

DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES



27/08/2026 at 19.30 hours held in Balnain Hall

Present:

Karen Edwards (KE), Erik Trelfer (ET), Aron Rayner (AR), Colin Marshall (CM), Andy O'Connor (AO)

In attendance:

Kara Scott (KS), Lalith Walemedage (LW), Dan Light (DL), Daniel Palmer (DP)

Apologies:

Martin Croft (MC), Alison Strange (AS), Arlene Johnstone (AJ)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

KE welcomed those present to the meeting. Lalith Walemedage, Dan Light and Daniel Palmer were welcomed as observers attending their first meeting with an interest in Board membership.

All attendees introduced themselves. LW, DL and DP outlined their backgrounds, interests and reasons for wishing to learn more about Soirbheas and potential future Board involvement.

Apologies were received from MC, AS and AJ.

2. Declarations / Conflicts of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3. Minutes and Actions from Previous Meeting – 28 May 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 May 2026 were reviewed.

Decision: The minutes were approved as a true and accurate record.

Proposed by: KE

Seconded by: ET

Action: KS to add approved minutes to website.

4. Financial Forecasting and Grant Funding Capacity

The Board reviewed the updated grant funding position dated 17 August 2026. The General Fund allocation for grants in 2026/27 was £79,957.33, of which £71,690.58 had been awarded, leaving £8,266.75 available. If the £20,000 GURCA application under Agenda Item 6 were approved, the grant budget would be £11,733.25 above the amount originally allocated.

The Board noted that the overall financial position was stronger than forecast in May. At 17 August 2026, the main bank balance was £271,047.48 and was expected to be £265,109.17 after payments due shortly. A further £131,555.95 was held across the Soirbheas Trading and Virgin accounts. Existing grant commitments expected to be paid during 2026/27 had reduced from £67,811.93 to £63,182.15.

The updated forecast showed an estimated main-account balance of £86,324 at the lowest point in February 2027. If the full proposed additional £40,000 were awarded and paid before February, this would reduce the estimated balance to approximately £46,324, before expected CEL income of £150,000 in March 2027. The separate accounts were not treated as available grant funding and continued to protect the organisation's reserves position.

The proposal was to permit up to a further £40,000 of awards during the remainder of 2026/27 across Small Grants, Community Benefit Grants and Tier 2. This would be a maximum funding capacity rather than a spending target. Tier 3 would remain closed and each application would continue to be assessed on its merits,

with particular consideration given to need, community benefit, value for money and the remaining funding available.

MC confirmed in writing that he supported making the additional £40,000 available on this basis. AS also confirmed that she supported the grant-funding recommendation.

Decision: The Board approved up to a further £40,000 of grant funding during the remainder of 2026/27 across Small Grants, Community Benefit Grants and Tier 2. Tier 3 will remain closed.

Action: KS to update the financial position in the Grant Log, notify the accountants of the revised grant-funding capacity, and monitor awards and commitments against the additional £40,000. The Board will review the position in January 2027.

5. Grant Applications

T2 0081 – Glen Urquhart Rural Community Association (GURCA)

The Board considered GURCA's application for £20,000 towards the continued employment of its Community Development Officer for a one-year period. The role has been in place since early 2022 and supports partnership working, volunteer development, community engagement, project development, funding applications and delivery of priorities identified through the Community Action Plan.

The detailed salary forecast showed a total project cost of £33,124.44 for 2026/27. The requested Soirbheas contribution represented approximately 60% of the total cost. A DTAS extension award of £8,500 had been confirmed, with the remaining cost to be met by GURCA. If approved, Soirbheas funding would commence on 1 September 2026.

The Board discussed the breadth of work undertaken by GURCA and the Community Development Officer, noting the risk of volunteer fatigue and the importance of maintaining sufficient organisational capacity.

Decision: The Board approved a grant award of £20,000 to GURCA towards the Community Development Officer post.

Action: KS to issue the grant award documentation to GURCA and ensure that the agreed monitoring and reporting requirements are included.

7. Tier 2 Grant Review

The Board reviewed the draft Group Grant documentation circulated with the Board papers, comprising the application form and guidelines, assessment form, salary grant payment process, award letter and conditions, claim form, and completion visit record.

The proposed framework allows applications normally up to £20,000, with exceptional requests above £20,000 and up to £50,000 requiring prior discussion. It strengthens application evidence requirements, assessment of community benefit and value for money, grant conditions, claims and supporting evidence, monitoring, and completion arrangements.

The Board welcomed the simplified approach and agreed that the revised documents were clearer and more accessible for applicants. It was agreed that the application and guidelines, together with the assessment form, should be shared with SSE for feedback before being finalised.

Decision: The Board approved the revised Group Grant documents, subject to consideration of any relevant feedback received from SSE on the application and guidelines and the assessment form.

Action: KS to share the application and guidelines and the assessment form with SSE, consider any feedback received, and finalise the documents for implementation.

8. Vision Review

The Board reviewed the findings from the community consultation undertaken between 30 April and 25 July 2026. A total of 35 valid preferences were recorded. Option A received 16 votes (45.7%), Option C received 13 votes (37.1%) and Option B received 6 votes (17.1%). Option A was therefore the strongest single preference but did not secure an absolute majority.

The feedback indicated support for a clear description of Soirbheas's role as a funding charity, alongside warmer and more community-focused language. Frequently supported words and ideas included thriving,

sustainable, caring, future and resilient. The term “stewarding” attracted divided views, while respondents also suggested explicitly referring to communities or local organisations and considering whether “community funds” would offer greater long-term flexibility than “renewable energy funds”.

The Board agreed that Option A provided the clearest explanation of Soirbheas’s role while allowing sufficient flexibility for future development. Members supported refining the wording to refer to “community benefit funds” and incorporating the strongest community-focused elements identified through the consultation. The Board thanked LT for preparing the consultation report.

Decision: The Board agreed to use Option A as the basis for the revised vision and supporting role statement, subject to final refinement of the wording.

Action: LT and KS to prepare revised wording, circulate it to the Board for confirmation via email, and publish the agreed vision on the Soirbheas website.

9. Future Community Benefit Funds and Renewable Projects

At KE’s request, and due to the number of apologies, the Board agreed to defer discussion of Soirbheas’s position and process in relation to future community benefit funds and renewable-energy projects until all Directors had an opportunity to participate.

Action: KS to circulate a date poll and arrange a separate discussion in October, using Teams if necessary, to maximise Director attendance.

10. AOB

a) Grant Connect Session:

KS advised that the previously proposed Community Connect Events would not be proceeding. Instead, Soirbheas intends to hold a smaller Grant Connect Session towards the end of October 2026.

The event is expected to operate as an informal grant-funding drop-in session. Individuals and community groups will be able to discuss their project ideas with Soirbheas representatives on a one-to-one basis.

These discussions will consider how Soirbheas’s grant programmes might support proposed projects and, where appropriate, identify possible sources of match funding.

Directors were encouraged to participate, with wider Board attendance welcomed to support the individual discussions.

Action: KE, KS and LT to meet on Thursday 3 September 2026 to begin planning the Grant Connect Session. KS to circulate the proposed format, date and venue, and Directors to confirm their availability.

b) Community Larder Handover:

The Board received an update on the proposed handover of the Community Larder to GURCA.

The handover process has begun, although responsibilities for ordering, payments and day-to-day management require clarification. Soirbheas has offered to continue placing orders in the short term while the arrangements transfer to GURCA.

In the longer term, it was considered more practical for ordering and payment responsibilities to be managed by the organisation operating the Larder.

Potential funding arrangements include GURCA submitting monthly claims against the Community Larder budget for the remainder of the current financial year. Subject to the necessary documentation and agreement, Soirbheas could consider providing the annual allocation in advance in future years.

Action: KE and KS to meet Susan Griffin and Anne Clarke on Tuesday 15 September 2026 at 2pm in the GURCA office to agree the responsibilities, timescale, ordering process and payment arrangements for the handover.

c) Community Partners Conference:

The Board noted that a Community Partners Conference will be held on Thursday 12 November 2026 at Glen Urquhart Public Hall.

The event will bring together organisations working with communities across Glen Urquhart and Strathglass, alongside representatives from the Inverness Community Partnership. Derek Brown, Chief Executive of The Highland Council, is expected to attend and contribute to the event.

The conference aims to:

- strengthen working relationships;
- improve understanding of the roles and activities of partner organisations;
- identify gaps or areas where services and initiatives are not connecting effectively; and
- agree practical opportunities for future collaboration.

KS is unable to attend. LT has agreed to represent Soirbheas, and it was considered desirable for a Director or another Soirbheas representative to attend alongside her.

Action: LT to represent Soirbheas at the Community Partners Conference. Further arrangements and any additional Soirbheas representation will be confirmed once more information about the event is available.

d) Banking signatories:

KS advised that the Co-operative Bank mandate required signatures to add and remove authorised account signatories. The relevant Directors were asked to complete the documentation, and the Board noted that one or two additional signatories would be beneficial. DP indicated that he would be willing to become a signatory, subject to his appointment as a Director and the bank's requirements.

Action: KS to progress the Co-operative Bank mandate.

e) Onboarding Directors:

Action: KS to contact LW, DL and DP following the meeting regarding the next steps in the Director onboarding process.

f) Staffing Update:

Following TM's resignation, KS's role has been confirmed as Community Grants Manager. The HR adviser is updating the employment contracts and developing a staff handbook. KS's revised documentation is being progressed first, followed by LT's. It was confirmed that LT's updated contract will be permanent.

Date of next meeting:

- **Thursday 24 September 2026**
Directors Meeting, Balnain Hall
7.15pm for 7.30pm start

Chair:
Karen Edwards

Company Secretary:
Erik Trelfer

Date: 29/09/2026