**HIGHLAND LEADER 2014-2020 PROGRAMME**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 30 MARCH 2016**

**HIGHLAND ARCHIVE CENTRE**

**PRESENT:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Voting** |  |  |
| Frances Gunn(FG) | Third Sector Interface | Private |
| Jon Hollingdale (JH) | Community Woodlands Association | Private |
| David Richardson (DR) | FSB | Private |
| Yvonne White(YW) | Scottish Crofting Federation | Private |
| Ian Wilson(IW) | NFU | Private |
| Cattie Anderson (CA) | SNH | Public |
| George Farlow(GF) | THC | Public |
| Debbie Gray (DG) | North Highland College, UHI | Public |
| Robert Muir(RM) | HIE | Public |
|  |  |  |
| **Advisory** |  |  |
| Paula Betts(PB) | LEADER |  |
| Fiona Cameron(FC) | LEADER |  |
| Anne Sutherland (AS) | Sutherland LAP |  |
| Judith Wainwright(JW) | LEADER |  |
| Nicole Wallace(NW) | THC |  |
| Liz Whiteford(LW) | LEADER |  |
| Alastair Swanson (AS) | NFU | Private |

**1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

JH chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were received from David Alston (George Farlow attended as deputy), Graeme Ambrose, Scott Armstrong, Sharon MacKay, Stewart Sandison (Cattie Anderson attended as deputy), Cathy Steer, Richard Wallace, Mhairi Wylie, Wendy Anderson, Martin Culbertson, Fiona Daschofsky, Sarah Lamb, Joe MacMillan and from LAP representatives John Fotheringham (Lochaber) and Meg Gillies (Skye).

**The meeting was quorate.**

JH updated the meeting that following a restructure by The Highland Council, responsibility for the LEADER Team has been transferred from Andy McCann to Nicole Wallace, who is now the Named Officer for the Accountable Body.Nicole was welcomed in her new capacity and the meeting extended its thanks to Andy for all his work on the LAG in this and the previous LEADER Programme.

**2 MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by YW and seconded by IW.

**3 MATTERS ARISING**

There were three actions for FC from the last meeting which were updated as follows:

* the Code of Conduct was sent to all LAG members and deputies, as requested,
* a response was provided to IMFN LAP in relation to the phasing of funding, as a result of which reference to the phasing has been removed from the Local Area Action Plan,
* the Pre-Application and Assessment forms have been revised and tabled for discussion at this meeting (item 11).

**4 RISK/GOVERNANCE**

The LAG is required to oversee risk and governance of the LEADER Programme. To equip members to take on this role, FC will provide Audit and Monitoring reports to members. Additionally, a Risk Register is being developed and this will be finalised prior to the next LAG meeting. Risk & Governance will be a standing agenda item, with JH & NW taking an ongoing lead role in reviewing and bringing specific issues before the LAG. **Action FC**

**5 IMFN LAAP FOR APPROVAL**

The IMFN LAAP had been distributed ahead of the meeting. FC confirmed that she had completed her assessment and that the LAAP complied with all aspects. The LAAP was approved subject to:

* Amendment of wording on P10 (Match Funding) to reflect that Applicants will need to have match funding in place, before the commencement of a LEADER funded project. As Agreement in Principle can only be given for a maximum of 60 days, applicants will need to be confident that full funding will be secured in this period, before a final application will be considered.
* The scoring mechanism for IMFN will need to reflect the priority to be afforded which meet the three identified additional outcomes.

In response to a query from GF, FC confirmed that proof of match funding would be required prior to the start of a project and this would take the form of a funder’s letter.

FC confirmed that all LAAPs will now be reviewed to ensure that they comply with SG guidance and do not include any ineligible activity**. Action FC**

**6 DO UPDATES**

Updates for IMFN, Lochaber, Sutherland, Caithness, Skye, WRSL and a summary of Expressions of Interest for Strategic Projects, had been distributed ahead of the meeting.

Specific points raised:

IMFN – there has been a change of Chair, following receipt of SG guidance that an employee of the Accountable Body cannot chair a decision making group. John McHardy stood down and has been replaced by Tom Davis.

Sutherland – PB confirmed that a youth meeting has been arranged for 18/04. She also advised that there were already sufficient EoIs to fully commit the budget and these will be prioritised at the next LAP meeting.

WRSL – LW mentioned receipt of an additional EoI, subsequent to producing her report – applicant are looking for LEADER funding for a new ‘exercise for older adults’ programme.

FC gave a short verbal update on IMFS. The LAP met yesterday for the third time to consider eligible activities under the five priority outcomes selected, funding requirements and LAP membership. It is planned to issue a draft LAAP to LAP members 28/04 and for queries/amendments to be resolved within two weeks. As the LAAP will not be ready by the date of the next LAG meeting, it was agreed that this could be considered electronically to avoid unneccesary delays in launching the Programme in IMFS.

Strategic Project EoIs – LW updated the meeting on two potential strategic EoIs. After some discussion, it was agreed that it is important that DOs have some guidelines to work with so that applicants’ expectations can be set.

The meeting agreed that there would be a presumption that LEADER funding would not exceed £100k for individual strategic projects. The LAG will consider further criteria at the next LAG meeting. Prior to this, FC will provide an assessment of the extent to which the collective LAAPs meet the outcomes in the LDS, although it was noted that as all LAPs have included the option to review their LAAPs following two meetings at which funding decisions are made, this may not provide a very robust tool. **Action: FC**

**7 ERG UPDATE**

There have been no meetings since the last LAG meeting. FC advised that a meeting has been pencilled in for 5/6 April, but this may need to be moved to 11/12 April to maximise attendance. At this meeting, it is intended to finalise:

* the Equalities Form to accompany the Pre-Application,
* the screening criteria for referring Pre-Applications to the ERG.

**8 EMFF**

NW had produced a short paper which was distributed ahead of the meeting. This included a number of questions that have been raised with Marine Scotland. Although feedback has been received, it still requires further clarification. **Action: NW**

Two key areas of concern are:

* The suggested inclusion of an indemnity clause in the Framework Agreement which places responsibility on the FLAG, when they don’t have financial resources.
* The exclusion of Nairn town as an eligible area for EMFF.

**9 RURAL ENTERPRISE & FARM DIVERSIFICATION (RE/FD)**

JH advised that the long awaited SG guidance had now been received, although it does not provide any steer as to the eligible funding criteria for these ring-fenced funds. FC confirmed that in the light of this, we would assume that activity used to deliver the LDS would be eligible. Once criteria for these funds has been determined it is intended that they will form an Appendix to the LDS which will be provided to SG, but it is not anticipated that approval will be required.

It was agreed that FC will convene a sub group prior to the next LAG meeting to consider criteria and provide guidance for applicants as to what will be covered by these funds in Highland. **Action FC**

CA mentioned that the output from the LEADER Conference sessions on RE/FD were available on the SRN Website and these contain information that might be helpul in considering Highland guidance:

https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/news-and-events/news/event-report-scottish-leader-conference-2016

**10 MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E) UPDATE**

FC and JW gave brief updates.

An outline framework was included in the LDS, but it was intended that this would be developed as guidance became available. A working group including members from a number of LAGs was formed several months ago and Highland has taken an active role in this. As things stand there will be:

* circa 20 compulsory Indicators
* circa 40-50 Indicators (distilled from 250-300 across all LDS’s) that are likely to be applicable to the majority of LAGs
* the ability for LAGs to add specific local Indicators.

A workshop hosted by SRN was held in Edinburgh yesterday at which the indicators were reviewed. The output from that workshop is due by the end of the week, following which LAGs will have two weeks to revert with final feedback.

FC invited nominations to join an M&E sub group to provide wider input on the proposed M&E Framework. It is intended that the M&E subgroup will meet for half an hour immediately prior to LAG meetings. DG and YW volunteered to join.

**11 PRE-APPLICATION FORM, GUIDANCE, TECHNICAL ASSESSMENT & SCORING MATRIX**

All forms had been distributed ahead of the meeting. Guidance is a new form; the Pre-Application Form, Technical Assessment and Project Assessment had been updated from versions previously circulated. Key changes were:

* A weighting has been applied to Technical Assessment in favour of the extent to which projects meet the requirements of the LDS/LAAP.

DR requested the inclusion of wording to show that possible displacement had been considered and it was agreed that FC will expand S2.7 of the guidance to include this requirement and provide a definition of displacement. It was agreed that the potential impact of this was not restricted to businesses.  **Action: FC**

**12 MoU**

A revised MoU had been distributed ahead of the meeting. FC advised that the main change has been to include risk and governance with some minor changes to the order of content.

The revised MoU was approved and FC is to provide a copy for sign off by JH and NW. The MoU can now be used as a template to develop a similar agreement setting out the different roles of the LAG and the LAPs. **Action FC**

**13 THC CASHFLOW PROPOSAL**

A paper drafted by Andy McCann had been distributed prior to the meeting and there was general approval for the proposal.

The paper included the requirement for THC to be asked to provide cashflow of £250k. NW requested the inclusion of the FLAG in the proposal as groups submitting applications to the FLAG will require the same level of support as those submitting LEADER applications. This was also agreed. NW is to take the proposal forward for approval. **Action NW**

If the cashflow funding is forthcoming, this will need to be administered. The paper outlines options for funding an administrative role:

* through a LEADER Strategic Project; eligibility of this needs to be dermined and FC will progress a decision from SG as to eligibility. **Action FC**
* through the LEADER Administration budget.

JH commented that the first option is preferable as there are already pressures on the LEADER Administration budget.

**14 FEEDBACK FROM LEADER CONFERENCE**

Those who had attended the Conference had felt it had provided a good networking opportunity, although expectations that greater clarity and guidance would have been provided, were not fully met. It was generally felt that it would have been better to have delayed the Conference until more aspects of the Programme had been developed.

JH felt that the LAG Chairs session had been useful and had given a better understanding of how LAG Chairs might work together.

Andy McCann had attended the Accountable Bodies Board session. NW fed back that he had felt this might be a useful forum for raising SLA queries. The session had not been well attended, with most attendees having been involved in the last Programme – it was felt that their attendance may have been prompted by them having experienced the impact of a range of audit issues that had arisen in that Programme.

FC mentioned that the Co-operation Café workshop had been particularly well received and a similar type of event could be included as part of the formal launch event for the Highland LEADER Programme.

**15 TIMETABLE FOR LAUNCH OF HIGHLAND LEADER PROGRAMME**

It was agreed that the Programme will be open following the next LAG meeting on 27/04/16, so DOs will be able to progress EoIs from 28/04/16.

**16 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 27 April venue and time TBC. Thereafter, meetings will be held on the last Wednesday of alternate months – dates to be confirmed at the next meeting.

**PAPERS SUBMITTED IN ADVANCE TO INFORM THIS MEETING**

Agenda

IMFN - Draft Local Area Action PLan

LAP Update – Caithness

LAP Update - IMFN

LAP Update – Lochaber

LAP Update - Skye

LAP Update - Sutherland

LAP Update WRSL

Expressions of Interest – Strategic Projects

EMFF Queries and Response

Draft Pre Application Form 240316

Draft Pre Application Guidance 240316

Draft Pre Application Scoring 240316

Draft Pre Application Technical review 240316

MoU Draft 30/03/2016

LEADER 2014 2020 Cashflow Proposal March 16