



COMHAIRLE NAN EILEAN SIAR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held in Cnoc Soillear, Isle of South Uist, Council Offices, Stornoway on Tuesday 23 April 2024 at 9:30am.

PRESENT

Mr Donald F Crichton (Chair)	Mr Kenneth Macleod
Mr Norman Macdonald (Vice-Chair)	Mr Donald Macsween
Mr Iain A MacNeil	Mr John A Maciver
Mr Paul Steele	Mr Iain M Macaulay
Mr Mustapha Hocine	Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE
Mr Uisdean Robertson	Mr Gordon Murray
Mr Grant Fulton	Mr Rae Mackenzie
Mr Robert Mackenzie	Mr Angus McCormack
Mr Angus Morrison	Dr Frances Murray
Mr Norman Misty Macdonald	

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Kenneth J Maclean	Mr Calum Maclean
Mr Iain M Macleod	Mr Malcolm K Macdonald
Ms Susan Thomson	Mr George Murray
Mr Paul Finnegan	Mr Finlay Stewart
Mr Ranald Fraser	

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

Mr Malcolm Burr	Mr Calum Iain Maciver
Mr Sandy Gomez	Mr Norman Maclean
Mr Domhnall Macdonald	Mr John Cunningham
Ms Mary Ann Graham	Ms Louise A Matthews
Mr Murdo Mackay	Ms Mairi Maciver
Mr Tim Langley	Ms Isabel Maclachlan
Mr James Mackinnon	Ms Anne Macdonald
Ms Charlene Macmillan	Mr Kathlene Morrison
Ms Marina Macaulay	Mr Derek Mackay
Ms Shona Hadwen	Ms Fiona Maciver
Mr Steven Ferguson	Mr Donald A Macleod
Ms Alison MacCorquodale	Ms Morag Ferguson
Ms Mary Clare Ferguson	Mr Allan Macdonald
Ms Caitriona McCuish	Mr Adam Hill
Ms Isla Macarthur	Ms Angela C Smith
Mr Iain Watson	

Prayer

The Meeting was preceded in prayer by Mr Duncan MacInnes MBE.

MINUTES

Minute of Meeting of 6 February 2024	1	The Minute of the Meeting of 6 February 2024 was approved .
Minute of Meeting of 20 February 2024	2	The Minute of the Meeting of 20 February 2024 was approved .
Declaration of Interest	of 3	There were no declarations of interest.

PRESENTATION

Archaeology
Service Update

4

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report providing an update on the archaeology Service of the Comhairle.

The Report stated that the Outer Hebrides archaeology Service/s main priorities were protecting, managing and documenting the historic environment throughout the Outer Hebrides.

Following on from lessons learnt from the cyber-attack, the Archaeology Service is reviewing future needs and cost implications for robust digital storage and back up requirements.

The Report further stated that the Archaeology Service continues to respond in support of national agencies such as Treasure Trove Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, and Police Scotland. It also supports and advises internal Comhairle projects.

The Chair welcomed Dr Rebecca Rennel, Lecturer of Archaeology with the University of the Highlands and Islands, base at Cnoc Sollier. A presentation was delivered to the Committee in respect of developing Digital Heritage Opportunities for the Outer Hebrides.

The presentation informed members of the Flagship Project “Uist Virtual Archaeology Project” (UVAP) which was born out of the Comhairle funded “Unlocking Potential” project which sought to develop opportunities for archaeological heritage across the Outer Hebrides.

Dr Rennel highlighted the challenges and opportunities faced in relation to the important archaeological sites in Uist in particular how little of the archaeological heritage is represented by impressive upstanding remains, instead most of the sites are buried beneath sand, peat or water.

These factors led to the exploration of digital reconstructions of archaeological sites in Uist, and working collaboratively with the Comhairle, local communities and other researchers to create innovative, interpretive content, Uist Unearthed (a mobile app, with augmented reality (AR) reconstructions of five key archaeological sites in Uist and Benbecula), was formed.

Dr Rennel went onto explain further about Uist Unearthed and about promoting Uist’s archaeology and future plans to developing Digital Heritage opportunities in Barra and Harris.

The Chair thanked Dr Rennel for her interesting and informative presentation.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) notes the ongoing work within the Comhairle’s Archaeology Service; and**
- (2) notes the positive impact of the new HER database.**

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Service Plan and Operational Risk Registers 2024/25	Business and Risk	5	The Chief Executive submitted a Report seeking approval of the Comhairle's Service Business Plans 2024/25. The Comhairle approved the five-year Operational Plan and associated Service Business Plans (SBPs) 2022-2027 in February 2022 that were prepared in accordance with the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027. The Report stated that SBPs were developed, reviewed, and monitored periodically in the Comhairle's electronic performance management system, Interplan. The organisational structure, as per Interplan March 2024, was provided at Appendix 1 to the Report and the Draft SBPs and Operational Risk Registers 2024/25 followed this structure.
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It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle approve the Service Business Plans and Operational Risk Registers 2024/25.

Business Continuity Plans		6	The Chief Executive submitted a Report providing an update on the status of Business Continuity Management across the Comhairle. The Report stated that risks that resulted in a disruption to service, required continuity strategies in place to allow the service to continue with minimum disruption to service users. Services were asked to prepare Business Continuity Plans (BCPs) for their most critical activities, therefore in the event of an incident causing service disruption, the BCP can be immediately actioned.
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It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle note the Report.

HERITAGE

Heritage Pricing Policy	Service	7	With reference to item 10 of the Minute of the Meeting of 28 November 2023, the Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report seeking approval for the updated Heritage Service Pricing Policy and Image and Media Licensing Policy.
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The Report stated that the Heritage Service covers three service areas:

- Outer Hebrides Archaeology Service – protecting and documenting the historic environment throughout the Outer Hebrides;
- Museum nan Eilean – two accredited museums both with changing exhibition programmes for diverse audiences, caring and conserving collections; and
- Tasglann na Eilean –(the archive service) collecting, preserving and opening up archives relevant to the Outer Hebrides.

Income is generated for the Heritage Service through charges, donations, the museum shop, licensing of images and media from the collections and funding from external sources for specific projects or activities.

The Heritage Service Pricing Policy was last submitted for approval in June 2019. Existing charges have been reviewed and in some cases, increased.

The Report further stated that for legal and ethical reasons, only some aspects of the service attract a charge. The policy takes account of relevant legislation and the Museum Association's Code of Ethics for Museums 2015.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) approve the updated Heritage Service Pricing Policy; and**
- (2) note the efforts of Heritage Service staff to generate income from a range of sources where staffing capacity permits.**

Museum Service 8
Update

With reference to Item 10 of Minute of the Meeting of 28 November 2023, the Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to provide an update on the Museum Service of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar pertaining to Accreditation.

The Report stated that Museum nan Eilean has two accredited museums both with changing exhibition programmes for diverse audiences, caring and conserving collections.

Museum nan Eilean submitted Accreditation returns for both museums in August 2023.

The decision from the Accreditation Panel was received on 21 March 2024 – the Accreditation status of both museums will be reduced to Provisional Accreditation for the next 12 months. The majority of the actions are as a result of the impact of the cyber-attack.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the impact of the cyber attack on the Heritage Service; and**
- (2) note the impact of reduced Accreditation status.**

PLANNING

Scottish Government
Consultation –
Investing in
Planning – a
consultation on
resourcing
Scotland’s planning
system

9

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to make the Comhairle aware of a consultation by Scottish Government on the resourcing of Scotland’s planning system and provide an opportunity to consider and input to the Comhairle response.

On 28 February 2024 the Scottish Government issued a Consultation Investing in Planning – a consultation on resourcing Scotland’s planning system to which it seeks responses by 31 May 2024. The Consultation is wide ranging with the document comprised of forty pages of proposals and discussion interspersed with forty consultation questions and arises in response to the current resourcing challenges being experienced nationally by the planning system in Scotland.

The Report acknowledged that there was no simple answer to the challenge of resourcing planning, given financial constraints and a complex set of circumstances to address.

This Consultation responds to both current and future challenges, with a view to identifying actions that could improve the capacity of the planning system by helping build resilience and by strengthening cross-sector collaboration. Part 1 of the Consultation document considers the potential to do things differently or ‘work smarter’ while Part 2 explores options for leveraging in additional financial resources to better support the system and move towards full cost recovery.

As the Consultation is extensive, has just been launched and will close on 31 May 2024, falling between Committee cycles, delegation to the Depute Chief Executive to respond is being sought. Members’ views on the Consultation questions, a copy of which is appended, are welcomed.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agree that the Consultation response be delegated to the Depute Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Sustainable Development Committee.

ENERGY

Islands Deal: 10
Islands Centre for
Net Zero (Outer
Hebrides) and
Energy Update

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report updating members on the first year of the Islands Deal funded project, the Island Centre for Net Zero and subsequent developments and Energy plans in the Outer Hebrides, with a focus on Uist and Barra.

The Islands Growth Deal is a £100 million Programme jointly funded by both UK and Scottish Government. It is a 10-year package of investment that will seek to drive economic growth and the creation of sustainable jobs across Shetland, Orkney and the Outer Hebrides. The Islands Deal was developed by Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney and Shetland Island Councils together with their partners in public, academic, business and community sectors.

The Report stated that the first project approved in April 2023 as part of the Islands Growth Deal portfolio was the Islands Centre for Net Zero (ICNZ) which is a pan island innovation centre that will support our Islands to become lighthouse communities in the energy transition by exploring, trialling and accelerating solutions to decarbonisation that have replicability and application worldwide, generating GVA and green jobs for the Islands.

The Report further stated that the Outer Hebrides will receive a total of £5m to be delivered through the Islands Centre for Net Zero Outer Hebrides (ICNZ OH) to support innovative decarbonisation research and project initiatives that are pertinent to our Islands.

As a key partner of the ICNZ, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar had been involved in the development and management of the ICNZ at Programme and local level and had ensured synchronisation with the Comhairle's Energy Strategy, with a view to leverage Uist and Barra energy opportunities through the ICNZ OH.

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle note the Report and continue to support the work of the Islands Centre for Net Zero (Outer Hebrides) and its delivery plans, in co-ordination with the Comhairle's Energy strategy for Uist and Barra.

Energy Development
Update 11

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to update members on major energy developments, on the work of the "Major Developments Forum" and to consider the approach to key policy matters and related governance ahead of, and through, the period of major capital works.

The Report stated that there were a significant number of major renewable energy projects and activities anticipated to go into development over the next period. These ranged from the establishment of 1.8GW HVDC transmission link, the build out of consented onshore wind projects and the potential construction of offshore wind projects, assuming the projects could move through the various licensing and consenting processes. In addition, there is the potential of an innovative hydrogen production facility and the establishment of more community scale projects through the work of the Islands Centre for Net Zero.

The Report further stated that if all the projects proceeded into construction it would result in an unprecedented construction programme in the local context that would have a significant labour requirement during the build period and would result in the creation of new and enduring jobs during the operations phases of the projects. The projects would also lend themselves to significant new community wealth and benefit opportunities. The build out would also coincide with the implementation of Islands Growth Deal projects and other potential investment opportunities such as the Levelling-Up Partnership.

The Report sought to lay out several of the key considerations around these issues and begin to look toward arising policy implications and towards appropriate governance arrangement to help guide activity over the next period. The Report also begun to consider capacity for the next period and the requirement for the Comhairle to “gear-up” and build appropriately staffed teams in critical areas of activity, such as planning.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the establishment of the Major Development Forum;**
- (2) agree to establish a Major Development Oversight Board with the following membership:**
 - **Leader and Depute Leader**
 - **Chair and Vice-Chair of the Sustainable Development Committee**
 - **Chair and Vice-Chair of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee**
 - **Member from Stornoway Wards – Cllr Angus McCormack**
 - **Member from West Side Ward – Cllr Kenneth Macleod (Convener)**
 - **Member from the Lochs Ward -Cllr Robert Mackenzie**
 - **Officers to be confirmed by the Chief Executive**

HOUSING

Local Housing 12
Strategy – Early
Engagement
Survey

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to advise members of the findings of the Local Housing Strategy (LHS) Early Engagement Survey that ran from 6 December 2023 to 17 January 2024.

The Housing (Scotland) Act 2001 requires that local authorities consult on their LHS. It recommends that this be commenced as early as possible for effective engagement.

The Report stated that the Local Housing Strategy Steering Group prepared an Early Engagement Survey (“the Survey”) to gauge initial views on the direction of the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy.

The Survey was made available online via the Survey Monkey platform for a period of six weeks. There were 232 responses in total and following closure of the Survey these were analysed, and results compiled collectively, and by postcode area. The Survey Report was attached as an Appendix.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the outputs of the Local Housing Strategy Early Engagement Survey at Appendix 1 to the Report.

Housing Target	Supply	13	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to outline how the outputs of the Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) 2023-2042 have been translated into a Housing Supply Target (HST) to underpin the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy.</p> <p>The Housing Supply Target sets out the level of additional housing that can be realistically delivered as opposed to the level of need that has been estimated, and it informs the Housing Land Requirement within the Local Development Plan (LDP).</p> <p>The Report stated that the HST covers all housing tenures and sets out the expected split between Market (Private Sector and Private Rented Sector) and Affordable (all affordable housing options including Social Rent, Shared Equity and Rent to Buy) housing.</p> <p>The Housing Supply Target for the forthcoming LHS period is set at 310 homes – 150 (48%) Affordable homes and 160 (52%) Market homes. This was proposed by the Local Housing Strategy Steering Group on 21 March 2024.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve the Housing Supply Target outlined in the Housing Supply Target Working Paper at Appendix 1 to the Report in support of the forthcoming Local Housing Strategy 2024-2029.</p>
ECO4 – Flexible Eligibility Scheme		14	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to inform members of the proposal to reintroduce an ECO4 Flexible Eligibility Scheme to assist fuel poor households.</p> <p>The ECO4 Flexible Eligibility Scheme is a UK Government initiative aiming to improve energy efficiency in homes, particularly focusing on low income and vulnerable households.</p> <p>The Report stated that the Scheme was delivered successfully by Tighean Innse Gall for several years and an opportunity has arisen to reintroduce it locally.</p> <p>The Comhairle’s role in the delivery of this Scheme would be that of enabler, with the majority of the delivery carried out by a partner Installer. The Scheme would be funded by Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) approves the reintroduction of the ECO4 Flexible Eligibility Scheme on a trial basis, and (2) gives delegated authority to the Depute Chief Executive, in consultation with the Chair of Sustainable Development, to put the administrative procedures in place to operate the ECO4 Flexible Eligibility Scheme.
Housing Agreements 2024/25	Funding	15	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to inform members of the proposed Funding Agreement with The Energy Advisory Service (TEAS) for 2024/25.</p> <p>In the past, the Comhairle has supported a number of partner agencies, through the use of grant funding, in order to support the delivery of the Local Housing Strategy (LHS). Following the decision taken in 2023 by Western Isles Foyer to cease operating, there is now only one Housing related Funding Agreement in place with a partner agency. This is with TEAS, which is delivered by Tighean Innes Gall (TIG).</p> <p>The Report stated that TEAS provided a wide range of energy efficiency and Fuel Poverty advice, assisting individual households and community groups. The performance of TEAS is monitored on a regular basis, and it has demonstrated satisfactory performance during 2023/24. Key performance impacts in 2023/24 for TEAS include securing £282,000 of</p>

funding from a range of funding bodies, which provided funding to employ 5.5 FTE members of staff within TIG.

Financial provision is in place for the continuation of Funding Agreement in 2024/25.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle approve the continuation of Housing Grant Funding for The Energy Advisory Service in 2024/25 to the sum of £39,000.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Addressing
Depopulation
Action Plan (ADAP)

16

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to brief members on the Scottish Governments recently launched “Supporting and enabling sustainable communities: action plan to address depopulation”, which is known as the Addressing Depopulation Action Plan (ADAP).

The Scottish Government (SG) published the ADAP in mid-February 2024 not only to identify a pathway to implement measures and actions to reduce population decline in Scotland through collaborating with local and regional partners, but also to establish the SG’s strategic policy position on the issue. The focus of the ADAP is to achieve a balanced population across Scotland and highlights that the Outer Hebrides, is only one of two Scottish Local Authorities forecasted to have more people leave the region by the end of 2028 than move there.

The Report stated that the ADAP pledges to support actions under five themes – similar to the Uist Repopulation Zone Action Plan – and these include Infrastructure, Services, Land and Marine, Culture and Economy. The delivery of these will be supported locally by the Settlement Officers and ensures that networks can continue to learn from each other and develop innovative solutions to depopulation.

The Report further stated that whilst the ADAP is welcomed, there is an absence of sufficient resources to support and deliver these actions. Consequently, as the Comhairle is a member of the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership’s Population Working Group – which until recently reported to the Convention of the Highlands and Islands – they can, together with regional partners, continue to collaboratively develop measures and actions to influence how both long- and short-term changes and policy decisions can positively impact peoples decisions to stay or move to the islands.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) welcome the ADAP as a first step to address the issues influencing depopulation and be involved in its Delivery Group; and**
- (2) continue to support the work of both the HIREP Population Working Group and the Uist Repopulation Zone Working Group.**

Uist Repopulation
Zone Update

17

The Chief Executive submitted a Report to provide an update on the progress of the Uist Repopulation Zone Action Plan and partnership.

The Uist Repopulation Zone (URZ) Working Group continues to support the delivery of an Action Plan which aims to implement change in existing and identified challenges which are impacting the decisions of people to stay in or move to Uist. The Partnership – consisting of local public and private sectors members – collaboratively support the delivery of a URZ Action Plan throughout their work, organisations and decision-making.

The Report stated that Community consultations identified the needs and the short and long term activities and objectives of the URZ Working Group. Outputs to date include the development and launch of the Uist Beo platform, supporting childcare provision in Uist and addressing any skills shortages.

Housing, Childcare, Infrastructure, Connectivity, Jobs and Skills all feature on the Plan and have warranted innovative actions and activities to be undertaken and implemented to tackle the issues that are known to impact on peoples decisions on living in the islands.

The Report further stated that as part of the Scottish Governments Addressing Depopulation Action Plan (ADAP), they are continuing to part-fund the Settlement Officer post for 2024-25 and this ensures further alignment and input to influence and inform future rural policy needs and changes. The support of the community is essential to the success of the URZ Action Plan and consequently both the Working Group and Settlement Officer continue to ensure that their needs are taken into account.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the Report; and**
- (2) agree to discuss future funding options for tackling housing issues in Uist.**

Visitor
(Scotland)
Update

Levy
Bill

18

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to update members on the progress of the Bill and seek establishment of a Short-life Working Group to oversee policy developments.

Through the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill, the Scottish Government has committed to create a discretionary power for local authorities to apply a levy on overnight visitor stays in various accommodation settings. The intention is that this will generate funds to invest in local tourism-related facilities and services to attract more visitors.

The Report stated that the Visitor Levy (Scotland) Bill was introduced to the Scottish Parliament in May 2023 and as of March 2024 has now progressed to Stage 3 of the Process. Here, final amendments are undertaken before it is debated and voted in Parliament on whether to pass the Bill. If passed, and given Crown Consent, the legislation will give local authorities the ability to add a levy to overnight accommodation should they wish to do. This would be based on a percentage of the cost, with the rate set by individual Local Authorities.

The Report further stated that if consent is achieved the local implementation process will formally begin which involves consultation with stakeholders and an 18-month development and implementation phase to agree on how the levy should be delivered and the income utilised in the Outer Hebrides. Therefore, the formation of a Members Short-Life Working Group to explore policy and arising implications would be beneficial to assist in progressing an Outer Hebrides Visitor Levy Scheme

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the progress of the Bill through the Scottish Parliament; and**
- (2) establish a Short-life Working Group to oversee policy developments, consultation and implementation.**

Visit Scotland and Gaelic Tourism Strategy Update	19	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to update members on developments within Visit Scotland and the launch of the Gaelic Tourism Strategy.</p> <p>The Report stated that the Comhairle enjoys a productive relationship with VisitScotland locally and nationally to support the development and sustainability of the visitor economy for people to 'live, work and visit' the islands. This is especially important as the tourism sector is one of the largest in the Outer Hebrides through the income generated from the volume of visitors and the employment and business opportunities it provides throughout the islands.</p> <p>It is therefore essential to preserve the local cultural heritage and language and therefore through being a member of VisitScotland's Gaelic Tourism Strategy Steering Group the Comhairle supported the development of the new 'Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland 2024-2029'. This strategy aims to provide a <i>'framework for the development of Gaelic's tourism potential, recognising its economic value to the Scottish economy.'</i></p> <p>The Report further stated that following a Strategic Review, and diminished resources, VisitScotland has announced a number of forthcoming restructuring and corporate changes including the withdrawal of its Quality Assurance schemes from 31 March including the start grading, Taste Our Best, and Welcome Schemes, and also the phased closure of all the Visitor Information Centres, including Stornoway. Instead they will <i>'focus on delivering a free-to-access programme of business advice that will continue to inspire quality in the tourism industry.'</i> The Comhairle will continue to work and liaise with VisitScotland on these changes, and the resulting challenges, to ensure the local communities and visitor economy are not detrimentally impacted.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle:</p> <p>(1) note the Report; and</p> <p>(2) support the delivery of the Gaelic Tourism Strategy for Scotland 2024-29.</p>
National Food Consultation	20	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to consider a response to the National Good Food Nation Plan Consultation.</p> <p>The Report stated that the Scottish Government was developing the National Good Food Nation Plan. This was a requirement of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act 2022, which was passed in Summer 2022. This Good Food Nation Plan was intended to set out the Scottish Government's goals for food policy and how it intends to achieve them.</p> <p>The Report further stated that the Scottish food and drink sector generates turnover of around £15 billion per annum, and exports of Scottish food and drink were valued at £8.1 billion in 2022. Our fantastic food industry provides employment from the local farmers' market to the export of Scotland's finest produce across the globe. This success contributes positively to the wellbeing of the food and drink workforce, while also making it easier for the population to access healthy food options. Food enables a healthy population to enjoy life to its fullest. Our establishment of the Good Food Nation body of work recognises this and the importance of Scotland's food and drink sector not only to our economy, but also to our culture, heritage, and society.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle, approve the proposed response, focused on island-specific issues and other points raised during consultation events in Uist and Lewis.</p>

Islands Grown Deal Food & Drink Programme Update	21	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to update members on progress made with the Outer Hebrides Food & Drink Programme component within the Islands Growth Deal, specifically with regard to developments at Acarsaid and Vatersay Harbours.</p> <p>The Outer Hebrides Food & Drink Programme contributes to the Islands Deal's investment objectives by stimulating the creation and growth of businesses and jobs, making significant capital investment in key food and drink-related infrastructure, and contributing to the reduction of carbon emissions by shortening food logistics supply chains.</p> <p>The Report stated that the Food & Drink Programme will enable the sustainable development of the islands' primary food production industries in a radically altered socio-economic context: developing local food and drink markets and responding to sectoral opportunities linked to product diversification and value added, in order to build economic resilience, community wealth and well-being.</p> <p>The Programme will deliver three inter-related elements of capital investment in new or upgraded infrastructure: Harbour/ pier improvements in Vatersay, Eriskay, Lochboisdale and Brevig; Food Hubs in South Uist, Harris and Lewis; and Capital investment for food processing capacity and innovation.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle notes the progress of the Islands Growth Deal Outer Hebrides Food and Drink Programme.</p>
Business Gateway Grant Scheme: CERGS Replacement Business Support Scheme	22	<p>The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to seek approval from the Comhairle to transfer £200,000 from its Revolving Loan Fund in order to create and fund a proposed "Outer Hebrides Business Development Scheme" initially as a replacement for the Covid-19 Economic Recovery Grant Scheme" (CERGS).</p> <p>The Report stated that the 'Covid-19 Economic Recovery Grant Scheme' (CERGS) – which was designed to help the economy recover from Covid-19 by supporting businesses and social enterprises with grant funding to aid recovery, build resilience and encourage development - was launched in August 2021. CERGS was successful in attracting new enquiries to Business Gateway, helping to improve the number of start-up and growth businesses supported and helped create over 100 FTE jobs across the islands, though the budget is now almost fully committed.</p> <p>Therefore, in order to build upon the success of CERGS, a replacement scheme is being proposed. This scheme would be similar to CERGS, providing grants of up to £3,000 at a maximum intervention rate of 50%. The scheme would complement existing Comhairle business development schemes in terms of filling the gap for business proposals that do not meet the criteria of existing schemes, thus ensuring that small but significant key developments with economic impact proceed as proposed by applicants.</p> <p>It is proposed that funding for such a new scheme be sourced from the Comhairle's existing 'Revolving Loan Fund' (RLF), as there is approximately £850k in the RLF budget currently. Utilising a proportion of these funds would allow resources to be used more effectively, achieving greater economic impact at a time when businesses are still recovering from Covid-19 and have reduced reserves for development activity. Demand for loans - including fisheries investments - tends to fluctuate, therefore it is important the RLF does not fall below a significant level of resource. It is considered that a transfer of £200k from RLF would not impact the fund adversely, it would maintain the RLF at a sustainable level and be a more efficient use of limited resources to achieve significant economic impact going forward.</p> <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle agrees to transfer £200,000 from the Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) to create and fund the Outer Hebrides Business Development Scheme (OHBDS) initially.</p>

<p>Scottish Authorities Economic Development Indicators Framework Report 2022-23</p>	<p>Local</p>	<p>23</p>	<p>With reference to item 7 of the Minute of the Meeting of 25 April 2023 the Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to update members following publication of the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Indicators Framework Report 2022-2023.</p> <p>The Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development group (SLAED) is the network of economic development services across all 32 Scottish Local Authorities. SLAED works with the Scottish Government Improvement Service and Local Authorities to develop an annual Economic Development Indicators Framework which provides evidence of the contribution that local authorities make to Scotland's economy through their economic development activities and provides a basis for collating consistent data.</p> <p>The Report stated that the SLAED Economic Development Indicators Framework provides an overview of performance across Local Authorities and a set of measurable benchmarks which can be used to better understand impact, allocation of resources and identify potential areas for improvement.</p> <p>The Comhairle's 2022-23 Return identified several indicators where the Eilean Siar area appears to have been performing relatively well against the national average, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [OP5] 'Percentage of Immediately Available Employment Land' (100%); • [OC5] 'Business Survival Rate (3-Year)' - 2019-2022 - (66.7%); • [OC8] 'Town Vacancy Rate' (3.3%); • [IG6] 'Percentage of Participation in Education, Employment & Training by 16–19-year olds' (97.6%); • [IG9] 'Percentage of Good or Very Good Life Satisfaction' (89.6%). <p>It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the Scottish Local Authorities' Economic Development Indicators Framework 2022-23 Report.</p>
<p>Spaceport 1 Project Update</p>		<p>24*</p>	<p>With reference to item 6 of the Minute of the Meeting of 6 February 2024, the Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report to provide an update on progress with the Spaceport 1 project and to overview process and expenditure to facilitate the further development of the project.</p> <p>The Report stated that the Comhairle has led on the Spaceport 1 project since its inception. Through the provision of modest, generic infrastructure, Spaceport 1 will meet the requirements of a range of commercial operators of suborbital launch vehicles. Planning consent was granted on 26 July 2023.</p> <p>At the February series of meetings, it was agreed that the Comhairle would take forward the construction of the enabling infrastructure at Scolpaig Farm and that a private sector operator would be procured to fund and commission the spaceport infrastructure and operate Spaceport 1.</p> <p>The Report provided an overview of project financing and details the funding required to reach the point at which the construction tender could be published.</p>

It was agreed to recommend, insofar as the Committee's interests were concerned, that the Comhairle:

- (1) note the update on progress with Spaceport 1 project;**
- (2) note expenditure to date; and**
- (3) agree expenditure of £419,600, funded from revenue resources, pending draw down of funds from the Islands Growth Deal and from the Comhairle's Islands Growth Deal Capital allocation, to allow the project to progress to construction tender publication.**

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Reports
Outstanding

25

The Depute Chief Executive submitted a Report detailing those Reports outstanding arising from the decisions of the Committee.

It was agreed to recommend that the Comhairle note the Report.

