

Item: 8

Policy and Resources Committee: 23 February 2021.

Economic Recovery Steering Group.

ASPIRE Orkney – Vision and Initial Action Plan.

Report by Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure.

1. Purpose of Report

To provide an update in relation to ASPIRE Orkney's Vision and Initial Action Plan.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, on 25 November 2020, when considering the allocation of funding towards establishment of dedicated programme management resources to support the ongoing work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group, the Council resolved:

- That the vision and initial action plan relating to ASPIRE Orkney, developed by the Economic Recovery Steering Group, be supported in principle.
- 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, since November 2020, the focus of activity for the Economic Recovery Steering Group and Council officers has been developing establishment of an appropriate mechanism to form an operational vehicle to support the Economic Recovery Steering Group in its work and, consequently, no further detailed work has been undertaken on the vision and initial action plan relating to ASPIRE Orkney.

2.3.

That it is anticipated that development of the operational vehicle will be concluded shortly and that dedicated programme management resources will thereafter be put in place to support the work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group.

2.4.

The importance of ensuring appraisal and understanding of the appropriate interaction between ASPIRE Orkney's vision and initial action plan and Council plans, policies and programmes.

It is recommended:

2.5.

That a Members' Seminar be arranged, as soon as practicable after establishment of the dedicated programme management resources, to review the ASPIRE programme with a particular focus on any activity which may have a direct bearing on Council policies and programmes.

3. Background

3.1.

At a Special General Meeting held on 25 November 2020, the Council considered a report regarding the proposed allocation of funding towards establishment of dedicated programme management resources to support the ongoing work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group.

3.2.

The Council noted:

3.2.1.

That, on 11 June 2020, when considering proposed governance and spending priorities in relation to the business and economy response and recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Council resolved inter alia:

- That the Governance Structure [attached as Appendix 4 to the Minute], including establishment of a short life working group which would be associated with the Vibrant Economic Delivery Group of the Orkney Community Planning Partnership, be endorsed.
- That Council representation on the Steering Group should comprise the Chief Executive, the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure and five elected members.
- That the Chief Executive should submit a report to the Council, in due course, presenting the Steering Group Cross Sector/Cross Agency Recovery Plan, together with any financial implications for the Council arising from the Plan.

3.2.2.

That, in June 2020, the Orkney Partnership Board established the short life working group, entitled the Economic Recovery Steering Group, with a remit to develop a strategy for Orkney's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.2.3.

That membership of the Economic Recovery Steering Group comprised the following:

- Five Elected Members of the Council, namely:
 - Councillor Barbara Foulkes.
 - Councillor Rachael A King.
 - Councillor John T Richards.
 - Councillor Graham L Sinclair.
 - Councillor James W Stockan.
- Nine representatives from Orkney's business sector.
- Senior officers from the Council and Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

3.2.4.

That the Economic Recovery Steering Group, which had met seven times between 18 August and 14 November 2020, had developed a vision for Orkney's economic recovery, ASPIRE, together with an initial action plan, attached as Appendix 1 to the joint report by the Chief Executive and the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure, which had been endorsed by the Orkney Partnership Board.

3.2.5.

That the Economic Recovery Steering Group had requested financial support from the Council to establish the dedicated resource required to deliver the ASPIRE programme.

3.3.

The Council resolved:

3.3.1.

That the vision and initial action plan relating to ASPIRE Orkney, developed by the Economic Recovery Steering Group, attached as Appendix 1 to the Minute, be supported in principle.

3.3.2.

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.

3.3.3.

To commit an allocation of up to £250,000, to be sourced from the Council's Coronavirus Business Hardship Fund, to enable the Economic Recovery Steering Group to establish the necessary programme management resource to instigate delivery of the ASPIRE programme.

3.3.4.

That powers be delegated to the Executive Director of Development and Infrastructure, in consultation with the Leader, the Chair of the Development and Infrastructure Committee, the Head of Finance and the Solicitor to the Council, to establish an appropriate mechanism to distribute the funding, referred to at paragraph 3.3.3 above, to be made available to the Economic Recovery Steering Group.

4. Progress to date

4.1.

Since November 2020, the focus of activity for the Economic Recovery Steering Group and Council officers has been progressing establishment of an appropriate mechanism to form an operational vehicle to support the Economic Recovery Steering Group in its work. This is being led by Business representatives from the Steering Group, and is proposed to be established as a Limited Company with charitable status. This Company will be able to receive the funding which the Council has resolved to make available to support the work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group over the next two years. Business Representatives have also been undertaking direct engagement with sector group representatives over the last few months in order to ensure a wide awareness of the Steering Group purpose and potential areas of future activity.

4.2.

Council Officials have experienced very substantial additional commitments in supporting the ongoing COVID-19 Economic Response effort as the Council has been tasked with leading on a number of new Scottish Government grant schemes. Consequently, there has not been any further detailed work undertaken on the Aspire Vision and Action Plan document.

4.3.

It is anticipated that work to conclude the operational vehicle will be concluded shortly and that dedicated programme management resources will then be put in place to support the ongoing work of the Economic Recovery Steering Group.

4.4.

It is important to ensure full and detailed appraisal and understanding of the appropriate interaction between the emerging ASPIRE Vision and Action Plan and approved Council plans, policies and programmes, in order to avoid duplication, but also to avoid risk of any conflict or confusion in relation to approved Council policy.

4.5.

To support the appraisal and understanding referred to above, it is proposed that a Members' Seminar is organised to review the ASPIRE Vision and Action Plan, with a particular focus on any activity which may have a direct bearing on Council policies and programmes. The timing of this Seminar would be as soon as possible, pending establishment of the programme resources.

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 directly arising from this report.

7. Legal Aspects

7.1.

Section 95 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, obliges the Council to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs.

7.2.

In terms of Section 20 of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003, the Council has power to do anything which it considers is likely to promote or improve the well-being of its area and persons within it, or either of these. This includes power to give financial assistance.

7.3.

The Economic Recovery Steering Group is in the process of setting up a company limited by guarantee, to be the principal vehicle through which the ASPIRE Orkney programme will be delivered.

8. Contact Officer

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