

Item: 20

Policy and Resources Committee: 21 June 2022.

Economic Recovery Steering Group.

ASPIRE Orkney – Progress Update.

Report by Corporate Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration.

1. Purpose of Report

To provide an update in relation to ASPIRE Orkney's activity in the period up to 31 May 2022.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, on 25 November 2020, the Council resolved that the detail of the ASPIRE Orkney programme be subject to further consideration, in the context of the Council's corporate plan, by the Policy and Resources Committee, with effect from January 2021, and thereafter as a standing item for the Policy and Resources Committee.

2.2.

That progress updates in relation to the ASPIRE Orkney programme of activity have been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee on 23 February 2021, 20 April 2021, 22 June 2021, 29 November 2021 and 22 February 2022.

2.3.

That, on 22 February 2022, the Policy and Resources Committee was advised that an update on both the Business Plan and Action Plan would be presented to the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee to be held on 21 June 2022.

2.4.

The main activities undertaken by ASPIRE Orkney Ltd between February 2022 and May 2022, including an update on the Business Plan and Action Plan, as detailed in section 4 of this report.

3. Background

3.1.

On 25 November 2020, when considering the proposed allocation of funding towards establishment of dedicated programme management resources to support the ongoing work of the Economic Recovery Group, the Council resolved inter alia that the detail of the ASPIRE Orkney programme be subject to further consideration, in the context of the Council's corporate plan, by the Policy and Resources Committee, with effect from January 2021, and thereafter as a standing item for the Policy and Resources Committee.

3.2.

Progress updates have been submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee on 23 February 2021, 20 April 2021, 22 June 2021, 29 November 2021 and 22 February 2022.

3.3.

On 22 February 2022, the Policy and Resources Committee was advised that ASPIRE Orkney Limited was currently preparing a Business Plan which would support the ASPIRE Vision and Action Plan. In addition, it was proposed to undertake an update and refresh of the Action Plan. An update on both the Business Plan and Action Plan would be presented to the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee to be held on 21 June 2022.

4. Progress to date

4.1.

The establishment of a private company, limited by guarantee without share capital, to act as a mechanism to direct Council approved funding to support the work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group has been undertaken, with ASPIRE Orkney Limited incorporated on 26 April 2021.

4.2.

The ASPIRE Orkney Programme Manager commenced in post on 7 June 2021. The post has been established for a fixed two-year period to provide core executive and operational support to the Economic Recovery Steering Group to deliver Orkney's COVID-19 economic recovery plan.

4.3.

A Members' Seminar with the ASPIRE Orkney Limited Board and the Programme Manager was held on 24 August 2021. The presentation to elected members provided an overview of the ASPIRE Orkney vision and an introduction to ASPIRE Orkney Limited; their vision of Orkney as an Innovation and Enterprise Hub; the mechanisms to achieve, and gaps in capacity, in regard to realising the vision; and finally, what ASPIRE Orkney Limited can contribute as a facilitating organisation.

4.4.

Since the last report to this Committee on 22 February 2022, the Economic Recovery Steering Group (ERSG) has met on two occasions – 24 February 2022 and 31 March 2022, with the meeting scheduled for 3 May 2022 cancelled.

4.4.1.

At the February meeting, Council officers provided an overview of the Green Freeport opportunity and the Chief Executive outlined the 'Our People, Our Plan' priorities. Other items identified challenges in convening the ERSG's business-led 'Think and Do Tanks' and ASPIRE Orkney Ltd offered a perspective on BREXIT impacts on the business community to inform a government consultation. A presentation offered by ERSG business representative, Gareth Davies, outlined projected opportunities in relation to the Scotwind offshore leasing round announced in January 2022.

4.4.2.

At the March meeting, Council officers provided an update on the Council decision to submit an application to establish a Green Freeport in Orkney. Other items covered included a response to the National Planning Framework 4 consultation, a discussion on progress of Think and Do Tanks, the Engage Orkney consultation software and a presentation on a potential format for an action plan score card.

4.5.

The key activity for ASPIRE Orkney during the period has been in regard to Engage Orkney as a central consultation hub shop for undertaking public engagement exercises in Orkney. Surveys undertaken on the platform in the period include by Orkney Renewable Energy Forum, Westray Development Trust, with other island Development Trusts in the process of joining the platform. Data sharing agreements with community planning partners have been explored with some being agreed to enable the platform to be used more widely.

4.6.

ASPIRE Orkney Limited is still considering a Business Plan which will support the ASPIRE Vision and an Action Plan, although no further details are as yet available. ASPIRE is also considering what the future direction of the organisation could be, which it is understood has slowed progress on the Business Plan and Action Plan. Any further update on both the Business Plan and Action Plan, or proposed direction of the organisation, will be presented to the next meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee, scheduled for 20 September 2022.

5. Corporate Governance

This report relates to the Council's response to the economic challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts to support the Orkney economy through the pandemic are considered in line with the Council Plan priorities.

6. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

7. Legal Aspects

There are no legal implications directly arising from this report.

8. Contact Officers

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