

Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Brexit Working Group** held **REMOTELY** on Thursday, 14 January 2021 at 11.00am

Present

Mr J Gray
Mr G Adam
Mr B Boyd

Mr D Louden
Mrs T Robertson

Other Members in Attendance:

Mr R Bremner
Mr R MacWilliam

Officials in attendance

Mr A MacLeod, Brexit & European Policy Co-ordinator
Ms Morgan Zavarella, Committee Administrator

Mr J Gray in the Chair

BUSINESS

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr J Bruce, Mrs M Davidson and Mr S Mackie.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Brexit Seminar

During discussion about the format of the Brexit Seminar, the following main points were suggested by Members:-

- it should be wide-ranging and encompass the current situation and impact of Brexit on the Highland Council area, though it may be useful to include Highlands/Islands;
- it was queried whether the timing of the seminar should take place before or after the funding details of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) were announced as prior meant it allowed an opportunity for lobbying and afterwards meant there were more definitive answers;
- it would be important for all Members to review papers in relation to Brexit that were readily available in order to provide meaningful input and strengthen the Council's position;
- there was interest in how the funding from the UKSPF would be spent and what mechanisms would be in place to allow this;

- looking forward, the involvement of University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) would be useful to bring a focus to new and changing industries;
- the purpose of the seminar could be to tackle a subject that was broad ranging such as economic implications, though it would be difficult to do so constructively;
- it was crucial to focus on the influence the Highland Council would have on funding rather than the source of funding;
- University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) and Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) could be utilised to present an opportunity versus risks scenario from their organization's point of view;
- it would be useful to have a seminar that was coherent, reflective and distilled into an item of value that would also allow for attendees to engage;
- Phillip Rycroft (former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Exiting the European Union) was suggested as a speaker as he was well informed on Brexit and had experience with lobbying strategy;
- it was queried whether the agriculture sector be included as Highland Council did not have a responsibility towards this specialist area, though it was also commented that it would be difficult to discuss the Highland economy without including agriculture;
- Microsoft Teams provided the opportunity to seek speakers from further afield such as Inverness Chamber of Commerce or small business leaders;
- it was important that the seminar be apolitical;
- it was queried whether the purpose of the seminar was to enhance lobbying efforts regarding the UKSPF or to have a general discussion and establish a focus on the industries in Highlands and impact of Brexit;
- specific difficulties expressed by fisherman and farmers were worth exploring as well as other industries most affected;
- the percentage of the UKSPF funding that the Highlands would receive was important along with what discretion Highland Council would have on spending;
- a seminar in the near future was required to allow for articulation of views prior to announcement on UKSPF funding, and another seminar to follow with a purpose to be decided following the first seminar;
- there was a responsibility to raise awareness in Highland on the impact of Brexit and to allow for publicity;
- Rob Clarke, HIE was suggested as a speaker due to his involvement in the Steering Group for the UKSPF and it was suggested that he focussed solely on the UKSPF at the seminar;
- a follow up seminar could be scheduled to review the impact of Brexit along with risks/opportunities, with potential involvement from UHI, HIE;
- the first seminar should be focussed internally for Member consumption and to agree a strategy for lobbying with respect to the UKSPF and the second seminar should involve the wider community with a more general focus on industries with an emphasis on mitigation of any damage caused by Brexit; and
- there was agreement that the first seminar should be scheduled with haste;

Thereafter, it was agreed that:-

- a Member Seminar would explored to take place on 1 February 2021 with a presentation by Rob Clarke, Highlands and Islands Enterprise on the UK Shared Prosperity fund with an opportunity for a Q&A period following; and
- there would be a follow up Member Seminar held that focussed on risks and opportunities of Brexit and the Brexit Working Group would reconvene to discuss the details prior to confirming a date.

The meeting was closed at 11:23am.