

Sleat Community Trust: Summary of Independent 7 Year Review – April 2012

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The Review

Sleat Community Trust (SCT) was incorporated in 2004 as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It was formed to improve the economy and social amenities in the Sleat peninsula of Skye through investigating and providing sustainable solutions to meet the community's needs and aspirations. SCT currently owns a filling station, garage and shop in Armadale, all of which are managed on its behalf by Sleat Community Trading Company (SCTCL). It recently acquired the 440-hectare Tormore Forest, which is managed on its behalf by Sleat Renewables Limited (SRL). The Trust also has a range of other working groups that deliver marketing of the area to visitors, environmental projects and a community newsletter amongst other activities.



In November 2011 Sleat Community Trust with the support of Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) started a review of the first 7 years operation of the company to reflect on what has worked well and what can be improved on as they move forward. The Review brief asked for analysis of 9 specific areas relating to progress made and issues to be addressed in the future which were addressed through three stages of research: a desk review of written materials; 52 face to face and telephone interviews with key individuals and members of the community, and; a survey of all Trust members which was completed by 170 respondents. A full report of the Review can be downloaded from Sleat Community Trust's website and a summary of the key findings is given below.



Main Findings

The **key achievements** have been:

- The securing of Tormore Forest, the Filling Station, Garage and associated assets by the community.
- The delivery of a wide range of services for the community including the retention of the Post Office in Armadale, the subsidised taxi scheme and a range of energy efficiency measures.
- High levels of community participation involving over 85 members of the community which was recognised through the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service to the Trust in June 2011.
- The creation of 6 direct jobs and 3 indirect jobs through the Trust and its subsidiaries.

The members **currently describe the Trust** as:

- Hard Working, Progressive, Forward Thinking/ Looking, Ambitious and Enthusiastic.

The members would like to **describe the Trust in the future** as:

- Successful, Inclusive, Hard Working and Forward Looking/ Thinking.

The **key areas requiring action** are:

- Sleat as a whole needs an overarching Plan and SCT needs to identify within that plan what its role and priorities are and how it will work with others across the peninsula.
- There is a need for greater integration of consultation and community engagement throughout the organisation's operations.
- There is a need to consolidate and address a range of organisational management issues, including formalising arrangements between the Trust and its subsidiaries and improving forward business planning.

The Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, through the Review evidence has been gathered from a range of sources which can demonstrate that:

- Sleat Community Trust is a well established, well supported and representative community organisation.
- Sleat Community Trust has demonstrated a strong track record in delivering a range of tangible outputs; securing assets, delivering services and providing a basis for long term financial sustainability. It is considered to be a competent, reliable and responsive organisation by funders.
- Sleat Community Trust has achieved a total of £894,000 of investment from a range of sources and has generated between £120,000 and £135,000 of income per annum (before costs) over the last 3 years from trading and other activity, all of which has been invested for community benefit. This has also secured 4 fulltime (1 of which is contracted) and 2 part time jobs directly and 3 full time jobs indirectly.
- Sleat Community Trust can demonstrate high levels of community involvement and volunteering with 85 members of the community involved to date in its 11 constituent groups. In recognition of this they were awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in June 2011.
- Sleat Community Trust has a high level of support from the Community with over 78% of survey respondents supportive of the organisation and believing they are doing a good job and over 75% of respondents supportive of the majority of their project work in particular the purchase and development of the Filling Station, Post Office, Garage, Trust Office and Tormore Forest.

The Review however identified that there are a number of issues which the Trust needs to address as it moves forward.

- Sleat as a whole requires an overarching development plan which pulls together the community's priorities. There is an expressed belief that SCT is the right organisation to co-ordinate this along with the Community Council.
- In developing a Community Plan and in seeking to implement it Sleat Community Trust should find ways to work more closely with other community and key organisations across the peninsula. A number of opportunities look likely to present themselves in the near future.
- Sleat Community Trust needs to have a clearer role, set of objectives and priorities for moving forward linked to the wider Sleat Plan. These need to be framed in such a way that annual targets can be easily set and progress against these monitored.
- In moving forward the Trust will have to balance responding to new opportunities with taking a more planned approach to delivering benefits from existing assets and services and focussing on clearly expressed community needs and priorities.
- There is an aspiration for SCT to more explicitly set the 'community' at the heart of its operation and find ways to actively engage with the whole community on an ongoing basis – addressing lack of specific engagement of defined groups within the community such as crofters, the elderly and parents of young children as well as encouraging greater input from all of the townships and villages of Sleat. There is a desire for more active ongoing consultation, clearer ways in which to volunteer and more community social events.
- The Trust is at a pivotal point in its development and having grown considerably there is a pressing need for SCT to address the issues relating to governance, internal communications and operational management identified in the Business Review 2011.
- While the Trust has a good track record of ensuring that it does not spend more than it can generate in income and there is a high level of financial scrutiny at every SCT Board meeting there is a need to move towards more strategic financial planning for the individual companies and the group as a whole. At the earliest opportunity business plans should be updated and completed for SCT, SCTCL and SRL. There is also a need to put in place the necessary legal and financial structures which will enable the transfer of funds from the subsidiaries back to the parent (and where necessary vice versa) while meeting all HMRC and charity law requirements.
- While the organisation is generally held to be open and accountable there are a number of areas where it could strive to lead on good practice, for instance, introduction of an independent complaints process and transparent guidance on decision making processes (e.g. decisions taken by staff, board, membership).

