

## **North Highland Local Economic Forum**

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on Friday 26 October 2001 at 10.30am In the Royal Marine Hotel, Brora**

**Present:** Robert MacLennan Chairman  
Hilda Morrison (Caithness Business Club)  
John Bannister (Chamber of Commerce)  
Winifred Sutherland (Federation of Small Businesses)  
John Dennison (Employment Service)  
Carroll Buxton (CASE)  
Jack Watson (CASE)  
John Rosie (HC – Caithness Area)  
Sandra Peterkin ( STB –visitscotland)  
Graham McLaughlin (HC – Sutherland Area)  
George Bruce ( Caithness Partnership)  
Duncan Allan ( HC- Sutherland Area)  
Christopher Brocklebank-Fowler (Caithness Partnership)  
Pat Buchanan ( HOST)

**In Attendance:** Sandra McCaughey (CASE) – Minutes

**1. Apologies:** David Noble (STB visitscotland)  
Alison Magee (HC – Sutherland)  
Gordon Todd (HC- Caithness)

**2. Minutes of the Meeting of 28 September 2001**  
The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record.

**3. Matters Arising**

Graham McLaughlin confirmed that the HC had approved £1000 towards the costs of the LEF Action Plan and Mapping Exercise. CASE indicated that they would invoice all those who would be contributing to the process.

**4. Action Plan**

Lord MacLennan thanked Sandra McCaughey and Joyce Sutherland for their work on the Action Plan and all those members of the Forum who had contributed to the process.

The Chairman indicated that responsibility for the document lay with him and reminded Forum members that it had to be with the Scottish Executive by the following Thursday. A system of clearance for amendments was agreed. All amendments, other than those agreed today, should be fed through to Sandra McCaughey by the close of play on Monday.

Lord MacLennan outlined the sources of evidence on which the Action Plan was based.

- Results of the postal questionnaire undertaken by the LEF
- Results of the telephone survey undertaken by George Street Research
- DORA Report
- HIE Customer Satisfaction Survey

Around 16 questionnaires had arrived after the deadline and these were not included in the collated report by George Street Research. 12 additional questionnaires had been sent to the Chairman in confidence and these had not been forwarded to George Street to preserve confidentiality.

Lord MacLennan invited initial round table comment on the Draft Action Plan from Forum members.

**Points from the round table discussion included:**

- Section 3.1, 3.4 and 3.5 of the Action Plan caused the most concern to Forum members.
- Concern was raised over the establishment of two new bodies as recommended within the Action Plan, Develop Caithness and Develop Sutherland, as subsidiaries of the Caithness Partnership and the Sutherland Partnership. There was no consensus in favour of this proposal.
- The need for an Executive capability to deal with corporate rescue was discussed
- The availability of specialist business skills within public sector agencies was discussed as being a potential gap
- The potential to bring in expertise as and when required was reiterated in response to the suggestion that there was a gap in provision of specialised services which could be filled by establishing these new companies.

**Amendments to Action Plan**

It was agreed after lengthy discussion that sections 3.1, 3.4 and 3.5 should be changed to reflect the views expressed by the members. Jack Watson agreed to give Sandra McCaughey a form of words to amend these sections, with section 3.5 to be deleted.

Section 3.3 was to be amended to include securing input from the Crofter's Commission and to liaise with Angus McCall regarding him taking on the role of rapporteur.

Under section 4.1 it was agreed that there was a need for a one-stop shop approach, but that this should be changed to be referred to as a one-stop service. A range of means of creating a one stop service approach were discussed. Mr Jack Watson agreed that CASE would take this matter forward and prepare a paper for further consideration.

**Action: CASE**

The Chairman reminded Forum members that the time scale was tight for getting the Action Plan to the Scottish Executive and the timetable referred to earlier in the meeting should be adhered to.

John Bannister thanked the Chairman for his work and for driving the whole process forward.

There being no other competent business, the meeting ended.

Date of Next Meeting – To be arranged following response from Scottish Executive to the Action Plan.