

Meeting Note - Strategic Board 18 June 2020 - Skype Call

Attendees:

Members: Nora Senior (Chair), Scott McLarty (Vice Chair), Caroline Barelle, Mike Cantlay, Liz Cameron, Simon Cotton, Audrey Cumberland, Alistair Dodds, Russel Griggs, Poonam Gupta, Steven Heddle, Gerry McCusker, Melinda Matthews-Clarkson, Alison Milne, Frank Mitchell, Gillian Murray, Grahame Smith.

Other attendees:

Stephen Boyle (Adviser to Chair), Liz Ditchburn (SG), Steve Dunlop (SE), Lorna Gibbs (SG), Gary Gillespie (SG), Nick Halfhide (SoSE), Benny Higgins, Uzma Khan (SG), Stuart King (AU/Sec), Jo-anne Lawson (Sec), Mary McAllan (SG), Linda Murray (SE), Richard Murray (AU/Sec), Karen Watt (SFC), Charlotte Wright (HIE), Damien Yeates (SDS).

Apologies:

Sara Carter, Kevin Quinlan.

Welcome and Minutes from the Previous Meeting

The Chair welcomed everyone to the call and asked the Board to agree the previous minutes with a request for any comments to be made via correspondence to the Secretariat.

Item 1. Introduction from the Chair

The Chair began the meeting with a recognition of thanks to the Members and for their patience with the technical issues involved in having the meetings remotely.

With most of the previous two meetings focussing on Members receiving updates from the Scottish Government, agencies and others on their response to the Pandemic, the Chair reflected that today's agenda would provide an opportunity to hear more from Members.

The Chair outlined her positive meeting with the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Fair Work and Culture, Fiona Hyslop the previous week. The Cabinet Secretary is very supportive of the Board's work and had recognised the key role the enterprise and skills will play with the economic recovery.

There were a number of papers for the Board's information which the Chair briefly referenced. There was a paper outlining the collective agency response to the crisis and the Chair noted that she very much welcomed the collaborative nature of this work in these exceptionally challenging circumstances. It was noted that it would be helpful for the Board to see further updates on joint working between the agencies in similar notes at future Board meetings.

The Chair also referred to the paper on the Innovation work project and noted that this work had commenced before the COVID-19 crisis so while there had been some slippage this was a timely reminder of this important piece and the Board should not lose sight of this and will look to have further regular updates on this.

Item 2. Supporting the Recovery

Part 1 – Update on the work of the ESSB Labour Market Sub-group

The Chair and Frank Mitchell (co-chairs of the sub-group) updated the Board on the work of the sub-group that was commissioned by the Deputy First Minister. They explained the timetable the group was working to was to submit their report to Scottish Ministers by the end of June. The group had identified a considerable number of potential actions and had prioritised those they felt would have greatest impact.

A discussion followed on each of the recommendations in turn and the Chair assured Members that this feedback would be noted and taken on Board. She asked for Members' consent to submit these in the Board's name. Each recommendation was approved by the Board.

Part 2 – Update from the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery

The Chair thanked Members for participating in the sessions with the AU to gather feedback to submit to the Advisory Group. She then welcomed Benny Higgins and invited him to update on the work of the Advisory Group who were due to submit their report the following week. Benny gave an update on the report, highlighting:

- The new ambition for Scotland is to build in resilience to the economy.
- The 3 main themes are inequality, education and unemployment and the recommendations are aligned to these.
- The recommendations will range from high level such as fiscal stimulus and interest rates to detailed ones e.g. investment in digital infrastructure.
- Skills will be crucial, making sure they are the right skills for the future. Renewables sector will be important, education, tourism and hospitality and digital infrastructure touches on a lot of issues.

The Chair then opened up for discussion with members touching on themes such as a green recovery, agriculture and natural capital. Benny noted the need to prioritise where resources will be invested and the need to lobby UK government for further fiscal stimulus.

Action ESSB June 20 (01) Secretariat to set up a discussion in the coming days between the Advisory Group and Sub-group chairs.

Item 3. ESSB Action Plan for Recovery

The Chair drew attention to the paper on the future of the current missions and a discussion of how these may need to change in light of COVID 19 followed.

The Chair noted that it may not be possible to reach firm conclusions while the crisis and details of the economic impact were still unfolding but that it was important to gather some initial thoughts and refine as government policies become clearer over the summer.

Business Models and Workplace Innovation

- Protection of women and other vulnerable Groups
- General trend of remote working/hybrid and how to we support companies with this.

- Also need to look at the infrastructure around urban areas and the impact of remote working on shops/cafes that support urban workers.
- This feels like a step change and it is unlikely to return to what we had before.

Exports

- What will happen in digital and more opportunities in e-commerce. With air travel restricted
- Lack of a support mechanism that business would welcome.

Business Creation and Growth

- With redundancies there is an opportunity to facilitate new business start-ups.
- We should look at what businesses are doing well at present and examine why.
- The importance of signposting to support.
- Huge opportunity to stimulate enterprise in a way that hasn't been done before – for those new and emerging sectors there is a need to articulate where the opportunities are and then to galvanise current businesses that can pivot easily to these.

Future Skills

- This mission had already been discussed as part of the response to the Labour Market subgroup.

General

- Net Zero and climate change are priorities that will not change.
- How do we use technology and looking at the digital divide.
- What have we already got? What fits with what our strengths and where we want to be?

Next Steps

- It was agreed that the missions remain relevant but the content of each may need to be reviewed as the full economic and policy context of COVID-19 becomes clearer.
- A cross-agency working group could be established to look at emerging policy themes from a prospectus type approach establishing current and new activity with respect to each of the missions and identifying any gaps.
- The Annual Report should also be placed on hold.

Action ESSB June 20 (02) Secretariat to work with SPJWG on a proposal to describe the current status of the missions.

The Chair noted that it would be helpful to have a meeting over the summer and would ask for members' availability.

Action ESSB June 20 (03) Secretariat to send out doodle poll for a summer meeting.

AOB

The Chair noted that this will be Gerry McCusker's last meeting and wanted to place on record the Board's thanks for all Gerry's support and work over the last couple of years and would hope he could still be involved in some of the work going forward. She thanked everyone again and the meeting concluded.