

**CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS  
MONDAY 26 October 2020**

(Paper 1)

**OUTCOMES FROM THE CONVENTION OF THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS – INVERNESS – 28 OCTOBER 2019**

<b>Update on COHI 2020 Projects (spotlight on skills)</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Updated October 2020</b>
<p>COHI members welcomed the progress emerging from the ongoing work of the Senior Officers Group. They endorsed the importance of the existing range of projects but with a greater focus on maximising the connections between areas in order to retain and attract young people and drive up working age population. The opportunities driven by digital as an underpinning for providing greater educational opportunity were particularly highlighted.</p> <p>COHI members asked for projects to be reframed to deliver integrated action in the context of a post-2020 timeframe factoring in themes including climate change and repopulation.</p>	<b>Joe Brown</b>	<p>SOG members have produced revised projects plans for reframed projects, building in initial content relating to climate change and repopulation . That work is ongoing and a formal update will be provided as part of the annual report during the October COHI.</p> <p>A cross-cutting quality assurance review process was agreed at the last SOG meeting to confirm or enhance that we are indeed maximising connections between areas. That will be completed by June.</p> <p>A paper prepared for the October 2020 meeting confirms that the review process is ongoing, and the meeting’s focus on COVID impacts and recovery planning will assist the completion of that review, calibrated to the new challenges faced by the Highlands and Islands and Scotland as a whole.</p>
<b>Population and productivity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Updated October 2020</b>
<p>COHI members endorsed the aim of the Government’s population programme and made the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management of depopulation, repopulation and population profile will be a focus for COHI’s future work programme;</li> <li>• To deliver analytical work on the impact of public sector job dispersal; and,</li> <li>• To engage with Scottish Government as it gathers intelligence and develops interventions to address Scotland’s population challenges particularly impacting on rural and island communities, working together to co-produce solutions. This includes a shared willingness to explore transformational options across key issues such as public and private sector jobs and housing provision.</li> </ul>	<b>Liam Kearney/ Cameron Anson</b>	<p>Building on work carried out in 2018 looking into Scottish Government job dispersal, talent attraction and retention officials are engaging with internal and external stakeholders and learning from Scottish Government location policies, past and present, to clearly articulate the evidence of the benefits of workforce dispersal and to explore options for the future. The Scottish Government will be engaging with members of the COHI Senior Officers Group as part of this process.</p> <p>Population policy officials will be meeting with COSLA officials in March to gather best practice of what has worked well (and not well) in terms of talent attraction and growing</p>

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	<p>their local population, as well as working with partners as members of the Population Programme Board to gather evidence to support the drivers for change. Officials will provide a further update at a future meeting.</p> <p>“Progress on the <b>Workforce Dispersal</b> workstream was temporarily deferred as a number of staff were redeployed to support emerging priorities in response to the COVID-19 crisis.</p> <p>The Skills, Talent Attraction and Retention (STAR) Team plan to resume working with Scottish Government colleagues to collate work to date and explore options raised by stakeholders, to develop a future SG footprint and workforce dispersal policy work plan.</p> <p>At the Convention of the Highlands and Islands meeting (COHI) in October 2019, a key recommendation was that SG undertake analysis of its own footprint and the impact that a workforce dispersal policy could have on Scotland’s population challenge. This will be considered as part of the project planning process.</p> <p>With employers across both the public and private sectors operating home working policies during lockdown, this has strengthened the argument for flexible location working becoming the ‘new normal’ when moving beyond Covid-19.</p> <p>Consideration to this work will be support to people, visitors and the wider community and to work together effectively with the government’s purpose of being: flexible, supportive, enabling; fit for purpose; open, accessible and safe; digitally connected; and sustainable.</p> <p>On <b>Scotland’s population</b> challenges:</p>
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	<p>On 10 March 2020, the Scottish Government's Rural and Islands Communities Team, with support from Scottish Rural Network, held a Repopulation Workshop with stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors to collaborate on potential pilot repopulation initiatives.</p> <p>These initiatives were developed on using the six key elements for a successful repopulation intervention as highlighted by the Scottish Rural College's <i>Case studies of Island Repopulation Initiatives</i>. The proposals sought to address key issues such as housing, and remote and home working.</p> <p>As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, our resources were pivoted to ensure priorities around the challenges faced by islands and rural communities continue to be met. However, as our capacity to focus on non-COVID related priorities has gradually increased, we have focussed our attention on our commitments to supporting rural and island population sustainability as a high priority.</p> <p>Currently, officials have been working across policy areas within Scottish Government to further develop the proposals presented by rural and island stakeholders at the March workshop. We intend to have these implemented by March 2021.</p> <p>These pilots will provide absolutely crucial learning to support the development of our repopulation action plan.</p> <p>Recently, our Rural and Islands Communities Team has been supporting colleagues involved in the Scottish Government's Population Taskforce to better understand the current</p>
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		population landscape, and the specific challenges now facing our rural and island populations as a result of COVID-19.”  <b>In addition a paper will be submitted to the October 2020 COHI meeting.</b>
<b>Global Climate Emergency</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Update – Paper 4 – for discussion at meeting</b>
<p>COHI members agreed the Global Climate Emergency (GCE) would be an overarching priority for future work, pulling together the different parts of the COHI work programme. While recognising both challenges and opportunities, members highlighted the unique assets of the Highlands and Islands region, alongside the willingness to collaborate, which will enable action at scale and pace to tackle GCE. In the run up to COP26 COHI members will work together to maximise this opportunity to showcase the region and what it can do on a global stage, and secure investment.</p> <p>COHI members agreed to develop their own plans for decarbonisation. COHI members commissioned the Senior Officer’s Group to work with the Scottish Government to map and add value to individual organisations’ climate change actions, when identified, and report back with an integrated and collaborative strategic plan for the Highlands and Islands. This includes identifying key areas such as land use, energy, nature-based solutions and opportunities from low carbon tourism. SNH agreed to also act as a critical friend to ensure scale and pace are optimised.</p>	<b>Michael Reilly</b>	COHI members have been considering the Global Climate Emergency within it’s programme of work. <b>In addition a paper will be submitted to the October 2020 COHI meeting.</b>
<b>Regional Transformational Opportunities</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Updated October 2020</b>
The purpose of the work is to develop a list of proactive, clear, strategic projects as agreed by CoHI members to be taken forward by organisations around the table which are compatible with CoHI’s ambitions including repopulation, climate change, economic development and supporting the skills base.	<b>Joe Brown/  Lorna Gregson-MacLeod</b>	Following the October 2019 COHI meeting, the RTO report was finalised in late February 2020 and issued for consideration to COHI in March 2020 (Which was cancelled). The report outlined next steps that could be taken along with a mapping of current strategic projects within growth deal proposals and from initial project identification work to

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<p>COHI supported the broad themes of the regional transformational projects paper (with an additional theme on culture and heritage), and commissioned further work led by HIE, with the Senior Officer's Group as informed by discussions with CoHI members, to develop a focused and inclusive list of transformational projects. This would be discussed at the next COHI in March 2020</p>		<p>illustrate the strong alignment between planned investments and the RTOs across the region.</p> <p><b>The RTO and COHI Projects Update is the subject of a paper for consideration at the October 2020 meeting.</b></p>
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