

Moray Economic Partnership

Wednesday 28 May 2025 (2.00pm - MStTeams)

Attendees:	
Sarah Medcraf (Chair)	Moray Chamber of Commerce (MCC)
Rhona Gunn	The Moray Council (TMC)
Beverly Smith	TMC
Lorna Williamson	TMC
Michael Kelly	TMC
Marc Macrae	TMC
Sandy Keith	TMC
Sonya Warren	TMC
Rod Lovie	TMC
Jackie MacLaren	tsiMoray
David Reid	Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
David Patterson	UHI Moray
Mike Duncan	Federation of Small Business (FSB)
Claire Sim	Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
Carol Wink (Minutes)	HIE

Apologies:	
Karen Greaves	TMC
Kathleen Robertson	TMC
Gary Templeton	TMC
Gemma Cruickshank	Visit Moray Speyside (VMS)

1	<p>Welcome and Apologies</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf (Chair) opened the meeting.</p> <p>It was noted that Andrew Anderson, tsiMoray, has resigned from the MEP Board and Claire Sim will take over as representative for Skills Development Scotland. On behalf of MEP members, Sarah welcomed Claire Sim and thanked Andrew Anderson for his support and valued contribution over the years.</p> <p>Matters arising not on the agenda</p> <p>There were no matters arising.</p>
2	<p>Minute and actions from previous meeting</p> <p>The minute from 26 February 2025 was agreed.</p> <p>The final version of the MEP Structure and Governance Paper will be circulated to MEP members for reference.</p>

3	<p>Discussion on Approvals Required</p> <p>All UKSPF projects approved by MEP have commenced and are actively working towards their expected outcomes and reporting milestones. Currently, £17k of the UKSPF funding remains unallocated.</p> <p>Lorna Williamson reported that a proposal had been received by Business Gateway from an external organisation for a digital offering aimed at supporting high street retail across all Moray towns. Although there is no formal proposal yet, it could align with the town centre development post and complement work already being undertaken, should spare funds be available.</p> <p>It was agreed to keep the process open for further discussion to see if any other proposals which could benefit from the UKSPF funding come forward.</p>
4	<p>Moray Growth Deal Update</p> <p>Michael Kelly gave a verbal update on the Moray Growth Deal projects. All projects are progressing with the focus being on delivery activity.</p> <p>Key achievements include: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continued advancement of ground clearance and archaeological works taking place on South Street, Elgin. • Construction works on the Elgin STEM Hub and delivery of the outreach vehicle, which still needs to be fitted out and wrapped. • Phase 2 of the Bus Revolution project has commenced extending access to the demand-responsive public transport service across the region. • The MICIM construction works are almost complete and the process of identifying an operator to run the MICIM service is progressing well. • The Elgin Town Hall tender process is nearing completion, with the appointment of the main contractor on track for early Q3. From both a financial planning and delivery perspective, this represents a significant milestone for the programme. SSEN has confirmed that some early enabling works will be carried out during July. • The governance process for skills and innovation has commenced with a paper being presented to TMC Strategic Leadership Forum and the MGD Programme Board followed by a member briefing in early June and a paper to TMC after the recess. The aim is to develop a proposal that integrates a skills campus with digital development with a primary focus on the energy and engineering sector which will also link into the work currently being undertaken on regional transformational opportunities in the Highlands and Islands. • As part of the RIBA Stage 3 work for Grant Lodge, a consultative session has been planned by the design team for 6 June. TMC will have a presence at the Motorfun Family Fun Day in Cooper Park, Elgin on 8 June. These sessions will provide an opportunity to engage with the public and other groups, to gather views to help shape the future development vision for the building. • The first MGD communications update was issued in March with the second due for issue in June. • The MGD Annual Report 2024 had been published highlighting progress made over the past year as projects advance from planning into delivery.

	<p>Sarah Medcraf reported that during a recent MCC audience event, a significant number of attendees were still unaware of the Town Board, Levelling Up and Growth Deal initiatives highlighting that there is a communications issue that needs to be addressed to ensure widespread awareness. Consideration may need to be given to identifying the most effective approach to communication to ensure there is maximum awareness and engagement.</p> <p>David Reid highlighted the importance of maintaining sustainable revenue models to support these individual projects and stressed that all partners need to remain committed to supporting and strengthening these business models as a key priority. Michael Kelly recognised the need to identify areas for improvement and efficiency, acknowledging that business models are constantly evolving.</p> <p>David Patterson raised the potential for confusion between the Business Hub project launched recently in Elgin Library by TMC and the MGD Business Enterprise Hub project. Michael Kelly acknowledged the need to ensure clarity of any communications issued to avoid confusion.</p>
5	<p>Net Zero Update</p> <p>Rod Lovie summarised the Climate Change and Sustainability Update paper and provided an update on the climate change work which TMC and Moray Climate Action Network (Moray CAN) have been progressing over the last year.</p> <p>The Climate Change Strategy which looks at corporate emissions is currently being updated and will concentrate on areas which the Council has direct control and influence over. It is due to be completed after summer 2025 with the draft document going out for public consultation after approval by the Council. This will pave the way for the Moray CAN region-wide Climate Change Strategy and a Biodiversity Strategy, both of which will go out to public consultation during the second half of 2025.</p> <p>Rhona Gunn pointed out that as the focus shifts from a council specific approach to a region wide climate strategy, many of the issues TMC aims to address also aligns with the remit of the MEP Communities and Place sub-group. TMC is keen to work with the sub-group to develop a broader regional strategy, tackling carbon emission reduction, climate adaptation, and sustainable practices at both corporate and regional levels.</p> <p>Rod Lovie reported that stakeholder engagement has taken place to develop an initial list of potential projects for consideration in a future round of the Scottish Government's Just Transition Fund. Feedback from the Scottish Government and Just Transition Commissioners has highlighted the need for a more strategic approach to funding bids, one that presents a cohesive suite of projects aligned with the Fund's overarching vision. The initial list will be developed further with Members and presented to Council for approval in Summer 2025, with the aim of developing these projects to a level suitable for inclusion in a future funding application. The deadline for expressions of interest for the 2025 Just Transition funding round is 17 June. Scottish Government is working towards multi-year bids starting from 2026.</p> <p>Rod Lovie advised that feasibility work on the council's Local Heat and Energy Efficiency Strategy (LHEES) is ongoing. The lack of sufficient local workforce capacity to progress the ambitious LHEES targets was raised. Claire Sim reported that at the recent COHI meeting, there was a request that mapping out of</p>

	<p>the critical workforce challenges in each local authority area across the highlands and islands needs be undertaken to identify key local challenges. Rhona Gunn emphasised the importance of maintaining alignment, noting that the MEP skills group is addressing the broader skills issues and updating the regional skills analysis for Moray. Additionally, ongoing work throughout the Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP), based on the Regional Economic Strategy, remains separate but is closely linked to regional transformational opportunities. It is important to avoid creating additional sub-groups as existing governance structures already support progress and should be utilised where possible.</p>
6	<p>Private Sector Engagement/Consultation Approaches</p> <p>There is an on-going requirement for partners to engage with businesses to obtain essential data with some consultations being driven by a Scottish Government requirement for business engagement on specific proposals while other consultation is aimed at enhancing partner services. It was agreed that there is a need to review how partners engage with businesses without overburdening them and contributing towards consultation/survey fatigue. The following points were highlighted during discussion: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider a joint structured programme to map out and plan ahead for anticipated consultations within a year. • Consider identifying core questions that need to be addressed then allowing other partners to personalise a set of questions at the beginning or end, as appropriate. <p>It was agreed to continue the conversation and keep it in mind for future discussions.</p>
7	<p>Verbal discussion on private/public sector opportunities/challenges</p> <p>Elgin BID</p> <p>Beverly Smith reported that Visit Moray Speyside and Elgin BID are going through the legal winding up process.</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf reported that MCC has received several enquiries from businesses about whether MCC would be taking on or partially taking on the Elgin BID service. MCC will continue to support businesses and will contribute to the UKSPF vacant premises and streetscape works but will not be taking over the responsibilities of Elgin BID.</p> <p>Beverly Smith reported that TMC is keen to support businesses in Elgin and the wider Moray area and emphasised the need for a more coordinated approach to available resource to fill the gap left by Elgin BID. A possible solution could be joint event programming with Business Gateway (BG), MCC and representation from TMC's planning, building standards and environmental health teams.</p> <p>Lorna Williamson noted that although the absence of Elgin BID will create some gaps, the businesses BG has engaged with recently have expressed a willingness to support each other and are looking to organise their own networking events.</p>

Rhona Gunn acknowledged that despite Elgin BID no longer being in place, there is merit in issuing joint communications to explain and highlight the ongoing activity being undertaken in Moray.

Sarah Medcraf advised that Anna Rogers, in her Town Centre Development Manager role, will be in post until the end of March 2026 and may be able to assist if any coordination work is required.

Visit Moray Speyside and Tourism Visitor Levy

Beverly Smith reported that next steps include the formal winding up of the VMS limited company and getting the tourism strategy out to tender.

Sarah Medcraf reported that MCC has had discussions around what domestic and international tourism marketing activity could be undertaken to fill any gaps during the interim period as VMS is being wound up. They understand the value and impact of tourism and are open for discussion in terms of what support they and partners could offer in the short term until a more sustainable solution is found.

Rhona Gunn advised that tourism marketing does not feature as a priority in the current TMC corporate documents and with all other competing priorities at present it would be unlikely that they would have in-house resource to dedicate to this.

The question of who should take ownership of VMS's website and social media was raised. Lorna Williamson questioned if MCC might be able to take on ownership, with the understanding that it would be a temporary arrangement. Rhona Gunn pointed out that due to the legal winding up process there would be limitations in terms of what can be done with VMS's website and social media with the Memorandum and Articles of Association determining what happens with the intellectual property assets.

Lorna Williamson expressed concerns about the significant gap that would be left if VMS's work discontinues and suggested that perhaps the £17k UKSPF underspend could be used towards certain aspects of the tourism marketing function.

Mike Duncan advised that FSB would be unable to take on the tourism marketing role but suggested that some of the unallocated £17k UKSPF be used to fund a feasibility study exploring future options and sustainable business models.

Beverly Smith emphasised that TMC has a formal responsibility in the process of winding up the BID and until that has been completed, no further progress can be made on determining what happens next.

It was agreed to carry this agenda item forward to the next MEP meeting in September, by which time a further update may be available.

ACTION: Private/public sector opportunities/challenges to be included on the agenda for the next MEP meeting.

	<p>Regional Transformation Opportunities</p> <p>Beverly Smith summarised the key opportunities and enablers outlined in the Regional Transformational Opportunities in the Highlands and Islands Executive Summary (RTO) paper. The areas currently being developed offer substantial future potential with the focus now on aligning this work with the efforts of the economic partnership and integrating it into HIREP. MEP members were invited to provide their feedback on the report.</p> <p>David Patterson noted that the report indicates that 19% of Moray's population could be impacted by the £100bn potential investment emphasising the need to fully understand the economic opportunities for Moray. This also forms the rationale for the skills proposal submitted to the Growth Deal Board to ensure those living and relocating to the region can access and are equipped with the necessary training and skills to work with the key employers overseeing the investment driving the new resources and opportunities.</p> <p>David Reid highlighted that a useful starting point for the MEP would be to examine the detailed local authority-level information allowing partners to work together to explore and shape meaningful action and an effective outcome.</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf emphasised the importance of transport and connectivity in shaping a region that is functional, efficient and fit for purpose and suggested that the RTO could serve as the catalyst for partners to work together to strengthen their engagement with Transport Scotland and other key stakeholders. Rhona Gunn reported that the same concern was voiced at COHI, highlighting concerns that the A96 was being overlooked in the strategic transport network. TMC has put forward a strong argument advocating for both the dualling of the A96 and the exploration of alternative options.</p> <p>ACTION: Sarah Medcraf to liaise with TMC to explore how partners can lobby further as a region on the A96 in light of the RTO.</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf reported that, following a candid discussion with Mark Wilson, Product Development Manager at Scotrail, regarding rail service concerns, he has offered to meet with MCC and TMC to support them in refining their pitch to Transport Scotland when advocating for rail improvements. Given his expertise and understanding of the right approach, his guidance would help MCC/TMC approach their discussions with clarity and direction.</p> <p>ACTION: Sarah Medcraf to engage with TMC to ensure the correct representative attends the Scotrail meeting with MCC.</p>
	<p>AOB</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf asked if there was any update on current messaging regarding future plans for the St Giles Shopping Centre building. Rhona Gunn confirmed that TMC is currently unable to disclose any information on St Giles or the continued operation of the bus station due to the commercially sensitive nature of the proposals.</p>
6	<p>Close</p> <p>The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday 4th September 2025.</p>

	Sarah Medcraf thanked everyone for their attendance and brought the meeting to a close.
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Summary of actions	
The final version of the MEP Structure and Governance Paper to be circulated to MEP members for reference.	HIE
Private/public sector opportunities/challenges to be included on the agenda for the next MEP meeting.	MCC
Sarah Medcraf to liaise with TMC to explore how partners can lobby further as a region on the A96.	MCC
Sarah Medcraf to engage with TMC to ensure the correct representative attends the Scotrail meeting with MCC.	MCC