

## MINUTES

### LEADER Local Action Group – Strategic Management Group Meeting

Wednesday 10 January 2018, 10.00am

Held at: The Usual Place, Dumfries

Present **Peter Ross (PR)** Cathy Agnew (CA)  
Caroline Brown (CB) Archie Dryburgh (AD)  
Barry Dunne (BD) Harry Harbottle (HH)  
Alastair McNeill (AM) David Rennie (DR)  
Andrew Wood (AW)

Staff Nicola Hill (NH) Jessie Mason (JM)  
Simone Tyrie (ST)

#### Welcome

The Chair welcomed new member of the group Councillor Archie Dryburgh (AD) to the meeting and asked each of the group to introduce themselves. During the introductions, Councillor Andrew Wood (AW) joined the meeting (10.05am) and was included in the Chairs welcome.

The Chair was feeling in a hopeful frame of mind, after taking a long walk along the shoreline of Luce Bay he had seen plants which were budding and growing and thought this could be applied to LEADER; seeds are sown, it takes a while, but with good planning and care they come to fruition., much like LEADER, we seem to be in a good position with EOI's and Applications continuing to come through.

#### Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting – Page 3 – an amendment was requested ie Roseanna Cunningham's name was to be checked and spelling changed.( Amendment has been made) The minutes were then proposed by AMcN and seconded by BD.

#### Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

#### Chairs comments

The Chair sits on the Scottish Chairs Group and they have organised a working group which has members from Accountable Bodies, Chairs Group and the Staff Group. The discussions centre round where are we going when LEADER funding ends.

The Group have been in talks since September last year and have a complicated task, there are over 400 people involved in Scotland. Scottish Government have provided money to allow them to

speak to those involved, their findings will feed into the Rural Advisory Group and Scottish Government in Spring.

Harry Harbottle (HH) joined the meeting (10.10am), he introduced himself to the new members and was also thanked by the Chair for taking the role of Chair of the newly formed LEADER Group as a result of the amalgamation of the Communities and Rural Enterprise Groups.

AD gave an outline of Council discussions and their view on funding options, post Brexit.

### **LAG Membership/Structure**

NH spoke about the recent refresh of LAG members, having circulated up to date lists of the 3 groups. She also confirmed that the first meeting of the newly formed LEADER Group would be in March, with them adopting the Rural Enterprise programme of dates for their deadlines and meetings.

CA asked if we still had a good representation of required skills and experience on the Groups, as we had lost a few members. NH confirmed we did and we also have a good mix of public and independent members. If there was a specific application came to the table, then we still had access to previous members and their expertise for their input. The SMG were reminded that if they have any persons who they think would be a good fit for any of the groups then they should let NH know and she would contact them. The reasons given for most people leaving were to do with change of circumstances with their roles and time constraints on their ability to commit to the time necessary. It was heartening to have received very many responses to the original email confirming members wish to remain on the LAG.

### **Threshold Harmonisation**

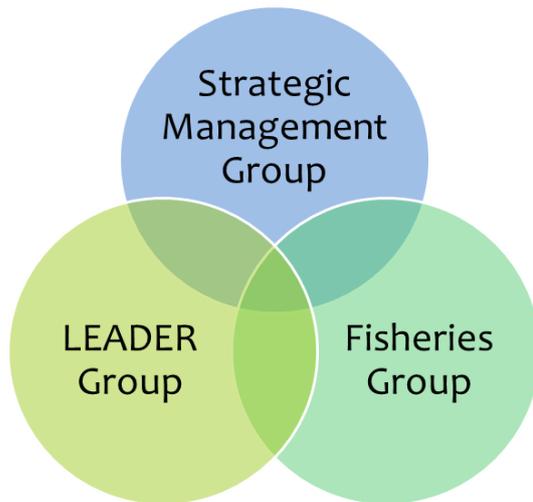
Discussions took place at the meetings in December to harmonise the Rural Enterprise and Communities with all applications being considered by the new LEADER Group. The group had a conversation which discussed the monetary levels of application and queried if the new levels would have an adverse effect on applications, ie if an upper cap would stop some applicant's aspirations? The Group decided early on that it was better to spread the money to as many benefactors throughout the region as possible, rather than making a few large awards.

A show of hands for support was requested by the Chair – it was unanimous (8).

### **LDS Change Request**

A document was tabled by NH, based on a report received from DGC Internal Audit team and changes to the Groups, the following amendments need to be made to the LDS:

- *Due to the change in LAG structure (amalgamation of Communities and Rural Enterprise Groups into the LEADER Group) we need to include an updated LAG structure in the LDS document.*



- *The LDS currently states that all projects over a threshold of £50,000 of grant funding will be ratified by the SMG. The wording will be amended to reflect the Strategic Management Group's agreed approach – to have sight of all applications in excess of £50,000 and provide feedback but not to get involved in the decision making process in any way.*
- *Additional wording is required in the LDS to reflect the process undertaken when deferring the decision on a funding application and enabling the LAG members to make electronic decisions between LAG meetings.*

*Amendments to the LDS document must be submitted via LARCS to the SG LEADER team for approval. This will be undertaken by the D&G LEADER team after gaining approval from the SMG members.*

NH advised we are audited by both SG and DGC, and the above paper had been tabled to meet areas identified

- more clarity on deferring applications for electronic approval was required.
- change to our Groups, ie 3 instead of 4,
- when applications came to meetings there were three possible outcomes, “approve, defer or reject”.

NH suggested adding an addendum to the LDS to accommodate these changes and amendments. Once the change request is approved, the document will be circulated to the Group.

Discussion was opened up to the Group.

AW asked how the rejection process worked, eg could the project come back to a subsequent meeting? NH advised that due to the close working nature of the project officers with the applicants during the process it is very uncommon to have a rejection at a meeting unless there is a late, unforeseen change in circumstance which affects the application.

If an applicant is unhappy with their feedback, they can appeal the SMG Chair, and if still unhappy, they can submit to SG. If an application is rejected, the same project cannot come back to the table.

A show of hands indicated a unanimous agreement (8) to proceed with the tabled changes.

DR wondered if the LDS should be reviewed as it was prepared in 2014, were there any areas which required change. Members were asked to consider this for discussion at the next meeting, this will be an item on the agenda for further discussion. NH confirmed that she had no other area of concern, but it should be noted that any changes require to be done through an electronic change request on LARCs and there were only 2 allowed in any one calendar year.

BD wanted to understand if the comments provided by SMG members when they were circulated projects over £50,000 were of benefit as members do not receive any feedback on their comments. **NH** was given the **action** of compiling the individual comments received from members, amalgamating them and circulating back to SMG once they had been pulled together.

The Chair called for a 10 minute comfort break at 11.00am.  
The meeting resumed at 11.10am.

### Budget Profile

NH confirmed that all funding had to be committed by March 2019. DR suggested from the table in the staff report, it looks like this will be very challenging as it appears there are only 6 projects progressing. NH explained the definition of “progressing” in the table refers to EOI’s not developed or applicants not going any further with their application. This table is produced using a SG database.

Challenges are still being experienced with Farm Diversification, although the PO is currently working with a number of potential applicants. We are always happy to receive guidance from Members on areas we can potentially tap into.

What kind of projects were coming forward? Initially, when the fund opened, there were a large number of self-catering accommodation projects who enquired about funding from the Farm Diversification pot, but the group decided not to support these as there was not a “need” identified in Dumfries and Galloway. On the other hand, if they were able to promote a USP then support could be given eg Rural Swim, Ernespie Farm Centre and Senwick Alpacas. Need and demand require to be demonstrated without displacement to an existing business.

HH noted we are well resourced as a team and networking well, with a recent attendance to an event in Birmingham. It is, all in all, quite a friendly application process and the current uncertainties should give rise to thoughts of diversification, but this is not always the case. As time progresses, deadlines become tighter for applicants to get up and running and complete before cut off dates.

The Group were advised that they were able to suggest strategic projects. Also it does not have to be a farmer who applies, eg it could be an Agent. It can be an overarching project as long as the final benefactors are farmers who wishes to diversify out of agriculture.

This is the Year of Young People – could a small number of farmers be identified and trained up and act as ambassadors? **NH** was given the **action** to contact Mark Molloy to ask if Young Farmers are involved.

Galloway Glens has recently been the recipient of funding from HLF – can we tap into already formed groups? **NH** advised that we have already had discussions with McNabb Laurie (GG P/O).

EMFF FLAG – This Group have also had challenges meeting with groups to explain how the money can be used, but at the recent FLAG meeting it was agreed to arrange visits to show exemplar projects outwith the region. The levels of enquiries are increasing.

Communities, if all applications in the pipeline at present were to come to the table, this fund would be heavily oversubscribed. **CA** asked if there was an option to vire from one group to another, **NH** advised this was not a possibility.

**DR** agreed that the agriculture community could be quite closed, can we perhaps use other bodies who have “ins”? **BD** noted the Farm Advisory Service is just setting up and thought it may be able to highlight opportunities and give quality advice. **BD** was given the **action** of contacting FAS to ask if they had any experts we could approach.

As it looks like Strategic projects are the way forward, **NH** was **actioned** to set up a working group to explore this. Once the group is formed, an invitation could be extended to NFU and FAS.

**AW** questioned how awards were made to the individual LEADER areas when set up. Highlighting £9m being awarded to Highlands. **PR** advised a report of how the awards were applied for and awarded were included in a James Hutton Institute report which he would forward to **AW** (**PR – action**).

**AMcN** concluded that the staff report confirms the great work the LEADER team are undertaking and that they should take a pat on the back.

**AW** asked for some more information on the CLD Strategy Working group she sits on. **NH action**, forward the report to **AW**.

### Strategic Projects

Day of the Region – there will be a call for interest in the 2018 programme being circulated to communities soon, it should be noted that there are a number who have already shown an interest. We will be linking heavily with the YOYP element in every group, aligning with DGS’s YOYP.

Amaze Me LEADER – receive funding at the December meeting of the Communities Group, subsequently a tender had been advertised on the Quick Quotes section of Public Contract Scotland and 6 organisations were asked to submit a tender. 3 responses were received and will be scored by the AML working group at the meeting on 10 January (tonight). All members were invited to sit

on the Working Group if they would like. Work on a draft programme of events will hopefully be available soon and a Partners Meeting is to be arranged in the Spring.

During the week of Amaze Me LEADER, it is envisaged that young people will be identified who will visit next year's AML project.

### **AOCB**

There were no items

### **Date of Next Meeting**

11 April 2018 at 10am – venue to be arranged.

Meeting closed at 12.10pm.

DRAFT