



Note of the Scottish Cities Alliance Leadership Group meeting

Friday 21st February 2025 – 9.30 – 11.30 am – online meeting

Attendees :

Cllr Christian Allard	Co-Leader, Aberdeen City Council
Cllr Mark Flynn	Leader, Dundee City Council
Gregor Hamilton	Dundee City Council
Cllr Jane Meagher	Leader, The City of Edinburgh Council
Paul Lawrence	Chief Executive, The City of Edinburgh Council
Cllr James Calder	Fife Council - Dunfermline
Ken Gourlay	Chief Executive, Fife Council - Dunfermline
Cllr Susan Aitken	Leader, Glasgow City Glasgow
Susanne Millar	Chief Executive, Glasgow City Council
Cllr Raymond Bremner	Leader, Highland Council - Inverness
Cllr Grant Laing (Chair)	Leader, Perth & Kinross Council – Chair
Thomas Glen	Chief Executive, Perth & Kinross Council
Cllr Jen Preston	Deputy Leader, Stirling Council
Caroline Sinclair	Chief Executive, Stirling Council
Tom Arthur MSP	Minister for Employment and Investment, Scottish Government - items 1&3

Also in attendance :

Adam Cox	Scottish Government
Nadia Abu-Hussain	Regional Economic Development, Scottish Government
Liam Farrow	Regional Economic Development, Scottish Government
Juliet Jopson	Public Policy Engagement Manager, Policy Leeds University – item 4
Mike Eakins	Head of Policy, Leeds City Council – item 4
Lauren Pascu	Investment Lead, Scottish Cities Alliance
Gillian McCallum	Policy & Stakeholder Engagement Lead, Scottish Cities Alliance
Isabel Brennan	Admin & Finance Officer, Scottish Cities Alliance

Apologies :

Cllr Ian Yuill	Co-Leader, Aberdeen City Council
Angela Scott	Chief Executive, Aberdeen City Council
Greg Colgan	Chief Executive, Dundee City Council
Cllr David Ross	Leader, Fife Council - Dunfermline
Derek Brown	Chief Executive, Highland Council - Inverness
Cllr Gerry McGarvey	Leader, Stirling Council
Iain McCreaddie	Programme Director, Scottish Cities Alliance

Agenda

1. Welcome, Introduction & Apologies

Confirmation of Chair - Cllr Laing advised the group that following Cllr Day stepping down as Leader of the City of Edinburgh Council in December, it has been agreed by the Group that Cllr Laing would be the sole chair of the Leadership Group. This was approved.

The Chair welcomed Cllr Jane Meagher to her first Leadership Group meeting as the newly elected Leader of The City of Edinburgh Council and welcomed Cllr Jen Preston, Deputy Leader of Stirling to the meeting and asked her to convey the Group's congratulations also to Cllr Gerry McGarvey as the new Leader of Stirling Council.

Apologies were given as detailed above.

2. Note of Previous Meeting (9th October 2024)

The note of the previous meeting was approved and an update on items not covered elsewhere on the agenda was given as follows:-

- **Item 4 - Scottish Economic Bulletin – February 2025** - it was noted that following the discussion with the Chief Economic Advisor to the Scottish Government at the last meeting, the Scottish Government's Economic Bulletin for February 2025 is now available and if there is anything specific to cities that should be included for future reports, please advise the Chief Economic Advisor.
- **Item 6 - Climate Delivery Framework** - Cllr Aitken advised that she attended the first meeting of the political oversight group for the framework in December representing the interest of city local government and that she was heartened and encouraged by the meeting which had a real focus on delivery. Following the meeting Cllr Aitken shared detail with CoSLA on the work between SCA and 3Ci including on net zero neighbourhoods and the investable propositions. Cllr Aitken informed COSLA that Scottish cities can move forward on these investment propositions to allow CoSLA to work with cities to ensure conversations with investors can be signposted.
- Cllr Aitken advised that she took the opportunity to send the 3Ci/ECCi proposal paper to establish a Net Zero Accelerator Paper in Scotland which was presented at the CEO Group Meeting in November to the Cabinet Secretary.
- Cllr Aitken stressed the importance the offering of large-scale, investable projects to attract green investment. It was noted that cities are ahead in green transition efforts and can lead the way for the rest of the country, with a focus on delivery of renewable heat, energy efficiency, and retrofitting buildings to provide tangible benefits to residents. She expressed optimism about the shift towards action and delivery rather than just setting targets and ambitions.
- Cllr Meagher highlighted the importance of ongoing work on heat networks, noting that several are operational, particularly in the West of Edinburgh. Concerns were raised about price capping for heat networks, as it does not currently apply and it was suggested that this should be addressed. It was noted that there is progress in retrofitting council buildings and housing stock in Edinburgh, however the grant from SG falls significantly short of the actual costs, which is a major issue. It was stressed that this is not an investment opportunity since there are no returns, and proper resourcing is essential for these initiatives to succeed.
- Cllr Aitken emphasised the need for effective financial models to resource climate action, highlighting the SCA net zero neighbourhoods model developed with 3Ci and noted that retrofitting in Glasgow, costing £11 billion, cannot be fully funded by the public sector. The model combines less investible projects like retrofitting with more investible ones like heat networks. The first pilot in Govanhill aims to address energy inefficiency and fuel poverty by implementing both renewable energy and retrofitting simultaneously. The importance of securing funding from SG was highlighted in order to develop these financial models along with the need for significant resources for adaptation and resilience efforts.
- The Chair noted that as a direct result of attendance and participation at a previous Scottish Cities Week, Perth were able to attract major energy heat system providers to come to Perth and collaborate with the Council, with 3Ci, Glasgow and Arup supporting Perth in taking this forward. The Chair also highlighted investor interest in green energy and climate change initiatives in Scottish cities. It was suggested that Edinburgh may wish to provide further detail to Cllr Aitken or the SCA Team to further inform SG/COSLA activity via the Climate Delivery Framework.
- Thomas Glen added that government support helped Perth develop a strategic energy network and seek a commercial partner and that procurement is currently ongoing and they are aiming to sign a commercial deal later this year. It was emphasised that there is a need for full public sector involvement to deliver at the required scale and to enable collaboration with the private sector.
- It was highlighted at Cities Week that investors are keen to be involved in green energy projects and that they see Scotland's cities as a desirable investment location.

- Ken Gourley confirmed that he sits on the Climate Delivery Framework's Senior Officer Group which is due to meet for the first time shortly. The SCA Team is also represented on this group.

3. Investment Promotion

Scottish Cities Week - the Chair formally thanked the Minister for supporting the programme in person this year alongside the support of Scottish Government and UK Govt, and it was noted that it really helped to demonstrate the collaborative approach between cities and Scottish Government, which sits at the heart of the Scottish Cities Week programme. By working together in this way with both Scottish and UK Governments via the Alliance, city Leaders are well positioned to create investor confidence and develop long-term strategic partnerships.

The Chair advised that he met with Alex Norris MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government following the group's meeting with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Scotland during Cities week and Mr. Norris indicated an interest in attending the Leadership Group in June, which the Alliance Team is progressing. Mr. Arthur advised that he also had a very constructive ministerial meeting with Mr. Norris about regeneration and that there is a willingness to engage constructively and that this will be taken forward across a number of areas.

Mr. Arthur apologised that he is unable to stay for the full meeting and advised that he was grateful for the opportunity to participate in Cities week, advising that he got a lot out of attending the excellent series of events which demonstrated an effective way of working, with opportunities for collaborative working with UK govt. It was noted that the meeting in Dover House particularly was consistent with an approach to deliver the best results. He advised that events he participated in were first class and he is more than willing to do more around that type of direct engagement with investors and stakeholders and also with UK govt and asked that it be put on record his thanks for the delivery of the programme and a very worthwhile series of events. The Chair agreed that the theme of Cities Week was collaboration which was reiterated by many of the speakers and many of the Elected Members who attended.

With reference to the output report for cities week tabled which included feedback received to date from the Alliance partners, a discussion took place to capture wider feedback from the group on the 2025 programme and what they would like to see from a future programme:-

- It was appreciated and agreed that having the Minister attend for a substantial amount of time was very helpful and made a significant difference to the overall programme.
- It was also noted that it is beneficial when all city Leaders are able to attend and that it would be helpful to ensure that scheduling, where possible, would allow full attendance by city Leaders.
- The engagements with the UK Govt were positive and although they advise that they are promoting Scotland it would be beneficial if they had a better understanding of what cities are doing and if they could proactively ask SCA what they should be promoting from within cities and city regions and what investable propositions they should be taking to Tartan Week in New York and other trade missions.
- It was suggested that we should be aware that investors increasingly want to hear about city regions and not just individual cities, particularly FDI investors, and that the programme could be framed around city regions as well as individual city authorities, with the messaging being around the aggregation and scale that we are able to offer through city regions and collaborations. This would be beneficial for the smaller cities, with city regions grouping together various cities or 2 or 3 neighbouring cities to give scalability. This will involve work behind the scenes to be carried out well in advance of the next event to agree messaging and projects to be promoted. The Chair agreed that smaller cities face scalability issues, suggesting that grouping cities into regions could help.
- The value of collectively going to London was noted, but it was suggested that consideration could be given to changing the format slightly for future events, perhaps hosting Cities Week every two years and with another format in between. It was agreed that it would be prudent to consider how we continue to engage with investors and agree the future format of Scottish Cities Week, but also give consideration to other Alliance events we host in order to keep up the momentum with the investor community, now that Scottish Cities Alliance is a known quantity.
- Ken Gourley shared feedback from Paul Vaughn, noting that while sessions and engagement were good, investors are looking for high-value investments (£500m+) and that Dunfermline, being a smaller city, may not meet these expectations, and there's a need to align aspirations with investor interests.

- The time commitment to attending London events was noted as considerable and hosting events in Scotland was raised. It was noted that separate investor events in Scotland do take place, but that it can be challenging to attract the senior decision makers to attend unless we are able to connect it to the launch of a city development. For example, the Alliance Team are working with Highland Council to frame a future investment event around the launch of Inverness Castle.
- The Investment Lead noted the Alliance team are very keen to work with the group and take on board their and their officers' feedback on how better to promote their cities. When it comes to these more top level conversations on the policy making side, i.e. key messaging around housing investment for UKREiiF, it requires the time to be spent on bringing everyone together to make that happen and that can feed down to the Alliance team promoting at a cross-city level at events.
- The Investment Lead also noted that the outputs report included in the papers is in a draft form and the Alliance team continues to seek feedback from officers about outputs such as leads, fringe meetings, post-event site visits arranged. The Chair agreed that it is individual cities who hold this information and that this should be shared with the Alliance to allow a full and final outputs report to be created.
- The Chair thanked the Alliance team for the work undertaken and the support given, noting that Prof. Greg Clark's facilitation of the programme was excellent. The Chair also thanked everyone for their comments and advised that the Alliance are open to having individual discussions with Leaders on how better to promote their city to allow a plan to be pulled together for further consideration by the group.

UKREiiF 2025 – the benefits of the Minister attending in May were highlighted by the Chair and the Minister advised that he is unable to confirm attendance at this moment in time, but that he does recognise the value of partnership working taking place between all levels of government and advised that he is happy to engage constructively where opportunities for wider SG and ministerial participation are identified. It was agreed that the Alliance team will support further discussion with the Scottish Government as the programme is developed. The Minister noted that the programme in the pavilion, rather than being driven by Scottish Government, should reflect shared priorities agreed upon by the cities, and the Government will engage constructively to support the programme and discuss identified opportunities for wider SG and ministerial participation. The Minister noted he is happy to reconvene to discuss UKREiiF as plans develop further.

The plans for the Team Scotland Pavilion were outlined and it was noted that the programme is being developed in conjunction with the city officers of the Investment Promotion Working Group who attend regular Steering Group meetings. It was noted that the group are further discussing the key themes and will be providing more specific detail on individual city participation by the end of February, however the three main themes city officers were clear they wanted to see were: housing investment, energy transition, and knowledge economy (life sciences/advanced manufacturing).

In discussion the following points were raised:-

- All cities confirmed that housing investment is the key topic they wish to see included as part of the SCA programme at UKREiiF as it is a shared priority across all the cities which underpins attracting investment in other sectors.
- Glasgow will have their own stand and programme of events but are keen to ensure there are no clashes with Alliance events to allow full participation to take place. It was agreed that efforts will be taken to ensure this does not occur and that the proposed event with Arup will be moved to avoid clashing with Glasgow's key UKREiiF event in the late afternoon of Day 2 of the programme.

The Chair reiterated that the onus is on cities to provide feedback to the Alliance, including finalising attendance from the Alliance partners, to ensure that the draft programme can be progressed. Feedback should be shared by 28th February.

4. Universities and Place

Building on discussions the Alliance facilitated last year with the higher education sector in Scotland as well as with the Alliance CEO Group in January where an interest was expressed in exploring how cities could be better supported to work with their universities at a regional level to deliver economic growth and attract investment, the Chair welcomed

Juliet Jopson, Public Policy Engagement Manager, Policy Leeds and Mike Eakins, Head of Policy, Leeds City Council to speak about the creation of Policy Leeds and the joint collaboration between the University of Leeds and Leeds City Council, providing an insight into funding models which support policy engagement in England between local government and universities.

Following the presentation the group agreed that it would be beneficial if there was more strategic alignment between universities and local government as well as funding being available aimed at enhancing capacity and capability across university/city local government collaboration in Scotland using Policy Leeds and Y-PEN as exemplars.

In discussion the following points were raised:

- The Chair agreed that there should be a more focused approach to collaborative working between local authorities and universities and expressed interest in the way Policy Leeds, Leeds City Council and Y-PEN have progressed this. It was noted that the SCA Policy Lead will liaise with the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Government with a view to opening discussions regarding the possibility of funding similar initiatives.
- Cllr Flynn noted that while Scotland's cities with universities have their own funding, it would be helpful to those cities who do not have universities in their localities if the Alliance partners could advocate for additional funding for those Scottish cities and regions. Policy Leeds advised that the funding started from a Research England Strategic Fund during COVID to allow universities to react quickly to policy priorities. After this, Research England invested in a time-limited Policy Support Fund to allow a transition in a way of working worth £29 million per annum over 2 years of which Policy Leeds received £1 million in total. The key was that the amount Leeds University received was not that large when spread over time but because it was dedicated to policy work through Policy Leeds, and they were open, transparent and dedicated to working directly with Leeds City Council, it worked well. It was suggested that if Scottish Cities wanted to advocate to the Scottish Funding Council for a dedicated funding pot it would be important to have a clear targeted vision.
- Cllr Flynn also asked how easy it was to get information from health boards and other bodies to achieve better outcomes in communities with various challenges. Mike Eakins advised that the sharing of public health data could be challenging, however, the transparency and openness between the university and the council enables the best use of resources. The university and the council work well together and this allows access to university data and security capabilities (safe access and data transfer) to support some projects.
- Cllr Meagher requested clarification regarding the issue of university and city/region local authority set-up and what issue required to be solved. She noted that Edinburgh universities have an excellent relationship with the city and there does not appear to be an issue with funding, highlighting in particular the East Lothian's connection with Queen Margaret University and Herriot Watt University during the housing emergency.
- The Alliance Policy Lead advised that following a knowledge exchange event the Alliance held in October 2024 to build capabilities and capacities between universities and local government and various discussion with universities, a gap was identified. While it is generally acknowledged that local universities work closely with their local governments on specific projects, it lacks a "Team Scotland" approach or more regional focused approach that could be more strategic and align funding between universities and local government to solve problems. Particular challenges are faced by the two Alliance cities which do not have universities of their own as well as central funding being targeted at innovation without equivalent funding for policy support.
- Juliet Jopson explained that prior to the award of this funding a review was carried out which highlighted many collaborations with the University of Leeds and external partners. However, the difference was that the Research England funding allowed Policy Leeds to focused on more strategically aligned solutions to address urgent needs. The transparency allows more inclusivity as more people were encouraged to contribute to ensure there weren't missed opportunities to include researchers. The important point to note was that the university, the council and other partners appreciated seeing that they were all pulling in the same direction. Universities are good at finding funding but through Policy Leeds they can now be referenced in funding applications and they have a vehicle to identify and address urgent challenges and link up with other organisations. By working together, it has allowed the university and the local authority to better augment knowledge. Y-PEN provides an interesting example of a regional network and could be replicated in Scotland.
- Mike Eakins noted that Leeds City Council's starting point was the large amount of work they did with the University, however, it was apparent despite the wealth of knowledge and expertise that Leeds City Council was under-utilising this. Instead, they were paying external consultants when they could use the university as

their partner. There were barriers to overcome, such as conflicting timescales and trying to change the nature of relations so they can be more productive and impactful. There was a lot of time spent navigating.

5. Directors Report

- The Director's report was tabled, providing the group with an overview of activity delivered since the last meeting in October.
- **Budget** – the quarterly report to 31st December 2024 was tabled and approval was given to publish this on the Alliance's website in accordance with the protocols.

6. A.O.B.

It was noted that a follow-up meeting will be arranged to discuss the continued commitment to the Alliance by the partners, including funding, for the period 2026-2030. Ahead of this the Programme Director will prepare a report of key successes of the current funding period, and throughout the history of the Alliance since its inception.

7. Dates of Future Meetings

- 5th June 2025 – 2-4pm. It was agreed that this take place online.
- 9th October 2025 – 9.30 – 11.30 am.