

HIGHLAND ECONOMIC FORUM

14.00 Monday, 26th May 2014

The Chamber, HQ, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

In attendance: Cllr Thomas Prag (Highland Council)
Stuart Black (Highland Council)
Steve Westbrook (Steve Westbrook Economist)
Kenny Macinnes (Highland Council)
Andrew Taylor (Highland Council)
Gordon Summers (Highland Council)
George Hamilton (Highland Council)
Marie Mackintosh (HOL)
Dorothy Low (Highland Council)
Stephen Carr (Highland Council)
Alistair Nicolson (HIE)
Lesley Cranna (SNH)
Ranald Robertson (HiTrans)
Fraser Grieve (SCDI)
Debbie Gray (NHC)
Diane Rawlinson (Inverness College UHI)
Gray I Campbell (UHI)
Murray Ferguson (CNPA)
Martin Johnson (HIE)
David Richardson (FSB)

Apologies: Alan Rankin (Visit Cairngorms)
Marina Jordan
Seonag Campbell (SDS)
Stephen Boyd (STUC)
Trudy Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce)
Ashley Gould (Highland Council)
Robert Muir (HIE)
Pauline Dingwall (P2Partners)
Derek Cairns (SDS)
Mhairi Wylie (HTSP Interface)
Kate Maclean (NHS)

NOTE OF MEETING

1. Note of Last Meeting

Agreed

Item 3 - Tourism skills academy

Gary I Campbell requested it be noted that the tourism skills academy was an idea which had been discussed rather than an approved project.

2. HIE Operating Plan (Alistair Nicolson)

Alistair Nicolson (Head of Planning & Partnerships, HIE) provided an update on the HIE Operating Plan (presentation attached). The economic background and the business base they are currently working with was explained, as were the HIE vision and priorities. AN provided insight of the main focus of 2014, explaining that they are focussing on the capacity of communities to take on assets in vulnerable areas to ensure the best use is made of them. The sectoral approach will continue in the same manner as previous years, focussing again on more fragile areas and drawing on the use of high-speed broadband as it is rolled out across the Highlands. An update on the high-speed broadband roll-out was given.

AN illustrated other large projects throughout the highlands, elaborating on clusters along A96, and the UHI campus project. Regionally significant investments were mentioned – with further discussion on this following the presentation.

Areas being targeted to increase wages, bringing them up to national levels were discussed, as well as schemes designed to increase employment in peripheral areas. Working with UHI and other colleges/universities to bring graduates into the area was discussed. It was noted that whilst jobs are being created through the measures discussed the main challenge is to ensure that this is maintained.

The effect cost of living has on people moving to the area was discussed, it was agreed that this is a major challenge of growth. SB advised that a report had been to the last PDI committee regarding affordable housing within the area, the issue of short term holiday lets and general land availability was discussed.

3. Highland Economic Forum Update (Steve Westbrook/Andrew Taylor)

SW provided an update on economic issues within the highland area (presentation attached), followed by an introduction to the Enterprising Highland website by AT.

The outward facing pages of the website were reviewed. Attendees were requested to review the website www.enterprisinghighland.com SW advised that he would contact the forum prior to the site going live with a request for feedback. The possibility of including an interactive map to assist people from outside the area was discussed.

Internal usage side – AT demonstrated the inward facing pages, and advised that these would be password protected.

4. EU programme (Gordon Summers)

GS gave a presentation on EU Structural Investment Funds. He advised that the financial allocations discussed on his presentation are not included in handouts as they have not been confirmed. GS informed the meeting of the purpose of the H&I Committee but advised that how this will relate to other committees is not currently known. Further information on this should be available soon. GS confirmed that the committee will be decision making, and following discussion it was agreed that the forum should have a representative on the committee. GS to forward this request to the Scottish Government.

Next steps: GS advised that a working group is currently being set up which will have an input into the UK partnership (England/Scotland/NI), further information on how this will work within the structure will be provided soon. SB reported that he will sit on the Joint PMC, and stressed the need to spend any money received for the region to avoid the risk of losing it. SB agreed to report back when the programme starts to develop, and advised that he is currently talking to SNH and TransportScotland on projects.

5. Carbon Clever (Stephen Carr)

Stephen Carr gave a Carbon Clever presentation (attached) which built on the report circulated with the agenda. He provided a background to Carbon Clever, outlining the 5 strategic themes Launched in November 2013. Following the presentation discussion was had regarding small business investment and possible assistance available. SB requested any feedback be forwarded to Stephen at stephen.carr@highland.gov.uk.

6. Business Gateway Plus (Marie Mackintosh)

MM distributed an information sheet on Business Gateway Plus (attached) and provided an update on Business Gateway Plus. She provided some background to Business Gateway Plus – an £80k fund, to cover a 15 month programme, providing a range of support to over 60 businesses. To date over 65 have been received assistance, 25 of which have required intensive support. They are currently developing e-books and other online materials to act as legacy information when the programme finishes.

7. SCA update (Stuart Black)

SB provided an update on the SCA – and circulated the Inverness City Investment Plan which had been produced by the information gained at the workshop held during the November Highland Economic Forum. SB advised that a city-region approach had been used, the plan looks at the city centre, UHI Campus, Muirton

Basin, Airport Business Park which is potentially £100s millions of investment, this information will be given to potential investors at events such as MIPIM and All Energy, with view to gaining additional investment for these projects.

8. AOB

Student Accommodation

SW raised the issue of student accommodation. DR advised that UHI have gone out to tender on this and an announcement is due at the end of May.