

## Moray Economic Partnership

**Wednesday 26 February 2025 (2.00pm – 4.30pm)**

**Venue: Moray Chamber office, Elgin**

<b>Attendees:</b>	
Sarah Medcraf (Chair)	Moray Chamber of Commerce (MCC)
Beverly Smith	The Moray Council (TMC)
Michael Kelly	TMC
Lorna Williamson	TMC
Marc Macrae	TMC
Sandy Keith	TMC
Sonya Warren	TMC
David Reid	Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
Fabio Villani	tsiMoray
Jackie MacLaren	tsiMoray
Gemma Cruickshank	Visit Moray Speyside (VMS)
Mike Duncan	Federation of Small Business (FSB)
Stephen Sheridan	Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
Carol Wink (Minutes)	HIE

<b>Apologies:</b>	
Rhona Gunn	TMC
David Patterson	UHI Moray
Andrew Anderson	tsiMoray

<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  Sarah Medcraf (Chair) opened the meeting.
<b>2</b>	<b>Matters arising not on the agenda</b>  There were no matters arising.
<b>3</b>	<b>Minute and actions from previous meeting (7/2/2025)</b>  The minute from 7 February 2025 was agreed.
<b>3</b>	<b>MEP Structure and Governance Paper</b>  Sarah Medcraf, MCC, reported that since the last meeting all MEP members have been consulted to confirm there is shared understanding and agreement of the role and remit of the MEP. Members feedback has been incorporated into the MEP Structure and Governance Paper and following further discussion additional changes will be made.  Current membership was agreed, and it was decided that other organisations would be invited to participate, based on relevance and the evolving agenda. It was also agreed that 'third sector' is incorporated into the 'verbal discussion on private/public sector opportunities/challenges' item of the agenda.

	<p>It was agreed that the chairing structure for the sub-groups will be: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural Funds sub-group – The Moray Council</li> <li>• Communities and Place sub-group – tsiMoray</li> <li>• Business Support sub-group – UHI Moray</li> <li>• Local Employability Partnership sub-group – The Moray Council</li> </ul> <p>An Annual Report outlining the progress and overall impact of the MEP will be prepared in due course.</p> <p><b>Action: Sarah Medcraf/David Reid to finalise the changes made to the MEP Structure and Governance Paper and circulate to members for final approval.</b></p>
4	<p><b>Visit Moray Speyside Update</b></p> <p>Gemma Cruickshank provided an update on the role of VMS as a destination marketing organisation connected to the Business Improvement District (BID) for Moray. VMS operates on a 5-year cycle with the next renewal ballot due in March 2025, determining its continuation. If the ballot is successful, proposed changes to the current operating model will include: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• broadening the criteria to include restaurants and licensed premises</li> <li>• recruitment of a Membership Manager</li> <li>• a change to the levy system from a banded structure to one based on rateable value</li> </ul> <p>If the ballot is unsuccessful VMS operations will cease with remaining funds used to support planned initiatives.</p> <p>The proposed tourism strategy is still scheduled to go out to tender in March 2025 as planned.</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf raised that if VMS is unsuccessful in its rebalot that MEP be considered when discussing next steps regarding VMS's assets, particularly the website and social media. Gemma Cruickshank, VMS agreed to this.</p>
5	<p><b>MGD Annual Report</b></p> <p>Michael Kelly, TMC, provided an overview of the MGD Annual Report which has been approved by the Growth Deal Board and TMC. The report will form the basis of the annual conversation with the UK and Scottish Governments and will be complemented with a programme of joint partner press and communications activity to raise awareness of work being undertaken.</p> <p>Reflecting on 2024 achievements, Michael reported that in January, two of the Deal's eight projects were in delivery stage and by December this number had reached six with project number seven expected to enter delivery stage early in 2025. Work completed to date has largely gone unnoticed, but moving into 2025 visible on-the-ground activity will begin to take shape. The increase in activity will span the whole of Moray, aiming to achieve the greatest possible geographical distribution of benefits delivered by the Deal.</p> <p>Key milestones for 2025 include: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ground clearances for regeneration work at the South Street site, in Elgin</li> <li>• construction works at the Speyview housing site, in Aberlour</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• construction completion and opening of the Manufacturing Innovation Centre for Moray (MICM) in Forres</li> <li>• expansion of the m.connect on-demand bus service across Moray</li> <li>• the first Early-Years STEM Hub in Elgin, supported by a mobile solution to reach the rural communities in Moray</li> <li>• developing a revised scope for the skills and innovation initiative</li> </ul> <p>MGD branded hoarding will be installed around development sites with the aim of improving visibility and to make it easier for people to understand the ongoing developments.</p>
6	<p><b>UKSPF proposals for discussion</b></p> <p>Lorna Williamson, TMC, provided an overview of the UKSPF applications evaluation, highlighting the significant amount of work and effort that has gone into the process. The UKSPF criteria has been used as a baseline to guide and structure discussion. Recommendations presented are intended solely for informational purposes and the responsibility for decision making lies with MEP members. There is a degree of flexibility to reallocate budget between sectors but transfers from capital to revenue is not permitted.</p> <p>The following applications were considered by MEP members: -</p> <p><u>Community Wealth Building Officer Project (TMC)</u> Funding for a 1-year post to drive forward the delivery of the Community Wealth Building Strategy and Action Plan approved by TMC in April 2024 and to develop a new model for securing and delivering regional socio-economic benefits in accordance with the National Planning Framework Policy.</p> <p>Following discussion, the application was formally approved by MEP members.</p> <p><u>Town Centre Regeneration (TMC)</u> This project involves two elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continuing to run the capital grant scheme across Moray's town centres to bring vacant, derelict and underused spaces back into productive use and improve shopfronts to support town centre vitality.</li> <li>- funding towards design work associated with the transformation of the site of the St Giles Shopping Centre which recently closed.</li> </ul> <p>Following discussion, members formally approved the application with the stipulation that projects in Forres town centre are also considered, provided there is no duplication or displacement involved. There are insufficient funds available to fund this project in its entirety, so it was proposed that £100k go towards St Giles Shopping Centre and the balance of funds available to go towards the capital grant scheme.</p> <p><u>Sustainable Volunteering (tsiMoray)</u> To strengthen and enhance volunteering across the third sector of Moray by securing a Development Officer dedicated to supporting local groups and organisations, focussing on building capacity, improving volunteer recruitment and retention, and fostering collaboration among organisations, community groups and volunteers.</p> <p>Following discussion, MEP members formally approved this application.</p>

#### Business Growth Programme (Business Gateway)

Business Gateway successfully delivered the Moray Business Growth Programme across 2023/24 and 2024/25 supported by funding from UKSPF. The proposal aims to continue this support and in addition include a specific support programme for young people by delivering three cohorts in 2025/26:

- Two business growth cohorts focussing on core business skills, strategic planning and financial management.
- One youth enterprise cohort supporting young entrepreneurs with mentorship and business development training.

Following discussion, it was agreed that this high-value, low-level market needs to be addressed and MEP members formally approved the application.

#### Third Sector Entrepreneurship Support (tsiMoray)

Funding to continue a key Social Enterprise Development Support post and related activities to provide direct support, facilitate networking, communication and collaboration between existing and emerging social entrepreneurs, social enterprises and enterprising third sector organisations.

It was agreed that tsiMoray provides support to an essential sector in Moray and MEP members formally approved this application.

#### Membership and Training Officer (FSB)

The project aims to support business owners in Moray by offering online training opportunities for their employees by delivering a 1-year part-funded offer of FSB membership. Alongside UKSPF funding, FSB would make a financial contribution by providing a discounted membership rate with business owners also making a financial contribution.

During discussion, it was noted that there is a lack of government funding available for the provision of CPD training for people in employment but as the proposal seeks funding from a membership organisation to support its membership, MEP members agreed to reject this application in its current format. FSB was given the opportunity to revisit the application with some changes to allow the project to be more accessible.

#### Apprenticeship Engagement and Development Lead (DYW Moray)

To fund a post to stimulate a higher level of availability and demand for Modern Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships not currently met locally in Moray.

Following discussion, MEP members formally approved this application subject to targets outlined in the application being reviewed and revised as necessary as it was felt that the targets in the plan were too ambitious. TMC to discuss with DYW a more appropriate target, perhaps reducing it from 50 to 30.

#### Moray Creative Enterprise (Glasgow School of Art)

The project aims to provide resources, mentoring and networking opportunities to help creative businesses establish and grow, strengthening Moray's creative economy by utilising community spaces in Moray for hosting workshops, training, peer to peer learning and making business support more accessible to local entrepreneurs.

It was noted during discussion that this proposal overlaps with the MGD Creative Hub and Business Enterprise Hub projects. MEP members collectively agreed to reject this application.

	<p><u>Business Engagement to support future business support initiatives (TMC)</u>  This project will conduct research and consultation with businesses across Moray, covering all sectors and sizes, to understand their support needs, identify key challenges, opportunities and gaps in existing support. The findings will ensure that future funding from the UK or Scottish Government for local business support is effectively managed and allocated to meet the specific requirements of businesses in Moray.</p> <p>During discussion, it was acknowledged that the number of partner surveys currently being conducted has resulted in a noticeable level of fatigue amongst businesses. It was agreed that wider engagement, along with research and intelligence gathering should be included on the agenda for a future MEP meeting.</p> <p>MEP members agreed to defer this application.</p> <p><b>Action: Wider engagement, research and intelligence gathering to be included as a future MEP agenda item.</b></p> <p><u>UKSPF People and Skills Projects</u>  The People and Skills applications have already been presented to the Local Employability Partnership (LEP) for consideration: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Moray Pathways Employment Support – supporting people furthest from the labour market to overcome barriers to work and providing youth work personal development activity and support for education and skills, targeting vulnerable young people leaving school.</li> <li>- Moray Pathways Financial Literacy Project – financial support to people who are economically inactive, underemployed and unemployed.</li> <li>- Moray Pathways Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) – the Moray Pathways local skills development programme tailored to meet local economic needs and support economic growth. The vocational skills programme also supports individuals who are underemployed to upskill and re-train.</li> </ul> <p>MEP members endorsed the LEP decision to approve the applications.</p> <p>At the previous MEP meeting it was noted that in the event of unallocated UKSPF funding being available, additional contingency funding towards the Town Centre Development Manager post might be considered. Sarah Medcraf, MCC, anticipates this to be circa £4k and will follow this up with Martin Skinner, TMC, to determine the appropriate application process.</p> <p>Lorna Williamson, TMC, reported that in addition to the applications being considered, there has been additional interest in the communities and place funding. It was recognised that there could be other worthwhile projects that might also qualify for any unallocated UKSPF funding.</p>
5	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>Sarah Medcraf, on behalf of members, thanked Fabio Villani for his support and valued contribution to the MEP over the years.</p>
6	<p><b>Close</b></p> <p>The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2025.</p>

	Sarah Medcraf thanked everyone for their attendance and brought the meeting to a close.
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<b>Summary of actions</b>	
Additional changes to be made to the MEP Structure and Governance Paper and circulated to MEP members for final approval.	MCC/HIE
Wider engagement, research and intelligence gathering to be included as a future MEP agenda item.	MCC/HIE