

**Minutes of the Cross Party Group on Food held in Committee Room 5 of
the Scottish Parliament on September 25th 2012**

Present

John Scott	MSP (Chair)
Patrick Harvie	MSP
Alex Fergusson	MSP
James Laws	Food and Drink Hub Scotland
Aidan Pia	Community Food Social Enterprise Network
Mary Lawton	Scottish Food and Drink Federation
Colette Backwell	Scottish Food and Drink Federation
Anne Gibson	Community Food and Health Scotland
Jacqui Macdowell	Community Food and Health Scotland
Ian Shankland	Lanarkshire Community Food and Health
Maggie Gordon	Dumfries and Galloway Food Co-op
Martin Meteyard	Community Retailing Network
Graeme Findlay	SQA
Ruth Chesser	NHS Health Scotland
Fiona Bayne	NHS Health Scotland
Sarah McDaid	Pagoda PR (Waitrose)
Pat Abel	Nourish Scotland
Graeme Millar	Robert Gordon Uni
Gillian Kynoch	Albert Bartlett
Alan Stevenson	SAOS
Alison Harker	Scottish Government
Peter Brown	The List
Graham Walker	REHIS
Daniel Gotts	Slow Food Edinburgh
Nikki Holmyard	Seafood Scotland
Jane Cullingworth	Forth Environment Link
Willie Fergusson	LANTRA
Martin Irons	Food Trust/ QMU
Pete Ritchie	Nourish Scotland
Uel Morton	QMS
Laura Stewart	Soil Association
Sheena Cleland	Office of Roseanna Cunningham MSP
James Withers	Scotland Food and Drink

1. Apologies for Absence

These were received from Jim Hume, Brian McLeish, Tony McElroy, Siobhan Paterson, Sarah Deas, Stephen Hutt, Christopher Trotter, Pieter van Graaf, Martin Hunt, Elaine Bannerman, Jim Wildgoose, Moyra Burns, Dave Simmers, Anna Whyte, Douglas Scott, Fi Bird, John Whitehead, Cathy Higginson, Mary Cursiter, Maggie McGinlay, Amanda Fox, Christine Fraser, Wendy Barrie, Sue Bird, Lorna Murray, Susan Gallacher and Jennifer Bryson

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

These were approved.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising, all actions had been completed.

4. Spaghetti Junction: Hubs and Networks linking private, public and third sector interests

James Laws (JL) Business Development and Support Director of the Food and Drink Hub Scotland gave a presentation, which is attached to the minutes.

Aidan Pia (AP) Executive Director of Senscot then gave a presentation on the new Community Food Social Enterprise Network.

Senscot were set up in 1999 to connect social entrepreneurs and social enterprises to help make them more effective. They have 3 key activities:

- Connecting and informing social entrepreneurs
 - Circulation of weekly Bulletin / use of website
- Facilitating Networks –broad spread urban/rural both geographic and thematic
- Developing the Sector
 - work with others to incubate and spin out new services – as with Scotland unLtd, DTA Scotland, the Social Enterprise Academy and First Port, influence policy and raise awareness.

The Community Food SEN was set up following a meeting at Community Food and Health Scotland where interest in establishing the network was highlighted and research by QMU suggested there was a growing interest in social enterprise in the community food sector.

Similar Senscot thematic networks have established roundtables where network members and members of public agencies meet quarterly and these have been successful.

Scottish Government is supportive of the network approach as through support and access to programmes social enterprises can grow and it is free. It also means there is a voice in policy such as the Procurement Reform Bill.

AP recognised the challenges – there are a lot of existing networks in food and drink so there is a cluttered landscape to work in.

Open Debate

John Scott MSP asked if the hub was increasing viability of MSMEs. JL said that this was true, that companies had increased access to markets and they benefitted from this. If the hub broke even that was fine, as they hoped to see revenue in the future. He gave an example of work he was doing with a tomato grower –the only one in the Clyde valley –for no cost.

Nicki Holmyard Seafood Scotland asked whether they were doing anything with fish. JL said they were engaged with some salmon producers and he was meeting with Seafood Scotland. Nicki said in particular she was interested in how they could help smaller inshore companies. JL noted that he was on the board of the Scottish Shellfish Marketing group and had good contacts in the sector.

Laura Stewart Soil Association Scotland asked if they were involved in distribution for food service, particularly the public sector. JL said yes this was one of the foci for year 2 and 3. There were definite opportunities but it took time to co-ordinate. He had been involved in local food for many years and he felt this experience would be useful.

Pete Ritchie Nourish Scotland said that community housing pioneers had noted the need for a new approach, had big ideas but these had taken time to get movement and wondered what learning there was from that sector. AP felt that there was a need to link up more to create opportunities and by coming together communities could be stronger. Pete asked about food and its place in the private sector. AP said there were 30 community cafes in Edinburgh and wondered how many were supplied by community food growers. He said the transition to a social enterprise took time and a culture change.

Jane Cullingworth Forth Environment Link asked about the hubs business model. JL said they were a private company. Other models had been looked at but this model was thought to be best for the quick moving environment. None of the retailers they dealt with currently were social enterprises.

Patrick Harvie MSP asked about suppliers. JL said if retailers dealt with wholesalers, margins then came in and this was less competitive for them. The hub built up a relationship with their companies and helped co-ordination. Another issue was the ability to have a single point of invoicing. Many big distributors want pallets of product but the hub could hold small amounts of stock for example casks/bottles.

Willie Fergusson LANTRA asked about the principle behind the hub and any thoughts they had on skills gaps. JL said that the hub never takes ownership of any of the businesses, just advises. He found that it was commercial knowledge that was missing –understanding costs and buyers expectations. They often needed technical help also on such things as life testing and bar coding. Often people were afraid of producing large volumes.

Colette Backwell SFDF said that there was a huge expectation that the third sector would take on more and more as contract and asked to what extent public sector expectations met the skills in the third sector. AP said that was increased awareness in the public sector of what the third sector can offer. He thought there was a willingness to engage and be flexible with split tenders.

There was an issue of capacity and capability and there was a need to demonstrate collaboration. AP thought about 20% of social enterprises were developed enough/at the right stage in terms of maturity, size skills etc to be ready to tender or fully engage with procurement opportunities. He thought there were also issues in consistency of approach at Local Authority level.

Alex Fergusson MSP asked what triggered the hub into action. JL said there were various triggers. Waitrose had identified gaps and asked for help. Suppliers had asked for help in delivering and small businesses in accessing markets. In particular the hub spent time understanding and working with companies especially micro ones. He noted that many had never talked to their business gateway –he now had built up good contacts with Lanarkshire.

He was currently working with QMU on how to get an “idea to the plate” – looking at the costs and how to get through the various hoops.

Ian Shankland LCFH noted the approach to the hub. Community food co-operatives want to use the approach to collaborate to buy supplies. He thought this was one way in which the two presentations fitted together and demonstrated the need for the two sides to work closely. A network could be set up to buy an entity and the social enterprises then use the product. It was important to see these synergies. JL agreed and said that in their 5 year vision, community food was one area that would be addressed including consolidated buying. AP agreed that there were huge opportunities and that the Scottish Government were keen to see examples of collaboration.

Alan Stephenson SAOS said that cultivating collaborative projects was important whether business to business or with a social enterprise. Support was needed along the supply chain and collaboration could lead to costs being taken out, new product development etc. JL noted that many companies did not understand the costs of their distribution enough.

James Withers SFD said that given the huge number of SMEs in Scotland – many producing high quality artisan food, in order to achieve the growth the key was collaboration and cooperation.

John Scott thanked everyone for the interesting debate He noted the synergy between the work of the two speakers and the need for the two sectors to consider links and how better to work together.

5. AOB

There was no other business.

6. Date of the Next meeting

This was Wednesday 21 November in Conference Room 5 at 5.30pm.