

MINUTES

LEADER Local Action Group – Strategic Management Group Meeting

Wednesday 11 July 2018, 10.00am

Held at:	Holiday Inn, Bankend Road, Dumfries	
Present	Peter Ross (PR) Cathy Agnew (CA) Caroline Brown (CB)	Harry Harbottle (HH) Alastair McNeill (AM) David Rennie (DR)
Staff	Nicola Hill (NH) Simone Tyrie (ST)	Jessie Mason (JM)
Apologies	Archie Dryburgh (AD) Barry Dunne (BD)	Andrew Wood (AW)

Meeting started at 10.00

Welcome

1.1 The Chair opened the meeting and thanked all members for attending. He was positive in his thoughts for LEADER, and felt they are in a good place with all the funds being almost all committed and so much going on, Day of the Region, Amaze Me LEADER AND Rural Parliament, which if you want to get involved, you should register to attend. There is a certain amount of Policy turbulence at present, but we are well positioned, we need to support our programme.

NH advised that LEADER is more audit driven and the systems put in place by Scottish Government are not particularly user friendly. Going forward it will become more difficult, if we are being judged on our systems rather than our achievements. We try to encourage applicants to speak to us and to follow the step by step guidance. If people do not resist the required process they will get through easier. If we know about it, we can help.

HH confirmed that LARCs is a difficult process to work, it increases the workload being carried out on behalf of the LAG, the automatic shutdown is a particular issue.

DR How much of the process is EU led and how much is Scottish Government? NH suggested that we adhere to all that is required by EU, but Scottish Government added another layer. Designed for auditors rather than the people who would deliver the programme.

The intention was always to have an IT system and if we had started with a new system rather than adapting a system which was being retired and remodelled it would have been better.

PR He had recently written a paper for the Budget and Governance Sub-Committee (Scottish Government) and the feedback was that there was definitely an appetite to keep LEADER going, but

difficulties seem to be outweigh this at the moment. There definitely needs to be a shift to focus on the approach rather than the process.

1.2 The Chair again reiterated the problems that the team have experienced trying to ensure meetings are quorate (5 members plus Chair over all groups). The group were asked to consider if they thought there were too many people/meetings involved? Should we add this as an agenda item to be discussed at the October SMG, when we are in a better position to understand what funding if any there is left. Previously when the LAG met as one, there were no quorate issues. CB saw the role of Member as make sure you attend as you need to be there to vote when required.

HH asked if there was any analysis on members and their reasons for non-attendance – this could not be collated. NH did say that the dates were set 2 years ago, but people arrange holidays or double book, no set pattern for non attendance. An added complication is that we have observe the private/public split of the group, which has given issues. If we are not quorate, we might have to advise applicants that we were unable to score the application and are not be able to give them a decision. This disadvantages the applicants and should be avoided at all costs. AM asked if there was a way of Members feeding into the Chair their scores and comments on applications if they were unable to attend the meeting. This system may need to be considered.

PR said it looks like funding may be fully committed in September and asked the members to consider options, even when funding is committed we will still need a LAG to make decisions, eg change requests. NH noted, if the groups amalgamated, then that group will make those decisions.

The LAG is required to oversee delivery of the programme and will not disappear/dissolve. LAG Members still have responsibility for Amaze Me LEADER, Day of Region, Rural Awards etc etc, there will be a lot still for the group to be involved in.

NH noted that there have been many opportunities recently for members to attend Project insitu visits carried out as part of the LEADER process – it was disappointing to note that only 2 members had attended.

1.3 Finally the Chair reiterated his welcome and feeling of positivity, enhanced by the recent fall of rain in the west, things are revitalised, with harvesting of first crops already well underway (potatoes and greenbeans).

Items to be considered under AOCB

The Chair asked the meeting if anyone had any items which they wished to discuss. The Chair noted he had a number of items.

Apologies

JM advised the members who had offered apologies - see above.

Minutes of Last Meeting

Due to the meeting in April 2018 not being quorate, the Minutes from the SMG held in January

2018 had not been approved. The Chair asked for any comments from Members in regard to the accuracy of the January Minutes, there were none, and subsequently AM proposed and HH seconded the approval of the Minutes.

In the Minutes from the April meeting it was noted that DR's name appeared twice in the attendees list, JM to remove. After this the Minutes were read for accuracy and subsequently approved they were then proposed by DR and seconded by AM.

Matters arising from the Minute

There were a number of questions arising from the previous meetings' Minutes.

DR asked, as a result of the Accountable Body (AB) meeting, if there had been an approach to Fergus Ewing – NH confirmed there had been, but as yet no response.

DR – have the operating costs moved over yet to Communities? NH - Not yet they would not be moved until the Project had gained all the necessary outstanding planning permission and ready to go live.

DR – there is likely to be an over subscription to the £10m available in South of Scotland Economic Partnership (SoSEP), but more might be available in 2019/20, could LEADER bid for this with Scottish Border LEADER? NH advised that she had contacted Scottish Borders LAG to enquire if they had submitted a response to the recent SOSEA consultation. DR advised that all responses were online and unless it have been marked as “not for publication”, there was no response from Scottish Borders, so unsure if they had responded.

NH advised it is not as straightforward as both LAGs applying for money, it needs to be AB to bid for it as LAGs are not legal entities. Local Authorities would have to administer it as it would not be LEADER money. Need to be set up as a separate pot. Question also would be if the team had capacity, realistically, not to set up separate programme to be administered through the Local Authority. DR proposed a more informed discussion, about the opportunity to get funding to carry on in a similar way. DR referenced the “Strengthening Communities” – community led local development. Perhaps link up with Southern Upland Partnership or Third Sector Dumfries & Galloway.

The LEADER approach is the way to go forward. It is a model of value, recognised by other agencies.

Action – add “LEADER Future” to the agenda for further discussion at October SMG meeting.

NH advised there was a report going to the Economy, Environment and Infrastructure Committee on 13 July, written by Jan Falconer, Head of Economic Development, who has been charged with carrying out a review of the department. This includes LEADER as part of the Business and Environment Team.

Staff Report

It was highly commended and the level of work undertaken. AM noted there were even more things going on, eg Cockles Sub Group.

DR asked for clarification regarding the number of applications. NH advised not all applications considered at the June LEADER Group meeting were listed as those which were deferred for various reasons eg planning, match funding don't appear until they are live on LARCs.

DR asked for information on the Fisheries decisions. NH advised that although the FLAG recommend applications to Marine Scotland they can syphon them off to other lines of MS funding. AM stated that there was a possible cross FLAG cooperation proposal coming forward.

NH confirmed that although it was a slow start, the project officer, Rowan Lloyd has done exceptionally well getting applications to the table and have a real chance of committing the money.

DR Suggested when the summer newsletter is sent out can it be forwarded to the press, try to get the good news stories about LEADER out there.

CA suggested making contact with Andrea Thomson-Medd at D&G Life Magazine – cover a project officer for a “day in the life of” feature. **ACTION** NH to explore the possibility.

DR raised the meeting in Shetland – to be covered in AOCB

CA really liked the report. Confirmed there were 6 members of staff in the team all managed by NH. NH confirmed we have a really good team who gel very well. The team support each other across all team responsibilities.

NH advised that AML is only 4 weeks away, we are in a good place, programme has been finalised with all the young people signed up. There is a Think Tank Session on 10 August, please sign up, your presence would be much appreciated and positively encouraged, as your input will be invaluable. There will be a concerted media push in the next few weeks.

DR suggested contacting the BBC to cover and also local and national press. NH is meeting with the project team this week and will ask what has been planned ie radio, tv, national press etc.

Ivan Annibal of Rose Regeneration will deliver a series of SROI workshops to support DoR communities. An invitation will be circulated to the CLD Strategic Group as interest has been shown in attending.

NH confirmed she is on the COSLA mailing list and has been involved a recent meeting with included LEADER and Local Authorities on 22 June. Serafin Pazos-Vidal from COSLA in Brussels, facilitated the discussion. Positive talks - making sure that something does happen after 2020. Will

meet again in September. With approval of the group, NH will continue to sit on the group. Approval given.

PR – Scottish Rural Parliament is to be held in November in Stranraer - you have to register to attend although locals will be given preference. There will be open days which you can turn up to without signing up. There is a much more focused feel to the event, not just a talking shop. Have been experiencing difficulties getting local businesses to offer sponsorship. He had been in touch a number of times with P&O but not successfully so far. **ACTION** DR will send PR his contacts details to see if that would get him any further.

CA left the meeting at 11.10am and the meeting took a comfort break
The meeting resumed at 11.20am

Budget Profile

NH advised the funds still to be committed sat at approximately £380k Communities; £249.5k Farm Diversity; and Cooperation £114k. Rural Enterprise was over subscribed at the June LEADER Group meeting and operating costs to cover the balance will be moved once the Loch Ken Passiv Pod Project has planning consent in place.

At present in drafts applications for Communities there are approximately £400k, and less developed projects sitting at approximately £500k, there is still a lot of interest and we may be oversubscribed against Communities budget at the September meeting.

Farm Diversification is looking good, there is a draft deadline next Wednesday, looks like we will have in excess of £249k in the pipeline and therefore also possibly oversubscribed in September.

We have Co-Operation projects in development. Scottish Government will have to come back to confirm movement of Co-operation monies to other headings. They might reduce the target for co-operation from 10% to 5%. In the September round we may see applications from, Sleeping Giants and Cross-Border Projects - comfortable we will commit our funding. If Scottish Government Cooperation Funds can be moved, the LAG would have to approve the movement of funds.

DR Are we confident that the September round will see us fully committed over all budget lines?

NH There is a very good chance if pipeline develops as it suggests.

DR the budget shows finished projects and reallocation, could there be any surprises? NH we work closely with applicants to help them fully spend.

HH Should we have a reserve list? NH Accountable Body's group met last week by telephone meeting. Accountable Body's group will look at the potential of reallocation of money between LAG area. They will meet on 2 August to discuss under committed funds and their release. Currently from Scot Gov we are shown in the tables as having committed 75.6%, Scottish Government suggest at least 70% should be committed by this point in the Programme. There are a number of groups way below this figure.

NH & David Gardiner (DGC AB Rep) will both attend meeting on 2 August.

Should Accountable Body's wish to reallocate funds, the process is unclear. We cannot assume this can be done quickly. Scot Gov are not taking a lead on this discussion.

It has been suggested LAGs could make decisions in principle where they are oversubscribed and then receive additional funds from elsewhere to cover the deficit.

We really need to be clear to our applicants, explain the process of what happens if we are oversubscribed. We must manage expectations.

Have LAGs, teams been consulted? NH will ask question at the meeting on 2/8, it is very late in the process to commit.

AM We could score on the understanding money may become available. CG asked if we could advise, being positive, that we will look for more money for them. Discussion will take place on 2nd August, but NH suggests those in attendance will most likely have to refer to their Accountable Body for approval.

PR advised that EU rules state LAG Chairs give the permission to move money. EU are likely to claw back underspend. Brian McGrath instigated the conversation at the AB meeting. Decisions in principle is the best approach, you then know how much you would need and how much you could commit.

For Chairs meeting to make any decisions, they too would need to be quorate and so far have not been at any meeting.

NH to email round the LAGs Coordinators to ensure the Accountable Body's are adequately informed and know what they might be asked to do at the meeting on 2/8. Discussions with Accountable Body's, LAG and Chair should take place before any decision is made.

If we set up a reserve list, it leaves applicants in a good position, all set to go and possible "we would have been supported if funding had been available" – looks good to other funders.

Audit

NH advised we are currently undergoing an Internal Scottish Government audit. There is a review of 4 projects. We are being assessed on our processes against EU regulations. NH will provide report at next meeting.

AOCB

Co-Ordinators Meeting in Shetland. PR attended and reiterated the message of "we need to work together". He was given a tour of the area by the Chair of LAG who is also the head of Economic

Development. He said there were many benefits to having all the relevant agencies in the same office, which gave many opportunities to discuss things which came up.

PR – attended the Scottish Rural Parliament Cross Party on Rural Affairs meeting – see link below – https://www.sruc.ac.uk/downloads/download/1379/meeting_4_technology_and_rural_communities

Chairs Group

The Chairs group met and arrived at 10 points to discuss – these have been circulated and will be written up and presented to the Scottish Rural Action Group in Perth on 18/8. NCRA and SoSEA.

AM was concerned that EMFF should be considered along with LEADER. There is no talk of how this will be funded in future. DR – Marine Scotland are not contributing. Fergus Ewing will be the Cabinet Minister for SOSEA Agency, this could be a route in.

PR gave a brief update on his recent attendance to the Borderlands Conference held in Dumfries recently. Doesn't have a lot of relevance to LEADER but good to see connections being made and developed. There is a draft report being submitted to civil servants, but there are no themes as yet, but detail should be available in September. No discussions on funding yet.

Date of Next Meeting

10 October at 10am – venue Holiday Inn, Dumfries.

Meeting closed at 12.12pm.