

## MINUTES

### LEADER Local Action Group – SMG Group Meeting

Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2016, 2pm

Held at: Solway House, Dumfries

Present: **Peter Ross (Chair) (PR)** Cathy Agnew (CA)  
Heather Brash (HB) Barry Dunne (BD)  
Caroline Graham-Brown (CGB) Karen Ward Boyd (KWB)  
Alastair McNeill (AMcN) David Rennie (DR)

Staff: Nicola Hill (NH) Gary Davidson (GD)  
Derek Hextall (DH)

Apologies: Claire Thirlwall (CT) Gillian Khosla (GK)

Absent: Colin Smyth (CS)

### Welcome

PR welcomes members and wishes all a Happy New Year. Apologies are accepted.

### Minutes of Last Meeting

DR proposes minutes, KWB seconds. Minutes are accepted.

### Matters Arising

Website steering group: GD has developed a draft tender for a new website. Members are asked to volunteer to join a temporary steering group to help shape the direction of the website. CGB and KWB agree to participate.

#### **Action GD – draft tender to be circulated with minutes for all members to comment**

DR asked if allocation of funding is secure following news from Scottish Government of a need to re-evaluate funds which have already been committed. NH advised that there has been mention of a possibility of LEADER allocation being re-evaluated, but nothing official at this time.

HB queried Memorandum of Understanding which was circulated for comment following last meeting. NH advised that comments have been taken on board and the document is now being scrutinised by Dumfries and Galloway Council Legal Services.

AMcN queried FLAG funding. NH advised that a window of opportunity was missed to have ministers sign off on the allocations. There has been confirmation that a FLAG programme will exist, Dumfries and Galloway will not be amalgamated with another FLAG area, and the amount of allocation will follow shortly.

CA queried point from previous minutes regarding hierarchy of LAG. PR agreed that the SMG effectively sits above the so-called 'sub groups' but since SMG has no power of veto there is no direct hierarchy. It was felt that 'hierarchy' was possibly not the correct word for the structure, but all members are members of the LAG, regardless of which 'sub-group' they sit on.

DR queried dates of scoring due to delays in guidance documents being issued. NH confirmed that we have received some draft documentation but are still awaiting final versions. Currently working towards the deadlines of having Expressions of Interest submitted by beginning of March, for first round of decisions in June. It was noted that this

deadline may be missed if Scottish Government do not provide guidance documents in a timely manner. NH is not comfortable sharing draft documentation which is still subject to change as this could present issues at later stages if applications are accepted under criteria which is later changed or removed. DR asked if there is anything that the LAG can do to help move this forward and alleviate the frustrations. NH advised that many of the Expressions of Interest are not ready to progress but the team are effectively managing expectations in the interim. DH advised that most applicants understand the need for a robust process and are happy to wait for this to be in place. NH gives reassurance to members that the work of the team leaves us well ahead of other LAG areas in terms of preparation and we are ready to go as soon as the documents are finalised. HB voices support for the decision not to send out draft documents and praises the team for their management of the situation in the pre-application stages.

### Chair's Comments

PR noted that there had been a minor incident around confidentiality which had been dealt with. The Chairs of the groups had met and prepared the following statement as a reminder to members:

"We would like to reiterate how important it is for LAG members to recognise where and when it is appropriate to share information provided by the LEADER team. When information is given to LAG members regarding the programme, unless the team explicitly confirm it can be shared, all LAG members should assume that this information is not for wider circulation. If a LAG member is also an applicant to the programme, clear separation of roles should be demonstrated to avoid conflict of interest."

PR asked that all members keep this in mind and that they are forthcoming about any known or potential conflicts. CA suggests we have a standing agenda point to review the Register of Interest at each meeting. PR agreed that this will be the case once the programme is fully up-and-running. CGB asked for clarification on definition of 'programme'. PR advised this will be when applications start coming in.

HB updated regarding Communities group noting that they had discussed the Expressions of Interest and identified a few additional points of guidance which will inform how the team manage expectations with potential applicants.

DR noted that Rural Enterprise group had set an intervention rate which had to be corrected. NH explained that the group had agreed a higher intervention rate but after contact with Scottish Government it was revealed that the Local Development Strategy that had been approved set a maximum rate of 50% which must be adhered to. Any higher rates would mean that the LDS would need to be resubmitted for approval. The Rural Enterprise group accepted this and agreed a rate of 50%, but it is understood that a review of the programme can take place at the midpoint which may highlight need for adjustment.

### Monitoring and Evaluation

Scoring sheet: the scoring sheet that was circulated following previous meeting has now been confirmed as a template document which LAGs have no obligation to utilise. Scottish Government advised that we could develop our own system as long as there is one scoring sheet completed on the day of the decision meeting, and a detailed minute of discussion around the decision is recorded. NH will use the provided template to develop a group scoring sheet for use during meetings.

### Action NH – develop and circulate group scoring sheet

CGB felt that the template was more suited to experienced and established groups and welcomed the opportunity to develop a more accessible version. DR felt that although the template was clumsy it did cover all the necessary points to be suitable as a nationwide standardised document. NH feels that the plan to have standardised documents for all LAG areas and processes has been discontinued due to complications in this process. She notes that the standardised

application form will go ahead as planned but feels that all other elements will be defined locally based on local need and knowledge. DR expressed concern that non-standard forms might result in one group or project receiving different decisions in different areas and notes the need for detailed minutes whenever a decision is made in order to provide justification. NH and HB feel that different groups delivering similar projects may indeed be approved or declined locally in accordance with LDS and local knowledge – this is a feature of the LEADER programme. BD asked for clarification on process: would whole group discuss and agree a numerical value for each step of the scoring sheet to arrive at a total? NH advised that yes, that would be the idea but there is scope for the process to be streamlined. BD asks how this will affect co-operation projects. NH advises that LAGs will make their own separate decisions and there will not be joint meetings in these cases.

DR had concerns over Exit Strategy of some projects in previous programme being too vague and asks if there is an opportunity to build something into the guidance or application to combat this. PR advises that sustainability is already built into the new programme and that applicants will be expected to demonstrate this relevant to their project. DR offered the example of a project officer being hired with LEADER funding and suggested that in most cases that officer would be lost when LEADER funding stopped. NH advised that any such contracts were usually defined as temporary and that applicants to those roles would be aware of this. Sustainability can take many forms so would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. BD encourages applicants to consider and plan for what happens after LEADER funding ends. CA notes that Heritage Lottery Fund expect a 10-year maintenance plan as part of the application process. NH feels that there may not be a need for a specific length of time to be stated but asking applicants to provide a few possible options for future sustainability/legacy could be included. CGB notes that smaller groups are more vulnerable to project failure which may leave a project officer in post for a project that is no longer running. NH and PR state that LEADER is not risk averse. Failure of projects is acceptable if lessons are learned.

NH circulated updated Monitoring and Evaluation table. This will be embedded in the application form, not a separate document, to allow applicants to choose which criteria are most suitable to their project. There will be a meeting to take place which will define national outcomes that will also need to be incorporated although some of these may be naturally covered in local discussion. NH thanked members for comments and feedback, these will be useful in defining the scoring and evaluation of projects.

### Strategic Projects

PR states that as a mature LAG we should be more strategic, specifically relating to Day of the Region. There currently exists a transition steering group comprised of members including some who sit on the Communities group. It is felt that this would cause conflict if the SMG decide to take Day of the Region as a project for funding through the Communities application process. Call for members of the SMG to join a new steering group to assist in development of application.

DR raised the question of process: would the Communities group be responsible for appraising and approving the 'strategic' project known as Day of the Region? KWB agreed that it was not strategic to apply to a sub-group for funding. DH advised that for audit purposes all applications must pass through the same application process. In this case the SMG would be the applicant, applying for funding from LEADER, and any members of the SMG (the applicant) who sit on the appraisal group would need to absent themselves. NH agreed that the process is a little counter-intuitive but directives from Scottish Government state that the LAG must be strategic, but also that all projects must go through an application process.

Discussion took place regarding the process of funding a strategic project. Options raised were to offer the SMG their own budget for strategic projects, or to allow the SMG to extract funding from appropriate pot as and when a project need is identified. Feasibility of this may require an answer from Scottish Government. It was recognised that strategic

projects would need an appropriate audit trail and it had been previously understood that the LAG could apply to the LAG so long as there was separation of applicants from appraisers. It was thought that this process was a counter-intuitive but was generally felt that it would be necessary to follow it in order to deliver the necessary strategic projects.

CA expressed concerns that the SMG was disconnected from the other groups due to lack of communication and information. NH expressed that the structure of the LAG is new and is a learning curve for everyone involved. She was disappointed that members felt out-of-the-loop and noted that she should have prepared an update from Rural Enterprise when she knew that GK was unable to attend this meeting.

NH updated members: Rural Enterprise Project Officer has been offered and accepted, Stephanie Carrick will start in post on 15<sup>th</sup> Feb. There are Funding Roadshows organised and taking place on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Jan, as well as 3<sup>rd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of Feb across the region. There will be a reintroduction of 'staff reports' to allow team members to provide updates to LAG members on a regular basis concerning ongoing tasks and workloads. The LDS has not been publically posted but is available to anyone who asks for it, this is largely due to the need for a new website that can host the document for public access.

PR noted the need for a decision on Day of the Region before the close of the meeting due to deadlines for printing and publications. NH suggests that a steering group is formed to make decisions on how Day of the Region will progress this year. DotR is listed in the LDS as promotion and animation and will be delivered in 2016 either as a strategic project, or by the team as part of the administration budget. Communities group has already agreed to evaluate an exceptional application for DotR in March as it was felt that the application would be generated by the team on behalf of the LAG and the content would be suitable.

After discussion, it was felt that DotR would need to be taken forward as a project in order that it does not lose the impetus or growth which has been generated in previous years. It was felt that as an admin task it would not be possible for DotR to have a substantial impact.

PR, CGB and AMcN agreed to join a DotR steering group to help shape how best to take this forward as a project.

PR suggests that each member take some time to consider options for future strategic projects.

#### **AOB**

PR noted that the next LEADER conference has been given a date and location: 10-12<sup>th</sup> March in Aviemore. There are limited spaces available for attendance but there may be opportunities for members to join.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

13<sup>th</sup> April 2016 – Woodbank House, Dumfries

Meeting closed at 16:10