

MINUTES

LEADER Local Action Group – Strategic Management Group Meeting

Wednesday 10 October 2018, 10.00am

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

Meeting started at 10.04am

Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked all members for attending. His message for the day was that we have the mistiness and mellowness of autumn to look forward to but due common sense prevailing and Scottish Government confirmation that dates for money to be committed and claimed have been brought in line with our LDS and Admin and Animation costs were to be covered by HM Treasury, he was feeling much more upbeat.

Apologies

The apologies were read out and as listed above.

Minutes

The Chair asked if the minutes of the previous meeting were a true and accurate record and asked for a proposer and seconder. The minutes were then proposed by AMcN and seconded by HH.

Items to be considered under AOCB

AW apologised for both himself and AD not having been able to attend meetings and noted the difficulties which had been experienced with meetings being quorate. NH noted we were thankful for both of their attendance when they were able, and reiterated that it was the effect that LAG members not being able to attend had the knock on effect of decisions not being able to be made if the meeting was not quorate. AW asked if it was appropriate to provide a substitute, NH advised it was not just about turning up at the meetings, the people would realistically have to be members of the LAG in their own right and aware of the business on the table and up to date with the programme.

Staff Report

PR congratulated NH and the team on a job well done, noting it was a lengthy document. NH advised it was an abbreviated version as were preparing also for the annual report which included Amaze Me LEADER and Day of the Region etc, the Group were advised that they would see presentations of both projects at the full LAG meeting in the afternoon (10/10).

NH went through the report and advised that the number of deferred decisions at the recent LEADER Group meeting, if all were to have their planning permission approved then we will be fully committed. If not money will be available to other projects.

Now we have agreement to the original timeframe of the SLA, committed by December 2019 and spend by December 2020, any underspend from projects can be put back into the pot.

DR asked what the difference was between approval in principle and deferred.

NH advised – Approval in Principle meant that there may only be one element of the application not in place eg match funding. If the applicants were able to meet the deadline of 60 days then a decision to approve the project electronically could be taken. Whilst deferred meant the group were supportive of the project but a number of the applications had no planning permissions in place and were unlikely to be able to meet the 60 days deadline and the group requested further information.

Deferrals, offered electronically, allowed applications to have their decision before the next meeting.

Expressions of Interest had reduced, but we still have applications in the pipeline, but we have to manage expectations carefully. The likelihood is that we will not have a lot of money and the PO's are working with projects, giving them the opportunity of putting their projects onto LARCs, but advising there may be no funding available.

AW asked what the issue was with planning. NH advised there are no specific issues with planning other than the length of time it takes to go through the process. We have a good working relationship with our planning colleagues. We make them aware if there are any applications which are depending on funding. All deferred applications are at different stages with their planning permissions. It is good to see the pre-planning process in place as this gives applicants a steer on viability of their project being successful in planning, before spending money to enter into the full planning process.

PR has attended meetings of the Chair and Staff Groups and has the view we are in a good position relative to other LAGs. NH advised although deadlines had been confirmed, Scottish Government



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were keen to see funds committed as soon as possible. Underspend can go back into the pot and be given away by December 2019.

CGB said it was good to push all to be spent and then see where we were, with the possibility to bid for more money for D&G. NH thought the signs were that there was no expectation of huge underspend. We would ideally have some projects who were ready to proceed if there were any funds available.

FLAG had a good meeting in September and may also be oversubscribed by December. There has been no suggestion of more money at present, but they have had confirmation that funding can be awarded up to end of 2020 with spend completed by 2023. Up to now both LEADER and FLAG have operated to the same timelines, there may be issues on how the programme would be delivered at a local level.

Fisheries, there are variable amounts of applications throughout Scotland. This has been due largely to retention of Project Officers. Although there are some areas who already committed all of their funding.

Budget

We are currently involved in 2 audits. All of the project updates were available in the staff report, NH asked if any members had questions.

DR asked what happens when a project does not complete their outcomes. NH advised that this has not happened to date and unlikely to as we are in constant communication with projects and therefore more aware of any issues. If projects need to amend their application they can do this by either change requests or if there is a significant change, then that is circulated to the LAG for their agreement.

PR again commended the team, their performance makes him relaxed. AM further commented that the FLAG project officer was working very hard in his endeavours, recently attending an IFG meeting with the Head of Economic Development. HH further reiterated that staff went the extra mile.

AW – Fisheries, the potential was not always recognised, the Head of Economic Development is very positive, but the group needs to have a plan of what's happening. AM is arranging a meeting with Marine Scotland, to speak about the potential to do trial of quota in Dumfries and Galloway, to run for 2 to 3 years. Discussion to take place on management of fisheries. AW asked that we keep the Council appraised as it has not only impact on Fisheries, but on Tourism too.

AM will email a copy of the Fisheries Plan to AW.

Budget Profile



Changes have been made recently by Scottish Government whereby levels of spend targets are now as follows

Originally set at	Type	Changed to
Minimum of 10%	Cooperation	5%
Minimum of 10%	Farm Diversification	Amalgamated to 20% of allocation
Minimum of 10%	Rural Business Support	

The reviewed targets have been emailed to the LAG and were unanimously approved. A subsequent LDS change request was made to adopt the changes. V3 of the LDS has been circulated to all members for their fullest information.

DG LEADER has already met these expectations already, Cooperation is sitting at 7.96% and Farm Diversification and Rural Business = 24.73%.

NH – we are compliant again with the LDS.

AW – Do we have plans for Farm Diversification. PR advised it was seriously thought about at LDS stage, many emails written and sent but not taken up. CGB questioned how we are to get new people in to farming, with so many selling off land for horses or houses. The previous option of come and stay in the region and you can have 2 acres of land was quickly squashed. Further discussion took place we need to upscale our thoughts or we will lose our young people.

AW – Try to pull together, the Council would take an active role. There have been many discussions for supporting young farmers, but need action.

NH the negotiated security of funding for Admin and Animation to the end of delivery of the funded projects. We are back on track. This doubt has been hanging over the team, with the risk of staff leaving.

We are mindful of people coming to the end of their contracts. Consideration was given on how to keep the project running, stripping out Evaluation, Rural Awards and Good Practice Guide. Discussion taking place on a national level, Evaluation of LEADER – may be a cooperation project or admin costs used to meet this. Will keep the SMG updated. Keep our options open for either local or national evaluation.

DR – National activity to get LEADER heard might make the difference. There is value of looking at it.

If we go ahead with the Rural Awards, the event will likely take place in November next year with the production and publication of the Good Practice Guide at the same time. A brief will have to be written and contractor appointed. Sub groups will be necessary to pull the briefs together for both

Evaluation and Good Practice. The organisation will take the majority of next year. It was questioned if the team have capacity? After December we will have a good steer in project funding. The PO role will change, evolve. We will look to maximise our resources.

Support in principle from the SMG was given to ask the full LAG.

NH was grateful to have Scottish Government staff backing to align with our SLA.

Meeting broke at 11.20 and resumed at 11.30

Audit

D&G LEADER were selected randomly for a Scottish Government Audit on their processes against EU Regulations. We have received a draft report but there is nothing alarming.

DGC Annual Audit – currently liaising with colleagues, once the audit has been confirmed it will go to the Scrutiny Committee to be signed off.

AW – What further information can be obtained over the last 20 years? What outcomes have been achieved. We have had evaluations carried out for each of the programmes. AW Could this be pulled together? NH advised that funding should only be used to evaluate the current programme.

AW further reiterated he was very aware all will be lost if we wait, there are so many groups losing funding.

Chairs Report



CLLD CHAIRs Note
Sept 2018.docx



Finance and
constitution Meetin

PR confirmed there were to be 3 Ministers attend the Scottish Rural Parliament. He again asked the Chairs Group for good news stories to put together into a document for Ministers. As it stands it will be largely D&G focused.

A Rural Challenge Fund has been proposed to run until there is a new programme, utilising the underspend. Cooperation should not be a compunction, depends on whether the LEADER approach is to be adopted in any new programme.

AW – stated Community empowerment with more cooperation and move to working together. It very much depends on the interpretation of cooperation ie transnational or neighbours.



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Push for collaboration to bring communities together, government should be working to break the silos. Rural needs as evidence to be gathered nationally. Need consistency of approach. PR advised Orkney had raised the question asking how other LAGs gather information.

PR advised the meeting that he is involved in bringing together a Parliamentary Reception to inform MSPs early next year – “Celebration of LEADER” as there seems to be a lack of understanding.

HH confirmed, if you can engage the politicians, you will get action. It should be noted that clearance of individuals to gain entry can be a lengthy process.

NH – With HM Treasury and pressure lighted slightly, we might be better placed to carry out evidence gathering task. We have the historical data, others don't.

AW advised most MSPs were councillors previously and should have knowledge.

Make LEADER the rock to hang onto, we provide stability. We need a clear sense of purpose to gather information for the meeting.

Getting ready for SRP, they have 197 delegates signed up with the prospect of filling 250 originally. There are stands Fringe events. Full programme available online, if you have not signed up then please do.

Members felt there was a distinct lack of information available. DG LEADER have taken a stand but looks like it will be a national stand with members of the Communications Group manning it.

Stands have also been taken by Rural Access Trust, Fisheries and Countryside Environmental (many agencies together).

PR has been proposed by Scottish Government to become a member of the Rural Assembly for Scotland and asked for permission from the Group to proceed. The Group felt it was a very good have the opportunity to push the LEADER process. Continuity and expertise when funding is finishing is very important. Set up a working group for the future – put together a group to look to the future.

AW Can we invite Fergus Ewing to one of our meetings? The timing may be appropriate, as he is involved and contributing to South of Scotland Alliance. If it is not going to be D&G LEADER LAG, then the agency might be the vehicle.

AOCB

There were no items.

Date of Next Meeting





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9 January at 10am – venue to be advised. It should be noted that papers might be a little later in coming out due to Festive period.

Meeting closed at 12.28pm.

