

**Highland Community Planning Partnership  
Chief Officers Group**

Note of Meeting of the Chief Officers Group held in Highland Council Headquarters, Inverness, on Friday, 7 November 2014, at 2.00 p.m.

**Present:**

**Highland Council (HC):**

Mr S Barron  
Ms M Morris  
Mr B Alexander  
Mr W Gilfillan  
Mr G Hamilton  
Ms F Palin  
Mr D Goldie  
Ms C McDiarmid

**NHS Highland:**

Mrs E Mead  
Mr K Oliver

**Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE):**

Mr M Johnson

**Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI):**

Ms M Wylie

**Police Scotland**

Ch Supt J Innes

**Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH):**

Mr G Hogg

**In Attendance:**

Mr J Dennison, Department of Work and Pensions (Item 2)  
Ms M Jordan, Department of Work and Pensions (Item 2)  
Ms S MacKenzie, Workforce Planning and Staffing Officer (Item 2)  
Mrs R Moir, Principal Committee Administrator, Highland Council  
Ms M Murray, Committee Administrator, Highland Council

**1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence: Mr S Black (HC), Mrs J Baird (NHS Highland), Mr S Hay (Scottish Fire and Rescue Service), Mr J Pryce, Scottish Government and Ms F Larg, University of the Highlands and Islands.

**2. Collaboration to Reduce Long-Term Unemployment**

Mr John Dennison of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) gave a presentation entitled "No-one left behind" that provided regional information on long-term unemployed people and the DWP's response to them. Having also shown a brief DVD on a recruitment initiative involving Tesco and its impact on the long-term unemployed individuals involved, he provided Highland statistics for the period June 2013 to June 2014 on the economic activity rate, the employment rate and the unemployment rate. He identified a number of Highland "hotspots", illustrating in particular the varying challenges and potential barriers faced in more rural areas, together with the likely knock-on demand on other public services.

During discussion, the impact of unemployment on the wider social environment was recognised, including: the wider economic impact of low income households with reduced spending power; impact on health and health services demand; the identified link with crime levels; and the demographic impact of young people leaving the area to find employment. Consideration was given as to what the Partnership role might be in tackling unemployment, in relation both to increasing local job opportunities and to improving employability.

One of the Partnership's roles, under the Single Outcome Agreement theme on Economic Growth and Recovery, led by HIE, was to promote an economic environment encouraging business investment and job creation. It would also be valuable to identify existing job supply and demand and to engage directly with potential employers.

Partners were also themselves employers; although budgets were shrinking (see item 6 below), areas of recruitment remained, particularly in remote rural areas, where recruitment could be difficult. Constraints included legislative requirements for certain jobs to be competency-based; partners should, however, seek to be as flexible as possible in their employment policies.

Partners also procured services and thus created employment opportunities; public sector procurement rules could, however, inhibit flexibility in commissioning local services. Every effort should be made, however, to factor in considerations such as Best Value and community benefit and to design contracts so far as achievable to allow local commissioning, in particular from social enterprises.

Mr Dennison confirmed that, while the DWP could not itself create jobs, it was keen to develop partnerships and to help boost employability and recruitment. He pointed out that the long-term unemployed had already been through the prescribed national milestone initiatives and needed innovative help, including third sector support.

The future role of the University of the Highlands and Islands was emphasised, in particular its scope to tailor courses to meet local skills demand. Skills could also be acquired through other ways. Volunteering, for example, could be a significant route for the provision of training and experience and for improving skills, and it was confirmed that participation in volunteering did not impact negatively on welfare entitlement. In relation to the crime/unemployment link, it was also pointed that carrying out community payback orders could involve developing employability skills.

The Group was also briefed on the recent announcement of the award of funding for the Highland area from the European Social Fund 2014-20 programme amounting to £10.82m (subject to match funding): £9.4m for developing employability pipelines, and £1.42m for tackling poverty and social exclusion. Further information would be provided at the Group's next meeting.

After discussion, the Group, having thanked Mr Dennison, **NOTED** his presentation and **AGREED**:

- i. to raise at Board level the linkage between the issues discussed and the Partnership's strategic priority to tackle deprivation and inequalities;
- ii. that the Partnership's Workforce thematic group take forward mapping geographical labour supply and demand across the Partnership area, with a view to identifying potential solutions to the issues raised in discussion, together with assisting partners themselves to find employees in remoter areas; and
- iii. to examine the scope for European Social Fund monies allocated to Highland to be used to support Partnership initiatives.

### **3. Chief Officers Group (COG) – 22 September 2014**

- i. **Note of Meeting**: The circulated Note of Meeting of the COG held on 22 September 2014 was **APPROVED**.

## ii. Matters Arising:

- a. **Possible Projects for Working with What Works Scotland (WWS)** (Minutes Item 3): It was **NOTED** that WWS's academic approach to its research perhaps offered little practical benefit to the Partnership; and **AGREED** that the Partnership stand down from active participation in WWS activities, whilst retaining an interest in any lessons to be drawn from its work with others;
- b. **Self-Assessment** (Minutes Item 6): It was **NOTED** that the lead officers for the Economy, Environment and Health Inequalities themes wishing to work with the Improvement Service should contact the Council's Corporate Manager after November, following the latter's return to work; and
- c. **Convention of the Highlands and Islands (COHI) Meeting** (Minutes Item 10): The draft note of the outcomes of the Convention meeting held on 27 October 2014, as issued by the COHI Secretariat, was **NOTED**, together with the benefits offered at such events by the opportunity to make informal contacts.

## 4. **Community Planning Board – 13 October 2014**

The circulated Draft Minutes of Meeting of the Community Planning Board (CPB) held on 13 October 2014 were **NOTED**.

## 5. **Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill**

The circulated Report No. COG/11/14 by the Head of Policy and Reform invited the COG to discuss the opportunities and implications for the Community Planning Partnership arising from the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Bill currently before the Scottish Parliament, with a view to ensuring that the Partnership would be ready to comply with and wholeheartedly support the Bill's intentions; and to agree how to proceed in partnership to respond to the Bill's provisions and opportunities.

The report outlined in particular the Bill's provisions relating to community planning, participation requests by community groups, community control of land and buildings in relation to community right to buy and asset transfers from public bodies, Common Good property, allotments and non-domestic rates; and the opportunities and advantages for partners in working together to support community groups and implement the Act, once in force, in an effective and efficient manner. The Partnership would have the opportunity to provide evidence for the Bill. The report invited the COG to consider, amongst other issues, how to ensure that the Bill would enable communities to be empowered where they were currently disempowered and least ready/supported to participate.

During discussion, Members were reminded that one of the Partnership's agreed strategic priorities was to "engage in dialogue with communities in order to empower them to participate in service planning and delivery". The importance of partners – and communities – being ready for the Bill coming into force was recognised. Emphasis was placed on the need for senior staff to bring together and optimise the use of resources, assets and experience across the partner agencies to support and empower local communities, including helping/enabling them to deliver services themselves. It was recognised that the Board's earlier

decision to establish a Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership was particularly pertinent in this regard; also the potential role of partners' property officers working together. Existing networks such as District Partnerships should be used as far as possible, to avoid duplication. To achieve a fuller picture as to the resource available, there would be value in mapping relevant third sector activity.

It was also important to recognise that meaningful community engagement was a two-way process and should be conducted in a coherent way that responded to community needs and capacity. The benefits of single contact entry points into the Partnership should be explored. It was also suggested that it would be useful for a future report to bring together a range of partners' case studies on relevant successful and unsuccessful projects/proposed projects to date, and their outcomes, to inform the Group's own thinking and to contribute to community engagement and awareness raising as to the Bill's potential.

After discussion, the Group **AGREED:**

- i. the need to put in place planning for drawing together partners' full range of resources in order to take forward the aims of the Bill;
- ii. that a report be brought forward providing an update on progress by the Community Learning and Development Strategic Partnership; and
- iii. to examine further the role of District Partnerships and their scope for a central role in delivery.

## **6. Financial Outlook, Budget Processes and Ensuring Effective Partnership Engagement**

The Group was reminded that:

- on 13 October 2014, the Board had approved the revised SOA Development Plan, including, as an improvement activity, a commitment that Budget proposals be shared and cumulative impacts identified, and that partners' views be influential
- on 5 June 2014, the Board had approved revised strategic priorities, including the following:  
*"Maximise the use of collective resources to achieve best outcomes, demonstrating a shift to prevention and the re-allocation of resources between Community Planning Partnership (CPP) members where this represents best value"*
- at that meeting the Board had also tasked the COG to examine the partnership approach to prevention going forward, and how this might be expanded and monitored for impact, with a report back to a future Board meeting, taking into account the new additional investment for prevention and the mainstreaming of preventative approaches through collaborative working
- on 18 June 2014, the COG had agreed that a small group of lead officers scope out the range of opportunities for taking this Priority forward; on 22 September, the COG had noted that, while a meeting had not yet taken place, it would convene shortly and feedback would be provided.

Partners were invited to discuss their financial outlook for 2015/16 onwards, their budget setting processes, how effective partnership engagement in that process could be ensured, and how working together as a partnership might assist in resource planning and in mitigating likely cumulative impacts.

In discussion, all partners acknowledged that they were facing financial constraints, with reducing or at best standstill budgets. All faced pressures to make reductions and focus on core activity/statutory responsibilities, with general expectations that any new areas of operation would be at the cost of some current activity. This scenario would impact on the ability to implement the Partnership's Prevention Plan. It would be important to consider the cumulative impact of reductions across all partner agencies and the consequent net effect on local communities. In this context, an offer was made to share learning from the Council's current budget consultation exercise, with its focus on impact assessment and identifying the scope for considering mitigation. In looking at the potential overall picture, it was vital to engage meaningfully with communities and also with the third sector.

After discussion, the Group **AGREED** that:

- i. all partners contribute to future impact assessments;
- ii. following the current budget process, some work be done on examining impact on a thematic basis; and
- iii. consideration be given to the implications for the Single Outcome Agreement.

## **7. Community Planning Partnership Membership**

The circulated Report No. COG/12/14 by the Head of Policy and Reform addressed the progress made in considering requests for wider CPP membership from five organisations, using the framework agreed at the previous meeting, and suggested recommendations to be made to the Board in this regard.

While the report set out specific proposals in relation to the requests from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), High Life Highland and Bòrd na Gàidhlig, it advised that further engagement was pending with Skills Development Scotland and the Cairngorms National Park Authority, prior to finalising recommendations on these. The report pointed out that both the latter organisations were included in the list of proposed statutory partners for Community Planning Partnerships.

In commenting on the report, it was acknowledged that consideration would be required as to how keep an expanding Partnership manageable. It was also recognised that Third Sector organisations might require reassurance that High Life Highland was not being unduly favoured at their potential expense.

The Group **AGREED**:

- i. that the interest of the DWP was satisfied through its attendance to discuss mutual aims for long term unemployed people at this meeting and through its on-going membership of two theme groups;
- ii. that it be recommended to the Community Planning Board that High Life Highland be invited to participate in the Chief Officers Group and Board, and that the Highland Culture Strategic Board be formally adopted within the CPP;
- iii. to convene a short-life group of officers with responsibility for Gaelic across the Partnership to identify how to make the most of Gaelic as an asset for the CPP, how to improve effectiveness and efficiency of Gaelic language planning and how best to locate it within the CPP structure, with partners identifying their officer to take part; prior to recommendations on the participation of Gaelic language interests being made to the Board; and

- iv. to support some Community Planning Board time being used for a short session on Gaelic awareness raising.

## 8. Communicating the Work and Effectiveness of the Partnership

At its meeting on 13 October 2014, the Board had agreed that this Group discuss further the issue of clearer communications and marketing, including to partners' own staff as well as the wider public, to promote better understanding of the role and achievements of the Partnership, with particular reference to improving the Partnership's online presence. In discussion, emphasis was also placed on the need to consider how best to deliver meaningful reporting to the Board and to be fully ready for Audit Scotland inspection of the Partnership's progress.

The importance was stressed of all updated delivery plans being sharp, meaningful and focussed on the issues that the Partnership would be measuring and on which it would be judged. It was acknowledged that a number of updates had still to be finalised,

The scope for improving the Partnership's low public profile was also discussed. Little resource had as yet been dedicated to this. It had previously been recognised that partners' media/public relations officers could have a role and this should be revisited following the retirement of the former Director of Marketing, Communications and Planning, UHI, who had been the COG lead on this. It was also suggested that there could be merit in producing periodic themed reports, perhaps on a cyclical basis, highlighting different areas of work, both for internal use within partner agencies and for external awareness-raising.

After discussion, the Group **AGREED**:

- i. that all SOA contents chapters be updated and all outstanding delivery plan updates completed;
- ii. that, with a view in particular to a future Audit Scotland audit, a brief summary document be prepared setting out headlines as to what the Partnership was trying to achieve together;
- iii. that a member of the Head of Policy and Reform's team work with partners with a view to producing a Partnership annual report incorporating perhaps 6 key indicators/highlights for each theme/priority;
- iv. that, with a view to raising the profile of the Partnership's work across the various themes on a more regular basis, a pilot report on Community Safety be produced, targeted initially at staff but also with a view to testing press interest; and
- v. to invite the Board to identify what style of performance reporting it might wish in future; for example, whether it might wish to focus in greater depth on one or two themes per meeting.

## 9. Community Planning Board – Future Agenda Items

The Group **AGREED**:

- i. a list of agenda items proposed for the next Board meeting:
  - Skills Development Scotland presentation
  - clarification of the Board's wishes as to the format for future performance reporting
  - performance up-dates, to include the Community Learning and Development strategic group and the expanded remit of the Health Inequalities group to cover rural poverty/fragility,

- gearing up for the Community Empowerment legislation
  - membership of the Partnership
  - approach to collaboration on budget process
  - Gaelic awareness
- ii. that feedback on tackling digital exclusion be brought to a future meeting.

## 10. Chief Officers Group – Future Agenda Items

The Group **AGREED** a list of agenda items proposed for future Group meetings:

- Community planning and District Partnership structures, including hearing the experience of a successful community group such as Transport for Tongue (target: January 2015)
- Partnership approaches to improvement methodologies
- Participatory budgeting
- Update on workforce planning and skills development
- Scope for the Partnership to take action to tackle digital exclusion in Highland
- Examination of the Public Health Annual Report's recommendations to ensure that all were being adequately addressed by the Partnership.

## 11. Events

The Group **NOTED**:

- **What Works Scotland invitation: Collaborative Action, Research, Learning and Sharing Event** – see item 2(ii) above
- **Carbon Clever Conference** – a reminder of this event being hosted by the Council on 17 November 2014 and that a complementary Climate Change Breakfast Meeting was being held early in the day in association with the Scottish Leaders Forum
- **Corporate Parenting Seminar** – that the Council was hosting this Seminar on 13 November 2014.

## 12. Chief Officers Group – Future Meeting Dates

The Group **AGREED** the following dates and times for meetings in 2015:

Thursday, 29 January, 2 p.m.

Thursday, 26 March, 2 p.m.

Thursday, 13 August, 2 p.m.

Wednesday, 11 November, 2.30 p.m.

The Group also **AGREED**:

- i. to revisit the proposed date of 29 June 2015 and seek an earlier meeting date in late May 2015; and
- ii. in pursuit of the principle of rotating the chairing of this Group's meetings, to invite offers to chair the next meeting in January 2015.

The meeting ended at 4.20 p.m.