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The Scottish Conservatives are today underlining their ambitions for Scotland by announcing the creation of a major new independent economic body to set out fresh thinking on future growth.

Comprising some of Scotland's pre-eminent figures in commerce, industry and academia, the Scottish Future Growth Council will advise the party on key economic issues – such as how to solve the country's "productivity puzzle".

The group will be chaired by former Scotland Office Minister Lord Dunlop who, in his time in government, pioneered the successful City Deal plans across Scotland.

The unveiling of the group comes as new figures have demonstrated Scotland is lagging behind the UK on business growth.

They show the number of new businesses in Scotland grew by just 1.6 per cent last year, the lowest in the UK.

That compares to a UK average of 4.5 per cent.

Announcing the group today, Lord Dunlop said he hoped it would deliver fresh ideas to help make Scotland "the best part of the UK to do business."

The group's reports will assist the Scottish Conservatives' on-going policy review set up following the General Election of this year.

Shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said the formation of the group demonstrated the party's intent to provide a credible alternative to the SNP, ready to take over in Government in 2021.

The new group will work independently of the Scottish Conservatives and will focus specifically on devolved policy-making, and ways in which Scottish Government policy can boost Scotland's performance.

Lord Dunlop said:

"I am delighted to accept Ruth's invitation to chair this exciting new venture.

“Scotland has world leading expertise in our universities, a competitive edge in sectors such as life science and oil and gas, and is one of the best places to live and work in the world.

“Scotland has what it takes, we now just need to make more of our potential.

“So our new group’s mission will be to come up with positive and imaginative new ideas for our devolved parliament with the aim of boosting Scottish growth.

“The group includes some of the country’s leading figures from business, academia and industry who have dedicated their lives to creating a more prosperous Scotland. We will report back regularly ahead of the 2021 election and pushing the debate forward.

“While the group has been set up by the Scottish Conservatives, we will work independently of party with the aim of influencing the wider political debate.

“The challenge is urgent. Scottish public spending is now more reliant than ever on our own economic growth.

“And if we don’t keep the economy moving forward, we won’t have the money to pay for vital public services. Our purpose is to show how Scotland can become the best part of the UK to do business, and so deliver the growing tax revenues upon which our schools and hospitals rely.”

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

“Having gone from being the third party of Scottish politics to now looking to challenge the SNP to be in government, the Scottish Conservatives are looking to expand our policy offer in advance of the next Scottish elections.

“We are delighted to have assembled such an impressive team of business leaders and economists to advise us on economic and financial matters, under Andrew Dunlop’s leadership. This demonstrates the scale of our ambition.

“With productivity being a key issue for the Scottish economy, we have asked this group to look first at this important area, and come back with suggestions on how productivity can be improved.

“I am sure that their conclusions will be of interest to everyone who wants to see our economy improve.”

Chair

Andrew Dunlop

Lord Dunlop was most recently a Minister in the Scotland office where he led efforts to promote Scottish trade and investment – most prominently through a new generation of city deals. He served as a special adviser to Prime Minister David Cameron during the independence referendum, playing a key role

in the Better Together campaign. Prior to that he was a councillor in Horsham District Council. He was elevated to the House of Lords in 2015.

Members

Alice Enders

Alice Enders is head of research at Enders Analysis, a service for media and telecoms sectors mainly in the creative industries and the financial sector. Up until 2009, Alice was an economist for the World Trade Organisation (WTO), having joined the predecessor GATT in 1988. She has also served as Assistant Professor of Economics at York University, having completed a PhD in economics at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario.

Belinda Roberts

Belinda Roberts is the founder of WeDO Scotland, the country's most exclusive leadership organisation for transformational business owners and leaders of dynamic companies. She is the co-author of 21st Century Networking, written with former Scotland rugby captain David Sole, which provides practical advice and guidance on networking. She is also the founder and managing director of Marvellous Mustard, a gourmet mustard producer and supplier of the world's only wholegrain flavoured mustard making kits.

Dr John Brown

Dr John Brown is the Chairman of the Roslin Foundation. He has extensive experience in the life sciences sector as Chairman of Synpromics Ltd, BioCity Group and the Cell Therapy Catapult. He was previously Chairman of Touch Bionics, Axis Shield and BTG . He Co- chaired the Life Sciences Advisory Board from 2005 to 2017. He is a Fellow and Trustee of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and Honorary Professor of the University of Edinburgh.

Ian McCormick

Ian McCormick, formally of Scottish Enterprise is a performance improvement specialist who worked principally with manufacturing businesses in Scotland, including companies operating in the food and drink, engineering, energy, agriculture, textile and construction sectors. He is currently a director of Growbiz, a charitable organisation founded in 2007 and based in Perthshire with the purpose of helping those living locally and in rural areas to develop their own business ideas and build successful and sustainable enterprises.

Graham Halstead

Graham Halstead was, until 2015, the Group Tax Director of the Royal Bank of Scotland for 22 years, responsible for the Group's worldwide tax affairs. During this time, he was also Group Financial Controller of RBS for the two years prior to, and the year following, the acquisition of NatWest. Prior to RBS he was Tax Director of NatWest's investment banking sub-group for 7 years.

Nick Parker

Nick Parker was formerly head of Performance and Innovation at the Scottish Executive from 2004 to 2007. He retired as head of Government Corporate finance Services at PwC in 2002. He now holds a portfolio of directorships in

the insurance, fintech, and digital media marketing sectors.

Prof Ronald MacDonald

Professor MacDonald is the current Research professor of Macroeconomics and International Finance in the Adam Smith Business School at Glasgow University. Prior to this he held the Bonar Macfie Chair of Economics, 2005-2006, and the Adam Smith Chair of Political Economy 2006-2015, both at the University of Glasgow. He has acted as a consultant to a large number of governments and public agencies, including the IMF, European Commission, General Secretariat for Development Planning, Qatar, the European Central Bank, the Monetary Authority of Singapore, the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, the National Audit office and the World Bank.

Sir Iain McMillan

Sir Iain is one of Scotland's leading business figures and was knighted for his services to the Scottish economy in 2015. He is best known as the director of the Confederation of British Industry in Scotland, a post he held for 19 years until his retirement in 2014. Prior to joining the CBI in 1993, Sir Iain spent 23 years with the TSB Group. His other appointments have included being on the boards of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Scottish Ambulance Service and Teaching Awards Trust. He is currently the Chairman of the University of Strathclyde Business School Advisory Board and a member of the Competition Appeal Tribunal.

Mike Kellard

Mike Kellard has over 30 years experience in the financial services sector in both the UK and Europe. In 2003 he took over as CEO of Credit Suisse's UK group. In 2010 he led a new venture led by Global insurance group AXA called "AXA Wealth". He has also been responsible for launching a new London based UK and European fund manager "Architas" which has to date raised in excess of £20billion. He is a specialist in start up and turn around business situations, with expertise in Asset Management, Distribution and IT platforms.

ONS figures on UK business activity, size and location were released today. Section 6, Table 2 and Figure 4 shows the relevant statistics for Scotland on business growth rate ([link](#)).