

# **Moray Economic Partnership**

## **Thursday 4 September 2025 (2.00pm – In Person)**

<b>Attendees:</b>	
Sarah Medcraf (Chair)	Moray Chamber of Commerce (MCC)
Rhona Gunn	The Moray Council (TMC)
Lorna Williamson	TMC
Michael Kelly	TMC
Marc Macrae	TMC
Sandy Keith	TMC
Gary Templeton	TMC
Mike Duncan	Federation of Small Business (FSB)
Fiona Robb	Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE)
Brian Robson	HIE
Jackie MacLaren	tsiMoray
David Jackson	Visit Scotland
Carol Wink (Minutes)	HIE

<b>Apologies:</b>	
Karen Greaves	TMC
Kathleen Robertson	TMC
Beverly Smith	TMC
Sonya Warren	THC
David Reid	HIE
David Patterson	UHI Moray
Claire Sim	Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

<b>1</b>	<b>Welcome and Apologies</b>  Sarah Medcraf (Chair) opened the meeting.  Sarah welcomed David Jackson, Visit Scotland Regional Director for Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray Speyside, who will join the MEP to represent the tourism sector.  Sarah also welcomed Brian Robson, Highlands and Islands Enterprise who will be replacing Fiona Robb as Head of Strengthening Communities.
<b>2</b>	<b>Matters arising not on the agenda</b>  There were no matters arising.
<b>3</b>	<b>Minute and actions from previous meeting</b>  The minute from 28 May 2025 was agreed.

4	<p><b>Discussion on Approvals Required</b></p> <p>An application for the development of Linzee Gordon Park in Buckie, supported by the Community Support Unit (CSU) has been received for consideration by MEP members. The proposal seeks capital funding from the remaining UKSPF allocation. The proposal has been fully evaluated against UKSPF criteria and demonstrates strong alignment with the fund's priorities and strategic local objectives.</p> <p>Queries raised by MEP members have been addressed and the application was formally approved.</p> <p>The UKSPF Delivery Forecast Plan will be updated accordingly.</p> <p>Rhona Gunn advised it is unlikely that there will be further rounds of UKSPF funding with the scheme being replaced with a different funding stream. Further detail on the new scheme is not available yet. Rhona also reported that there is indication that the Levelling Up Fund and Town Centre Regeneration Fund are to be amalgamated into one regeneration pot. Detail of timescale and governance mechanism has yet to be published.</p>
5	<p><b>Subgroup Reports and Updates</b></p> <p>The subgroups as set out in the MEP Structure and Governance Paper have been agreed. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities and Place</li> <li>• Local Employability Partnership</li> <li>• Business Support</li> <li>• Structural Funds</li> </ul> <p>Rhona Gunn reiterated the importance of having clear terms of reference for the subgroups to ensure there is alignment with the Moray Economic Strategy but also to ensure there is added value gained from each of the subgroup activities, not just the sharing of information.</p> <p>Sarah Medcraf reported that an annual report will be prepared at the end of the fourth quarter summarising the work undertaken by the subgroups aligning with the aims and objectives set out for the region in the Moray Economic Strategy. The annual report will be presented to the Community Planning Partnership for approval.</p> <p><u>Communities and Place</u></p> <p>A Strategy Plan for 2025/26 has been drawn up, outlining the challenges, opportunities and actions planned for each of the groups key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talent retention and attraction</li> <li>• Moray climate strategy</li> <li>• Community wealth building</li> <li>• Critical infrastructure</li> </ul> <p>Gary Templeton reported that the subgroup is working on a new joint strategic approach with the potential to secure substantial funding from energy, renewables and procurement contracts to benefit community projects. More detail will be provided to MEP members once it has been presented to the council board.</p>

	<p><u>Local Employability Partnership</u>  An update report was submitted outlining key themes, detailed actions and measurable outcomes being considered by the group.</p> <p><u>Business Support</u>  A chair still needs to be appointed to the Business Support subgroup.</p> <p><b>ACTION: Sarah Medcraf will contact David Patterson, UHI Moray, to consider a suitable chair for this subgroup.</b></p> <p><u>Structural Funds</u>  It has been agreed this group will comprise primarily of programme managers who look after structural funds programmes in the region. A list of core attendees has been identified with expertise being drawn in when required.</p>
6	<p><b>Verbal discussion on private/public sector opportunities/challenges</b></p> <p><u>Grid Infrastructure</u>  Gary Templeton reported that partners are thinking more strategically about the benefits and legacy that could be achieved from energy, renewables, onshore, offshore and hydrogen projects and how developers could create a longer-term legacy to help support some of the big challenges currently being faced in the region (eg childcare, affordable homes, health and wellbeing).</p> <p>An example could be working with developers when they are installing workers housing/portacabins and how this site infrastructure could be developed to leave a legacy for the area by providing affordable homes in the future.</p> <p>Rhona Gunn highlighted that progress on several strategic developments across the highlands and islands has been significantly affected due to the lack of infrastructure and grid capacity available. It is recognised that action is required at government level to address the impact these constraints are having on economic development in the area. Concrete examples to demonstrate these constraints would be useful to pass on to Highlands and Islands Regional Economic Partnership (HIREP) for lobbying to Scottish Government.</p> <p><b>ACTION: Partners to gather examples from their members of developments constrained by lack of infrastructure and grid capacity in the area.</b></p> <p><u>A96 Dualling</u>  Sarah Medcraf reported that the Scottish Chamber of Commerce network has created a business plan for taking to political parties during the upcoming Scottish elections. Moray Chamber of Commerce has also drafted a business plan which will act as their manifesto for Moray.</p> <p>Sarah highlighted that dualling of the A96 features in the Scottish Chambers of Commerce business plan, not just in the Moray plan, showing how vital this project is to the wider Scottish economy, not just for Moray.</p> <p>Rhona Gunn reported that following the last MEP meeting, a joint letter from Moray Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business and The Moray Council was sent to the Scottish Government. The letter emphasized the urgent need to dual the A96, not only as a catalyst for economic development across the region, but also as a vital measure to prevent further unnecessary fatalities along the route.</p>

	<p>Mike Duncan expressed concern that the response received from the Scottish Government indicated there is ongoing commitment to dual the A9 between Perth and Inverness and to deliver improvements to the A96. Mike queried what further action MEP must take to influence government policy to ensure that all political parties include a firm commitment to the A96 dualling in their upcoming election manifestos.</p> <p><b>ACTION: MEP members to consider the next steps required to ensure that the dualling of the A96 remains a central focus in all future discussions with Scottish Government ministers.</b></p> <p>Lorna Williamson reported that from ongoing discussions, there are encouraging signs of growing confidence across the small business sector.</p>
7	<p><b>Key Topic Focus</b></p> <p><b>VisitScotland</b></p> <p>David Jackson provided an overview of Scotland's tourism sector along with an update on recent changes within VisitScotland.</p> <p>David reported that Scotland's tourism sector presents a mixed picture. While it continues to face many challenges, including rising operational costs and global competition, it has experienced notable growth over the past year. Despite this, demand remains strong, with Scotland outperforming the rest of the UK in both domestic and international markets, contributing an estimated £4 billion to the Scottish economy.</p> <p>While the domestic market continues to show strong visitor volumes and a growing trajectory in demand, consumer behaviour reflects a shift towards shorter stays, reduced spending and doing fewer activities. Businesses are challenged with rising operational costs, including the cost of living, doing business and increased regulatory pressures, all of which make investment and business growth difficult.</p> <p>The introduction of the visitor levy has potential to be a solution to some of the sector challenges but needs to be properly thought through prior to implementation. There will be flexibility within the scheme allowing local authorities to make adaptions eg exemptions. Further clarity is expected over the coming months as guidance continues to evolve.</p> <p>Lobbying on business rates and VAT will be key factors in shaping policy discussion for the upcoming Scottish elections.</p> <p>VisitScotland is undergoing significant change driven by the way consumers want to engage with and access services but also by internal streamlining requirements.</p> <p>In a local context, it is recognised that Scotland's tourism growth potential lies in regions like Moray which can offer genuine year-round capacity.</p> <p>The Tourism Strategy will play an important role in setting a new direction for the sector, galvanising ambition, identifying opportunities and bringing people together. It aims to rebuild confidence across the industry while aligning closely with the Moray Economic Strategy to ensure tourism contributes towards the region's wider economic goals.</p>

	<p>Sarah reported that Visit Moray Speyside is still in the process of being wound up and in the meantime asked if there is anything that MEP members could do to offer support. David emphasised the importance of recognising tourism as a key contributor and noted that the Tourism Strategy, along with MEP's endorsement, plays an important role in reaffirming the sectors value. He asked that the visitor economy is acknowledged, not only as an economic driver, but as integral to areas such as health and wellbeing, placemaking, transport, and the natural environment. Many of these aspects have a tourism dimension that can be leveraged for broader benefit when considering capital investment planning. A strategic perspective on tourism is essential to unlocking the full potential of the visitor economy and the Tourism Strategy will play a key role in helping to achieve that.</p> <p><b>Workforce North – Skills Summit for Moray</b></p> <p>Sarah Medcraf reported that the skills summit event being organised for Moray will have a focus on energy, renewables and the supply chain, giving the business community and public sector partners the opportunity to consider future skills requirements in these sectors. Skills Development Scotland have been tasked with organising this event which is scheduled to take place during the afternoon of Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2025.</p> <p><b>Action: Lorna Williamson to keep MEP members briefed on the proposed agenda, speakers and invitation list for the Skills Summit for Moray event.</b></p>
8	<p><b>AOB</b></p> <p>The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 9 December 2025 (MS Teams).</p>
9	<p><b>Close</b></p> <p>Sarah Medcraf thanked everyone for their attendance and brought the meeting to a close.</p>

<b>Summary of actions</b>		
Sarah Medcraf will contact David Patterson, UHI Moray, to consider a suitable chair for the Business Support subgroup.		MCC/UHI Moray
Partners to gather examples from their members of developments constrained by lack of infrastructure and grid capacity in the area.		ALL
MEP members to consider what the next steps should be to ensure that dualling of the A96 remains at the forefront of any discussion with ministers.		MCC/FSB/TMC
Lorna Williamson to keep MEP members updated with proposed agenda, speakers, invitation list for the Skills Summit for Moray event.		TMC