

**The Highland Council**

**City Region Deal Monitoring Group**

Minutes of the meeting of the **City Region Deal Monitoring Group** held **Remotely** on Tuesday, 17 November 2020 at 9.00am.

**Present:**

Mr B Boyd	Mr A Henderson
Mr A Christie	Mr A Jarvie
Mrs M Davidson (Chair)	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Gray	Mr P Siggers

**Officials in attendance:**

Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer, Environment and Infrastructure  
Mr F McGunnigle, Programme Manager, City Region Deal  
Miss M Zavarella, Committee Officer

**Other:**

Ms Claire Munro, Senior Project Manager, Northern Innovation Hub

**Business**

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Ms M Smith, and Mrs M Paterson.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**3. Appointment of Chair**

It was **AGREED**, having been duly proposed and seconded, that Mrs M Davidson be appointed Chairman of the City Region Deal Monitoring Group to replace Mr A Christie.

**4. Northern Innovation Hub Overview**

During a verbal update, the Senior Project Manager provided an overview of the Northern Innovation Hub and highlighted that it was a multifaceted project aimed at businesses across the Highland Council area with the objective to support transformational change in the adoption of innovation. To address the economic challenges of the area core themes consisted of young people, enhanced growth capacity, and sectors in place which focussed on the subsectors of creative industries, life sciences, tourism and food and drink.

During discussion the following points were made:-

- regarding increased wages, it was queried if baseline wages were gathered from across the sectors at the onset of the program and if there would be an evaluation of progress at the conclusion of the program;
- it was promising to see the range and impact of programs delivered;
- concern was expressed regarding the specific criteria required for eligibility as it appeared to limit the opportunity of non-account managed customers to partake;
- an update was sought on the planning for the Food and Drink Tech Hub and if it would be a physical or virtual space;
- the wide scope of programming and focus on digital innovation was commended;
- there appeared to be more focus on cost rather than benefits of the NIH in the public domain and it was suggested that more work be done focussing on the positive outcomes by using case studies and publicizing opportunities for young people doing project work;
- it was queried whether businesses out with the Highlands would be able to access the graduation placement available for the Tech it Out program;
- it was queried whether program outcomes were being evaluated, particularly as it related to retaining talent and young people in the Highlands and emphasized that paymasters would expect this information be available throughout the program;
- it was queried whether there were uncommitted funds still available; and
- it was suggested that a NIH financial overview report be provided through the Programme Manager of the City Region Deal and returned to the Monitoring Group which included the impact of Brexit and climate change.

Officers responded in detail to the points/questions raised, during which it was confirmed that:-

- at the onset of involvement businesses provided basic information such as the amount of full-time positions and turnover rate and at the conclusion of the program an evaluation was conducted that assessed the progress however, there was no baseline information gathered regarding wages;
- it was important that the NIH program was seen to be inclusive to non-account managed companies as this program specifically targeted every SME in the Highland Council area and was the vast makeup of the program;
- the initial intention for the Food and Drink Tech Hub was to create a physical space however, due to various reasons including delays in approval by the UK government the virtual network had been launched initially and the plan for the physical space would be re-evaluated, ensuring that the service was accessible to as many businesses as possible across the Highlands;
- regarding the Tech it Out program, NIH would only support a business in the Highland Council area to offer a placement however, if a business supported by NIH wanted to employ a graduate out with the Highlands it was something that could be considered;
- an independent interim review of the program was currently being undertaken which involved speaking to past participants by survey and

- telephone interviews to gather feedback about how they had progressed through the program; and
- it was confirmed that there was 1.5 million pounds of the City Region Deal of uncommitted funds as a large portion was already dedicated to programming.

## **5. City Region Deal Annual Report – Draft Review**

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager of the City Region Deal sought Member feedback on amendments to the draft Annual Report prior to submitting the final report to the Annual Conversation in December 2020.

Members provided feedback of the draft report at which time the following points were made:-

- it was suggested that financial and performance information be brought back to each meeting moving forward;
- the European sector money was unlikely to be received, and it was suggested that this be removed;
- with reference to paragraph 6, it did not outline that the R100 Scheme had been resolved;
- with reference to paragraph 6, the A9/82 Longman Junction draft orders were published and an update on progress was sought;
- with reference to the A9/A96 Inshes to Smithston, it was queried when and if a public inquiry was likely to be decided upon;
- rewording was required with reference to paragraph 2 of the City Region Deal Overview;
- with reference to the Physical Renewal paragraph on page 7, it would be useful to have additional examples out with Inverness;
- with reference to the graph at paragraph 5 depicting Governance and Accountability the lettering was unclear;
- with reference to the graph depicting Inverness Castle on page 20, the lettering was difficult to read;
- with reference to the funding paragraph on page 21, the anticipated dates had already passed and should therefore have a decision outlined;
- with reference to the table at paragraph 9, clarity was required with the respect to the two-column layout;
- with reference to paragraph 10 Cumulative Users of Wi-Fi, it was queried if dates could be included;
- with respect to the Royal Institution Christmas Lecture Series it was queried whether it was confirmed that the Royal Institution would be taking part;
- with reference to the 2017/18 Project Units on page 39, the total should read 58;
- with reference to the fifth paragraph on page 44, the text required clarity;
- the format of the reporting required consistency, despite differing projects it was suggested that themes of, purpose of the project, timescale of the deliverables and progress updates could be universal across all projects. In addition, spend and anticipated economic return separated by Area Committee would be useful;
- it was suggested that in addition to the required reporting for the UK government relevant and timely summaries taking into account future planning be included for the benefit of the Council;
- it was necessary to include climate change in the reporting along with the concentration on outcomes and bringing focus to the first principles of the

- City Region Deal regarding employability and retaining young people in the Highlands; and
- positive feedback was provided to the Programme Manager of the City Region Deal regarding the effort put into the report thus far.

Officers responded in detail to the points/questions raised, during which it was confirmed that:-

- it was confirmed that future meetings would include more detailed financial reporting that was not contained in the draft report given the focus was to ascertain Member feedback;
- it was highlighted that the Annual Report was designed to cover the period up until March 2020 in line with the Scottish and UK Government requirements and the content of the report reflected this;
- regarding European funding, this would be queried and responded to out with the meeting;
- it was confirmed that Member comments would be noted and updates brought back to the Monitoring Group;
- it was reviewed that due to timescales the restructuring feedback would have to be implemented for the subsequent annual report;
- it was confirmed that Member comments regarding Highland Council objectives being included in the report could be implemented in such a way that was easily removed for the copy required for the paymaster; and
- the document would be professionally desktop published and as a result the typographic and layout issues would be resolved.

## **6. Design of Workshop for Members – 18 December 2020**

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager for the City Region Deal reviewed an all Members' workshop had been requested to provide an overview of how the City Region Deal spend may shift and to outline the limitations of the deal. As a result, Member feedback was sought regarding the design of the workshop.

Members provided feedback at which time the following points were made:-

- it was suggested that partners such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise or Transport Scotland be involved in the workshop to allow an opportunity to hear directly from the source about the possibilities and limitations of the deal;
- it was important to outline the fundamentals of the City Region Deal and highlight that it was based on the premise that cities across Scotland drove much of the overall economy and how this benefited sectors across the Highlands;
- it was important to emphasize Inverness as a service hub for the whole of the Highlands and that much of what was spent in the city benefited the wider community;
- emphasis ought to move away from spend and towards benefits which should not focus solely on financial impact; and
- the Land Remediation project was still under debate and this would be an opportunity to seek Member creativity in taking a change in direction.

## **7. Update on Key Risks**

During a verbal update, it was advised that there were no updates on key risks since the previous meeting.

## **8. Approval of Change Requests**

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager for the City Region Deal advised that given the group had reformed it was important to discuss governance and how change requests would be managed through the program. Feedback was sought from Members on the draft programme of governance levels and future change requests likely to come.

Members provided feedback at which time the following points were made:-

- there were no changes required for the draft governance levels proposed;
- the reason for the escalating price of fit homes was queried;
- it would be helpful to quantify the issues in relation to the cost of the new builds and a comparison made to other new builds,
- it was queried if additional monies for fit homes could be sought through the City Region Deal;
- it would be useful to investigate the possibility of having fit technology in existing buildings to allow for energy efficient homes;
- it was requested that a report on housing be brought to the next meeting of the City Region Deal Monitoring Group;
- it was important that focus remained on all project areas despite the projects being at a lower level. For instance, Life Sciences Recruitment was important to the Council being a learning organization and it was queried whether this should be at a higher level;
- it was highlighted that unused project money ran the risk of being clawed back and further discussion was required on the subject. It would also be useful to mention at the Member workshop; and
- an update was sought on the Longman Flyover project; and

Officers responded in detail to the points/questions raised, during which it was confirmed that:-

- it was the building of the fit homes that had escalated the cost;
- the overarching benefit with the fit homes was the development of the technology and using the data gathered to best support individuals;
- follow up would take place with the Head of Development and Regeneration regarding a cost comparison and funding in relation to fit homes;
- it was agreed that a report on housing would be brought to the next City Region Deal Monitoring Group;
- regarding Life Science Recruitment, the consultants were medical consultants overseeing medical and life science research and therefore the opportunity to bring this into the Council was limited; and
- regarding the Longman Flyover project, the current position was to enter consultation phases and review legal ramifications. At this stage, there was no commitment as to when the money would be spent.

The meeting ended at 10:49 am.