

**CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS
15 MARCH 2021**

(Paper 1)

OUTCOMES FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS – VIRTUAL EVENT – 26 OCTOBER 2020

Covid-19: Regional Impacts and Economic Recovery	Lead	Updated March 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Convention welcomed and endorsed a comprehensive paper on economic recovery, with particular focus on the key areas of interest for the Highlands and Islands. • Members highlighted a very positive and ambitious long-term outlook for the Highlands and Islands, with strong opportunities from a number of areas including a green recovery however, the short term will require increased vigilance and a redoubling of efforts at national, regional and community levels to ensure that those worst hit by the COVID crisis are not left behind and are fully supported. Acknowledging particularly the non-COVID health (specifically mental health) harms related to the pandemic. • Members raised the importance of a renewed approach to defining the area’s unique infrastructure requirements, identifying the need for investment and driving delivery. • The Convention identified the importance of increased communication between partners and left open the discussion on how to strengthen the regional economic structures, with HIE committing to take this discussion forward in the coming weeks and months. These discussions should focus on ensuring the correct structures are in place to: 	<p>Kimberley Daly Matthew Farrell</p>	<p>Since the last Convention of the Highlands and Islands meeting in October 2020, we have continued to work with regional partners to support national and regional economic recovery in a variety of forms.</p> <p>Working with regional partners and UKG we have driven forward the development and implementation of the City and Regional Growth Deals Programme.</p> <p>With four deals spanning the Highlands and Islands the programme will deliver combined investment of over £400m to support projects that will protect and create jobs.</p> <p>We have secured Heads of Terms for the Argyll and Bute Deal. With a strong focus on maximising the region’s marine resources to attract visitors, jobs and investment.</p> <p>We are close to securing Heads of Terms for the Islands Deal, which will have a strong focus on renewable energy to support green economic recovery and future growth.</p> <p>Work continues to advance the Moray Growth Deal with a strong focus on aerospace to drive growth and secure business investment. And work is well underway to implement the Inverness and Highland Deal with a focus on innovation, digital connectivity, skills and tourism.</p> <p>We have also committed an additional £300,000 towards regional economic recovery, to support local authorities in assessing impacts,</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shape the critical COVID supports such as the Young Person’s Guarantee and other labour market interventions; ○ Drive the region’s shared opportunities from a green recovery; ○ Improve engagement and sharing of information; and ○ Ensure that recovery plans are complimentary and take advantage of synergies across the region. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● There was an understanding that place-based, cross-sector support for individuals, businesses and communities will be needed for immediate resilience through this winter but also to be resilient for sustainable recovery in the medium and longer term. 	<p>developing strategy and creating action plans to target resources to mitigate Covid impacts.</p> <p>Figures on the funding made available to businesses affected by the COVID-19 restrictions under the Strategic Framework, from 2 November to 22 February, were published on 10 March at: Coronavirus (COVID-19) Strategic Framework: Business Support Funding Statistics (Tranche 4) and other local authority support Schemes - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)</p> <p>Funding provided to COHI local authorities under the 4 core SFBF funds during that period are shown below:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>SFBF closure/ restrictions</th> <th>RHL top up</th> <th>IEP</th> <th>IEP top up</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Argyll and Bute</td> <td style="text-align: right;">7,251,000</td> <td style="text-align: right;">4,903,000</td> <td style="text-align: right;">731,900</td> <td style="text-align: right;">620,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highland</td> <td style="text-align: right;">21,199,850</td> <td style="text-align: right;">14,151,000</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Moray</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2,805,600</td> <td style="text-align: right;">3,807,000</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>North Ayrshire</td> <td style="text-align: right;">5,021,300</td> <td style="text-align: right;">5,290,000</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Na h-Eileanan Siar</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1,354,600</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: right;">548,200</td> <td style="text-align: right;">844,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Orkney Islands</td> <td style="text-align: right;">248,400</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: right;">1,017,600</td> <td style="text-align: right;">853,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Shetland Islands</td> <td style="text-align: right;">753,800</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: right;">658,800</td> <td style="text-align: right;">987,000</td> </tr> <tr> <td>total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">38,634,550</td> <td style="text-align: right;">28,151,000</td> <td style="text-align: right;">2,956,500</td> <td style="text-align: right;">3,304,000</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-top: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="width: 30%;">grand total</td> <td style="text-align: right;">73,046,050</td> </tr> </table> <p>An update on the development of a Regional Economic Partnership model for the Highlands and Islands has been tabled separately by HIE.</p>		SFBF closure/ restrictions	RHL top up	IEP	IEP top up	Argyll and Bute	7,251,000	4,903,000	731,900	620,000	Highland	21,199,850	14,151,000	-	-	Moray	2,805,600	3,807,000	-	-	North Ayrshire	5,021,300	5,290,000	-	-	Na h-Eileanan Siar	1,354,600	-	548,200	844,000	Orkney Islands	248,400	-	1,017,600	853,000	Shetland Islands	753,800	-	658,800	987,000	total	38,634,550	28,151,000	2,956,500	3,304,000	grand total	73,046,050
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Building a Greener Economy	Lead	Updated March 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CoHI members agreed the potential to develop opportunities through the green and blue economy, noting the importance of partners working together to delivery activity that maximises the region’s natural advantage. • Particular areas that COHI members agreed to develop further include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Infrastructure investment to enhance connectivity and to develop improved capability of ports and harbours; ○ Developing a delivery road map for realising key opportunities (including, but not restricted to, the blue economy) with a focus on how public funding can help unlock additional private investment; ○ The circular economy, including the deposit return scheme, and options to address additional costs of rural waste; ○ Development of green / sustainable tourism with opportunities for wider local supply chain benefits; and ○ Connectivity and technology development to support local service delivery and remote working opportunities. <p>COHI members also noted the need to develop longer term funding certainty to develop these more strategic activities.</p>	<p>Sarah Hart /Helena Gray</p>	<p>Retaining a focus on building the green economy should remain a priority for COHI.</p> <p>In December, the Scottish Government updated its Climate Change Plan with over 100 new policies, setting out a pathway to meet its emissions targets over the period to 2032 and helping to achieve a just transition to net zero by 2045.</p> <p>The updated climate change plans is underlined by a commitment to working closely with those communities and organisations in areas that need change, are undergoing change or are affected by change. Rethinking how our places are lived in, planned, delivered and adapted will help to futureproof our villages, towns, cities and regions from the more extreme and costly impacts of climate change.</p> <p>The updated plan has been supported by £1.9 bn of capital funding in the Scottish Budget to tackle climate change, create good, green jobs and deliver a green recovery from the pandemic. The fiscal challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis are considerable, but it will be important to continue to prioritise action to reduce our emissions, using public investment to create an environment where new industries, markets and innovations can thrive is key.</p> <p>It is vital that just transition principles, and the importance of equity, engagement and planning, are being embedded across government policy. COHI members may wish to consider the recommendations from the independent Just Transition Commission, due to be published at the end of March, and how these related to the priority areas previously identified.</p>

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Gaelic	Lead	Updated March 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COHI members confirmed a commitment to maintain the engagement and dialogue with Gaelic communities, to look closely at what is in place, what else could be done in speaker communities and for this discussion to feed into the next version of the National Plan for Gaelic. • COHI members also committed to continue to make progress with the initiative, Gaelic, a Faster Rate of Progress, and in particular to consider how the linked areas of tourism, heritage and creative industries can be strengthened in this initiative. 	<p>Douglas Ansdell / Stuart Pescodd</p>	<p>To be discussed at the CoHI meeting on 15 March 2021</p>
Population and Fragile Communities	Lead	Updated March 2021
<p>COHI members endorsed the paper on Population and Fragile Communities produced by Argyll and Bute Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Highland Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, and agreed to the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the acuteness of the issues in relation to population decline in Argyll and Bute, the Outer Hebrides and Caithness and Sutherland requires a targeted, inter-agency policy response; • That this inter-agency response should consider options to rapidly impact on population issues in Argyll and Bute, the Outer Hebrides and Caithness and Sutherland; • Recognising that communities across rural Scotland, including other islands, not specifically referenced in the Paper are facing their own 	<p>Liam Kearney/ Rachel Sunderland/ Cristina Thomson</p>	<p>Since the last Convention in October, the Scottish Government's Ministerial Population Taskforce has developed the UK's first Population Strategy. This is expected to be published on 15th March 2021 (the same day as the next upcoming COHI)</p> <p>As one of its building blocks, the Strategy sets out a vision for 'a more balanced population.' This acknowledges that every local authority in Scotland is experiencing different demographic challenges . From population decline in areas in the West, to increasing population growth in the East, it frames these challenges as cross-cutting – spanning across economy, infrastructure, and public services.</p> <p>Its vision is one that not only pulls together existing Scottish Government work, but also challenges Government (both national and local) to do more. Both in terms of addressing Scotland's long-term population change, but also in responding to the urgent population needs of many communities today. Many of which are felt in Highland and Island regions.</p>

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<p>population challenges, the work of this response should be developed in such a way as to be replicable across other Highland and Island areas;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognising the crucial role of working aged populations in the long-term sustainability of our Highland and Island communities, there needs to be a specific focus on attracting and retaining working aged people to these areas; and <p>That this sub-regional population response should also consider the feasibility and potential impact of the establishment of a “West Coast Innovation Zone” and other appropriate policy interventions that would support additional areas facing population challenges such as the islands of Arran and Cumbrae in North Ayrshire</p>		<p>This vision has been developed in a deeply collaborative way with officials across all 32 local authorities and partner organisations. And in January, it was unanimously endorsed by COSLA Leaders .</p> <p>The upcoming strategy represents the beginning of a conversation to drive long term change. A conversation where there is a need to find the correct balance between high-level, national policy and specific, targeted, local area interventions.</p> <p>As a first step, it identifies 36 individual actions, ranging from building more affordable homes and considering the Scottish Government’s workforce dispersal, to a series of broader programme-level next steps for further strategic engagement, consultation, and intervention-focused evidence gathering.</p> <p>To further this conversation, Scottish Government Population officials have joined the COHI Population Working Group. Together, Scottish Government and the COHI Working Group will be presenting a joint agenda item on the national population strategy and the concept of repopulation zones at the next COHI in March. This sits along further work being undertaken by the group to identify relevant actions and a place-based approach to addressing demographic change.</p>
<p>Community Wealth Building</p>	<p>Lead</p>	<p>Updated March 2021</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Convention discussed the opportunities to further develop community wealth building (CWB) across the Highlands and Islands, noting the Scottish Government commitment to work with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to deliver a CWB action plan that reflects and builds on pre-existing practice. It was noted that any lessons and learning from this process should be shared across the region, particularly 	<p>Geraldine Campbell/ Euan McArdle</p>	<p>The Community Wealth Building Action Planning process for the Western Isles is well underway with expected delivery of the completed action plan by mid-March 2021</p> <p>As part of the action planning process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key existing CWB related activities and projects were identified and benefits identified;

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<p>where this can support population increases and involvement of young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members heard the emerging next steps for Comhairle nan Eilean Siar action plan, focussed on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Profiling key pre-existing CWB projects and the benefits they deliver; ○ Working with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar as an anchor institution; ○ Expanding on and sharing lessons from existing strategies which incorporate CWB principles – such as the Outer Hebrides ‘Community Wealth Recovery’ strategy; and ○ Building on positive sectoral roles by exploring potential for technology, energy or marine sectors to be seen as ‘anchors’ for the region. • HIE and local authorities were supportive of the principle and partners agreed the need for a bespoke and flexible approach to develop CWB in Highlands and Islands. Comments from members raised the question of delivering procurement efficiency, alongside CWB objectives and SG officials should discuss this with Scotland Excel. • The ideas presented were agreed as a good basis on which to develop a CWB action plan in Outer Hebrides that we can all learn from. Scottish Government should now progress work with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, engaging with other relevant partners where appropriate and report on delivery progress at next CoHI in 2021. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In collaboration with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, key partners were identified for discussion, interviews were conducted with senior council members and documentation on relevant CWB activity was shared; • Early lessons have been identified on the challenges and areas for progress in adopting a community wealth building approach and for the particular geography of the Highlands and Islands; and • Key actions and priorities for the action plan were identified. It is evident that the framing of community wealth building can help to both scale up and amplify existing activity and give new impetus to economic development within the WI. This includes work around green economy, inclusive ownership, sustaining key sectors, growing role of anchor organisations.
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<p>Replacement of the European Structural and investment Funds (ESIF) Post EU Exit</p>	<p>Lead</p>	<p>Updated March 2021</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CoHI members restated that EU funding is fundamental to life in the Highlands and Islands. The lack of information provided by the UK Government regarding the development and operation of their proposed replacement to the European Structural Funds, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is concerning. COHI members agreed that the UKSPF must maintain the momentum of existing funding and the Scottish position must be predicated upon regional policy making to ensure funds are targeted to meet the needs of all Scotland's communities. It is proposed that any replacement fund aims will be focussed on promoting place-based economic development and cohesion, helping communities across Scotland to improve key economic, social and wellbeing performance indicators. Scotland's recommendations for any replacement is currently being considered by Scottish Ministers and will be published in the upcoming weeks. It is agreed that further feedback from COHI members would be welcomed going forward and Scottish Government will update members at the next session as the matter unfolds. 	<p>Sean Jamieson</p>	<p>To be discussed at the CoHI meeting on 15 March 2021</p>
<p>Update on CoHI and Transformational Projects (Spotlight: Digital)</p>	<p>Lead</p>	<p>Updated March 2021</p>
<p>COHI welcomed R100 and related developments and the cross-cutting importance of digital, as enhanced by COVID and the prevalence of working from home. There</p>	<p>Robbie McGhee/ Andy Manson</p>	<p>On 14 December 2020, the Minister advised Parliament that the North lot contract of the R100 programme had been signed, successfully concluding the procurement process and meeting our commitment to do</p>

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<p>was agreement that COHI members should work closely together to innovate and sweat these developing assets to boost economic and social impacts. There is more to do collaboratively on education and business transformation.</p> <p>COHI also noted the work undertaken on identifying RTOs and the strong alignment with current and emerging strategic projects, especially those within growth deals. The research can inform the wider development of economic recovery and growth planning for the region. Strong collaboration to plan and implement strategic projects which can contribute to realising these opportunities will be required.</p>	<p>so before the end of this calendar year. However, we cannot confirm R100 build plans in the North lot intervention area until BT's survey and remodelling work – to account for increased commercial coverage – has been completed. This work will then be reflected on our online checker at https://www.scotlandsuperfast.com, at which point those within the North lot contract area will be able to confirm whether or not their properties are within those build plans.</p> <p>In the meantime, we remain committed to providing support to ensure that everyone can access superfast broadband services by the end of 2021 - delivered through the SBVS, which we launched on 14 September 2020, with over 50 suppliers now registered to deliver services.</p> <p>Anyone whose home or business broadband speed is less than 30 Megabits per second (Mbps), and where there are no plans to bring superfast broadband to their address by the end of 2021, will be eligible for a voucher.</p> <p>Properties that are not expected to receive a connection through either the R100 contracts or commercial investment will be eligible for a main voucher, offering a subsidy worth up to £5,000 per property.</p> <p>This also currently includes premises in the North of Scotland R100 lot area. A significant number of these premises are expected to fall within R100 build plans, but we cannot confirm which premises this will apply to, and consequently which premises will continue to be met through the main voucher scheme, until such time as those plans are known. However, securing a connection in this way could potentially remove any such properties from the intervention area for build through the R100 contract.</p> <p>The Scottish Government is committed to increasing digital participation and ensuring that all of Scotland is able to enjoy the social, cultural and economic benefits of the internet.</p>
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		<p>Our commitment to increasing digital participation – and ensuring that everyone in Scotland is able to enjoy the social, cultural and economic benefits of internet access – is demonstrated through the Connecting Scotland programme.</p> <p>The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the importance of access to the internet at home and the first phase of the programme has provided data, devices, digital skills training and technical support to low income, digitally excluded people who are clinically at risk from coronavirus.</p> <p>The second phase of programme will provide devices, unlimited data and support to more than 20,000 low income families with children and young care leavers and Phase 3, which was announced in our Programme for Government, will extend this even further. By the end of 2021, Connecting Scotland will have supported an additional 50,000 low income households across Scotland.</p>
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