

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL
PLANNING, ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE
21 JANUARY 2009

Agenda Item	
Report No	

HIGHLAND ECONOMIC FORUM

Report by Director of Planning and Development

SUMMARY:

This report introduces the recently established Highland Economic Forum, sets out its role and identifies which organisations are represented on it. It is proposed that the Planning and Development Service should lead for the Council on the Forum and that it is chaired initially by the Chairman of the Council's Planning, Environment and Development Committee. The first meeting will take place on Tuesday, 27 January 2009.

Committee is invited to:

- (a) Recommend that the Planning and Development Service act as lead for the Council on the Highland Economic Forum and;
- (b) Propose to the Forum that, subject to its approval, it be chaired initially by the Chairman of the Planning, Environment and Development Committee.

1. Background

- 1.1 A number of recent changes to the way in which services to business in the Highlands are in the process of being introduced. The removal of the Local Enterprise Company Network and the discontinuation of Local Economic Forums, coupled with the establishment of the Business Gateway Service in the Highlands transferring responsibility for the delivery of business information and advice from HIE to the Council, have meant that both organisations have had to re-examine how they engage with the business community. The Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise have therefore decided to set up a new Highland Economic Forum.
- 1.2 The Concordat that the Council has entered into with the Scottish Government also means that the Council and HIE have entered into an agreement to deliver a number of Single Outcome Agreements (SOA) related to the growing of the economy of the Highlands. These local outcomes are:
 - Growing more local businesses including Social Enterprises
 - Increasing the productivity in businesses with growth potential in key sectors
 - Balanced population growth across the Highlands
 - Ensuring high levels of economic activity are sustained
 - Median earnings are increased
 - More balanced economic growth across the Highlands

- Increase the proportion of school leavers in positive and sustained destinations
- Increase the number of young people in training and apprenticeships
- More people able to access opportunities for learning and employment in their communities
- Improved workforce development and workforce planning
- Research and development supported to deliver business growth in the Highlands

2. Current Situation

2.1 In order to successfully implement the Single Outcome Agreements, the delivery of the Government's Economic Strategy and to establish the Business Gateway in the Highlands, the Council and HIE require to demonstrate that they have fully consulted with Highland Businesses and with other Public Bodies. The Highland Economic Forum will form part of the Community Planning Partnership and will have a specific remit to:

- Advise the partnership on economic development priorities and confirm the local economic outcomes to pursue
- Agree the performance framework for measuring progress against these outcomes
- Agree the joint actions to be taken
- Report on progress and performance to the Community Planning Partnership Performance Board

2.2 It is expected that the Highland Economic Forum will meet two or three times each year with the inaugural meeting scheduled for 27 January 2009. A wide range of organisations have been invited and these are listed below:

Inverness Chamber of Commerce	Cairngorm Chamber of Commerce
Caithness Chamber of Commerce	Fort William & District Chamber of Commerce
North Scotland Industries Group	HITRANS
North Highland College	Inverness College
Lochaber College	UHI
Federation of Small Businesses	Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd
Highland Opportunity Limited	VisitScotland
HISEZ	North Highland Regeneration Fund
CBI Scotland	Institute of Directors
Scottish Council for Development and Industry	Scottish Natural Heritage
Skills Development Scotland	JobCentrePlus
Scottish Trades Union Congress	Cairngorm National Park Authority

2.3 The initial agenda for the first meeting of the Forum will consist of a welcome from the Chairman of the Planning Environment and Development Committee Councillor Iain Ross followed by presentations on the Highland Single Outcome Agreement, and progress with the development of the Business Gateway in the Highlands. It is also envisaged that there will be a discussion on the current economic situation and its impact upon the Highland economy.

- 2.4 The closure of the Local Enterprise Companies, together with the ending of the Local Economic Forums, means that there are fewer opportunities for the Public and Private sector representative bodies to meet together to discuss business related issues. The establishment of the Highland Economic Forum is specifically designed to address this deficiency, coming as it does at a time of economic change/upheaval. The introduction of the Business Gateway in April 2009 offers the opportunity for the Highland Business Community to work closely with the Council to ensure that the new service addresses the needs of the business community. Furthermore, the successful delivery of the SOA will only be possible with active participation of the business community, indeed cooperation between public and private sectors is a central theme within the Council's SOA document. The current economic downturn also presents the public sector with the challenge of how best to assist the Highland business community deal with the many challenges facing it. The Forum provides us with a valuable source of practical advice on how the private sector in the Highlands wishes the Council and its partners to proceed.
- 2.5 It is proposed that the Planning and Development Service lead for the Highland Council on the Economic Forum. However it is recognised that other Services of the Council will have an interest in the Forum and are likely to become involved as it progresses. The Forum also therefore supports cross service working.

3 Council Programme

- 3.1 The establishment of the Highland Economic Forum aligns with some of the key priorities for the Council Administration and these are listed below:
- *Work with the Scottish Government, the business community, Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and the third sector to promote business growth, including more local businesses and social enterprises through the establishment of Business Gateway by 2009 and other Council support.*
 - *Work with the Scottish Government, HIE and the private sector to promote national key sectors namely energy, food and drink, life sciences, financial services, tourism and creative industries through engagement in strategy development and a range of initiatives.*
 - *Develop Highland tourism - our most significant industry - in partnership with the business sector, VisitScotland, EventScotland and HIE. We will focus on opportunities such as Gaelic, green tourism, events and activities. We will improve the Council's own services for visitors.*
 - *Work with HIE, Scottish Development International and statutory infrastructure providers to make the Highlands one of the most attractive places to do business in Scotland.*
 - *Work with the Scottish Government, HIE and the private sector to support the provision and use of high speed broadband services for our businesses and communities.*
 - *Recognise the world class skills of the workforce at Dounreay and work in partnership with HIE, the Nuclear Decommissioning Agency and the Scottish and UK Governments to safeguard and enhance the social and economic environments of Caithness and North Sutherland during the Dounreay decommissioning.*

- *Work with the Scottish and UK Governments and partners to prevent and reduce poverty by supporting more people into sustained employment.*
- *Work with employers, further education colleges and other partners to increase the training and apprenticeship opportunities across the Highlands, with a 33% increase in the number employed by the Council by 2010-11 (a rise to 200).*
- *Work with the University of the Highlands and Islands and HIE to support the award of full university title to include research degree awarding powers and ensure the development of its academic research capability as the basis of economic development. We will support the development of a new, high quality Inverness campus as an essential part of the UHI network.*

5. RECOMMENDATION

That Committee:

- (a) Recommend that the Planning and Development Service act as lead for the Council on the Highland Economic Forum and;
- (b) Propose to the Forum that, subject to its approval, it be chaired initially by the Chairman of the Planning and Development Service

Signature:

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 12 January 2009

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Background papers: Highland Council Single Outcome Agreement