

**ACTION NOTE OF THE ‘CONNECTED ECONOMY GROUP’ (CEG)**

**Wednesday 4 March 2020, 1400-1600 hrs, Saltire Room 2, John Muir House, Haddington**

**Members present:**

Cllr J McMillan, East Lothian Council (JMM) (Chair)

Cllr J Findlay, East Lothian Council (JF)

Cllr P McLennan, East Lothian Council (PML)

Frank Beattie, Scottish Enterprise (FB) (for E Morrison)

Keith Barbour, Mid- and East Lothian Chamber of Commerce (KB)

Garry Clark, Federation of Small Businesses (GC)

Douglas Proudfoot, East Lothian Council (DP)

Neil Craik-Collins, East Lothian Council (NCC) (for L Brown)

**In attendance:**

Susan Smith, East Lothian Council (SS)

Paolo Vestri, East Lothian Council (PV)

1. **Appointment of Chair**

All those present agreed that Cllr McMillan continue to chair CEG meeting as Spokesperson for Economic Development and Tourism. JMM said that he would favour the appointment of an independent chair longer-term. It was agreed that the previous advertisement used for the appointment of Nigel Paul be reviewed and be advertised locally and through networks and CEG/East Lothian Plan membership **(ACTION: SS/PV).**

DP commented that it can be challenging for business leaders to find time and suggested that a programme of networking events for businesses be developed with topics such as National Planning Framework (NPF) 4, Climate Change for rural businesses and that these be held early evening to encourage attendance **(ACTION: SS/DP to draft topics).**

1. **Welcome, introduction and apologies**

Welcome and introductions were made. Apologies from Nick Croft, Phil Ford, Lesley Brown, Elaine Morrison, John Reid and Monica Patterson.

1. **Minutes of previous meeting**

Approved.

1. **Matters arising**

The East Lothian Tourism Action Plan will be circulated once finalised. Also, all members will be invited to the Scottish Tourism Month East Lothian conference on Thursday 19 March **(ACTION: SS).**

With regard to R100, JMM added that a local business, Lothian Broadband, has moved to Haddington and is expanding further. NCC commented on challenges in Ormiston where East Lothian’s digital school is located.

1. **Update on Major Projects (verbal)**
* ESESCRD – Regional Growth Strategy

DP reported that ELC has the lead for all ESESCRD groups for 2020. With regard to the NPF refresh, each local authority will be making their own submission around the ‘call for ideas’ – eg Cockenzie/Blindwells for East Lothian. He added that there will be three distinct pieces of work undertaken during 2020 – the NPF ‘call for ideas’ with deadline of 31 March; the submission of the Regional Spatial Strategy, 30 June deadline, for outline of areas of growth and constraint; the development of the Regional Growth Framework – more narrative and greater role for the Regional Enterprise Council and businesses. The ESESCRD Joint Committee will meet on Friday 6 March to agree the joint submission on ‘call for ideas’. DP added that agencies and elected members have all been involved.

PML suggested a Rural Economic Strategy with a focus on Climate Change, (over-) tourism, food & drink, unique labour market circumstances. NCC drew attention to the challenges of delivering the Rural Skills programme in conjunction with SRUC and commented on higher-level skills in agriculture increasingly being in demand. It was agreed that a paper be prepared outlining rural engagement opportunities and a terms of reference for a Rural Economic Strategy **(ACTION: SS).** It was also suggested that a keynote speaker operating within the rural economy be invited to the next meeting **(ACTION: All).**

* ESESCRD – IRES

DP said that a report on IRES progress will be submitted to the Joint Committee on Friday. All business cases have been approved and individual projects are being led. NCC added that the Intensive Family Support project is led by Children’s Services, supported by ELWorks. The Housing & Construction project presents opportunities and there is engagement around the DDI (Data Driven Innovation) project led by the University of Edinburgh. SS is the representative on the Integrated Employer Engagement group and referred to ESESCRD Community Benefits being developed. It was agreed to send members the latest IRES Performance Dashboard as background **(ACTION: SS).**

* ESESCRD – QMU

DP reported that the QMU Oversight Group had recently met. He reminded members that this project involves a £30m UK Government grant with East Lothian Council accounting-for and undertaking the land deals for this project. There is interest in the Innovation Hub and other economic land. The junction works will start in August and the Procurement Information Notice has been issued. Communication is key with diversion routes. 3500 jobs is the conservative estimate. PWC has been commissioned to prepare the full business case that will be submitted in September 2020. Scotland Food and Drink and Scottish Enterprise are both involved in the project. JF asked for more detail on the number of jobs whether for East Lothian residents or those from elsewhere and DP said that there may be relocation of businesses from elsewhere to East Lothian.

* Cockenzie

SS updated the group on Cockenzie, namely the port study that has not been finalised, interest from expanding local and inward investing businesses, the constraints of NPF3. DP added that Cockenzie/Blindwells is a regionally-important strategic development area providing the opportunity to drive the local, regional and national economy and this will be reflected in the Council’s NPF4 submission. Key agencies and businesses are involved. The indicative timeline prepared for the Cockenzie Community Forum will be shared with members **(ACTION: SS).** DP added that the grid connection, freight link and other access means that the site is attractive to appropriate businesses with offsite construction mentioned too. PML stressed the importance of a communications strategy and asked for CEG members to have more information **(ACTION: SS to provide regular update).** FB highlighted regular SE engagement with SS and Cockenzie Project Manager.

* Blindwells

The Blindwells update has been covered under Cockenzie. The first build will start summer 2020. PML suggested a Developers’ Forum and DP confirmed that he and Tom Reid, Head of Infrastructure, have established such a grouping.

1. **The East Lothian Partnership**
* ELP Governance update

PV reported on the most recent meeting of the East Lothian Partnership Governance Group where it was agreed to review the East Lothian Plan, principally the non-economic priorities. Climate Change should be over-arching and proposals around this will be presented to the next Governance Group meeting in May to ensure that all supporting partnerships integrate Climate Change into their remit. PV added that the East Lothian Partnership is undertaking a self-evaluation within the next few months and members will be asked for views followed by a workshop. The next Partnership Forum will be held during June 2020 focusing on a review of the existing Plan and developing priorities for the next two years.

1. **Employability update**

NCC said that the East Lothian Council Chief Executive is about to sign the DYW (Developing the Young Workforce) Pledge, showing a commitment to developing youth employability and NCC added that the East Lothian DYW is one of the best-performing programmes in Scotland. ELWorks is currently undertaking a service review. NCC found the Scottish Government Employability Summit particularly useful and he is taking on board Scottish Government guidance on what an optimum employability would comprise noting that a number of employability programmes may be returned to local authorities and that employability may become a statutory service. As example, Fare Start is currently administered by the Scottish Government. Other programmes delivered by ELWorks include the Parental Engagement Support Fund, the Disability Engagement Support Fund, European Social Fund for those further/furthest from labour market, No-one Left Behind. Involving Health and Housing is a Scottish Government recommendation that NCC is investigating. He added that the Scottish Government announcement for under-18’s free travel is important for employability. NCC drew attention to the School Leaver Destination Report – for 2018 and 2019 the positive figures are over 95% and a five-year upward trend. With regard to adult employability, NCC is considering how numbers can be measured.

Other projects are: *Jobs Kingdom Live* turned Queen Margaret University into an Employability City for Primary 5 children and 50+ employers were present; the *Jobs Roadshow* presented 2000 live jobs, a range of apprenticeships and all schools were represented. NCC asked if a regional college campus could be a consideration under LDP2, noted. Finally, NCC mentioned the Oxford residential and an assessment process is underway to identify beneficiaries after a successful pilot project in 2019. This is for more able pupils in S3 including 2019 participants as mentors.

1. **The East Lothian Economic Development Strategy**
* Updated workplan, leads and activities

SS drew attention to the Economic Development Strategy workplan. PML said that reporting progress to CEG and ELC including the PPRC (Policy & Performance Review Committee) is important. JMM stressed the importance of demonstrating how the partnership is working and identifying ways of making partnership-working more effective. An annual report event for businesses was suggested including case studies and offering opportunity to enhance the profile of CEG**. (ACTION: SS to produce a starter paper on the programme for a business-focused event to promote CEG activity, need hook and ‘asks’).**  As example, KB said that Climate Change could be a topic, namely what does that mean, where are the opportunities and JMM added that the success of Business Gateway and East Lothian Investments could be profiled.

* Open for Business update

SS produced draft of a document being developed by East Lothian Council to encourage and support inward investment in particular. This was noted.

* Business engagement

Today’s discussion had a focus on engaging more with the business community and a number of ideas were mooted that will be part of a paper being produced by East Lothian Council **(ACTION: SS).**

1. **BREXIT/UK Shared Prosperity Fund update (verbal)**

SS reported that the Council’s Brexit Working Group had reconvened and suggested that BREXIT and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund as replacement for much European funding be a standing item on the CEG agenda.

PML drew attention to the emerging Immigration Policy with food & drink, hospitality and rural businesses all expected to suffer from skill shortages as a result. This will be put on the agenda for the next meeting **(ACTION: SS).**

With regard to Coronavirus (COVID19), SS will share the communication issued to businesses through East Lothian Council and GC mentioned the FSB advice on their website, the Chamber is reflecting on events planned and whether these should go ahead **(ACTION: SS).**

1. **Any other business**

JMM thanked CEG members for their attendance and input to the discussion.