

HIGHLAND ECONOMIC FORUM

Maclean Room, Eden Court, Inverness

2.00pm, 27th February 2013

Present:

Cllr Thomas Prag, Highland Council (Chair), Stuart Black (Highland Council), Sylvia Beswick (Highland Council), Ian Couper (Energy North), Angela Wilson (Energy North), Neil MacRae (HiTrans), Mhairi Wylie (Highland Third Sector Partnership), Scott Armstrong (VisitScotland), Robert Muir (HIE), Charlotte Wright (HIE), Kirsty Curry (SSE), Nolan Miller (SSE), Susan Johnston (Jobcentre Plus), Andy McCann (Highland Council), Trudy Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce/North Highland Regeneration Fund), Derek Cairns (Skills Development Scotland), Seonag Campbell (Skills Development Scotland), Melanie Newdick (Fusion), Pauline Dingwall (Institute of Directors), Ken Gray (Inverness Chamber), Geoff Robson (Highland Council), Steve Westbrook (Economist Nairn), Kenny MacInnes (Highland Council)

1. Apologies:

Diane Rawlinson (Inverness College), Ashley Gould (Highland Council), Dorothy Low (Highland Council), Garry Sutherland, Lesley Cranna (Scottish Natural Heritage), Ian Fraser (Department of Work & Pensions), Lesley Rhind (Scottish Council for Development and Industry), Fraser Grieve (Scottish Council for Development and Industry), Ranald Robertson (HiTrans), Rona Campbell (CBI)
Stephen Boyd (STUC), Stewart Nicol (Inverness Chamber of Commerce), Martin Johnston (HIE)

2. Note of previous meeting held on 26 September 2012

Approved

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising from the previous minutes.

4. SSE Open4Business Presentation

Cllr Thomas Prag introduced Kirsty Curry & Nolan Miller from SSE to talk about their Open4Business website. It was explained that currently the team were engaging with over 410 suppliers, and that there were just under 100 opportunities available on the site. A brief history of the team was also given along with an explanation of how the site worked and what the three levels of registration meant to a company's interaction within the site.

The talk provided information and general instructions on how to register & note interest for tenders, as well as the benefits of using the site – free online marketing tool, continuous support, supply chains & networking, can set up alerts for local work, support from local agencies, enhance procurement processes, drives compliance/competition.

Information regarding a massive capital investment over the next 10 years in the area of between £5-10billion was given, the forum was told that it was a platform to encourage strong working relationships and that they were looking to maximise local benefits. DR suggested that they use Federation of Small Businesses to promote this.

Following a question regarding the use of smaller local companies the speakers assured the forum that a flow-down clause was embedded in registration agreements that local contractors must be used if business is won through the site, the clause is passed down to the subcontract level also. They also stressed that they would be unable to contractually enforce specifying that these contractors used local individuals to complete the work.

Cllr Prag thanked SSE for their presentation.

5. SDS: Employer Offer/school/post school careers

Cllr Prag introduced Seonag Campbell who gave a presentation on school leaver destination (SLDR), which was followed by Derek Cairns giving a presentation on the new online employer service.

SDLR – The talk explained that the careers information advice & guidance service focused on those most in need and introduced the 'My World of Work' website which Seonag offered to demonstrate at a future meeting. SLDR results demonstrated that positive destinations (HE/FE/VW/ etc) were 0.8% higher than Scottish average and showed an increase of 1.3% from last year – this was something which had increased year on year over past 3 years. Seonag reported that the figure for 'leavers to employment' for the Highland area is the third highest in Scotland at 29.7%. Questions were raised over whether there are sufficient HE/FE opportunities available for students in the area, and whether statistics for those returning to the Highlands following University were available – it was suggested that the University Alumni are contacted. Thomas Prag agreed to speak to UHI regarding potential research opportunity for determining where people from the Highland area move to following HE training both in the Highlands and elsewhere. These figures were unavailable. It was reported that a higher percentage of females went on to a 'positive destination' than males, this was explained by girls more likely to go into HE/FE, and boys more likely to go into employment – and that the statistics would be available in more detail within the next couple of weeks in a 'community planning partnership report'. A school break down was provided, which showed that the vast majority of leavers have remained in school past 'statutory school leaver' date.

Our Skills Force website – Derek Cairns

DC introduced the 'OurSkillsForce' website, explaining that it is designed to be a web service for Scotland's employers, in partnership with JobCentre+ and local authorities and act as a reference for employers to see what is available to them – examples were given of grants up to £5,000 towards staff training. Questions raised included whether employers were aware of any of the information available. DC reported that only 45 businesses within Inverness successfully applied for flexible training funding last year and that they would be looking at how the information is passed to companies as there is a belief that employers are spending

so much time running business, they have no time to look into additional funding. DR suggested going through accountants.

6. HC/HIE Economic Recovery Plan

Cllr Pragg introduced Robert Muir from HIE who talked about the Highland Council/HIE Economic Recovery Plan. He discussed the work being done with the Highland Council relating to the single outcome agreement. Members were encouraged to feed back information and reactions to the plan by mid March.

Discussion was had regarding providing assistance around the Highland region, especially in the Caithness/Sutherland area where the renewable energy sector is doing much better than the service sector. The problems with getting local businesses together to improve the situation was discussed, along with the recent jobs event in Thurso.

A request for the organisation of a meeting around 22nd March was made to discuss the responses to the Recovery Plan. Robert thanked Geoff Robson for the work he had done to date.

7 Working Group Update

Cllr Prag introduced Steve Westbrook, Economist, to provide an update on the working groups. A website has been set up to provide a place to allow communication between the initiative leaders (a list of which had been circulated recently). Stuart Black told the meeting about the solid progress which had been made in most areas, including superfast broadband, and encouraged people to get involved. HIE reported that the BT contract was still being worked on. TP asked for a further update at the next forum.

8. Highland Opportunity – Future Focus

Cllr Prag introduced Marie Mackintosh. Marie described the current priorities: a two year programme with Enterprise Europe and Business Gateway, and their main services to the forum: assisting businesses to access finance, providing serviced accommodation, and accessing the EU markets. The forum was informed of discussions with Moray Council to look at a Moray equivalent of Highland Opportunity. Along with Business Gateway they are looking at ways to stimulate start-ups and are currently working with UHI to create workshops/seminars, and especially looking to target women and companies who are wary at recruiting more staff due to lack of knowledge. Marie reported that the success of the grant scheme and graduate placement programme has resulted in additional advisers (1FTE x Inner Moray Firth and 0.5 for Moray)

Copies of the presentation to be sent out with the minutes

9 Highland Council Procurement Review

Cllr Prag introduced Sylvia Beswick and Stuart Black who explained the consultation exercise and requested forum members take the questionnaire back to their own companies/organisations to review/discuss, and return comments to the Highland council. Forum members were informed of the 15 March deadline and the need to put the paper to council.

Sylvia went through the current results from the reform bill consultation already completed by the Scottish Government, and explained how the questions asked in the consultation linked to the three themes within the questionnaire.

Cllr Prag thanked the speakers, and encouraged the members to distribute the questionnaire amongst their associations/companies.

Questionnaire to be forwarded to Forum Members for distribution.

10. AOB

No additional issues were raised.