



## Cairngorms Economic Steering Group

Hybrid meeting via Teams and in-person, at Grantown-on-Spey, on 27 November 2025 at 2pm

### **Present:**

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Jackie Brierton         | Cairngorms National Park Authority (chair)    |
| Gavin Miles             | Cairngorms National Park Authority            |
| Eilidh Todd             | Cairngorms National Park Authority            |
| Alastair Rhind          | Aberdeenshire Council                         |
| Michael Dearman         | Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust         |
| Gordon Hector           | GrowBiz                                       |
| Mike Duncan             | Federation of Small Businesses                |
| Kirsti Conti            | Moray Council                                 |
| Allison Carrington      | Skills Development Scotland                   |
| Michelle Hardie         | The Highland Council (THC)                    |
| Alice Fogg              | Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey (VABS) |
| David Boag - Presenting | The Highland Council                          |

### **Apologies:**

|                  |                                     |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Paul Macari      | Aberdeenshire Council               |
| Ian Robertson    | Countryside Learning Scotland (CLS) |
| Beverly Smith    | Moray Council                       |
| Julia Latto      | Scottish Enterprise (SE)            |
| Jamie Bell       | Scottish Enterprise                 |
| Anthony Standing | Skills Development Scotland         |

### ***Welcome and apologies***

Jackie Brierton welcomed everyone to the meeting, gave apologies, and all members in attendance introduced themselves to the group.



## Note of last meeting and matters arising

The note of the last meeting was agreed.

- AP1 - JF WEAP as agenda item for future meeting.

This will be agenda item for next meeting

- AP2 - Allison Carrington to share an update on the Careers Services Collaborative, information on the level 5 qualification for rural skills and the Sector Skills Assessment for the Rural Sector (annual report published end October).

There are a number of pilot projects that SDS are involved in and if successful they will roll out across other local authorities, which will include the Park area.

- Workforce North Initiative (H&I) a pilot looking at ways that we can work more collaboratively together to develop the workforce.
- Foundation Apprenticeships. Consider inviting Andrew Ritchie (DYW lead Aberdeenshire Council) along to speak about the FAA work that he does in Aberdeenshire.
- Also looking at ways in which we can support mostly young people if they're applying for apprenticeships.

Links to updated SDS regional and sectoral skills assessments:

- [Regional Skills Assessments - Skills Development Scotland](#)
- <https://www.skillsdevelopmentScotland.co.uk/what-we-do/skills-planning/sectoral-skills-assessments>

### **ACTION 1.: Allison Carrington to share a summary of the above.**

- AP 3 - Jackie Farquhar to add Scottish Government Rural Delivery Plan to ESG SharePoint site when it becomes available.

Noted and will be actioned when available.

- AP4 - Mike Duncan to investigate mining National Park specific data from the wellbeing business survey and the Highland FSB survey.

This was investigated but turned out to be impossible to drill down in that amount of detail.

- AP5 - Jamie Bell to consult with Julia Latta to see if there is any useful data around skills that could be extracted from the Scottish Rural Leadership Programme network. Scottish Enterprise was not represented at this meeting so this will be followed up by email.



## **ACTION 2: Email Scottish Enterprise re: leadership data extraction.**

- AP6 - All ESG members to consider the potential of a depository for all opportunities around skills development in the National Park.

## **Highland Council Employability Team Presentation**

David Boag (The Highland Council) presented on "Work Life Highland," the public-facing brand for the Highland Employability Partnership (HEP).

Key takeaways from the presentation were:

- **Employability Services:** Highland Council's "Work Life Highland" brand simplifies access to services for job seekers and employers, funded by the Scottish Government's "No One Left Behind" program (~£3M/yr).
- **Data Gap:** The lack of granular, park-specific data hinders strategic planning and funding applications. A pilot with SRUC to access aggregated HMRC data is planned to address this.
- **Housing Crisis:** A housing crisis in Badenoch & Strathspey is a critical barrier to economic growth, with zero social housing allocations in the last six months.
- **Future Agenda:** Upcoming topics include the social/wellbeing economy, community wealth building (CWB), and procurement, with speakers from CLES and Cooperative Development Scotland proposed.

### **Employability Services in the Park**

- **Mission:** Poverty alleviation by connecting people to sustainable, fair work.
- **Funding:** Primarily Scottish Government's "No One Left Behind" program (~£3M/yr), supplemented by UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).
- **Delivery:** A hybrid model using in-house staff, a provider framework, and challenge funds.

### **Services for Clients:**

- Person-centred support (CVs, job applications, confidence).
- Training & work experience access.
- Support for self-employment via the "Launchpad" scheme.

### **Services for Employers:**

- Matching job-ready clients.
- Paid placements (3–6 months) for job-ready candidates.
- "Hero" grant for SMEs to support new hires.
- Promoting flexible work options.



- Data: DWP Universal Credit stats can be broken down to council ward/postcode level to provide park-specific data.

### **Careers Collaborative - SDS update**

Allison Carrington will provide a summary of activity to the ESG as discussed at the beginning of the meeting.

### **Economic Profiling & Data Needs**

A new economic profile for the park is needed to inform the next National Park Partnership Plan, as the last one is ~15 years old.

Key Data Gaps:

- Accurate business counts (excluding non-functioning entities).
- Scale of the tourism economy.
- Number of economically inactive people (esp. older residents).
- Evidence of rural poverty, which is often hidden and not captured by standard metrics like SIMD, creating a barrier to funding.

CNPA is exploring a pilot with SRUC to access aggregated HMRC data.

Precedent: Michelle Hardie noted the North West 2045 collaborative, which used socio economic profiling by Bigger Economics to create a "call to action" for systemic change.

### **Partner Updates**

- FSB (Mike Duncan):
  - Shared Highland/North East survey data on skills gaps (e.g., hospitality, trades).
  - Reported positive sentiment from the Cairngorm Business Partnership conference.
  - Planning an Aviemore networking event for late Jan/early Feb.
- Highland Council (Michelle Hardie):
  - A report on the visitor levy consultation goes to committee on Dec 11; papers will be public beforehand.
  - Seeking park-area projects for the Highland investment prospectus.
- Moray Council (Kirsty Conti):
  - Visitor levy pre-consultation is pending a new tourism strategy (due Dec).
  - Hosted a successful procurement event for 32 businesses.
- Aberdeenshire Council (Alastair Rhind):
  - The new business start-up grant is closed due to high demand; seeking more funds.



- Aberdeenshire Restaurant Week included 5 park businesses out of 80.
- A public consultation is open for a new mobility hub in Ballater.
- The Ballater Visitor Information Centre closed in Oct; feedback is requested.
- Cairngorms Housing Partnership (Mike Dearman):
  - Reported zero social housing allocations in Badenoch & Strathspey in the last six months.
  - A Highland Council decision to cancel a guaranteed rent scheme with the Partnership is seen as a key factor.
- GrowBiz Scotland (Gordon Hector):
  - Launched a program for entrepreneurs over 50.
  - Expanding the SEED program into schools in Angus, Aberdeenshire, and Moray to promote self-employment.
- SDS (Alison Carrington):
  - Shared links to updated regional and sectoral skills assessments.
  - Offered to help members navigate the SDS data matrix.
- Cairngorms NP Authority (Gavin Miles):
  - Developing the next National Park Partnership Plan.
  - Planning a "call for sites" for the next Local Development Plan in Feb/Mar.

### ***Next meeting***

Thursday 23 April 2026 2pm, hybrid meeting on Teams or in-person at Park Authority office, Grantown-on-Spey.