Orkney Fund Board

Minute

Venue: **Microsoft Teams**.

Date: **Wednesday, 25 February 2026**.

Time: **14:00**.

Present:

- Stephen Hagan, Chair.
- Morven Brooks.
- Davie Campbell.
- Michael Morrison.
- Chief Inspector Scott Robertson
- Rachel Scarth.
- Councillor Gwenda Shearer.
- Craig Spence.

Orkney Islands Council Officers:

- Hazel Flett, Service Manager (Governance).
- Laura Hutton, Economic Development Manager.
- Harvey Crew, Economic Development Officer.
- Hudson Johnson, Communications Officer.

1. Welcome and Apologies

Stephen Hagan, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies had been intimated on behalf of Cheryl Chapman, Councillor Kristopher Leask and Sweyn Johnston. No response had been received from Alistair Carmichael MP.

2. Draft Minute of Meeting held on 31 October 2025

There had been previously circulated the draft Minute of the Meeting held on 31 October 2025, which was approved as a true record.

3. Resignation

The Chair reported that he had received a letter of resignation from Liam McArthur MSP and advised that consideration of any appointment should be deferred until after the Scottish Parliament elections.

4. Website

The Chair advised that, although the website was ready, it had been agreed to postpone the launch to coincide with the announcement on the approval of the Regeneration Plan.

5. Year 1 Funding Application Process

There had been previously circulated a report setting out the process for applications, for consideration and approval, as well as an overview of Expressions of Interest received for the 2026/27 funding round and the estimated level of funding requested.

Harvey Crew advised that, when the Expression of Interest (EoI) phase closed in December 2025, a total of 53 EoIs were received, with estimated requests as follows:

- Capital funding – £722,162.
- Revenue funding – £232,847.

The Board's allocation for 2026/27 was as follows:

- Capital funding – £360,000.
- Revenue funding – £232,000.

Additional capacity funding, amounting to £150,000, was available to support Board activity and engagement.

Discussions had taken place with applicants to determine whether an application was and applications were not progressed where the funding request fell below the proposed minimum threshold or where there was no clear alignment with the Orkney Fund's priorities.

The existing application form and guidance had been reviewed and refined ahead of the Year 1 funding round, reflecting feedback from the previous round. It was proposed to introduce a minimum request threshold of £10,000 for capital applications and £5,000 for revenue applications to reduce the volume of small-scale requests and to ensure that funding focused on projects of strategic significance, while retaining flexibility where appropriate. The assessment criteria were also revised and refined, including clarification of the wording of each criterion to improve consistency, and expanding the scoring range from 0-3 to 0-5, which was intended to allow greater differentiation between applications and provide a more robust basis for ranking applications.

Eligible applicants had been invited to submit full applications by 20 March 2026, following which officers would assess applications against the agreed criteria and prepare a report setting out scores and funding recommendations for consideration by the Board.

Given that the EoI process had indicated an oversubscription for capital funding, Michael Morrison queried whether the Board was able to substitute revenue funding for capital funding. The Chair advised it was understood this was possible, although capital funding could not be substituted for revenue funding.

The Board **resolved**:

5.1. That the Year 1 funding application process, as set out in the report, be approved, including:

- The revised application form.
- The revised guidance.
- The revised scoring sheet.

5.2. That an officer-led assessment approach, whereby officers assess applications against agreed criteria and submit recommendations to the Board for final approval, be approved.

Actions:

- Officers to provide support to applicants ahead of the submission deadline (20 March 2026).
- Undertake officer-led assessment of applications against the approved criteria following the 20 March deadline.
- Prepare scoring summary and recommendations report for consideration at the next Board meeting (anticipated late April 2026).
- Review effectiveness of Year 1 assessment approach and report back to the Board with any recommended refinements for future rounds.

6. Future Consultation

There had been previously circulated a report setting out a structured outline for themed roundtable discussions, for consideration and approval of the scope and facilitation approach.

The Chair advised that the Steering Group (the Chair and two Vice Chairs) had met to consider more theme-specific engagement to inform strategic direction and funding priorities.

While previous consultation had generated valuable insight, a more structured and theme-focused engagement model would test emerging ideas, identify delivery partners, and explore collaboration opportunities for projects.

Aims of the roundtable discussions were to:

- Gather informed stakeholder insight.
- Identify priority challenges and opportunities within each theme.
- Generate potential project concepts aligned with Board priorities and suitable for further development.

- Map key organisations, potential project leads and delivery partners.
- Identify opportunities for collaborative or cross-sector initiatives.

The proposed format was five two-hour long discussions, facilitated independently. Each session would be open to the public, and individuals with expertise or relevance to the discussion invited to attend. The following categories were proposed:

- **Community Safety**: to identify and prioritise strategic investment opportunities that support safe, connected, inclusive communities across Orkney.
- **Sports and Leisure**: to explore collaborative investment in sports and leisure infrastructure that strengthens wellbeing, participation, and intergenerational inclusion.
- **Performing Arts and Festivals**: to explore strategic collaboration within the festivals and performing arts sector, identifying shared infrastructure needs and opportunities to improve cultural vibrancy across Orkney.
- **Heritage, Regeneration, and Public Realm**: to explore regeneration opportunities that strengthen town centres, improve public realm, and leverage heritage assets to support economic vitality and community wellbeing.
- **Business Development and Tourism**: to explore strategic interventions that strengthen high streets, visitor experiences, and support sustainable business growth across Orkney.

Work was ongoing to identify potential facilitators and relevant contacts for the roundtable discussions, and Board members were encouraged to a submit further suggestions to the Chair.

Roundtable discussions would commence following approval of the Regeneration Plan, and it was not proposed that the sessions would take place simultaneously. However, given existing discussion and project momentum in certain areas, Sports and Leisure and Performing Arts and Festivals may be prioritised initially. The remaining themes required further scoping to clarify focus and identify key stakeholders.

The Board **approved** the principle of the proposed approach to the themed roundtable discussions, including scope, themes and sequencing, as outlined above, and delegated powers to the Steering Group to progress accordingly.

Actions:

- Officers to commence procurement to secure a facilitator(s) and confirm associated costs.

7. Budget Statement

There had been previously circulated a report providing a budget statement for the UK Government's Plan for Neighbourhoods funding received up to 31 January 2026, along with a summary of costs incurred and committed.

Laura Hutton referred to Table 1, which set out the detailed budget statement, and confirmed that the first grant claims had been paid.

The Board noted the budget summary.

8. Chair’s Update

The Chair referenced the latest prospectus for the Pride in Place programme, which included the following statement:

- Each Board must transition towards a community-led model of delivery by year three of the programme. This might mean an established local community organisation acting as an anchor institution, or the Board itself becoming a co-operative, community interest company, community benefit society or charity.

The Chair advised that he would be participating in a webinar the following day which would focus on Boards within Scotland becoming charities.

Harvey Crew confirmed that representatives of the UK Government would be visiting Orkney during the week commencing 5 May 2026, where an opportunity would be available for Board members to discuss matters, including any concerns regarding transitioning to a charity.

9. Any Other Competent Business

On the motion of the Chair, seconded by Craig Spence, the Board resolved that the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting, as the business to be considered involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 as amended.

Hudson Johnson gave a short presentation on the website and members suggested various improvements and additions, which would be actioned before the website went live.

The Chair referred to discussion at the last workshop regarding support for Community Councils and, after discussion of various potential models, it was agreed that proposals be submitted to the next meeting for consideration.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting would be confirmed in due course.

11. Conclusion of Meeting

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting concluded at 14:50.