathpeffer. Certain size not-for-profit businesses would be considered.</p>

<u>Item</u>	<u>Discussion</u>
<p data-bbox="108 786 204 819">Action</p> <p data-bbox="108 853 204 887">Action</p> <p data-bbox="108 1379 204 1413">Action</p>	<p data-bbox="268 197 1422 969">PC asked where tourism fitted. AMcC advised that it would depend on scale but again would refer to Business Gateway to filter from there, It was clarified that Business Gateway would filter out to other advice and support agencies if necessary. DC then referred to village halls and larger halls with employment opportunities. Where would the line be drawn and where would Business Gateway/HIE get involved in terms of providing advice. KM advised that Business Gateway would be involved right from the start. AMcC clarified categorically that HIE and Business Gateway would not step in to pick up revenue costs. Example given of Seaboard Hall that, due to closures of local hotels was now running a small commercial business for weddings and functions. There was support provided for this for the commercial development planning aspect so there was scope to provide support for village halls and community hall type enterprises. RB asked if the target was additive. AMcC said that the target of 40 'sign ups' for next year was in addition to the 30 targeted for this year. Equally with social enterprise the target for next year was 6 which would add to the current 5. AM asked how the whole process had been marketed. KM advised that there had been a 'soft launch' on the 1st of April. There had been a few hiccups with budgets but things were settling down. Marketing budgets would improve the marketing aspect. There was involvement with Service Points and a walk-in office in Castle Street in Inverness. AM asked if Business Gateway information should be put in with business rates information. Action Point. KM thought that this was a good idea and would follow this up. Action Point. RB said that more information and training needed was need for Service Points. KM to pick this up. There were concerns about the branding used being closely aligned to Scottish Enterprise.</p> <p data-bbox="268 992 1422 1527">AM then raised ideas around Dingwall and local branding, internet shopping, local deliveries and local marketing. How could this be taken forward? Advice was for the new Business Association to contact Business Gateway. AMcC did caution that a Dingwall brand would not be big enough. There were niche areas that did work but in general terms to achieve growth of 20% over three years was a significant target. Growth had to be by profitability. RB asked if local contact points could still be used. KM advised that Business Gateway is the 'front door' but that if individuals have established local contacts these could still be used. Question was asked on the "suite" of advice points that could be offered e.g. Highland Opportunity, Community Land Unit, HIE, Highland Council Economic Development. It was agreed to clarify who could be contacted to give business, community and social enterprise advice and information. KM emphasised that Business Gateway was to be seen as a one-to-one service and this should be a big improvement. Action Point. He also advised that he would take forward the development planning issues raised by Councillor Chisholm and would pass these to colleagues in Planning in Inverness. Councillor Chisholm closed this section of the meeting by thanking all for attending.</p>