

Orkney Towns Board

Minute

Venue: **Council Chamber, Council Offices, School Place, Kirkwall.**

Date: **Monday, 10 June 2024.**

Time: **18:30.**

Present:

- Stephen Hagan, Chair.
- Morven Brooks.
- Davie Campbell.
- Cheryl Chapman.
- Liam McArthur MSP.
- Michael Morrison.
- Chief Inspector Scott Robertson.
- Rachel Scarth.
- Craig Spence.
- Councillor Gwenda Shearer.

Orkney Islands Council Officers:

- Oliver Reid, Chief Executive.
- Gareth Waterson, Corporate Director for Enterprise and Sustainable Regeneration.
- Sweyn Johnston, Head of Enterprise and Economic Growth.
- Gavin Mitchell, Head of Legal and Governance.
- Stuart Allison, Service Manager (Enterprise).
- Ross Cunningham, Service Manager (Democratic Services and Communications).
- Hazel Flett, Service Manager (Governance).
- Susan Shearer, Service Manager (Development and Marine Planning).
- Gavin Barr, Economic Development Manager.
- Harvey Crew, Economic Development Officer.

1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to this first meeting of Orkney Towns Board and thanked members for their willingness to serve on the Board.

The Chair asked everyone present to introduce themselves and advised that, once the Board was up and running, attendance by Orkney Islands Council (OIC) officers would be on a reduced scale. Although the Board would be making decisions for approval by the UK Government, this would be subject to approval by OIC as accountable body for the funding.

Each of the Board members introduced themselves and gave a brief summary of their experience and background and how this would relate to the success of the project.

OIC Officers then introduced themselves, with the Chief Executive advising that he would not normally attend meetings, however it was important that he attended the first meeting to ensure the Board had everything they needed, as well as to thank everyone for taking up the challenge at such short notice.

2. Apologies

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Councillor Kristopher Leask.

The Chair also advised that the MP, who was a member of the Board by virtue of the position held, would take their place after the UK Parliamentary Election, which had been called for 4 July 2024.

3. Orkney Towns Board – Governance

The Head of Legal and Governance, OIC, referred to the draft Terms of Reference which set out the role and remit of the Board, and regulated the meetings and business of the Board. The draft Terms of Reference were informed by UK Government guidance as well as benchmarking with Terms of Reference produced by Town Boards already established. It was proposed that the Terms of Reference be reviewed after one year, and then every two years thereafter. Although Terms of Reference were required to be submitted to the UK Government by 3 June 2024, which had been done, it was for the Board to agree the document. Any changes required would be forwarded to the UK Government.

After discussion the Board **agreed**:

- To amend the Terms of Appointment of Board Members to include a review after three years.
- To include a clause relating to payment of reasonable expenses, in line with that paid to OIC elected members.
- To amend the section on Secretariat to include an option for this function to be provided by a community/voluntary body, to allow for flexibility.

Action: Head of Legal and Governance to arrange to amend Terms of Reference and submit updated version to UK Government.

The Head of Legal and Governance, OIC, advised that, in line with other Town Boards, it was proposed to adopt the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies, as published by the Standards Commission for Scotland. The Head of Legal and Governance highlighted the following:

- Document familiar to OIC Elected Members, as very similar to the Councillors' Code of Conduct.
- Section 4 – Register of Interests – expressed thanks for all Board members completing and returning their Register of Interests forms.
- Section 5 – Declarations of Interest – once declare interest, leave the room for discussion of that item.
- Section 6 – Lobbying.
- Breach or Allegation – the Complaints section in the Terms of Reference would apply, namely that these would be dealt with inhouse by the Board.

The Board **agreed** to adopt the Model Code of Conduct for Members of Devolved Public Bodies.

4. Introduction to Long-Term Plan for Towns

Overview of Towns Fund and Role of Board

The Head of Enterprise and Economic Growth, OIC, gave a presentation which set out the background to the creation of the Town Boards across the UK as part of the levelling up agenda of the UK Government, some key OIC decisions to date, details on what could be funded, together with deliverables and timescales.

Following discussion, OIC officers provided the following clarification:

- Although a UK Parliamentary Election had now been called for 4 July 2024, to date there had been no indication of any amendments to timescales, therefore the Board should continue to work towards existing timelines, namely submission of the 10-year vision and the 3-year investment plan by 1 November 2024.
- The overall funding was a mix of capital and revenue funding, with the earliest capital spend realistically being financial year 2025/26, given that spending plans required to be approved by the UK Government.
- The Board could consider additionality in order to stretch the £20M pot further, although the guidance suggested that projects could be 100% funded, subject to subsidy control considerations.
- With timescales exceedingly tight, OIC would consider the most appropriate route to achieve approval of the 10-year vision and the 3-year investment plan ahead of the deadline for submission to the UK Government of 1 November 2024.
- An initial sum of £40k had been set aside to procure consultants to undertake the statutory consultation on behalf of the Board, with a project scope sent to five local consultancy firms. The Chair of the Board would be included in the assessment of tenders received.

5. Overview of Existing Consultation Activity

The Service Manager (Development and Marine Planning) gave a presentation on consultations, plans and projects, including Orkney Matters, undertaken during 2021/22, which had produced a vast amount of information, with the main findings as follows:

- Consultation and volunteer fatigue.
- One Community Base Plan.
- Housing.
- Digital Connectivity.
- Transportation.
- Sense of community.
- Enjoyment of the outdoors and the Environment.
- Equality.
- Health.
- Economic opportunities.

Three existing local place plans, published between 2018 and 2024, identified a number of proposals and potential projects, which the Board could consider, when drafting its plans:

- Your Kirkwall.
- What's Next for Stromness.
- Dounby Place Plan.

The following points were noted during discussion:

- Tie in with Orkney Matters 2 and attend as many events as possible.
- Paid resource often achieved more in communities, than relying on volunteers, both in producing plans and project management.
- Independent facilitators often resulted in increased participation in community engagement.
- The 10-year vision was an aspirational document, whereas the 3-year investment plan should be more focussed.

6. Next Steps

The Chair advised that a lot had been covered in the discussion already. Once the consultants were appointed, they should be invited to a meeting of the Board. He encouraged Board members to attend as many of the Orkney Matters 2 events as possible, as well as other events, and make it known that they were a member of the Board.

The Chair advised that he had arranged for a stand at the County Show, however the first stage would be to engage with the public, then get some project idea, followed by consultation.

7. Availability for Future Meetings

The Chair asked members which day and time suited best for Board meetings. Although in person meetings was the preference, hybrid meetings could be arranged. There was general agreement that meetings should be held at 18:30, with the next meeting scheduled for week commencing 24 June, following the appointment of the consultants.

8. Any Other Competent Business

In response to a query, the Chair advised that members should continue using their personal emails for now. The Chief Executive, OIC, advised that a central email to gather information could be looked at, although the consultant may have their own ideas.

9. Conclusion of Meeting

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting concluded at 20:00.