



**Note of the Scottish Cities Alliance Leadership Group meeting  
Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2022 – 9.30am – 11.30am**

**Attendance:**

Cllr Ian Yuill	Co-Leader, Aberdeen City Council
Richard Sweetnam	Aberdeen City Council
Cllr John Alexander	Leader, Dundee City Council (Chair)
Greg Colgan	Chief Executive, Dundee City Council
Cllr David Ross	Leader, Fife Council - Dunfermline
Steve Grimmond	Chief Executive, Fife Council - Dunfermline
Cllr Cammy Day	Leader, The City of Edinburgh Council
Andrew Kerr	Chief Executive, The City of Edinburgh Council (Agenda Item 4)
Cllr Susan Aitken	Leader, Glasgow City Council
Sharon Thomson	Glasgow City Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Leader, Highland Council - Inverness
Cllr Ian Brown	Leader, Inverness City, Highland Council
Malcolm MacLeod	Highland Council - Inverness
Cllr Grant Laing	Leader, Perth & Kinross Council
Thomas Glen	Chief Executive, Perth & Kinross Council
Cllr Chris Kane	Leader, Stirling Council
John Swinney MSP	Deputy First Minister, Scottish Government (Agenda Item 4)
Colin Cook	Director of Economic Development, SG (10am – 11am)
Iain McCreaddie	Programme Director, Scottish Cities Alliance

**Also in attendance :**

Jane Laiolo	Glasgow City Council (Agenda Item 5)
Catherine Brown	Scottish Government (Agenda Items 1-4)
Neil Cameron	Scottish Government
Kate Higgins	Scottish Government (Agenda Item 4)
Lauren Jefferies	Scottish Government (Agenda Item 4)
Tanaka Musakambeva	Scottish Government
Mark Robertson	Ryden (Agenda Item 5)

**Apologies received from:**

Angela Scott	Chief Executive, Aberdeen City Council
Annemarie O'Donnell	Chief Executive, Glasgow City Council
Donna Manson	Chief Executive, Highland Council
Carol Beattie	Chief Executive, Stirling Council

**1. Welcome, Introduction & Apologies**

The Chair welcomed the group to the meeting and extended a formal welcome to Cllr David Ross, Leader of Fife Council representing Dunfermline following the approval of Dunfermline's membership of the Alliance in August. Apologies were noted as detailed above.

For the benefit of the note, the Chair formerly acknowledged his appointment as Chair of the Alliance for the new local government term which was agreed at a special virtual meeting of the Leaders with Kate Forbes MSP on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

## 2. Note of Previous Meeting (9<sup>th</sup> March 2022)

The note of the previous meeting was approved by the Chair and Cllr Aitken as the only two Leaders who were in attendance at the last meeting and an update was given as follows:-

**Item 2 – Levelling Up** – The chair advised that the planned discussion with Michael Gove on Levelling Up and UKSPF never took place in the end due to events at Westminster. Maintaining a working dialogue with the UK Government on this agenda remains a priority for the Alliance and consideration will be given to future opportunities to engage.

**Item 2 – Scottish Schools Hydrogen Challenge** – The Chair noted that building on the success of the inaugural programme which was supported by the City Leaders last year, the Alliance has worked with industry partners to confirm Scottish city participation in the Scottish Schools Hydrogen Challenge 2022-2023 aimed at inspiring the next generation of renewable energy engineers.

**Item 2 – MIPIM** – The Chair advised the group that whilst MIPIM Cannes used to be a valuable and key event in the partnership's investment promotion programme, that following discussion with the Alliance partners the feeling was that the focus for resources next year should be on developing the Alliance's presence at the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREIIF) which will take place in Leeds in May 2023. The Alliance will put forward proposals to its Investment Promotion Working Group for consideration in October to ensure the Scottish cities maximise their profile at the event next year building on intelligence gathered from the light touch programme it ran in May this year.

## 3. Alliance Business Update

- **Operational Plan 2022-2026**

The Leadership Group approved the Operational Plan 2022-2026 tabled and supported its publication on the Alliance website. It was noted that the plan provided an overall framework for the work the Alliance would focus on but that there was scope within it to adjust the focus of resources to reflect the priorities of the Alliance partners across the period it covers including key policy developments announced in the programme for government.

- **Scottish Cities Week – Rearranged – 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> January 2023**

The Programme Director advised that as per correspondence with the group over the course of the last week, the full Scottish Cities Week programme has been moved to take place at the end of January 2023. The Alliance will now work with officers to finesse the programme, further develop the collateral available to cities to support promotion of their propositions and drive the desired attendance including from Ministers on the new dates noting that a further opportunity to review the programme with Leaders will be provided at the next Leadership Group meeting in November.

In discussion, the Leaders agreed that it would be useful to factor in time to prepare how they collectively contribute to the programme in a collegiate way. Cllr Ross also noted that the revised timescales for the programme would allow Dunfermline to give wider consideration as to how best it contributes to the overall programme and develops its own collateral for the event.

- **Directors Report and Budget Update**

The Programme Director spoke to the Directors Report tabled noting the following points:-

- Feedback from the Investor Breakfast held at the opening of the Grade A offices at 177 Bothwell Street in Glasgow in June was positive. The Alliance is keen to work with cities to utilise the opening of significant developments across the cities to run similar investor events and use them as an attractor to bring our investment contacts from elsewhere in the UK to Scotland and arrange onward visits for them to other development opportunities across the cities. Cities were invited to come forward with ideas of opportunities they have which may provide a suitable venue for future activity in Scotland.

- Links to original collateral generated showcasing the cross city narrative across a range of themes/sectors were included in the report. Cities were encouraged to come forward with suggestions for original blog and opinion piece content for their city.
- Scotland's 8<sup>th</sup> City – the Smart City ERDF Programme is continuing to run and deliver on its targets in terms of new innovative services created and data sets opened for innovation. Programme Delivery will end in September 2023 and the group noted the importance of bringing the final completion report back to the Leadership Group in due course. Discussions with City Leaders over the summer reconfirmed the desire to look at a future programme to ensure the cities are supported to continue the way of working established by the programme once delivery of the existing programme completes and Perth as the lead for the Alliance's Technological Change activity is developing a proposal for consideration.
- Following a recommendation from Cllr Aitken at the Leadership Group meeting in March, the Alliance has worked closely with 3Ci to ensure Scottish cities had visibility within a national register of bankable projects and are best placed to receive support from both 3Ci and the Scottish Government to both attract investment to their pipelines as well as access planned support from a National Technical Assistance programme.
- Due to resource challenges both within the Alliance Team as well as in cities it has not been possible to develop a workplan at this stage to progress the strategic objectives detailed in the City Centre Recovery Taskforce at this time. Discussions with cities over the summer confirmed that the aim should be to complete this work as soon as resources allowed however at present the group noted work underway to give consideration to strategic objectives connected to repurposing city centre property, vacant and derelict land and net zero city centres led by Glasgow, Stirling and Edinburgh respectively.

The Programme Director spoke to the budget report on the City Investment Fund tabled noting:-

- That as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, £118,972 was unallocated to activity in 2022-2026. Discussions with the chair and the Scottish Government at the time suggested that it would be appropriate to allocate this to support future City Centre Recovery activity as there is currently no funding to support this work in the new funding period. The group approved this suggestion on the understanding that detail would be brought forward as part of a workplan for the city centre recovery work in due course as to how this funding will be utilised.
- That as at 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022, there remained £96,206 of unallocated spend.

The Group approved the budget report for publication on the Alliance website.

#### **4. John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister of Scotland**

The Chair welcomed John Swinney to his first meeting of the Leadership Group in his temporary capacity representing Kate Forbes MSP during her maternity leave. Mr Swinney began by extending a warm welcome to the City Leaders following the local government elections in May and specifically welcoming Dunfermline to the first formal meeting of the Leadership Group noting the important economic impetus city status had offered his own city of Perth following its award in 2012. The important role the Scottish cities had played in facilitating tributes to Her Majesty the Queen following her passing was noted and warm thanks were extended on behalf of the Scottish Government to public servants across the cities for their role in coordinating commemoration arrangements.

Mr Swinney went on to speak about the important role of cities in regional economic development as part of the workplan for the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), noting that this was a theme he was keen to make progress on in a tangible way. Ahead of discussions with the NSET Board, he was keen to hear from the group about what their own economic strategies are focusing on and how this is best supported through national programmes. The Deputy First Minister noted that the NSET strategy is designed to be reactive to disruption initially on the back of recovery from the pandemic and more recently the acute cost of living crisis noting in particular the pressures being experienced by profitable businesses across the cities as a result of the cost of energy and the limitations on the government and cities to perhaps deploy support at this time in the way that they would like.

The Chair thanked the Deputy First Minister for his overview noting the opportunity the Alliance presented government and cities to take a focused approach to alleviating mutual financial challenges faced through a collective focus on increasing investment and economic output across our cities, which would in turn increase

the money available to address social and environmental challenges. Discussion followed in which the following key points were raised:-

- Interest was expressed in a mechanism by which the Alliance could be kept informed of the key developments on the delivery plan for NSET to allow the Alliance to look at it through the auspices of our shared agenda and how it can contribute to it. Establishing a clear line of sight between the Alliance's Delivery Group and NSET would be really important particularly in relation to the regional economic programme for which Colin Cook noted he had portfolio responsibility for.
- Cities noted that the mutual financial pressures they were contending with presented the opportunity for them to work with government to explore what might be devolved to cities including enterprise and skills to better enable them to deliver economic growth in their local area within the context of national frameworks. The example of how Glasgow as the strategic authority has used the affordable housing grant to deliver affordable housing in a way that has generated economic growth was cited. The Deputy First Minister acknowledged that aligning programmes and resources in a way that maximised impact at a local place level was something worth pursuing.
- The Deputy First Minister noted that the Scottish Government was open to discussion on local tax raising powers to drive economic activity within the context of what is happening with tax policy at a UK Government level. The Deputy First Minister offered to provide a response to questions raised around Empty Buildings Tax and the Tourism Visitor Levy.
- Cities raised questions around next steps in terms of supporting them to house Ukrainian refugees locally within communities rather than emergency accommodation with the Scottish Government acknowledging the pressing need to work closely with local authorities to find solutions to this challenge.

## 5. City Centre Recovery Taskforce

- **City Centre Property Repurposing: Accelerating shifts in supply/demand – Mark Robertson, Managing Partner, Ryden**

Cllr Aitken introduced Mark Robertson from Ryden to speak to a piece of work Glasgow commissioned to allow it to understand the medium to longer term impacts of the pandemic on its city centre, noting that some of the trends detailed in the work were apparent before COVID happened but that the research makes it clear that the pandemic has accelerated the need for action. Cllr Aitken noted that whilst the research is particular to Glasgow, the Alliance has done some work with Ryden and officers across the other 7 cities to identify areas of commonality which the 8 cities can develop further evidenced asks for discussion with both the Scottish and UK Governments which are touched upon at the end of the presentation.

City Leaders welcomed the presentation, noting that although there were differences in scale across the cities there was an opportunity for them to take it back into their authority and consider the application to their city centre in more detail as there are clear common asks around levers and policy drivers to adapt city centres to their needs.

In discussion, Leaders were advised that the trend data for returning to office working did not suggest that it would return to pre-pandemic levels even when the cost of living and rising energy costs to heat workers homes was factored in. Guidance was also given around coordinating the conversation with business as part of cities working with their public sector partners around the vision for their city centres. Another key issue highlighted which was apparent across Scottish city centres was the impact of fragmented ownership on the ability of cities to deliver effective regeneration and placemaking plans. Cities were encouraged to take a longer term view of the impact of selling public sector assets to the private sector to redress the current imbalance with delivering placemaking objectives.

The Chair thanked Cllr Aitken for sharing Glasgow's work with the group and Mark Robertson for his presentation and encouraged cities to share further thoughts on the application of the research to their city with the Alliance to further inform its collaborative work on city centre recovery.

## **6. A.O.B**

- **Business Improvement Districts – Scottish Government**

The Programme Director spoke to this item on behalf of the Scottish Government, advising that Tom Arthur MSP, Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth met with the city BIDS Forum in May and was asked about the merits of city BIDS participating in Alliance meetings specifically to assist with addressing some of the issues connected with city centre recovery. The group agreed with the Scottish Governments suggestion that the merits of city BIDS being more actively involved with the Alliance be raised at the next Delivery Group meeting in December but City Leaders were keen to learn more about what the BIDs consider the collaborative opportunity to be before progressing any activity through the Alliance.

## **7. Dates of Future Meetings**

- 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2022 – The Chair noted the UK Infrastructure Bank had accepted an invitation to attend this meeting to speak about their work on shared objectives with the cities around driving regional economic growth and tackling climate change.

The meeting finished at 11.30 pm.