

AGENDA ITEM 8

Highland Economic Forum

10.00 a.m. 12 June 2013

The Chamber, Highland Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

Present

Thomas Prag (Highland Council)
Stuart Black (Highland Council)
Kenny MacInnes (Highland Council)
Maria Peter (Highland Council)
Steve Westbrook (Economist)
Sylvia Beswick (Highland Council)
Pauline Dingwall (Institute of Directors)
Ranald Robertson (HiTrans)
Marie MacKintosh (Highland Opportunities Ltd)
Seonag Campbell (Skills Development Scotland)
Marena Jordan (JCP)
David Hosey (Inverness College UHI)
Gary Campbell (UHI)
Roy Kirk (Highlands & Islands Enterprise)
Scott Armstrong (VisitScotland)
David Richardson (Federation of Small Businesses)
Stewart Nicol (Highlands & Islands Enterprise)

Also in attendance:

Gary Campbell (UHI) (Item 4)
Derek Yule (Highland Council) (Item 6)
Stuart Robertson (HIE) (Item 8)
Viccie Masson (minutes)

1 Apologies

Apologies received from: Alan Rankin (VisitCairngorms), Alastair Nicolson (HIE), Angela Wilson (Energy North), Ashley Gould (Sylvia Breswick replacing), Charlotte Wright (HIE), Diane Rawlinson (Inverness College UHI) (David Hosey representing), Fraser Grieve (SCDI), Garry Sutherland, Ian Couper (Energy North), Ian Fraser (Susan Johnston representing), Lesley Cranna (SNH), Lesley Rhind (SCDI), Martin Johnston (HIE), Melanie Newdick (Allan Simpson representing), Mharie Wylie, Rona Campbell, Stephen Boyd

2 Note of Meeting held on 26 March 2013

Agreed

3 Matters Arising

Nothing raised.

4 Skills for Energy Sector

Thomas Prag introduced Gary Campbell from UHI. Energy skills, and skills delivery partners were discussed, including the need for skilled

workers to encourage the energy sector to bring business to the area. Gary described how UHI is forming collaborative partnerships with the energy sector to provide a conduit for businesses to help create new technologies, and develop training. He encouraged the forum to contact him if they had any questions, and requested his contact details be sent out with the minutes.

VM to provide contact details.

Gary explained that UHI is looking to create similar partnerships with other sectors, e.g. tourism, which are prevalent in the area. The importance of notifying UHI of potential investment into the area to ensure training be put in place was stressed.

Improved response to training requirements was commented on, and a request was made for a report on how improvements could be continued. The possibility of setting up an 'Energy Board' to determine how to use the funding and facilities which are available was discussed, which in turn would open up new training opportunities. Attendees agreed that the 'skills academy' concept was a good idea and ways to develop this further should be looked at. Seonag Campbell provided some information about the energy Challenge Fund, encouraging the college to work with them to obtain additional funding.

All agreed that further discussion was required to encourage inward investment by proving that Highlands & Islands have the facilities, the ability and the willingness to provide a trained workforce

A request was made for a report showing what is currently happening, and for UHI/Gary Campbell to return to a future meeting to provide an update.

GC to attend next meeting and provide current situation report

5 **HEF Working Groups / Key Initiatives Update**

Thomas Prag introduced Steve Westbrook (SW), economist, who provided an update on the working groups, and the current financial situation, stressing the effect that underemployment and outsourcing had on the economy.

The possibility of providing trained, local people into the potential 5,000 -10,000 jobs within renewable energy sector was discussed at length, including ways to ensure that the high level jobs for graduates were in the area as well as the lower level positions.

The aims of the forum website were discussed, including it becoming a place for networking for local businesses, and an information resource. Concerns were voiced that whilst the documents requested were ready to be uploaded to the site, responsibility for updating this material was not clear. It was agreed that the provider of the initial document would be responsible. It was stressed that long term the

website would become a public resource for information, but was currently only for Highland Economic Forum members. Further discussion needed to be had on the issue of maintenance and marketing.

It was agreed that the website would be discussed again at the next forum, once the site had 'gone live'.

SW to provide update at next meeting

6 **Highland Council Procurement Update**

Thomas Prag introduced Derek Yule, Director of Finance in the Highland Council. Derek described the Highland Council's aims within the latest 5 year programme. He also explained the current situation with the procurement review which is taking slightly longer than anticipated.

The research findings in terms of local economy/business community were discussed, including the potential conflicts between statutory requirements and the Highland Council objectives. He went on to describe some early of the immediate actions which could be taken, such as the possibility of adopting a standard process questionnaire, and storing company information on a database to speed up the form completion time. With regards to the longer term actions the need to look at the research strategy and procurement development was discussed.

Forum members to input to Derek Yule

7 **Highland Single Outcome Agreement (SOA)/ Economic Recovery Strategy**

Thomas Prag introduced Roy Kirk from HIE.

RK worked through the 3 main areas of the SOA document, including the challenges and opportunities which living in the Highlands provides. He elaborated on the ways which growth in the private sector can be achieved. Acknowledging that youth employment presents major challenges he suggested that opportunities in life sciences, the oil & gas industry, hospitality and the creative industries were ways to provide employment for young people.

Forum members to not the importance of the SOA

Stuart Black explained that each local authority in Scotland is completing an SOA and that HIE are leading on the economy section of the SOA in the Highlands.

8 **HIE Broadband Infrastructure Programme Update**

Thomas Prag introduced Stuart Robertson from HIE. Stuart explained that HIE are the lead on the roll-out of the next generation Broadband project within the Highlands, and that BT are looking to provide a minimum of 75% availability across each local area, covering a total of 84% of households over 2014-16. He explained that the bulk of the backhaul is being done in 2014 including subsea cables to the islands. SR explained that the 84% has been chosen by improving the current network, and smaller hubs will be decided on a case by case basis.

The BT Openreach website will be available to provide additional information, and HIE will put out information in near future to provide the up to date position. If individuals require further information they should go to www.superfast-openreach.co.uk/where-and-when/. He elaborated on HIE's plan to work with Community Broadband Scotland to help communities put projects together.

Attendees requested more information regarding the broadband rollout, and stressed that this was vital.

HIE to present to PED Committee in August

9 **HOL / Business Gateway Update**

Thomas Prag introduced Marie MacIntosh, Chief Executive of Highland Opportunity Ltd who provided a background and update for the company. She explained that the team had three new staff members, including 2 new recruitment advisers both adding resource to urban areas, with a view to identifying small local businesses, and promoting opportunities. MM reported that to-date 2013 had been the best year for start-ups since 2010. A partnership agreement has been exchanged with UHI and combined workshops will be happening in near future.

MM reported that the workshops continue to have high attendances, and that similar events for business start-ups will be commencing soon.

10 **SCA Update**

This item was carried forward to the next meeting.

11 **AOB**

Gatwick flights update – SB reported on the discussions being held with easyJet following their acquisition of Flybe's Gatwick slots. He informed the meeting that as well as the Highland Council, HIAL, Visit Scotland, and HIE are putting information to easyJet. They are also trying to ensure long term solutions to connections to London Hub airports. He stressed that a great deal of work is going on in the background. Attendees were urged to put in comments to SCDI as evidence of their current situation and how this could change if links were lost.

Forum members to input to SCDI survey

It was agreed that the best way forward was to promote the message to easyJet that there were significant business opportunities in the Highlands.