



**Note of the Scottish Cities Alliance Leadership Group meeting
Wednesday 9th March 2022 – 12 noon – 2.00 pm**

Attendance:

Cllr Jenny Laing	Leader, Aberdeen City Council (virtually)
Angela Scott	Chief Executive, Aberdeen City Council (virtually)
Cllr John Alexander	Leader, Dundee City Council (Chair)
Greg Colgan	Chief Executive, Dundee City Council (virtually)
Cllr Adam McVey	Leader, The City of Edinburgh Council
Andrew Kerr	Chief Executive, The City of Edinburgh Council
Cllr Susan Aitken	Leader, Glasgow City Council
Sharon Thomson	Glasgow City Council (virtually)
Donna Manson	Chief Executive, Highland Council (virtually)
Malcolm MacLeod	Highland Council
Cllr Scott Farmer	Leader, Stirling Council (virtually)
Carol Beattie	Chief Executive, Stirling Council (virtually)
Kate Forbes	Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy
Colin Cook	Director of Economic Development, SG (virtually)
Iain McCreaddie	Programme Director, Scottish Cities Alliance

Also in attendance :

Gavin Slater	Glasgow City Council (virtually)
Catherine Brown	Scottish Government
Jenny Bann	Scottish Government
Lauren Jefferies	Scottish Government
Lauren Pascu	Scottish Cities Alliance
Isabel Brennan	Scottish Cities Alliance

Apologies received from:

Annemarie O'Donnell	Chief Executive, Glasgow City Council
Cllr Margaret Davidson	Leader, Highland Council
Cllr Murray Lyle	Leader, Perth and Kinross Council
Thomas Glen	Chief Executive, Perth and Kinross Council

1. Welcome, Introduction & Apologies

The Chair welcomed the group to the meeting in and noted apologies as detailed above.

2. Note of Previous Meeting (15th September 2021)

The note of the previous meeting was approved and an update was given as follows:-

Item 2 – Levelling Up – Following Iain Stewart MP's presentation at the LG meeting on 11th March, the Chair of the Alliance extended an invitation to Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up to attend a round table discussion with City Leaders to take stock and learn lessons from the levelling up applications submitted by cities last year as well as reflect on the UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper. The Alliance received a positive response from Michael Gove's office last week and are liaising with them to set up the discussion with city Leaders prior to local government elections if possible.

Item 6 – Scottish Schools Hydrogen Challenge – Following the success of the inaugural Scottish Schools Hydrogen Challenge which the Alliance Leaders supported last year it was noted that plans are in place for this to become an annual event, ensuring that Scotland’s workforce of the future is best placed to reap the economic rewards from the developing hydrogen economies across the Scottish cities. The Chair encouraged all cities to play an active role in this year’s Challenge.

Item 7 – MIPIM 2022 – it was noted that the Scottish Government are not having a Team Scotland pavilion at MIPIM 2022 which is taking place in Cannes week beginning 14th March. SDI has offered advertising opportunities in the MIPIM brochure free of charge to the cities as well as free passes for city officers to attend. The Alliance took up the opportunity to place an add on the back page of the agenda promoting opportunities in the online investment prospectus.

3. Kate Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy

- **National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)**

The Chair opened the discussion by expressing his thanks for the opportunity extended to him as Chair of the Alliance to be involved as the only local government representative on the Advisory Council for Economic Transformation which guided the development of the national strategy and the opportunity it provided to ensure it took account of the opportunities and challenges facing the Scottish cities. The Chair also noted that the Alliance worked with Colin Cook, Director for Economy in the Scottish Government to provide an opportunity for the city CEOs to inform the development of the strategy in November.

The Chair then welcomed the Cabinet Secretary who gave an overview of the strategy, noting real opportunities for the cities via the Alliance to support its delivery as part of its future operational programme. The Cabinet Secretary highlighted that the strategy covered a 10-year timescale and is aimed at ensuring economic success for Scotland by 2032, thus the challenge for the next decade was to ensure that there was in-built flexibility within the strategy to respond to opportunities and challenges as they materialise. It was further noted that the strategy intentionally focuses on 5 policy programmes of action and does not seek to do everything.

In discussion the following points were noted:

- The strategy provided scope to explore the role of cities in delivering economic growth in a way which provides for differentiation on a local basis in terms of both need and contribution. It was acknowledged by the cities that this was perhaps something missing from previous strategies but that the relationship between cities and the Scottish Government nurtured by the Alliance has facilitated wider understanding of these differences nationally.
- Cllr Aitken and Cllr Farmer highlighted that their local economic strategies align with NSET; the role urban centres play in tackling inequalities and the need to better understand how inward investment in cities radiates benefits out to surrounding regions, including with the role of wider regional growth deals play in helping to realise these benefits.
- The Cabinet Secretary acknowledged that NSET delivery will require local differentiation and every part of Scotland should have its own economic plan: the Scottish Government should support localised solutions, whilst delivering national actions which underpin those solutions. Ensuring alignment between national enterprise agencies and city economic strategies and that the agencies are more localised in their approach to supporting cities is also key.

In summary, the Chair agreed that there was a real opportunity for the cities to work together intensively and intentionally with the Scottish Government via the Alliance on the implementation plan for the strategy over the course of the next 6 months as getting the delivery right for the national strategy should also ensure the partners deliver on the priorities of the City Centre Recovery Taskforce. Ms. Forbes welcomed the feedback and looked forward to working closely with the cities to ensure the Scottish Government progresses those actions which strongly support local activity as part of the implementation plan.

- **City Centre Recovery Taskforce**

The Scottish Government began by updating the group on the recently announced £6 million of funding allocated to aid city centre recovery in 2021-2022 which builds upon the £2 million of funding awarded in 2020-2021 before speaking to the paper tabled which provided an update on progress with taking forward both the immediate and longer-term actions in the report.

On behalf of the cities, the Chair thanked the Scottish Government for the additional funding for city centre recovery and specifically thanked Glasgow City Council for offering to commission expertise to progress important work focused on increasing residential occupancy in city centres from which all seven cities will benefit.

In discussion, the cities asked that text in the report relating to revenue and fiscal levers be redrafted to allow greater flexibility for partners to explore a wider range of innovative options in the context of city centre recovery, noting that a differentiation of approach may be required depending on the particular needs of individual cities. Cllr McVey asked for action to tackle vacant retail units be included as an immediate priority in the report, highlighting issues in Edinburgh City Centre that indicate rates relief may be a disincentive for landlords to agree terms for meanwhile uses.

The Chair and the Cabinet Secretary noted that once the workplan has been approved by the Leadership Group in June that there was an opportunity to look at the longer-term funding approach to support implementation via both a revenue raising and funding lens. Finally, the group acknowledged that it was important that the Alliance did not lose sight of the positive work taking place across the cities as it looks to take forward the workplan for recovery and for the partnership to explore opportunities to promote and celebrate this.

The following actions were noted and agreed:-

- a) City Leaders agreed in principle to approve the draft report for publication, subject to providing final comments to the Scottish Government by correspondence to allow these to be incorporated into the report for final approval prior to its publication before the end of March 2022;
- b) The update on the immediate actions in the report were noted alongside the planned approach to finalising the workplan for the longer-term actions for presentation to the Leadership Group in June. It was further noted that the workplan for the longer term actions should give consideration to:-
 - Prioritising those actions likely to have greatest impact on the ground;
 - The inclusion of a timeline with milestones for delivery of key actions over the 5 year period;
 - The business case for identifying centralised resource to aid collective delivery of priority actions where specific expertise and/or capacity issues have been identified across the partners; and
 - Which of the partners is best placed to lead on priority actions including individual cities, the Scottish Government, or government agencies.
- c) That responsibility for co-ordinating delivery of the Taskforce going forward should be led by the Scottish Cities Alliance with support from the Scottish Government, as part of its Operational Plan for 2022-2026, with operational delivery overseen by the Delivery Group and progress reported into future Leadership Group meetings as a standard agenda item.

4. SCA Handover

The Alliance Programme Director gave an update on the following :

- **Key achievements – 2012-2022** - The Leadership Group approved the updated list of SCA Key Achievements 2012-2022 and agreed that these be tabled at the first meeting of the new Leadership Group in June.

The Chair commented that these achievements show how the Alliance has gone from strength to strength particularly over the last few years, providing an important showcase for all of the cities which the current Leadership Group can be proud of.

- **Draft Operational Plan 2022-2026** – The Programme Director spoke to the draft Operational Plan 2022-2026 and the Leadership Group agreed that it should be tabled at the first meeting of the new Leadership Group in June for their approval.

The Chair highlighted that there is much to be proud of in terms of what has already been delivered as part of the 2018-2022 Operational Plan and that there is a lot in the new Plan that is consistent but also directly corresponds to the group’s earlier discussion on the National Strategy for Economic Transformation in making sure we are co-ordinated and collaborative in our approach.

- **Cities Week – Draft Programme – Sept 22** - The Leadership Group agreed that the overall structure of the programme meets their expectations, noting that further work will be undertaken by the cities through the Investment Promotion Working Group to further develop the Agenda, decide key themes, the investment pipeline and the focus, along with the contribution each partner can make to different parts of the programme.

The Chair commented that this is a really positive opportunity for all of the cities and stems from direct feedback from the Leaders, and much like the work of the Alliance, this is an evolution building on previous investment activity and providing a focused opportunity for the cities to showcase their investment potential to a wide array of investors and developers. Leaders noted they were keen to have a working understanding of the programme as it develops as well as for the Alliance to explore opportunities for a wider programme of engagements and visits beyond that which an individual city may lead on. The opportunity to shape the Sustainability session on day 1 to be part of Glasgow’s COP26 legacy activity was noted as an example.

- **CIF budget as at 31st December 2021**

The Leadership Group:-

1. Noted that as at 31st December 2021 the Cities Investment Fund reported a balance of £82,606.
2. Note that the Alliance is on course to report the savings required to carry across at least £109,706 into the budget for 2022-2026 in line with the future funding approved by Leadership Group on 3rd June 2021 which is required for the 2022-2026 programme.
3. Agreed that the Alliance publish the budget report up to 31st December 2021 on the Alliance website.

5. A.O.B

- **New Scottish City - Queen’s Platinum Jubilee** – it was noted that there currently are 7 towns and 1 area in contention for being awarded city status in Scotland to commemorate the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. It was agreed that if the new city is known in advance of the Leaders dinner on 14th June, that their newly elected Leader should also will be invited to the meeting.
- **UKCCIC** - Cllr Aitken highlighted and commended an opportunity for the Scottish Cities to get involved with plans for the UKCCIC demonstrator programme on transition/climate change activity which Glasgow currently participates in. It was agreed that the Alliance would circulate details on the opportunity to allow further consideration to take place.
- **Acknowledgements** – Acknowledging that this was the last meeting of the Leadership Group in its current form, Ms. Forbes thanked the City Leaders for their commitment to supporting the cities they represent and for bringing so much passion and energy to the work of the Alliance to further our shared ambitions for Scotland’s cities noting in particular their resolve to identify unique solutions to the challenges placed on the cities during the pandemic. The Leaders have left the future Leadership Group with a strong legacy, noting in particular the opportunity for them to focus on the implementation of the City Centre Recovery Taskforce Report. Special thanks were extended to Cllr Laing and Cllr Lyle who will be standing down at the election and for the lasting legacy they will leave behind as well as to Cllr Alexander for his chairmanship of the partnership for the duration of the last local government term.

The Chair thanked Ms. Forbes for her kind words to individuals and the Alliance and thanked the Alliance team and all of the Leaders who made his job as Chair incredibly smooth over the last five years – noting that there has never been an occasion where collectively the Alliance has been unable to reach a consensus. Through collaboration and co-ordination the Alliance has shown that collectively it can respond to some of the really challenging and difficult issues for our cities and bring our collective capacity to bear in a positive way.

Cllr Laing thanked everyone for their kind words, noting that the Alliance has definitely evolved over the eight years she has been involved with the partnership, and that particularly over the last few years the partners have really come together as a collective which has been of great benefit to Aberdeen City Council. As a group of leaders, the Alliance naturally has shared different views on key issues but has always managed to come to a collective agreement which is to the benefit of our individual cities as well as Scotland as a whole. Cllr Laing noted that the Cities Week programme discussed earlier on the agenda was a positive opportunity for the new Leadership Group to build the in-person relationships needed to continue the good work of the partnership to deliver inclusive economic growth and extended her thanks to Cllr Alexander for his Chairmanship and to Ms. Forbes for her listening ear during challenging times.

In summary, the Chair extended thanks not only to the politicians that have contributed so pro-actively to the Alliance's agenda, but also to officials, both from Scottish Government, Scottish Cities Alliance and the individual councils who have made everything the Alliance has done over the last few years possible, and who will continue to make everything the Alliance does over the next 5 years possible too.

6. Dates of Future Meetings

- 14th June - Leaders Dinner with Minister – appointment of SCA Chair

The Chair advised that Alliance Core team are making arrangements to host a private dinner for the newly elected city leaders and the Cabinet Secretary in Glasgow on the evening of 14th June. The dinner will provide both an opportunity to introduce the new group to the work of the Alliance as well as select the chair for the next local government term.

The Alliance Core Team will be in touch with Leaders' offices following the election to ensure it is in diaries and advised that in order to make the most of Leaders' time, the Alliance also plans to run an investor breakfast in Glasgow the following morning to provide an early opportunity for the new Leadership Group to network with live investor contacts from the Alliance's investment promotion programme. Opportunities for investors to attend site visits across the Scottish cities will also be explored. Ms. Forbes confirmed her attendance at both the dinner and the investor breakfast.

The meeting finished at 1.45 pm.