Agenda	4.
Item	
Report	COG
No	03/18

Chief Officers' Group – 26 April 2018

National Strengthening Communities Conference - 21/22 September 2017 - Aviemore

Recommendation:

COG are asked to note that the National Strengthening Communities Conference, held 21/22 September in Aviemore, was very well received by those attending.

1. Objectives of the SC Conference and relevant aspects of it to Community Partnerships

The first National Strengthening Communities Conference was conceived and hosted by HIE in partnership with the Scottish Government (Regeneration Team).

The conference was aimed at communities, community development organisations and practitioners alongside intermediaries, enablers and policy makers from across Scotland. It sought to highlight best practice, innovations, and the current and evolving policy and legislative environment, with a focus on maximising impact from an **assets and place based approach**.

Conference organisers aimed for a 60:40 split of community activists to enablers, and achieved around 50:50.

The format of the conference was a mix of informative presentations covering the policy position, best practice and looking to the future, augmented with ample networking opportunities. In addition there was also a 'market place' for exhibiting and inspiring collaboration, innovation and adoption of ideas, all in the pursuit of strengthening communities.

Agenda: http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-conference/presentations.html

Workshops: http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-conference/workshops.html

Speakers: http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-conference/speakers.html

Videos: http://www.hie.co.uk/community-support/community-conference/videos.html

2. Brief synopses of the key workshops (all with relevance to Community Planning)

W1 - Opportunities for all - practising inclusion

Community-led development is inherently inclusive in character, how it is governed, consults and makes decisions. What's less clear is how we recognise how inclusive the economic and social progress made through that effort is. This workshop explored the characteristics of what we might call inclusive growth. What are the KPI's that make sense for organisations?

W2 - Putting the community in community planning partnerships

A chance to hear about progress being made in getting the grass roots community voice more integrated in community planning efforts, and to explore how we can make faster progress in mainstreaming community-led participation in CPPs.

W3 - The importance of skills to Community Development

As well as retaining and developing the skills of local people, community led projects are a vital part of opening up new opportunities for the local workforce. Stephen Sheridan of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is hosted this session to discuss the importance of talent attraction and retention to communities. SDS offered practical advice on topics including the Apprenticeship family, workplace development and succession planning.

W4 - Calling time on vacant and derelict land

Over 12,000 hectares of developable land in Scotland is vacant or derelict, and that doesn't even include land which might be considered abandoned or neglected. Hamish Trench, Chief Executive of the Scottish Land Commission outlined why so much land remains an ongoing blight to our communities. Dave Thomson of Scottish Government's Community Land Team then explain how communities can seek to bring land, coming under all of these various descriptions, back into productive use, through the forthcoming 'Abandoned, neglected and detrimental land' legislation.

W5 - Powering up community energy in new ways

The Scottish Government has been consulting on a new Energy Strategy. It is leaning towards a new joined up power, heat and transport strategy for energy supply framed within a low carbon context. With subsidies being reduced the time is now for communities to plan how best for them to do this with the renewable and low carbon resources they have available. Participant heard from a group that have done just this!

W6 - Enterprising communities – building a long term successful community business

Participants heard from two long standing community led businesses on how to build and sustain a successful business; the importance of diversifying income streams, effective financial management and strong community support.

W7 - Building your community-led housing project

Affordable housing is at the heart of building sustainable communities. Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and 2 successful community housing projects presented on the funding and delivery mechanisms available to communities and top tips for success.

W8 - Ready for investment?

Moving from asking to earning – understanding the potential of social investment for social enterprises and communities. The workshop demonstrated how social investment, in the right circumstances, can liberate and enable organisations to take control of their own futures. By explaining the social investment landscape and the various players within it, using case studies, social enterprises and communities gained insights on how they can access the right money reflecting their development stage and specific needs.

W9 - Getting creative with Heritage

This workshop explored opportunities to incorporate emerging virtual reality and augmented reality digital technology, through a heritage sector example.

GSA in conjunction with Archaeology Scotland give an overview of the emerging technology landscape, and highlighted the most obvious opportunities for communities.

W10 - Engaging your community – make it happen

In the area of simple tools for organising community events to bring people together, exchange ideas and make stronger, more active communities, participants found out what the Leapfrog project is all about, and heard from a community that's tried it.

W6 and **W10** were the highest rated by participants, followed by **W2** (led by Pablo Mascarenhas) and then **W4**. **W7**, **W3** and **W5** were also highly valued. W1, of particular relevance to CPP, discussed the SG's evolving thinking and was perhaps pitched in much in

'policy language' for participants to get the most out of it in the time available for the workshops.

In addition to the above, the conference concluded with 'Huddle sessions' covering **Collaboration between private sector and communities, Entrepreneurialism** and **Youth**. These sought to brainstorm ideas for action to progress these areas. The organisers are completing the correlation of those captured actions, with a view to identifying and making offers on areas they are prepared to lead on, and areas where they would participle in, prior to sharing with stakeholders in case others wanted to pick up and run with ideas identified.

3. Likely themes/topics for future conferences

No theme has yet been finalised for a future conference as that would have to be relevant, useful and attractive to participants at the time, of any such conference. That is likely to be considered over the next few months, as will desirable partners, which are likely to be informed by the theme/topics. However, given the enthusiasm for another conference at some stage there is an initial thought that another conference 18 months from the last, would place that in Spring 2019 and potentially take that out of the busy Autumn Conference period.

4. Highlights form conference feedback

- 51% thought the conference overall was excellent, 35% very good, 9% quite good, 5% poor
- 51% wanted the event to be run again annually, 41% favoured every two years
- The video content, Alex Thomson's MC role from an inquisitive journalistic perspective and the overall format of the event were all highly rated.

The full conference survey complete with hundreds of useful reinforcing and developmental feedback comments can be made available to members of the COG.

Conference Poll results, from asking delegates to describe the conference in one word:



Neil Ross HIE, on behalf of the HIE/Scottish Government organising team 04-12-17