

Highland Economic Forum

2.00pm 19 April 2016

Chamber, Highland Council HQ, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness

Note of Meeting

In attendance:

Cllr Audrey Sinclair (Chair)	Stuart Black (HC)
Murray Ferguson (CNBP)	Stewart Nicol (Chamber of Commerce)
Mark Tate (Cairngorm)	David Richardson (FSB) (DR)
Fraser Grieve (SCDI)	Scott Armstrong (Visit Scotland)
Jason Hubert (FC)	Michael O'Donnell (HC)
Kenny Macinnes (HC)	Robert Muir (HIE)
Neil Macrae (HITRANS)	Callum Macaulay (Albyn Housing)
Georgie Parker (Inverness College UHI)	Gary I Campbell (UHI)
James Gibbs (HIE)	Steve Westbrook (Economist)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Diane Rawlinson (Inverness College UHI), Seonag Campbell (SDS), Debbie Gray (NHC UHI), Neil Stewart, Marie Macintosh (HOL), Janey Mackinnon (DWP), Randal Robertson (HITRANS), Roddy Bailey (SDS), Stephen Boyd (STUC), Trudy Morris (Caithness Chamber of Commerce), Fiona Ambrose (Inverness College UHI)

2. Note of Previous Meeting

Item 7 - Construction training – update action to Diane Rawlinson / Steve Westbrook.

Agreed

3. Matters Arising

All discussed through meeting.

4. The Economic Contribution of the Forestry Sector in Scotland – Jason Hubert

Presentation attached.

2016 focus split into three strands: forestry and timber processing; forestry related recreation/tourism; and forestry related deer and game

- Forestry & Timber processing excluded secondary processing and paper production from imported pulp, and most haulage from primary to secondary processors. Installation and operation of wood fuel boilers was also excluded, although processing of wood for fuel and production of wood pellets was included.
- Forestry related recreation/tourism focusses on activity directly related to forest business (i.e. not bike purchases etc).

- Forestry related deer and game – conservative estimates used.

key messages are underpinned by Scotland's Economic Strategy:

- **Investing** in our people and infrastructure in a sustainable way;
- Fostering a culture of **innovation** and research and development;
- Promoting **inclusive growth** and creating opportunity through a fair and inclusive jobs market and regional cohesion; and
- Promoting Scotland on the **international stage** to boost our trade and investment, influence and networks.

Infrastructure noted as main restraint in the Highlands – large amount of investment has already been made, but this is likely to continue to be a major restraint.

Employment/skills for work training: A skills group, liaising with SDS and UHI, is currently reviewing how best to ensure sufficient employees for the future. JH's role is to review vulnerabilities and address wherever possible.

5. City/Region Deal – Stuart Black

SB presentation (attached)

28 city region deals across UK, including Aberdeen.

Construction work has started on Inverness Castle North Tower visitor attraction / environmental works, the cost of which is included within the £3m already received. A large proportion of the Council's contribution is the West Link Project, with some funding towards affordable housing and other smaller projects, some of which have been agreed, others are still waiting for confirmation.

Action: Further information to be circulated with minutes. **SB**

A Programme Manager and board will be established to co-ordinate the projects and governance.

Broadband investment - Aim to provide the remaining 16% superfast broadband (left over from BT rollout). Additional investment by Vodafone/O2/EE to improve mobile broadband coverage is planned as well as a programme of engagement with businesses to establish how it will be used. Brendan Dick (BT) will be presenting at May PDI committee. A minimum of £15m will be available from the City Region Deal towards broadband, and additional EU/Council funds will be added to that figure.

6. Strategy update – Steve Westbrook

City Deal investment will help encourage young people to stay/return to the area. The lack of productivity growth one of the main issues for the area, the establishment of a digital hub will help with this. A HEF working group will be set up over next few weeks covering areas such as:

- innovation programme – business start-ups by ex-public sector staff;
- involvement of young people – starting up businesses;
- superfast broadband – helping with innovation, providing services/support, and start-ups;
- procurement – focussing on small businesses; and
- construction skills.

Enterprising Highland website is currently being redesigned, bringing it up to the same standard as other cities. The new site should be more useful to small businesses in the area, as well as providing information for inward investors.

7. AOB

Nothing raised.