

The Highland Council

City Region Deal Monitoring Group

Minutes of the meeting of the **City Region Deal Monitoring Group** held **Remotely** on Monday, 1 November 2021 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr A Christie
Mrs M Davidson
Mr B Boyd

Mr J Gray
Mrs T Robertson

Officials in attendance:

Mrs D Manson, Chief Executive
Mr M Macleod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Economy & Environment
Mr F McGunnigle, Programme Manager, City Region Deal
Ms M Zavarella, Committee Officer

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr A Henderson, Mr A Jarvie, Mrs M Paterson and Ms M Smith.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting – 2 August 2021

Minutes of the Previous Meeting held on 2 August 2021 were **APPROVED**.

4. Update on Key Risks and Digital

An updated on Key Risks was provided as follows;

Northern Innovation Hub

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager reviewed the slippage to the Food & Drink project caused by delays in, resourcing and Covid-19 as well as the mitigating factors and measures being undertaken.

During discussion, Members raised the following:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, on whether the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) was part of the original funding package; and

- it was requested that a substantive briefing on the ERDF funding be provided at the next meeting of the Monitoring Group.

Science Skills Academy (SSA - STEM)

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager reviewed that there had been very positive feedback from the Newton Room sessions and focus was now on how the legacy moved forward beyond the City Region Deal. The options being considered were overviewed and it was explained that a report was being undertaken in this regard.

During discussion, Members raised the following:-

- it was important to analyse efforts being made around employability as training for better paid jobs was crucial to benefit the Highland economy;
- feedback was sought, and provided, on whether pursuing interest from Glasgow in the SSA would be a benefit to Highland;
- it was disappointing that schools had not taken full advantage of the SSA due to Covid-19 and there was a hope that this increased as time moved forward;
- skills were required for the Green Energy Hub, and in this regard a keen interest from youth was crucial to the future of Highland. It would be important to look at companies that were going to be investing in Green Energy skills;
- it would be interesting to see who the lead agency would be, if not Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE);
- it would be useful to do an exercise to determine the training bodies and who would be leading in training skills in Highland;
- a report on employability was required as the need was changing;
- links into schools were vital to the success of Highland;
- in response to a request for a skills audit regarding STEM training and linking back to schools, the Executive Chief Officer of Infrastructure, Environment & Economy agreed to connect with HIE about who was providing what training and speak to Education colleagues at the Council to gather information around uptake on STEM and bring back to the Monitoring Group; and
- the Leader requested an informal briefing with relevant officers around the subject of employability.

Innovative Assisted Living (Fit Homes)

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager advised that the risks around Fit Homes build programme were typical due to delays as a result of Covid-19, Brexit and increased construction costs. In terms of the Fit Homes technology work itself it was proceeding well with a revised plan.

During Member discussion, it was commented that partnership working should be undertaken with NHS because a lot of the land belonged to the Council and there was potential for changing the model of care delivery taking the examples of the homes recently completed in Fort Augustus.

Life Sciences Innovation Centre

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager reviewed the risks around: the ability to build the new facility within the original budget; delays in the construction program of the new facility capability to attract inward investment and new companies in the region. Mitigating factors were reviewed and it was explained that the risks should be de-escalated as a result.

Digital

During a verbal update, the Programme Manager reviewed recent meetings between Scottish and UK Governments in relation to moving the Digital Programme forward as well as the R100 project and UK Gigabit Programme.

During discussion, Members raised the following:-

- political work may be required to find success and the Leader was keen to let all Members know as soon as in a position to do so;
- in response to a question, it was explained that the Deal project funding that was led by HIE had great potential to unlock a further large sum of money through the UK Gigabit Programme and work was currently underway to come up with projects that would deliver to more inaccessible locations and some would be more achievable than others due to the geography and infrastructure. It was emphasised that good work was underway in this regard but required pace in order to be successful;
- coming up with a pilot scheme that pulled projects together from the UK Gigabit Programme and the R100 Scheme would be useful;
- a portfolio would be useful to show the extent of opportunities for technology companies in Highland and could be used to unlock the UK Gigabit Programme funding;
- Members were keen to assist politically if this would be helpful; and
- it was requested that Digital be reviewed at the next meeting of the Monitoring Group.

5. Consideration of Change Requests

There were no formal change requests at the time of the meeting.

6. Draft Annual Report – March 2021

There had been circulated draft annual report for year to March 2021 for feedback.

During discussion, the following comments were raised:-

- appreciation was expressed to the Programme Manager for efforts made;
- there was significant introductory information though it may be useful for those without any knowledge on the subject;
- there should not only be a focus on the change in the five years since the onset of the Deal but also where it hoped to be by year ten;
- pace was still required in some projects, and some were doing very well;

- it was important to have a focus on employability;
- the focus should be on what the Council needed to do but also the role partners had to play;
- the Longman Interchange should be included in the document; and
- it was crucial to discuss climate change and decarbonisation throughout the report.

Meeting ended at 10.54am.