

Update on the Work of the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership' for Meeting on Thursday 9 September 2021

Introduction

This paper provides an update on the work of the South of Scotland Economic Partnership.

South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy Partnership (REP)

In brief the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership (REP) has a collective ambition to deliver a clear and compelling vision and direction for the economic success of the South of Scotland which harnesses the efforts of all its partners. The REP has 31 members and they come from the community, third sector, social enterprise, business, Higher and Further Education and joint Elected Members appointed from both Councils (D&GC and SBC) and South of Scotland Enterprise Board members. The Chair of the REP rotates between Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council on an annual basis based on financial years. The current chair is Councillor Mark Rowley, Executive Member for Economic Regeneration and Finance, Scottish Borders Council.

At the initial meeting on 18 September 2020 the REP agreed its immediate focus would be on the development of a South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy and that this work should be done as quickly as possible. However the REP was also clear that although it wanted the Strategy to be delivered at pace, this should be done without compromising its robustness and quality of outputs.

The REP indicated that the purpose of the Strategy should be to shape the future economic direction of the South of Scotland, by tackling key issues and challenges and making the most of opportunities, and focusing on long term outcomes with a rolling forward delivery plan.

Development of the Draft South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy

Following a lot of preparatory work, the production of the Strategy commenced in early December 2020 with the appointment of consultants to bring in additional capacity, expertise and external challenge. The first stage involved comprehensive analyses of economic, social and other data and other studies pertaining to the South of Scotland. This was followed by a public and stakeholder consultation exercise through February, March up to mid-April 2021. This comprised direct interviews with key public and private partners, and on-line surveys and drop-ins aimed at businesses and communities.

A smaller Reference Group of the South of Scotland Regional Economic Partnership chaired by Councillor Rowley met weekly from mid-April to the early June 2021 to consider these responses and feedback from the themed

workshops. This Group continued to meet frequently, often weekly, to maintain momentum to achieve the finalised Strategy and Delivery Plan.

Members of the Scottish Borders Community Planning Partnership have contributed strongly to the development and the production of the Strategy through input at REP meetings, and through responses to the consultations and participation in workshops.

Scottish Borders Council's REP members have provided advice into each stage of the work on the Strategy and officers have provided considerable input into the planning, analyses, meetings and consultations that have been required to produce the Strategy.

The draft Regional Economic Strategy was presented and agreed by the REP at its meeting on 8 June 2021 and then endorsed by Dumfries and Galloway Council, Scottish Borders Council and the SOSE Board at their meetings at the end of June 2021. The Scottish Borders Community Planning discussed the draft Strategy at its meeting on 10 June 2021 and agreed to encourage and support engagement in the planned consultation on the document.

Finalising the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy.

Consultation on the Draft Strategy

The consultation on the draft South of Scotland Economic Strategy began on the 2nd July 2021 and finished on the 16 August 2021. It was well publicised via social media and digital/web means, radio, newspaper and select publication adverts and an on-line public survey was hosted on 'Citizen Space' by Scottish Borders Council. There were around 100 responses to the consultation.

A small group of REP members is taking forward the work of producing an Integrated Impact Assessment for the Strategy. It is recognised this will be an ongoing process to ensure the needs of equality and other groups are fully taken into account as part of the implementation of the Strategy.

The Strategy with amendments was agreed by the REP at its meeting on Thursday 2 September 2021 and is now in the process of being finalised. It will be submitted for approval to Scottish Borders Council at its meeting on 23 September 2021. It is intended to bring the final Strategy to the next meeting of the Scottish Borders Community Planning Board.

Development of the Initial Delivery Plan for the Strategy

In tandem with the consultation exercise the REP worked on the development of an initial delivery plan. This plan will have a three year focus. It aims to identify actions that are:

- Strategic and high-level and collaborative,
- New or add value to what is already happening,
- Able to demonstrate a tangible impact across the themes of the Strategy, and are
- Stretching and ambitious but ultimately deliverable within the timeframe of the delivery Plan (3 years).

Six advisory workshops aligned to the draft Strategy's six key themes were held at the end of July 2021 and first week in August 2021 with officers and representatives from local and national partner bodies. The aim of these was to generate ideas and advise on potential actions for each of the priorities defined for each of the key themes. An initial draft of possible delivery actions was discussed by the South of Scotland's REP at its meeting on Thursday 2 September.

Conclusion

In conclusion the REP has made considerable efforts to ensure the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy is robust and that there has been effective public and stakeholder engagement and co-production in the production of the Strategy. The Strategy is intended to be ambitious for the short, medium and long term and been developed by the South of Scotland for the South of Scotland with an emphasis on transforming place and communities in an inclusive and sustainable way. It is planned to bring the final Strategy to the next meeting of the Scottish Borders Community Planning Board. The next phase of the work of the REP is finalising the delivery plan for the Strategy and then ensuring its effective implementation.