

Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development

Member Survey 2014

Results

Improvement Service

www.improvementservice.org.uk/economicoutcomes

February 2014

About this Report

This report has been developed as part of the support provided to Scottish Councils by the Improvement Service’s Economic Outcomes Programme (EOP). This Programme is funded and delivered by the Improvement Service, with support from the Scottish Government, and aims to improve the quality of delivery of economic development by Scottish Councils. As well as support to individual Councils, a key component of the Programme is support to national or regional delivery that Councils are contributing to.

SLAED is in the process of drafting its Strategic Plan for 2013-2016. It highlights a number of aims and objectives, and corresponding actions in support of these. The EOP has supported SLAED in the form of hosting a survey, to canvass the current views and needs of SLAED members to inform the finalising of the Plan itself, and the work of Andy Kinnaird, recently seconded from the Scottish Government to SLAED, to support its development.

Survey Objectives

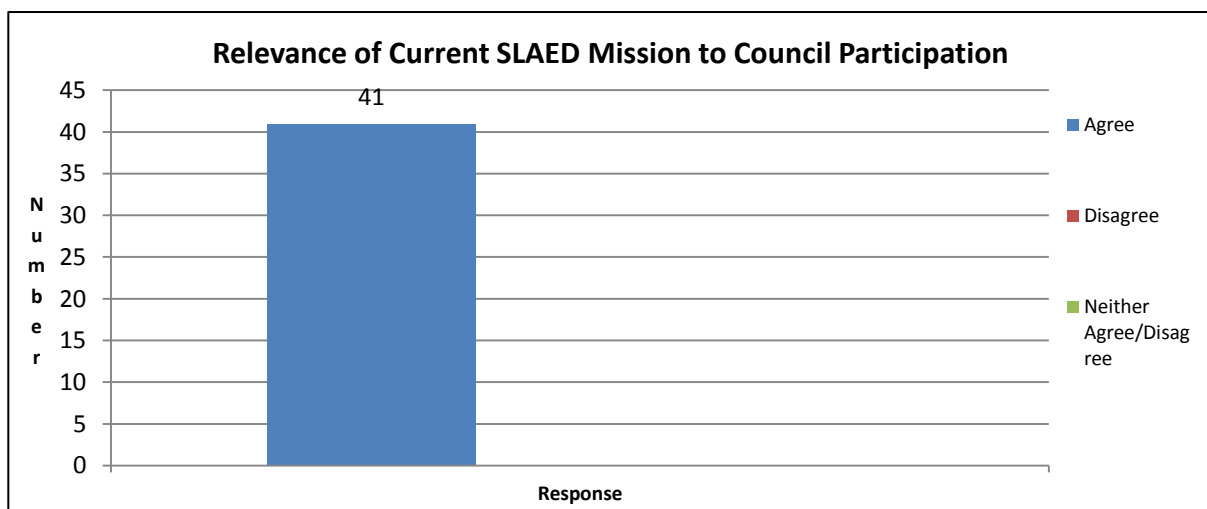
The purpose of the survey was to canvass the views of SLAED members in relation to SLAED’s current delivery, structure and future priorities. The survey content was agreed and signed off by the SLAED Executive in October 2013. It was then distributed electronically via Questback to a sample of officers in participating Councils, and those officers that contributed to the SLAED Indicators Framework for 2012/13.

The survey was sent to 189¹ Economic Development Officers from all 32 Scottish Councils. These officers were encouraged to share the survey with other colleagues working in Economic Development and who also participate across SLAED activity. 41 responses were received from 25 Councils, a response rate of 22% (78% of all Councils).

The survey findings have been written up in this report, which will be submitted to the SLAED Executive for discussion and action.

The SLAED Group - Mission

SLAED’s mission is *to provide a national voice for local economic development in Scotland by linking the work of Scotland’s 32 Local Authorities and bringing a collective influence to bear at national and European levels.* Respondents were asked to state whether they feel that this mission is relevant to their Council’s participation in SLAED.



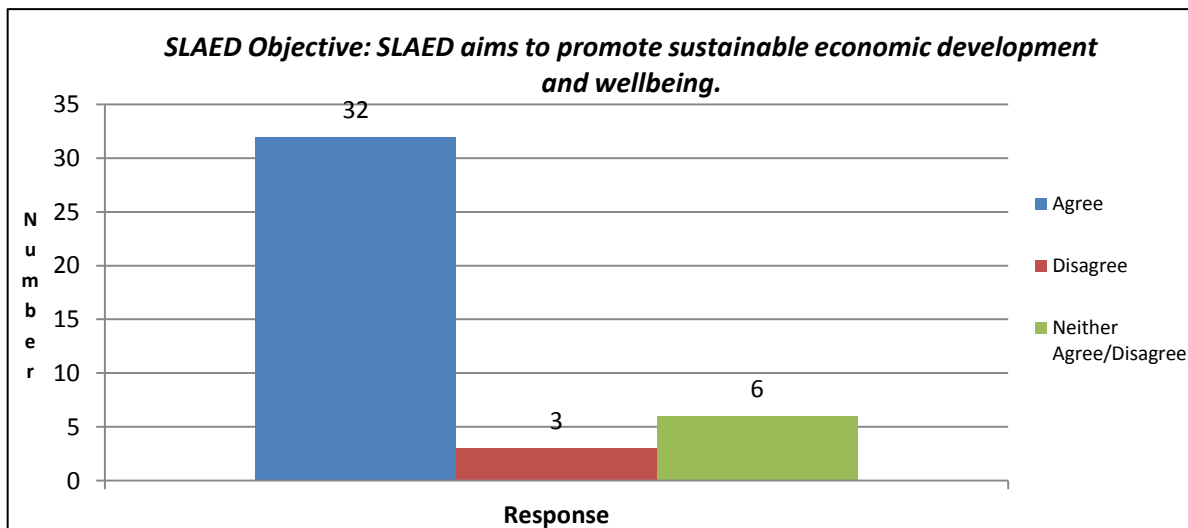
¹ Equates to 15% of the estimated 1,300 ftes working in Scottish Councils’ economic development services (SLAED Annual Report, November 2014). This means that the 41 responses to the survey represents only 3% these officers.

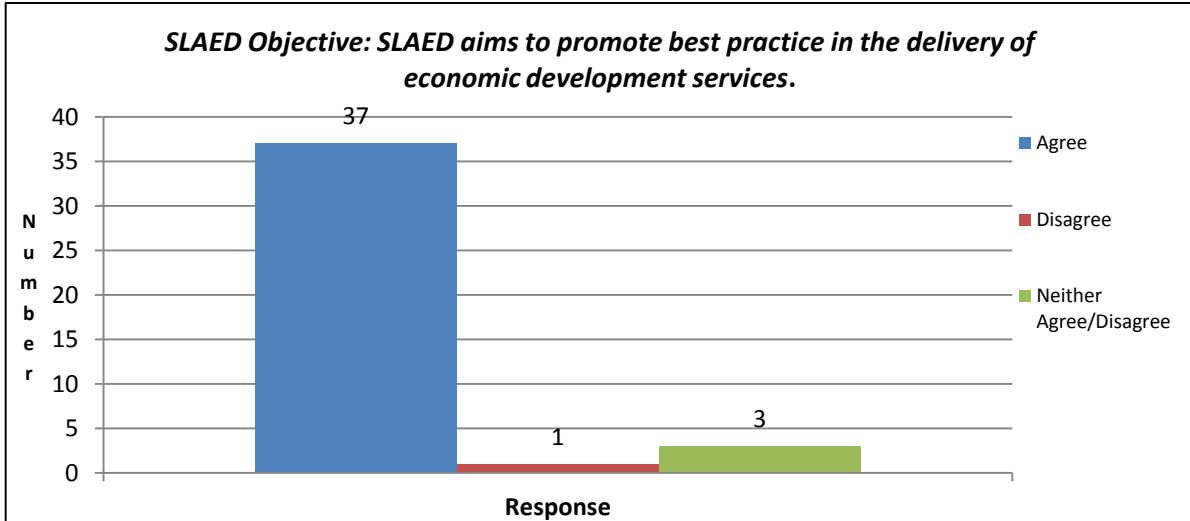
100% of the respondents agreed that SLAED’s current mission statement is relevant suggesting that no significant changes are required going forward. However, respondents were then asked to comment on other aspects of SLAED’s work that they felt is not reflected by the current mission. Several suggestions were made:

- Benchmarking and sharing best practice
- Better engagement with Highland and Island local authorities
- Potentially sharing capacity, resourcing and other collaboration in some of the 32 Councils
- Balance with wider sustainability imperatives e.g. low carbon and climate change agenda
- Developing the skills and competencies of staff and agreeing quality standards
- Measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of the network as a whole
- Supporting economic development as a profession and encouraging CPD of officers across Scottish Councils
- Economic regeneration - a vital part of what should be encompassed by economic development. It bridges across place-making and therefore into planning and land and property economics as well as interfacing with transportation, housing, public realm and urban design
- Developing focussed sub groups with economic development specialists to provide in depth perspectives to industry sectors
- Providing a framework for assessment of impact and performance of economic development function at local and national level

SLAED Objectives

This section of the Survey discussed SLAED’s current objectives in response to the needs of local authorities. Respondents were asked to state whether they agree that each of the objectives adequately reflect their Council’s participation in SLAED.





The responses demonstrate that the majority of respondents agree that both objectives adequately reflect their Council’s participation in the Group.

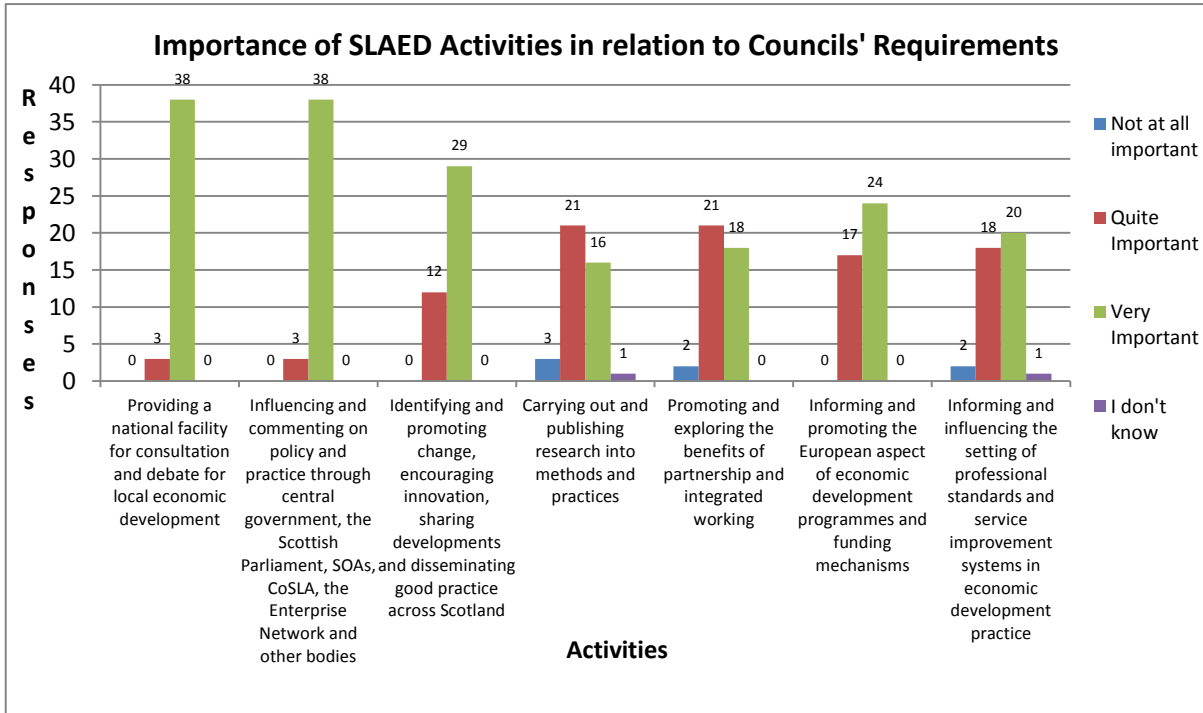
In the context of these broader and ‘strategic’ aims, officers were then asked to comment on whether there are any new objectives relevant to their Council’s delivery of economic development in the next three years, that SLAED should consider. We have aligned these suggested specific objectives according to the Scottish Government Priorities Table 1 below:

Table 1: SLAED Objectives Aligning to the Government's Economic Objectives

GES Objective	SLAED Objectives
1. Supportive Business Environment	Growing exporting, promoting innovation and R&D, identifying and assisting companies in key sectors
	Maximising EU funding
2. Transition to a Low Carbon Economy	Pursuit of local energy generation opportunities, resource efficiency in local business, low carbon training and skills needs
	Maximising EU funding
	Exploring opportunities for collaboration between Councils and joint delivery of projects
3. Learning, Skills and Well-being	Employability agenda in the context of Welfare Reform
	Promoting professional development for economic development officers
	Rationalisation & co-ordination of national/ regional economic indicator data
	Maximising EU funding
4. Infrastructure, Development and Place	Promotion of cooperation between economic development services - opportunities for joint delivery of projects
	Delivery of broadband infrastructure improvements and developing the digital economy
5. Effective Government	Supporting the development of local Strategies and Action Plans
	Reinforcing the connection between national and local economic development activity
	Maximising the wider economic impact of Council and CPP partners
	Consideration of the Independence Referendum and what a 'yes' vote would mean for economic development
	Exploring opportunities for collaboration between Councils and joint delivery of projects
	Support with benchmarking and key indicators
	Integration of economic development within community planning delivery framework across service outcomes
	Creating a single coherent voice for local economic development
	Promoting better integration of activity between national enterprise agencies and local authorities
	Developing a collective local authority role/voice
	Promoting strategic partnerships with national organisations in regeneration
Continue working with IS - integrating economic development considerations through CPP and across council departments	
6. Equity	Addressing the challenges of rural and island economies
	Developing a collective local authority role/voice
	Promoting better integration of activity between national enterprise agencies and local authorities
	Maximising EU funding/ RSA

Current Activity

Respondents were then asked to rate the relative importance of each of SLAED’s existing activities in the context of their own Council’s requirements.



The responses demonstrate that ‘providing a national facility for consultation’ and ‘influencing and commenting on policy and practice’ are the two most important activities to Councils.

However, all of the other SLAED activities are deemed to be either ‘quite’ or ‘very important’ to the majority of respondents. This again demonstrates that SLAED is responding to the needs of its members.

Respondents were then asked whether there are any other activities that they feel are relevant to their delivery of economic development, but are not currently catered for by SLAED. A range of responses were submitted which reflect the different priorities of individual Councils, and we have grouped these by GES and SLAED Objectives in Table 2 below:

Table 2: SLAED Activities Contributing to SLAED & Government Objectives (Activities in **bold** are existing SLAED activities, and those in *italics* are suggestions put forward by Councils)

GES Objective	SLAED Objectives	SLAED Activities
1. Supportive Business Environment	To grow, export and promote innovation and R&D, identifying and assisting companies in key sectors	<i>Professional development</i>
		<i>Providing work placement/secondment opportunities across Councils/ partners</i>
	To identify & assist companies in key sectors	<i>Maximising EU funding</i>
2. Transition to a Low Carbon Economy	To pursue local energy generation opportunities, resource efficiency in local business & low carbon training	<i>Sharing and disseminating good practice</i>
		<i>Maximising EU funding</i>
		<i>Exploring opportunities for collaboration between Councils and joint delivery of projects</i>
		Carrying out and publishing research into methods and practices
		Promoting and exploring the benefits of partnership and integrated working
		Informing and promoting the European aspect of economic development programmes and funding mechanisms
3. Learning, Skills and Well-being	To deliver the employability agenda in the context of Welfare Reform	<i>Delivering professional development</i>
		<i>Promoting opportunities for cooperation between local authorities</i>
	To promote professional development for economic development officers	<i>Sharing and disseminating good practice</i>
		<i>Undertaking collective research studies</i>
	To rationalise and co-ordinate national and regional economic indicator data	<i>Providing work placement / secondment opportunities across Councils/partners</i>
		<i>Developing a Performance Framework</i>
	To maximise EU funding	<i>Rationalising and coordinating national and regional economic indicator data</i>
		<i>Arranging / sponsoring events for economic development staff across Scotland's local authorities to meet and learn from one another</i>
		<i>Boosting CPD activity to develop economic development as a profession</i>
		Identifying and promoting change, encouraging innovation, sharing developments and disseminating good practice across Scotland
	Carrying out and publishing research into methods and practices	

GES Objective	SLAED Objectives	SLAED Activities
<p>4. Infrastructure, Development and Place</p>	<p>To promote cooperation between economic development services and opportunities for joint delivery of projects</p>	<p><i>Promoting opportunities for cooperation between local authorities</i></p>
	<p>To deliver broadband infrastructure improvements and developing the digital economy</p>	<p><i>Arranging / sponsoring events for economic development staff across Scotland's local authorities to meet and learn from one another</i></p>
		<p>Promoting and exploring the benefits of partnership and integrated working</p>
		<p>Informing and promoting the European aspect of economic development programmes and funding mechanisms</p>
<p>5. Effective Government</p>	<p>To support the development of local Strategies and Action Plans</p>	<p><i>Promoting opportunities for cooperation between local authorities</i></p>
	<p>To reinforce the connection between national & local economic development activity</p>	<p><i>Sharing and disseminating good practice</i></p>
	<p>To maximise the wider economic impact of Council & CPP partners</p>	<p><i>Undertaking collective research studies</i></p>
	<p>To consider the Independence Referendum & what a 'yes' vote would mean for economic development</p>	<p><i>Providing work placement/ secondment opportunities across Councils/partners</i></p>
	<p>To explore opportunities for collaboration between Councils on joint delivery of projects</p>	<p><i>Developing a Performance Framework</i></p>
	<p>Support with benchmarking & key indicators</p>	<p><i>Short and regular written briefings on policy with reference to issues for local government</i></p>
	<p>To integrate economic development within community planning delivery framework across service outcomes</p>	<p><i>Rationalising and coordinating national and regional economic indicator data</i></p>
	<p>To create a single coherent voice for local economic development</p>	<p><i>Promoting itself amongst local authorities and economic development staff to raise awareness of what SLAED does</i></p>
	<p>To promote better integration of activity between national enterprise agencies & local authorities</p>	<p><i>Acting as a bridge between members and national priorities/agencies</i></p>
	<p>To develop a collective local authority role/voice</p>	<p>Influencing and commenting on policy and practice through central government, the Scottish Parliament, SOAs, CoSLA, the Enterprise Network and other bodies</p>
	<p>To promote strategic partnerships with national organisations in the delivery of regeneration</p>	<p>Identifying and promoting change, encouraging innovation, sharing developments and disseminating good practice across Scotland</p>
	<p>To continue working with IS - integrating economic development considerations through CPP and across council departments</p>	<p>Informing and influencing the setting of professional standards and service improvement systems in economic development practice</p>

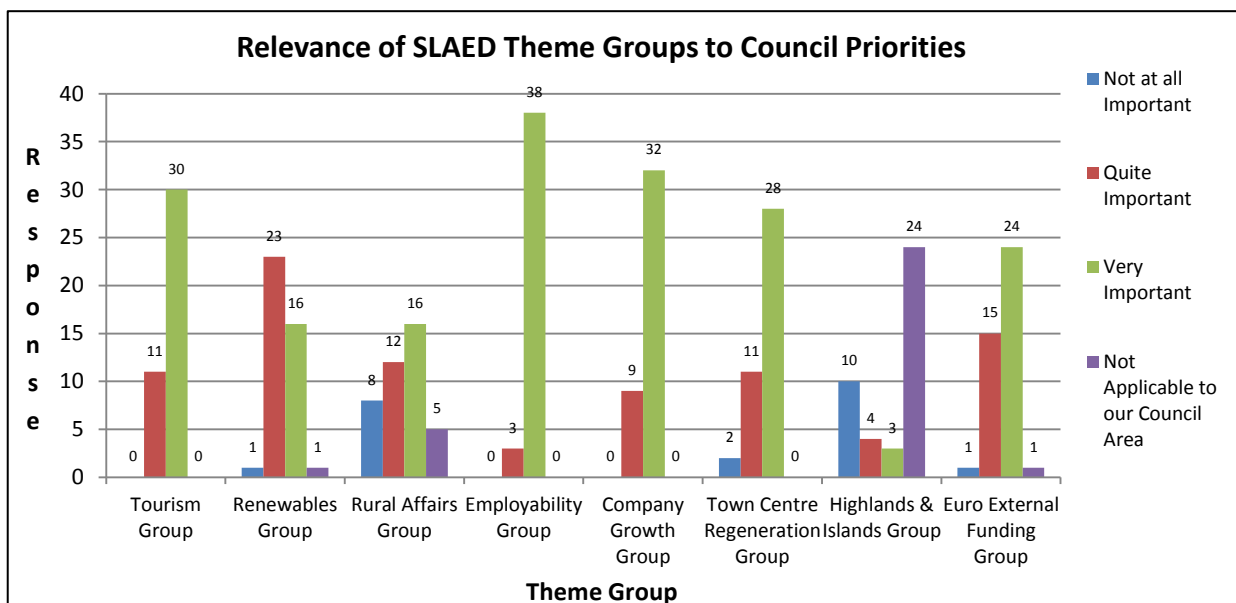
GES Objective	SLAED Objectives	SLAED Activities
6. Equity	To address the challenges of rural and island economies	<i>Promoting opportunities for cooperation between local authorities</i>
	To develop a collective local authority role/voice	<i>Undertaking collective research studies</i>
	To promote better integration of activity between national enterprise agencies and local authorities	<i>Providing work placement / secondment opportunities across Councils/partners</i>
	To maximise EU funding	<i>Acting as a bridge between members and national priorities/agencies</i>
		Providing a national facility for consultation and debate for local economic development
		Influencing and commenting on policy and practice through central government, the Scottish Parliament, SOAs, CoSLA, the Enterprise Network and other bodies
		Promoting and exploring the benefits of partnership and integrated working

One participant stated that all of these activities are important, but they are not actually being delivered currently. And consequently SLAED should now consider its structure, operating model, resources and fit with other bodies such as COSLA.

It was also suggested that some activities could be covered by professional bodies, rather than SLAED, as this might improve links with other public and private sector practitioners.

SLAED Theme Groups

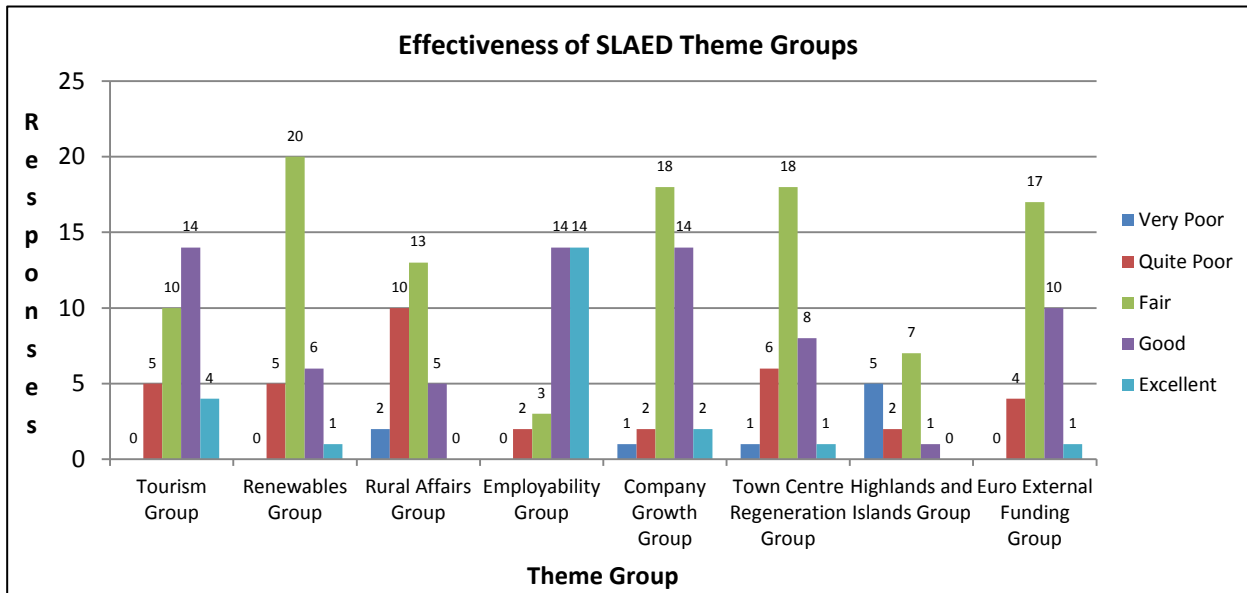
Respondents were asked to rate the relevance of each of the SLAED Theme Groups in relation to their Council’s economic development delivery:



According to the majority of respondents, the ‘Employability’ and ‘Company Growth’ Groups are considered to be the most important and relevant to Councils. As would be expected, the ‘Rural

Affairs’ and ‘Highlands and Islands’ Theme Groups ‘score’ less well, only being applicable in certain Council areas.

Respondents were then asked to think about the terms of reference and the work carried out by each of the groups and rank their effectiveness from ‘very poor’ to ‘excellent’, based on aspects such as participation in meetings, relevance, communication, agenda, content of meetings etc.



The results demonstrate that the Employability Theme Group is considered to be the most effective, and that the majority of the Groups are considered to be ‘fair’ in terms of how they function, suggesting room for some improvement. However, there are a range of differing opinions across the board on the effectiveness of each group, particularly the Tourism, Rural Affairs, Town Centre Regeneration and Highlands and Islands Groups. Specific reasons for this were not provided, and while it is inevitable that specific groups are more relevant to individual Councils based on their priorities in terms of geography, size or focus, SLAED Executive may wish to consider more in-depth feedback from participating officers.

Respondents were then asked to state any key priorities that they feel are not currently being catered under the existing Theme Group structure. The following suggestions were made:

- Food and Drink sector
- Performance/Evidence/Research/SLAED Indicators
- Maximising the Council's wider economic development role – the ‘corporate economic footprint’
- Developing Professional Practice

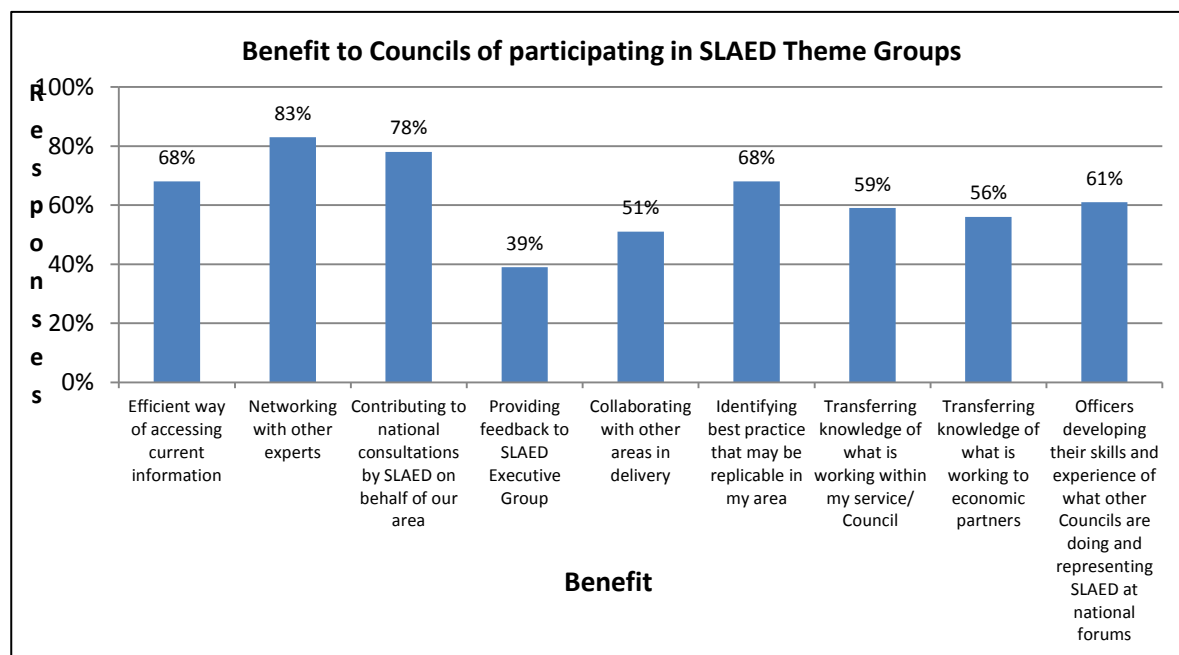
Respondents were also asked for comments on how the existing Theme Groups could be improved and several suggestions were made as demonstrated in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Suggested Theme Group Improvements

Structure
Less themes would facilitate better engagement and therefore contribution
Avoid duplication with work carried out elsewhere e.g. similar COSLA groups
Focus on debate and discussion of issues, policy and establishing a SLAED or local authority view, rather than restricted to information exchange
Role
Clarity around remit of Renewables Group and how it interacts with other SLAED Groups
Low carbon should be embedded in all Groups for SLAED activity to be effective, rather than just a Renewables Group
Clarity between Company Growth group and Business Gateway network
Review of the focus of the Euro Funding Group in light of the move to 2014-2020 programmes
Tourism group should be extended to include events
Meetings
Some groups should meet more regularly
Communications
Increased engagement
Better information on SLAED website re Theme Group membership, chairs, meeting dates, copies of minutes etc

Benefits of Participating in Theme Groups

From a list, respondents were asked to select all of the benefits of participating in the Theme Groups. The main benefits identified are illustrated below:



- Networking with other experts (83% of responses)
- Contributing to national consultations by SLAED on behalf of our area (78% of responses)

- Efficient way of accessing current information (68% of responses)
- Identifying best practice that may be replicable in my area (68% of responses)
- Officers developing their skills and experience of what other Councils are doing and representing SLAED at national forums (61% of responses)

Respondents also took the opportunity to provide comments on the operation of the Theme Groups and improvement in this area should be an important part of the Development Plan going forward:

- Interface with the SLAED Executive Group – feedback to and action by the SLAED Executive Group.
- No real benefit from participation in Groups and therefore we do not participate in them
- Feedback to SLAED Executive is weak – the group leads should be on Executive
- The role and remit of the Executive and composition of it, is not clear
- What does the Wider Meeting aim to do that Executive does not?
- Reassess the remit of the meetings/ Groups and develop schedule
- SLAED should have meetings in other locations

SLAED Strategic Plan 2013 – 2016

The third section of the Member Survey asked respondents to propose ideas on the SLAED Development Plan for 2013-2016. Respondents were asked to identify three priority actions that they believe should be the key focus for SLAED going forward. This produced a very mixed response, reflecting the varying priorities of individual Councils. However, the key recurring actions are summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4: SLAED Strategic Plan 2013-2016 – Potential Activity

Current Development Plan Focus	Suggested Future Focus	Suggested Actions
Provide a national facility for consultation	To raise Council participation in SLAED and Theme Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing and raising the profile of SLAED • Using Twitter for communications • Better resourcing with web presence, leadership and communications • Ensuring value added reflects the amount of time individuals give to SLAED • Prioritising Exec meetings with heads of economic development in attendance, longer meetings and external venues
Influence and comment on policy	To articulate and integrate Economic Development priorities through CPP and SOA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lobbying Government on economic policy • Developing Infrastructure • Delivering broadband improvements and developing the digital economy • Developing low carbon and resource efficiency • Ensuring Business Gateway maintained through Councils • Focussing on employability and skills • Encouraging business growth
Identify and promote change, encourage innovation	To maximise corporate economic potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness of how Councils can deliver economic benefit locally • Engaging with the Sustainable Scotland Network to further understanding of low carbon economy imperatives and delivering the requirements of the Scottish Climate Change Act • Engaging higher level officers such as Directors/Chief Officers to ensure full buy-in and support • Regenerating town centres
Carry out and publish research	To rationalise and co-ordinate national and regional economic indicator data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing an agreed outcome monitoring performance framework
Promote partnership and integrated working	To promote and encourage national/regional collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing services on a national/regional basis

Current Development Plan Focus	Suggested Future Focus	Suggested Actions
Inform and promote the European aspect of economic development	To deliver European Funding priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping Councils to source funding for ED • Influencing national and European policy
Inform and influence the setting of professional standards	To develop and disseminate examples of Best Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer working with CoSLA and the Improvement Service/EOP • Providing opportunities to discuss best practice

Conclusions and Recommendations

The previous sections of the report are summarised below in the conclusions and recommendations. These should be considered by the Executive.

Table 4: Suggested Priorities for SLAED Strategic Plan 2013-2016

	Area	Conclusion	Recommendation	Lead
1	SLAED Mission	Mission remains relevant although there are a number of activity areas that Members do not feel are adequately reflected by current mission/ objectives.	No change to mission, but Executive to maintain improvement made in SLAED profile with Scottish Government. Executive needs to consider improving the activity/ contribution in these areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitoring, performance and benchmarking - effectiveness - Collaboration/ sharing of services - Professional standards and development - Low carbon 	SLAED Executive - Secondment
2	SLAED Objectives	Members agree that the two strategic objectives are relevant. However, there are a number of new priorities that could be reflected in new objectives for SLAED	We have grouped these under each Government Economic Strategy Target area and recommend that SLAED aligns all of its work under these broad headings. Members have identified a number of objectives that they feel are not reflected Under 'effective government' there are a number of priorities to improve integration across Council departments and CPP organisations to maximise the wider economic impact	SLAED Executive – Secondment Support from IS/ Economic Outcomes Programme
4	SLAED Activity	While there is general agreement on SLAED activity, there is a number of activities that Members feel are important and could be improved	These activities have been presented under each Government and SLAED objective. The next step will be to prioritise them according to their overall contribution to SLAED objectives Suggestions from the survey should be considered by the SLAED Executive and actioned where appropriate	SLAED Secondment SLAED Executive
5	SLAED Theme Groups	The Theme Groups are generally considered to be important and beneficial. But they are not considered to be	While the perception of effectiveness will be influenced by the relevance of a Group to a Council area/ priority, the results do indicate that SLAED should	SLAED Executive & Theme Group chairs

	Area	Conclusion	Recommendation	Lead
		operating as effectively. There are some exceptions	consider a new approach to how the groups operate, the need for new groups and the involvement of Council officers Consider assessment of what lessons from the 'success' of the Employability Group and what can be learned from this SLAED may also wish to consider operating some of the less effective group on a 'call-off' basis only drawing on the input of officers in response to specific need – eg response to specific consultation	
6	SLAED Theme Groups	Members think that the links between theme groups and with Executive and other SLAED activity are not good	Having looked at the relevance of existing Groups and the need for new ones, and how these operate, SLAED Executive needs to develop an organisation chart indicating how the Groups link to Executive and Chair/ Vice Chair roles and responsibilities. This should be circulated to all members SLAED should also clarify the role and remit of the Executive Group	SLAED Executive
7	Strategic Plan	Members have identified a number of actions that could contribute to the development of the Plan and its implementation	The next step will be to prioritise them according to their overall contribution to agreed SLAED objectives and the overall purpose of the Plan	SLAED Secondment/ SCDI