

**DOUNREAY STAKEHOLDER GROUP
SOCIO ECONOMIC SUBGROUP**

Minutes of the DSG Socio Economic subgroup meeting held on Wednesday 16 July at 1330 hours in the Orlig meeting room, Dounreay public information office and Microsoft Teams.

Present:	David Alexander	Thurso and Wick Trades Council (chair)
	Roger Saxon	DSG Site Restoration subgroup deputy chair
	Donna Chambers	Deputy Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
	Vicky Rosie	Administration and Communications Officer, Focus North
	Eann Sinclair	Area Manager, HIE
	Cllr Struan Mackie	Highland Council (DSG chair)
	Ron Gunn	CHAT
	Debbie Miller	UHI Northwest and Hebrides
	Ryan MacLean	Scrabster Harbour Trust
	Janet McEwan	Highland Council
	David Broughton	DSG Co-opted member of the public
	Ken Nicol	DSG Co-opted member of the public
	John Deighan	DSG Co-opted member of the public
In addition:	David Calder	Head of Sustainability & Socio Economics, NRS Dounreay
	Jeremy Gilmour	Head of Community & Economic Development, NDA
	Dawn Clasper	EHSSQ Administrator, NRS Dounreay
	Hannah Sutherland	HR Administrator, NRS Dounreay

MINUTES**1. WELCOME**

David Alexander welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted the presence of new attendees, introductions were made.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from:

- Tina Wrighton, Stakeholder & External Relations Manager, NRS Dounreay
- Cllr Raymond Bremner, Highland Council
- Magnus Davidson, Socio Economics Manager, NRS Dounreay
- Gillian Coghill, Buldoo Residents Group
- Trudy Morris, Chief Executive, Caithness Chamber of Commerce
- Peter Faccenda, Programme Manager, Focus North

3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

David Alexander noted that the minutes of the last meeting - DSG/SESG(2024)M01, April 2025 – had been endorsed at the public meeting held in June 2025. He invited members to raise any issues from the minutes. No issues were raised.

4. ACTIONS

David Alexander noted that the status of actions had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting. Of note:

- DSG/BM(2025)M004/A001: NDA to provide a full breakdown of the total NDA socio-economic funding by travel to work area for every site. Ongoing.

David Alexander noted that discussions were ongoing with the NDA.

5. DOUNREAY COMMUNITY FUND REQUESTS

David Alexander noted that the Community Fund report had been circulated in advance. He reminded members to declare an interest if there was any involvement from members in these projects.

Funding applications were reviewed and following discussions decisions were made on each funding application.

ACTION: DSG/SESG(2025)M02/A01: David Alexander to review the ongoing administration and the criteria for the Dounreay Communities Fund with David Calder and Magnus Davidson.

6. DOUNREAY SOCIO ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

David Alexander noted that a written paper had been provided DSG(2025)P017. David Calder was invited to provide key highlights:

NRS Dounreay is engaging with the Highland Council and Hub North on the council's Highland Investment Plan (HIP). Dounreay is currently engaged in discussion on understanding possible alignments and synergies related to various POD designs including an office POD as an opportunity to consolidate off-site accommodation.

Socio Economic grant funding delivered by NRS Dounreay and the NDA will be highlighted in a series of upcoming campaigns. Of note Dounreay and partners, the Caithness Business Fund managed by Caithness Chamber of Commerce were awarded the best socio-economic initiative award at the NDA Group Employee Awards for The Future Skills Programme.

The Just Transmission Commission visited Dounreay as part of their wider visit to Caithness. They met with a number of Dounreay executives to discuss the socio economic role of the site and wider Scottish economy.

Dounreay Socio Economic Grant Funding is currently sitting at 68% committed for this financial year with a forecasted spend coming in just above the nominal budget,

however the team are in constant dialogue with the NDA to potentially draw down from the central budget if required.

Procurement - as the trend is similar to last year with Caithness resourced and Caithness owned suppliers making up over 50% of our annual procurement spend.

The written updates on staffing are provided to the Socio Economic subgroup on a regular basis highlighting recruitment due to new posts, internal backfill and leavers.

STEM activities are ongoing, NRS Dounreay engineers and apprentices supported 4 primary schools at Goblin Car Final at Alford on 13 June. Lybster Primary school won Best Car Design and Dunbeath Primary won Best Portfolio.

A book commemorating Dounreay's 70th anniversary, written by James Gunn and Iain Grant, will be launched at the Mey Games on 2 August 2025. Proceeds will go to the Dounreay Employees Charity Fund.

David Alexander thanked David Calder for his update and invited questions from members.

David Broughton noted that the Apprenticeship Programme and Future Skills Graduate Scheme were over 2 years however they have been paid in full. David Calder responded that this was a programme where the funding for these schemes can be used over 2 years for the apprenticeship or graduate.

Ken Nicol asked if procurement was of the same order as last year. David Calder responded that there was a slight increase compared to last year.

John Deighan noted that NRS are employing people outwith Caithness and asked how many NRS employees are working outside of Caithness. David Calder responded that there were over 96% of the workforce living in the Dounreay to travel to work area. He also noted that there are employees that will be working on the behalf of Dounreay and seconded to other parts of the NRS estates that are still benefiting the area.

David Alexander noted that the Thurso Community Development Trust have funding committed for 3 years. He asked what the funding is to be used for. David Calder responded the funding was put in place for a development officer and administrator to develop projects and the plan.

David Alexander asked what the UpNorth! CDT Masterplan Delivery Officer is. David Calder responded that Melness, Skerry and Tongue have problems with housing and transport as set out in the masterplan, this role is to deliver against the objectives set out in the plan. Eann Sinclair noted that HIE helped bring the masterplan together for Tongue, Melness and Skerry, and the local development trust is looking to deliver against this plan.

Jeremy Gilmour noted that they have confirmed three year funding to the Caithness and north Sutherland Fund which will provide longevity and a forward plan for the fund.

Discussions are ongoing regarding co-funding a project in Caithness and north Sutherland to support projects in priority skills areas.

David Alexander thanked David Calder and Jeremy Gilmour for their updates.

7. FOCUS NORTH UPDATE

David Alexander noted that a written paper had been provided DSG(2025)P018. He noted that Peter Faccenda had tendered his apologies but noted that if any questions were raised from the report these would be actioned.

David Broughton queried the definition and scope of renewable jobs. He noted that while there are visible signs of renewable activity in Wick, but it remains unclear how these roles are classified and counted. There was a discussion that followed noting that there were a number of skills required, from engineers to project managers, with core skills being taught at UHI and bespoke skills being developed though on the job training.

David Calder added that classification of roles can vary. The latest Ekosgen report suggested there would be about 18,000 jobs in the Highlands. He emphasised that it was important to understand how many people will be coming up to the area to work, and how many will stay here.

Ken Nicol noted there is an urgent for accommodation and there are a number of commercial properties empty and enquired if there is any work to engage with owners of these properties or look at a model where these could become residential properties as we go forward. Eann Sinclair noted there is a lot of work going on and HIE are trying to learn from work that has been done in Orkney and other areas of the region.

David Alexander asked if there was an update on the Sutherland Spaceport. Eann Sinclair noted that the operator met with stakeholders, and they provided updates that confirmed intention to continue previously announced plans and timescales. HIE are continuing to engage with the NDA.

David Alexander asked if there was an update on the Wick John O' Groat Airport PSO. Eann Sinclair responded that a business case is being taken forward, and that there has been a change in personnel. The Business case needs to be submitted by September.

Jan McEwan noted that the reliability went up in June. She asked as the number of flights have been reduced, would there be an impact on jobs. Eann Sinclair noted that questions are being asked about the new PSO period and what the right destinations are. Offshore wind traffic will have a bearing on what the routes would look like over the next 4-5 years.

8. CORRESPONDENCE SINCE LAST MEETING

David Alexander noted there has been no correspondence.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

David Alexander opened this to members there was no other business from members.

10. CLOSE

There being no further business David Alexander thanked everyone for their input and formally closed the meeting.

DAVID ALEXANDER
DSG Socio Economic Subgroup Chair
6 August 2025

ACTIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

DSG/SESG(2025)M02/A01: DSG/SESG(2025)M02/A01: David Alexander to review the ongoing administration and the criteria for the Dounreay Communities Fund with David Calder and Magnus Davidson.