**HIGHLAND LEADER 2014-2020 PROGRAMME**

**MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 31st August 2016**

**CULDUTHEL CHRISTIAN CENTRE**

**PRESENT:**

|  |  |  |
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| **Voting** |  |  |
| Jon Hollingdale (JH) | Community Woodlands Association | Private |
| Frances Gunn (FG) | Third Sector Interface | Private |
| Yvonne White (YW) | Scottish Crofting Federation | Private |
| Sharon Mackay (SM) | Visit Inverness Loch Ness | Private |
| Ian Wilson (IW) | National Farmers Union | Private |
| David Richardson (DR) | Federation of Small Businesses | Private |
| Robert Muir (RM) | Highlands and Islands Enterprise | Public |
| Stewart Sandison (SS) | Scottish Natural Heritage | Public |
| Debbie Gray (DG) | North Highland College, UHI | Public |
| Cathy Steer (CS) | National Health Service | Public |
| **Advisory** |  |  |
| Scott Armstrong (SA) | Visit Scotland |  |
| Nicole Wallace (NW) | Highland Council |  |
| Calum MacLennan (CM) | Youth Convener – High Life Highland |  |
| Fiona Cameron (FC) | LEADER |  |
| Wendy Anderson (WA) | LEADER |  |
| Martin Culbertson (MC) | LEADER |  |
| Joe MacMillan (JM) | LEADER (**Minute Taker**) |  |

**1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

JH chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone. A brief introduction was then provided by the meeting attendees.

Apologies were received from Mhairi Wylie, Richard Wallace, Sarah Lamb and from LAP reps., Pat Buchanan, Lachie MacDonald, Amy MacDonald, Anne Sutherland, Tom Davies & David Godden.

**The meeting was quorate (6 x Private & 4 Public).**

**Note: CS (public) arrived late and RM (public) left prior to agenda item 10.**

JH advised the meeting that the order of the agenda was changing and that item 5 on the agenda, Declarations of Interest would be next for discussion.

**2 Declarations of Interest (DoI)**

FG declared an interest in the Strengthening Communities Project. JH advised that as this was a proposal for discussion purposes only then FG could remain in the meeting.

DG declared an interest on the Road to the Isles Marketing Organisation project as it utilised contacts in UHI. JH advised that as there was no direct interest and DG did not have any budgetary control or financial link to the project then DG could remain in the room when project was being assessed.

RM declared that his wife was involved in the Road to the Isles Marketing Organisation project. JH confirmed that RM would have to leave the meeting when this project was being assessed.

**3 MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed by FG and seconded by RM.

**4 MATTERS ARISING**

NW advised the meeting that the FLAG had appointed Duncan Pocket from Moray as the chair and Tom Bryan-Brown from Mallaig as the vice-chair. As the chair of the FLAG has advisory position on the LEADER Strategic LAG an invite to attend future LAG meetings will be sent out. **Action NW**

Query raised about the level of evidence a business would need to provide to show community support as there may be issues around displacement. It was agreed that this would be discussed under agenda item 9.

**5 Governance and Risk**

Note: Standard agenda item.

Risk register to be brought to LAG meetings for discussion. **Action FC/WA**

All risks associated with Brexit to be added to Risk Register.

LEADER EU Audit workshops being held around Scotland. FC attended a workshop in Aberdeen and intimated that large fines maybe applied for relatively small issues i.e. the person taking minutes at meetings not being identified and problems with some LAG areas not being quorate at meetings (49% public and 51% private). FC stated that our Operating Guidelines were clear in this matter.

A meeting relating to the 2014/15 EU Conformity Clearance Audit, carried out last year, is being held in HQ on Monday 5th September. JH & FG were delegated by the LAG to approve any changes to operating guidlines.

**6 SG/EU update**

There is still no clarity from the Scottish Government (SG) beyond the Autumn Statement which is due to take place towards the end of November or beginning of December. Have to assume that there will be a programme beyond the Autumn Statement.

JH handed out a letter from Fergus Ewing responding to Stuart Black’s letter dated 1st August. Copies of letters attached.

Statement from SG confirming that all contracts agreed i.e. signed by both contracted parties (LAG and applicant) prior to the Autumn Statement will be honoured, even if their duration is scheduled to go beyond any point of exit from the EU.

NW queried whether the LAG wished the accountable body to pursue a suggestion with SG that domestic funds within the LEADER programme be used to give a period of certainty for commitment.

**7 DO Updates**

A Strengthening Communities Project Proposal, updates for all seven LAP areas and an update on Strategic/Co-operation Projects, had been distributed ahead of the meeting.

Additional points/questions:-

Caithness

* YW raised the issue about the 3 x ineligible projects – applicant can submit a revised EOI
* Publicity – very difficult to promote

Sutherland

* JH asked if the 14 x FD/BE EOI’s were additional to the 19 x Community EOI’s – yes

IMFS

* Request from LAP to increase max. grant levels from £25k to £50k – approved by LAG as required by LDS.

Strategic/Co-operation

* MC stated that the Identified potential commitment figure of £194,833 should actually read £144,833.

A concern was raised about the low number of new EoIs being submitted. FC raised a concern that Highland may miss out by not promoting the programme. It was stated that a steer from the LAG regarding programme promotion would be welcomed.

It was therefore agreed that Jon, Nicole and Fiona would produce text to be used for promoting the programme by the LAG and LAP’s. **Action JH/NW/FC**

It was suggested that the local press should be used as one of the methods to promote the programme. FG offered to put the promotion in the HTSI electronic newsletter. LAG/LAP members should also circulate through their own networks.

Strengthening Communities Project Proposal – see appendix 1

**8 EMFF Update (verbal update from NW)**

Highland/Moray FLAG met on the 19th August and agreed that the framework agreement should be signed.

The following minimum/maximum was agreed by the FLAG – **min. of £5k project cost** and a **maximum of £100k grant** although the FLAG had the discretion to approve projects in excess of the £100k.

Process would be EoI straight to full application.

Marine Scotland had issued a statement that the end date of the programme had been brought forward and projects had to be completed by March 2018.

Moray Council or Moray TSI to appoint staff to assist in running the programme.

As previously mentioned a chair and vice-chair had been appointed at the FLAG meeting on the 18th August. Chair to be invited to future LAG meetings.

**9 RE/FD Update**

FC presented a paper to the meeting which had been developed by RE/FD sub-group. LAG were given time to read the document prior to the following discussion points:

* Due to the increase in demand on accommodation from the North Coast 500 Route, SM asked that the decision making bodies be made aware of the current shortfall in provision when condsidering B&B applications up North
* RM asked about guidance for the applicant/business on state aid. DO’s would provide advice on a case to case basis
* project eligible for FPMC grants then applicant should not be coming to LEADER
* if application rejected by another SRDP grant then not allowed to apply to LEADER
* FC confirmed that the installation of broadband would be eligible under LEADER unless an alternative fund was available
* Business Gateway were asked to provide comments
* Care farming – rehabilitate people with problems back to work through working on farms and working with farm animals
* Ten outcomes give a community slant but requires to be re-written for business applicants so as to be clear
* Paper should indicate how RE/FD applicants can demonstrate community support and benefits

In general the LAG was happy with the guidance that the document provides. Action points to be discussed by the forum with final version going to SG for approval.

**10 Pre-applications for consideration – see appendix 2**

**11.** **LARCs Demo**

FC was unable to give a demo on the new IT system due to connectivity issues.

The new system has been rolled out to the 21 LAGs in Scotland. Highland LEADER staff have attended user testing sessions and training in both Inverness and Edinburgh. Having had training on the system, DO’s have concerns about the level of support applicants will require and resource implication for team. FC raised further concern that it does not give accountable body re-assurance on risks as intended.

**12. Application Process**

FC reminded the meeting that at the last meeting the LAG agreed to use the proposed updated pre-application process for a period of three months and then review at the LAG meeting following this date.

Now that the LEADER team have seen LARCs there was a general feeling within the team that the above mentioned pre-application stage was causing duplication of work and more importantly it was time consuming for both the applicant and DO.

It is proposed that LEADER enter a test application on to the system and document all the issues to take back to the SG.

FC apologised to the LAG for proposing another change but felt it necessary, on the back of recent correspondence from SG, to speed up the process and to try and reduce the burden on everyone. It was therefore proposed that the LEADER team would review the process again and produce a streamlined process at their team meeting next week.

The LAG agreed to delegate authority to JH and FG to approve any changes to the process and forms. LDS to be changed to reflect the revised process. Audit viewpoint to be sought on running a parallel system.

**13. Co-ordinators meeting**

Co-ordinators meeting to take place on the afternoon of the 13th and the morning of the 14th September at Eden Court. JH attending on the 14th. FC to circulate agenda to the LAG with an invite to attend.

**14.** **AOB**

MC indicated that due to a previous instruction from SG he felt uncertain introducing the pre-applications to the LAG and asked for clarity on what he can and cannot say.

JH advised that whilst it must be clear that the LAG/LAP makes the decisions, the technical advice provided by DO’s is valued, and that it was the responsibility of the chair to keep DO’s within the guidance when introducing projects.

JH suggested that application issues identified by the DO are raised with the chair prior to the meeting. The chair could then raise the issue when application being discussed.

**15. Date of next meeting**

The date of the next meeting to be pushed back from October and a new date to be arranged closer to the date of the Autumn Statement, once this date is known.

**Meeting closed at 1pm**.

**Papers Submitted in Advance to inform this meeting:**

Agenda

LAP Updates for Caithness, IMFS, IMFN, Lochaber, Skye, Sutherland & WRSL, Strategic/Coopereration projects

Project Proposal (for discussion only)

Pre-applications x 3

**Papers presented at meeting:**

Highland LEADER RE/FD Funds

Letter from Stuart Black dated 1/8 & response from Fergus Ewing dated 30/8

Letter from Fergus Ewing dated 24/8 responding to letter from Peter Ross

**List of Acronyms**

**BE – Business Enterprise**

**COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities**

**EMFF - European Maritime and Fisheries Fund**

**EoI – Expression of Interest**

**ERG – Equalities Reference Group**

**EU – European Union**

**FD – Farm Diversification**

**FLAG – Fisheries Local Action Group**

**FPMC – Food Processing Marketing & Co-Operation**

**IMFN – Inner Moray Firth North**

**IMFS – Inner Moray Firth South**

**LAG – Local Action Group**

**LAP – Local Area Partnership**

**LAAP – Local Area Action Plan**

**LDS – Local Development Strategy**

**RE – Rural Enterprise**

**SLA – Service Level Agreement**

**SRN – Scottish Rural Network**

**TSI – Third Sector Interface**

**WRS&L – Wester Ross, Strathpeffer & Lochalsh**