

Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Brexit Working Group** held **remotely** on Thursday, 1 April 2021 at 2.00pm

Present

Mr J Gray
Mr G Adam
Mr J Bruce

Mrs M Davidson
Mr D Louden
Mrs T Robertson

Officials in attendance

Mr A MacLeod, Brexit & European Policy Co-ordinator
Ms F MacBain, Committee Administrator

Mr J Gray in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Mr B Boyd and Mr S Mackie.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 14 January 2021

There had been circulated and were **NOTED** Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 14 January 2021.

4. Brexit and European Update

There had been circulated Report No. BWG/1/21 dated 23 March 2021 by the Brexit & European Policy Co-ordinator.

Following a summary of the report and update on current issues, the following issues were raised during discussion:-

- concern was expressed that focus on Brexit issues, especially the pursuit of alternative funding sources, would be lost if the Working Group was wound up and the issues dealt with by the relevant Strategic Committees;
- the new funding criteria being developed did not apply to Highland in the way that previous European funding criteria had. Communication was being undertaken with the UK Government, local MPs, and the Scottish Office on this as a matter of urgency and would be further discussed by the Council Leader and the Chair of the Working Group;
- Brexit issues now comprised day to day business and were best dealt with by the most relevant Committee to minimise damage and take advantage of opportunities. However, some Members expressed a desire to maintain the Brexit Working Group, given the need for a focussed group with specialist interest, especially for economic and financial focus. It was suggested the Brexit Working Group, as it was currently constituted, be formally wound up as recommended, but that the Chair would explore the best reporting mechanism for future funding issues that could involve

Brexit Working Group Members in some capacity, which might be through the relevant Strategic Committee;

- information was sought and provided on the anticipated end date of the various European funding sources;
- reference was made to export opportunities outwith the European Union; and
- the lack of consultation with Highland by the UK Government was disappointing and cross-party communication with them in conjunction with the Scottish Government was vital. Consideration was required to decide whether this should be done for Highland Council or as part of a regional Highlands & Islands approach. Reference was made to the role of HIE to consider economic issues, and to the Fraser of Allander Institute at the University of Strathclyde to provide academic rigour to issues of rurality and similar, and whether to include partners in forthcoming negotiations. The short timescales for the first rounds of funding bids were emphasised, as was the need for timely focus and a strong lobbying position.

Members:-

- i. **NOTED** the paper;
- ii. **AGEED** the Summary of Ongoing Work highlighted in Section 12 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** to wind up the Brexit Working Group as outlined at Section 13.3 of the report; and
- iv. **NOTED** the Chair would explore the best reporting mechanism for future funding issues that could involve Brexit Working Group Members in some capacity.

5. Date of Next Meeting – If Required

A further meeting was not required at this time.

The meeting ended at 3.10pm.