

Harris Forum Vice Chair report

December 2024

When I attended last year's AGM – 15 mins late due to a venue mix-up – I certainly didn't think I would be delivering the (Vice) Chair's report at this AGM.

Our outgoing Chairman, Paul Munro, suffered ill health shortly after the AGM, and so I became the acting Chairman. Paul has recently written to me signalling his intent to stand down as chair due to ongoing health issues. I would like to note the Forum's universal thanks to Paul for standing in as Chairman when there weren't many other options, and his tenure as *interim* Chair being extended graciously at every subsequent election.

It was a year of two halves with two different development officers in post: David Macdonald to begin with and then succeeded by Eva Kreileder. My role as acting Chairman has been made eminently easier with these two very strong development officers.

Through the year there have been several notable events. David wrote his housing strategy document to assist member organisations with aspirations of housing projects. The housing sub-group attracted membership from HHP, TIG, CNES, and HIE and was instrumental in delivering the Leverburgh Housing Project, which is currently under construction. This was a massive victory for Donnie Macdonald and his team, battling against the odds to deliver a transformational project in South Harris.

Probably the most contentious issues this year revolved around the Crown Estates Fund. The council had motioned a top slice of £200K to fund Stornoway centric projects. Grant Fulton, our then councillor, had tabled an amendment to this, which was ultimately unsuccessful. This led to his resignation and would see a former Forum chairman, Kenny Macleod, being elected to the Harris ward. Furthermore, the council approached the Forum to top-up a funding gap of £34K from our ward fund for the Leverburgh housing project. This was roundly rejected. There was lively debate around the suggestion that the Forum should ringfence £35K of the Crown Estate ward allocation to match fund a continuation of the HFDO post beyond March 2025. It was agreed that the member boards should vote – and true democratic credentials were shown when a decision was reached – on this occasion in favour of the match fund. The CE fund allocation sub-group, led by Mairi Maciver, then successfully disbursed the remaining funds to numerous projects.

There was a suggestion made that there was considerable crossover between the Harris Forum, and two of its member organisations, namely HDL and HVS. The idea of a merger was floated. This drew vigorous debate, but the Forum finally decided to remain with the status quo for the time being.

Other important changes during the year included attendance at business meetings of paid officers, to be replaced by their board members. This led to the Forum losing joint secretaries Michael and Linda, who had served the Forum very well over a long period. The secretarial role would now come under the remit of the HFDO, and this is now working well.

After David decided to move on, we were successful in recruiting a new HFDO, Eva, and she has hit the ground running. Amongst many other things she has instigated a traffic light style system for HFDO time. A consequence of this was that it was agreed that MOs with their own paid development officers would have less access to the HFDO. After an initial round of applications, the MOs with paid officers were granted 1 hour of HFDO time.

She has implemented a community events calendar to prevent crossover of events. She runs a column in the De tha Dol introducing all the member organisations and is hoping to develop a welcome pack for newcomers to the island.

She is currently consulting the local population as she begins to develop a Local Place Plan, which will inform strategies for the Forum going forward.

I am resigning this evening from the post of Vice Chair. I am of the opinion that the position would be better suited to someone who would have more time to support Eva in her role, and I trust we will find a suitable candidate tonight. I was most honoured to have served as acting Chair this last year.

Angus J. Macleod

Harris Forum Vice Chair