Highland LEADER 2014-2020 Programme

Inner Moray Firth North
Local Area Action Plan

Version	Date	Author	Revision
1.0	09/03/2016	JA Wainwright	
1.1	23/03/2016	JA Wainwright	To reflect LAP comments
1.2	04/04/2016	JA Wainwright	To reflect LAG feedback
1.3	03/04/2016	JA Wainwright	To reflect LAG requirements 27/04

Inner Moray Firth North Action Plan

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Section 1: Summary

The Highland Local Development Strategy (LDS) sets out the aims and objectives of the Highland LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020. The Programme will be delivered locally by seven Local Area Partnerships (LAPs), of which one will represent Inner Moray Firth North (IMFN). Each LAP will have the flexibility to focus on specific priorities from within the LDS which are of most relevance locally and these priorities will be set out in Local Area Action Plans (LAAPs). Collectively the seven plans will need to demonstrate that the aims and objectives of the LDS will be met and this will be monitored by the Highland Strategic Local Action Group (LAG).

This LAAP sets out the priorities for LEADER funding in IMFN. It has been informed by:

➢ relevant demographic data (Appendix 1)
➢ information gathered during a community consultation process undertaken by the Highland LEADER team in preparation of submission of the Highland Local Development Strategy (LDS), presented as a SWOT analysis (Appendix 2)
➢ suggested key priorities for IMFN taking account of the demographic data and results of the community consultation (Appendix 3).

The LAAP also includes details of the processes that have been followed:

➢ to inform and develop the LAAP, and
➢ to form the LAP, ensuring that it collectively possesses the skills, experience and knowledge required for delivery of the LAAP and has an appropriate demographic and public/private distribution of membership.

The Strategic LAG set out a process for forming LAPs and developing LAAPs in Highland. The four key steps in this process are shown in the diagram below.
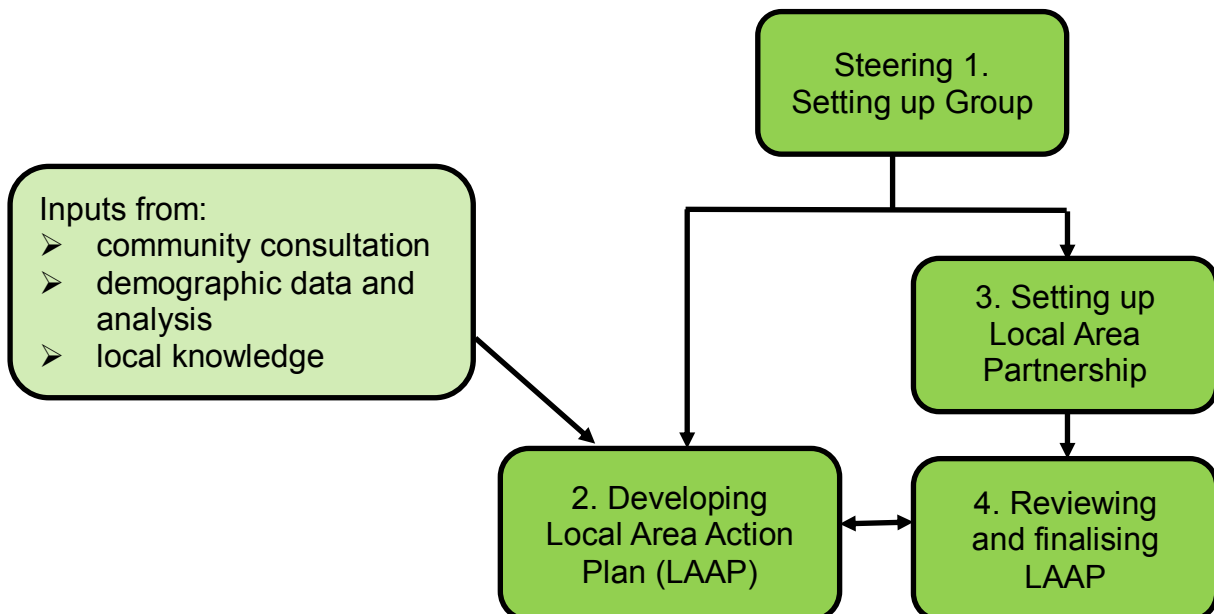
Formation and Work of Steering Group

In June 2015 a Steering Group was formed in IMFN; this included members of the LAP from the previous LEADER Programme, representatives from community council areas, elected members and ward managers.

Using the information provided, together with their local knowledge, Steering Group members considered and prioritised target groups, themes and outcomes to be delivered by the Highland LDS in terms of their relative importance for LEADER funding in IMFN. As a further step, Steering Group members identified the types of project that will deliver their chosen outcomes and deliver maximum benefit to communities in IMFN.

Formation of LAP

Steering Group members were invited to put themselves forward to sit on the LAP by completing a Skills Checklist, in line with agreed process for forming LAPs in Highland, however, due to a low response rate, LAP membership was subsequently advertised

The Skills, Knowledge and Experience requirements identified by the Steering Group were used as a check to ensure that collectively, the LAP had the relevant skills. It was also necessary to achieve a representative geographic and demographic balance of members, together with the required public/private voting member representation (a maximum of 49% of voting members to be from the Public Sector).

Advertising for LAP members took place in October and November 2015. This attracted 17 applications, which together with the nomination of four elected members and a Ward Manager, resulted in the appointment of the IMFN LAP.

Development of LAAP

The planned process for developing the LAAP assumed that many of those people involved on Steering Groups would put themselves forward to sit on the LAPs and therefore preparatory work undertaken by Steering Groups could be reviewed and endorsed by LAPs without the need for significant editing. In the case of IMFN, however, there was not a significant overlap of Steering Group/LAP members.

Although the initial work undertaken by the Steering Group was used to inform LAP members, the detail required to develop this LAAP has been essentially based on work undertaken by the LAP members.

The LAP members followed the same process that had been used by the Steering Group members to consider priority themes, outcomes, project priorities, target groups and additional funding considerations, on which this LAAP is based. These are all detailed in the next three Sections of this Plan.

Local Priorities

Eligibility for LEADER is defined in the overall Highland LDS. However, the IMFN LAAP provides a focus on the specific project activities required to meet local development needs while contributing to the overall delivery of the Highland LEADER Programme 2014- 2020.

It is important to note that there is significantly less funding available in the 2014- 2020 programme than the 2007- 2013 programme. The funding environment is likely to be very competitive as a result of this. Applicants are therefore strongly urged to familiarise themselves with the content of this plan and ensure they demonstrate how their project will contribute to its aims and objectives.

Section 2: Funding Allocation and Priorities

IMFN has been allocated a devolved budget of £550,575 for the duration of the Highland LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme and this section sets out the local priorities for this funding.

Additionally Inner Moray Firth project applicants will have access to other elements of Highland LEADER funding which have been ring-fenced to deliver specific aspects of the Highland LDS. These are summarised in the Financial Strategy (Appendix 4).

The IMFN LAP will consider funding projects that meet one or more of the Highland themes and all appropriate cross cutting themes: all projects will be expected to meet the first three cross cutting themes and the fourth and fifth where these are relevant to the nature of the project.

Highland Themes (ranked in order of priority to IMFN)
- Increased and Sustained Local Services and Activities
- A Growing and Diversified Economy that Promotes Sustainability
- Stronger and More Resilient Communities
- Enhanced cultural and natural assets

Cross Cutting Themes
In addition to the four main themes there are five cross cutting themes that we would expect to see projects contribute to:

- Fairer Highland – advancing equality (addresses equality issues or benefits people in groups that are under-represented or disadvantaged)
- Innovation (a new or different approach is proposed within the area)
- Sustainability/Legacy (the project outcomes will continue beyond the life of the project)
- Carbon Clever (the project can demonstrate a positive impact on the environment)
- Skills Development (the project aims to expand the skills of those involved in implementing the project and/or on its participants)

Target Groups
It is recognised that during the consultation process in 2014, young, old and disabled people were identified as groups across Highland:

- which would benefit from removing/minimising barriers or disadvantage
- that have particular needs
- where under-representation or prejudice could be tackled or where understanding could be promoted.

The IMFN LAP identified a number of additional disadvantaged groups locally and therefore rather than targeting specific groups, will welcome any projects that result in addressing the needs of particular groups by:

- removing/ minimising barriers or disadvantage
- tackling under-representation or prejudice, or
- promoting understanding of groups with particular needs.

It is expected that collectively projects in IMFN will support a range of groups over the course of the programme. This will be monitored by the LAP as part of its review cycle and the LAP will move to more targeted interventions if it feels this is necessary, or if directed by the Strategic LAG as part of supporting the wider Highland LEADER Programme.

Outcomes

Of the ten outcomes, to be delivered by the Highland LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme, The IMFN has identified three Primary Outcomes which it would like to deliver. For a full definition of the outcomes, please refer to the Highland Local Development Strategy. These Outcomes will deliver local services and activities, jobs and greater community control of local assets and services. All projects seeking funding will be required to deliver at least one of the Primary Outcomes:

1. Increased community ownership/control of assets and services/activities
2. People have better access to local services and activities
3. Increased employment opportunities locally through new business start-ups and existing business diversification.

Within these outcomes, the IMFN LAP has identified specific project types that it would like to see being submitted; projects that it feels will maximise the benefits of LEADER funding to the communities in IMFN. These are detailed in Section 3. Whilst many of the project types have been identified in broad terms to stimulate innovation, applicants will need to ensure that their projects align with the eligible activities listed under each outcome in the LDS (See Appendix 5).

It is recognised that many projects will deliver more than one outcome and priority will be given to projects that, in addition to delivering one of the Primary Outcomes, also delivers one or more of the following additional Outcomes:

4. Impact of funded projects can be better demonstrated leading to increased capacity to secure future funds
5. Increased partnership working between groups (within and across areas, including inter-generational partnerships)
6. People feel better supported to undertake volunteering opportunities.

Outcomes not prioritised for delivery by IMFN

The additional outcomes included in the Highland Local Development Strategy, but not prioritised for delivery by the Inner Moray Firth LAP are:

➢ Increased income from local produce through adding value
➢ Improved management/conservation/sustainability of cultural, natural and heritage assets.
➢ Improvements in the visitor experience
➢ Improved access for residents and visitors (physical and knowledge based) to cultural, natural and heritage assets.

Section 3: IMFN LEADER Project Priorities

The IMFN LAP has selected the following LEADER outcomes and project activities to meet local development needs and help deliver the overall aims of the Highland LEADER 2014- 2020 Programme. LEADER funding support will be considered for projects that focus on the following:

1. Increased community ownership/control of assets and services/activities
Projects that:

> ➢ enable communities to take over and/or sustainably develop community assets, services and activities
> ➢ provide support for the development and expansion of social/community enterprises and community owned/managed resources
> ➢ support communities to acquire income generating assets which enable them to become more sustainable and assist with community regeneration.

2. People have better access to local services and activities
Projects that:

Develop local services and activities, in particular:

> ➢ village hall/community building developments to accommodate new/innovative services/ activities
> ➢ clubs that provide sports, health and wellbeing activities and services
> ➢ local markets so local people can buy local produce, including developing wider supply chain and distribution links
> ➢ development of community energy or recycling/reuse schemes
> ➢ community events which improve community cohesion or attract inward investment.
>
> Services and activities which promote inclusion and wellbeing/reduce isolation, address the limited availability of indoor or wet weather facilities, or include the regeneration of vacant/dilapidated sites and facilities, would be particularly welcome.

Improve access to new and existing local services and activities, through:

> ➢ increasing awareness/better promotion of what is available locally
> ➢ removing or minimising barriers or disadvantage to services/activities
> ➢ improving physical access through, for example, the development of sustainable transport schemes, cycle tracks and pathways particularly where these are able to provide better links between communities and local services/attractions, better broadband and mobile phone coverage.

3. Increased employment opportunities locally through new business start-ups and existing business diversification

Projects that:

Support the development of new businesses, products and/or markets that will lead to sustainable increased employment. The creation of employment that will attract/retain young people and young families in the area would be particularly welcomed.

Support the development of activities that will improve employability, through for example:

- ➢ Creating new, or widening the remit of existing apprenticeship schemes
- ➢ Developing employability schemes for all ages
- ➢ Developing mentoring and/or upskilling programmes to support the unemployed and/or employees to further develop their skills and career progression.

Delivery of Outcomes 4,5 and 6.

All eligible activity listed in the Highland Local Development Strategy for Outcomes 4,5 and 6 will be considered. Eligible activities are listed in Appendix 5.

Highland LEADER Outputs in IMFN

Guidance from the Scottish Government is currently awaited regarding the output categories that will need to be delivered Highland wide. Outputs will be used to show what progress is being made towards achieving the Programme Outcomes. All projects that are awarded LEADER funding will commit to delivering a number of Outputs selected from a list of Programme Outputs.

Project Applicants that are awarded LEADER funding will be asked to monitor achievement of Outputs.

LAPs will monitor Output achievement across all projects awarded LEADER funding in the LAP Area.

Output achievement will also be monitored as part of the Highland LEADER Monitoring & Evaluation Strategy to ensure each LAP is on track to deliver its LAAP, and Highland is on track to deliver its Local Development Strategy.

Section 4: Funding Considerations

IMFN has a discretionary *'indicative'* budget of £550,575 to allocate to projects over the course of the LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme.

Funding Priorities
Project applications will be assessed by the IMFN LAP and greater weighting will be attached to the types of project meeting the priorities and considerations set out in Sections 2, 3 and 4 of this LAAP.

Whilst the IMFN LAP wishes to focus on projects that will deliver against its prioritised outcomes it also notes that there is often an overlap between outcome headings and eligible activity and it therefore retains discretion to consider applications that deliver against other Highland outcomes if the applicant provides sufficient evidence that it will achieve substantial community impact/legacy/ benefit.

The IMFN LAP has the discretion to commission projects that meet its priorities if these do not come forward in the normal course of events. Commissioned projects will be assessed in line with the process outlined in the Highland LDS.

LEADER Grants
There will be no cap on the maximum grant that can be awarded, however applicants should bear in mind that they will need to be able to demonstrate that the benefit/impact of their project is commensurate with the level of funding being requested.

The minimum total project cost will be £5,000.

The minimum grant size will be £2,000.

Intervention Rates
Maximum intervention rates will normally be circa 50%, subject to any Scottish Government limits imposed to reflect State Aid requirements, however the Inner Moray Firth North LAP has the discretion to offer a higher rate where they feel this is warranted.

Project Duration
Projects will be funded for the maximum period agreed by the Strategic LAG.

'In Principle' Funding Offers
'In Principle' funding offers will be considered for a maximum period of two months, until December 2018.

Alternative Sources of Funding
Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that they:

➢ are unable to fund the project from their own resources
➢ are unable to source a commercial loan, and
➢ have fully explored alternative/additional sources of funding

Where projects are eligible for funding under the 'ring-fenced' Rural Enterprise or Farm Diversification LEADER budgets or under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), it is expected that these sources of funding will be considered in the first instance.

LEADER is one of several schemes included in the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) and applicants will be expected to have explored the availability/eligibility of other Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding sources before approaching LEADER. For further information about all the SRDP schemes refer to http://www.gov.scot/Topics/farmingrural/SRDP/.

Identifying the most appropriate SRDP funding for a project is essential: it should be noted that if applicants submit a full application for SRDP funding (including LEADER), which is declined, they will not be permitted to make the same application to another SRPD funding source.

Match Funding

As LEADER 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. All match funding in place, before the commencement of a LEADER funded project.

Applicants will be expected to demonstrate that local support for the project is reflected in contributions from known local funding sources, where appropriate.

Sustainability

The IMFN LAP feels that delivering projects which can demonstrate a sustainable legacy will maximise the benefits of LEADER funding locally. All projects will therefore need to show how they aim to continue benefitting the community beyond the life of the LEADER project. This will include, for example, plans for the ongoing maintenance of assets, and plans for revenue generation to continue posts or activities developed.

Impact of Project

All projects will be expected to monitor and undertake self-evaluation of their project activities so that the impact delivered to the community can be clearly demonstrated.

Monitoring the Local Area Action Plan

The IMFN LAP will put in place a monitoring system for the ongoing monitoring of the distribution of LEADER grants (geographically, and in terms of the outcomes being delivered and target groups benefitting) and it will proactively seek to facilitate, encourage, and support projects from areas or communities that are less pro-active or experienced in submitting applications to ensure that there is an appropriate distribution of funds and that priorities are met across the area.

Monitoring will also include the ongoing assessment against plan of expenditure or claims by projects so that any underspend can be identified at the earliest opportunity and re-allocated.

The IMFN LAP will therefore review its LAAP following two cycles of LAP meetings at which applications and/or expressions of interest have been considered and assessed against the delivery of the prioritised local outcomes for IMFN. This will allow for an early re-assessment of the initial outcome and project priorities and any other funding criteria to be considered in light of the actual applications/ expressions of interest coming forward and the budget available to distribute.

The LAAP will then be subject to review on an annual basis thereafter. Potential LEADER applicants should therefore be aware of the possibility of changes to the LAP's priority outcomes, LEADER grant intervention rates and the level of LEADER grants available.

Section 5: Steering Group Formation

In line with the process agreed by the Strategic LAG for setting up local steering groups, invitations to join the IMFN Steering Group were sent to Councillors, Ward Managers and members of the LAPs covering Black Isle, Cromarty Firth, Dingwall & Seaforth and Tain & Easter Ross at the end of the last LEADER Programme. Additionally, all Community Councils in IMFN were given the opportunity to put forward someone from their area that was interested/involved in community development. Initial membership of the Group is shown below:

Steering Group Member	Organisation	Public/Private
Di Agnew	Ward Manager (Dingwall and Seaforth & Black Isle)	Public
Helen Ross	Ward Manager (Tain and Easter Ross & Cromarty Firth)	Public
Jennifer Barclay	Elected Member (Black Isle)	Public
Mike Finlayson	Elected Member (Cromarty Firth)	Public
Isobel McCallum	Elected Member (Black Isle)	Public
Alister Mackinnon	Elected Member (Dingwall and Seaforth)	Public
Angela MacLean	Elected Member (Dingwall and Seaforth)	Public
Martin Rattray	Elected Member (Cromarty Firth)	Public
Fiona Robertson	Elected Member (Tain and Easter Ross)	Public
Carolyn Wilson	Elected Member (Cromarty Firth)	Public
Tom Davis	Previous LAP Member - Muir of Ord	Private
Rory Bews	Previous LAP Member -	Private
John McHardy	Previous LAP Member - Evanton Trust	Private
George Muirden	Previous LAP Member – Dingwall	Private
Robert James	Previous LAP Member – Balintore Residents Group	Private
Jon Palmer	Cromarty CC Nominee	Private
Helen Campbell	Previous LAP Member & Nigg/Shandwick CC Nominee	Public
Leslie Logan	Kiltearn CC Nominee	Public
Tina McCaffrey	Invergordon CC Nominee	Public
Mary MacDonald (Chair)	Alness CC Nominee & Alness CAB	Public
Bill Robins	Ardross CC	Public
Janette Douglas	Highlife Highland	Public
Sophie Mitchell	Highlife Highland	Public
Fiona Richardson	Highlife Highland	Public

Membership of the Group was discussed at the first Steering meeting on 29 June 2015 and it was agreed that this should be expanded to provide a more geographic representation from the Black Isle and Tain areas, and young people. This led to additional membership as shown below:

Val Cameron	Ross-shire Voluntary Action	Private
Stuart Wells	Fling Film Festival – Tain	Private
Roy Sinclair	Black Isle Partnership	Private
Iain McCallum	Ferintosh Community Council	Public
Ana MacPherson	Ross-shire Youth Forum	Private

Jodie Riddler	Ross-shire Youth Forum	Private

Following the first Steering Group meeting, two members resigned:

Bill Robins	Ardross CC	Public
Helen Campbell	Previous LAP Member & Nigg/Shandwick CC Nominee	t.b.c.

Section 6: LAP Formation

The IMFN LAP will have responsibility for making decisions about the allocation of LEADER funding to local projects, in line with their Job Description (Appendix 6), and a set of Operating Guidelines.

Skills, Knowledge and Experience Requirements

The collective skills, knowledge and experience required on the IMFN LAP to provide informed assessment of applications, and give appropriate guidance and support to applicants is shown on the table on the next page.

Having the right blend of skills, knowledge and experience will enable effective prioritisation of projects and allocations of grant funding, thereby maximising outputs from delivery of the LAAP and consequently, community benefits.

Skills, Knowledge and Experience requirements for the IMFN LAP were developed by the Steering Group based on their prioritisation of themes, outcomes and project priorities. Each requirement was reviewed to establish whether this was essential or desirable. Once formed, responsibility for reviewing these and addressing any gaps in membership is the responsibility of the IMFN LAP.

LAP Formation – Process

In line with the agreed Highland process for forming the IMFN LAP, members of the Steering Group wishing to put themselves forward to sit on the LAP were asked to complete a Skills Checklist, by way of application.

By the agreed date of 16 October, 2015, only five members of the Steering Group had put themselves forward to sit on the IMFN LAP. Following consultation with the Ward Managers and the Chair of the Strategic LAG, it was agreed that the number putting themselves forward was too small to provide a representative group for the area and that an open recruitment process following the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies in Scotland, would be followed. The five members of the Steering Group who had previously put themselves forward to sit on the LAP were advised that they would need to submit an application under the new process.

An advert was placed in the Ross-shire Journal and on the Highland LEADER website on 30 October 2015, seeking three members from each of the four wards in IMFN. A copy of the advert can be found in Appendix 7. An advance copy of the advert was also circulated via the mailing lists of Ross-shire Voluntary Action.

Applicants were asked to complete an application which comprised a Skills Checklist and questions regarding their skills, experience and why they were interested in sitting on the LAP.

Additionally, Ward Managers were also asked to identify one elected member from each ward to sit on the LAP. It was agreed that Helen Ross would sit on the LAP in an advisory capacity to represent the two Ward Managers in the area.

By the closing date, 17 applications were received and four elected members had put themselves forward to sit on the LAP.

Of the 17 applications, five were from youth members – one from Dingwall and four from Cromarty Firth.

Of the remaining 12 applications, there were four each from Black Isle and Cromarty Firth and two

each from Dingwall and Tain and Easter Ross. A number of applicants had an interest in the wider Inner Moray Firth area, or beyond in relation to their work, and collectively there was a good balance of gender, skills and experience. This is summarized in the table on the next page.

Two members of the Strategic LAG (Jon Hollingdale and Sharon Mackay, as deputy for Graham Ambrose) formed a review panel. They were satisfied that there was a good overall representation from the area, a good balance of skills and experience and that all applicants should be invited to join the LAP. The LAP would then be able to determine for itself, whether any additional representation would be required.

Skills, Knowledge and Experience Required and Number of Members Possessing

Essential	No. of members	Desirable	No. of members
Healthcare	0	Farming/Crofting	3
Socialcare	4	Tourism	2
Youth	8	Leisure	3
Older People	4	Transport	3
People with disabilities	2	Food/drink	4
Equalities	4	Construction/ Renovation	3
Voluntary sector	8	Energy Conservation	2
Community representative	7	Renewables/Recycling	2
Partnership & networking	6	Pathways/cycleways	2
Community development	5	Wildlife & ecology	2
Funding	5	Biodiversity	0
Business start up/ development/support	7	Natural heritage	1
Social enterprise	3	Cultural heritage	3
Financial management	5	Conservation	2
Marketing & promotion	2	Community ownership	2
Training/skills development/mentoring	5	Website development	1
Communications	2	Sales	2
Project assessment	6	Employment Law	2
Project management	5	Education	6
Project monitoring/evaluation	6		

The key gaps identified were healthcare, biodiversity and representatives from the 18-29 and 30-44 year age groups. Given the size of the LAP, LAP members have agreed that additional membership will not be pro-actively sought at this stage, but the position will be monitored.

The LAP has the option to co-opt membership with skills in healthcare or biodiversity if this is required to inform decisions on specific projects.

IMFN LAP Membership

Name	Public/ Private	Voting?	Representing
Jennifer Barclay	Public	Voting	Elected Member, Black Isle
Helen Barton	Private	Voting	
Tom Davis	Private	Voting	
Val Cameron	Private	Voting	
Sheila Fletcher	Private	Voting	
Alan Hasson	Private	Voting	Dingwall Youth Forum
Robert James	Private	Voting	Balintore & District Residents Group
Elizabeth Lochhead	Private	Voting	
Sarah Mackay	Private	Voting	Youth Member
Angela Maclean	Public	Voting	Elected Member, Dingwall & Seaforth
Iain McCallum	Public	Voting	Ferrintosh Community Council
John McHardy	Private	Voting	
Ana MacPherson	Private	Voting	Youth Member
Jillian Munro	Private	Voting	
Jon Palmer	Private	Voting	Cromarty CC Nominee
Franca Reid	Private	Voting	
Alasdair Rhind	Public	Voting	Elected Member, Tain and Easter Ross
Jodi Riddler	Private	Voting	Youth Member
Gordon Robertson	Private	Voting	
Hannah Ross	Private	Voting	Youth Member
Helen Ross	Public	Advisory	Ward Manager, Cromarty Firth and Tain & Easter Ross
Carolyn Wilson	Public	Voting	Elected Member, Cromarty Firth

At the inaugural meeting of the IMFN LEADER LAP on 9 December 2015, John McHardy was elected Chair and Elizabeth Lochhead was appointed Vice Chair.

At the LAP meeting on 16 March 2016, John stepped down as Chair, following Scottish Government guidance that LAG decision making groups should not be chaired by employees of the Accountable Body. John was replaced by Tom Davis.

Operating Guidelines
The IMFN LAP has agreed to adopt the Highland LEADER (2014-2020) Programme Operating Guidelines (a copy is attached copy as an Appendix 7), subject to the following addition to Section 6.1:

The IMFN LAP will meet at least four times a year. A Pre-LAP meeting will be held prior to each LAP meeting to accommodate the requirements of some Youth LAP members. Youth LAP members may attend the Pre-LAP meeting, the LAP meeting, or both. If a Youth LAP member or their deputy does not attend either the Pre LAP meeting or the LAP meeting for three consecutive meeting cycles, the presumption is that membership will be terminated at the discretion of the Chair.
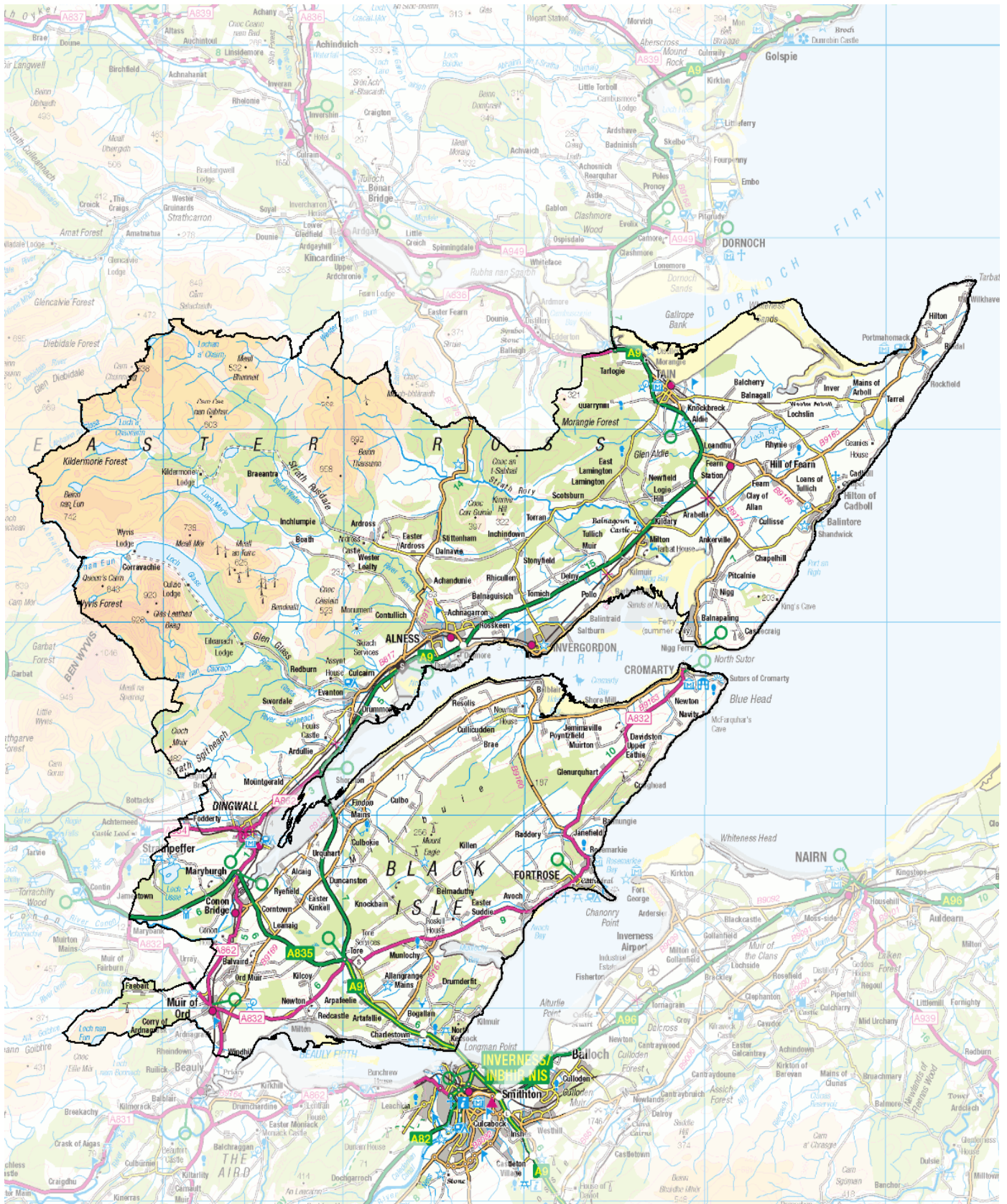
Appendices

1. **Area Overview and Demographic Data**
2. **Community Consultation – SWOT Analysis**
3. **Key Priorities**
4. **Financial Strategy**
5. **Eligible Activities**
6. **LAP Member Job Description**
7. **LAP Member Job Advertisement**
8. **Operating Guidelines**

Area Overview
Inner Moray Firth North

Demographic Data*

Physical Features

IMFN includes the areas covered by Cromarty Firth, Dingwall & Seaforth, Tain & Easter Ross and the Black Isle. The area as a whole contains a mixture of good agricultural land, forestry, extensive coastline and numerous town and village settlements. The area encompasses a North Sea shoreline, together with the Cromarty, Dornoch, Beauly and Moray firths and includes the deep water port of Invergordon.

The market town of Dingwall sits at the head of the Cromarty Firth and its conservation area includes many of the area's historic buildings. Muir of Ord has a substantial industrial estate and is the venue for the Black Isle Farmers Society Show.

Tain and Easter Ross contains a mixture of good agricultural land with small town and village settlements.

The Black Isle contains the historic towns of Cromarty, Fortrose and Rosemarkie; together with a hinterland that includes sites with important wildlife and other conservation and historical interests
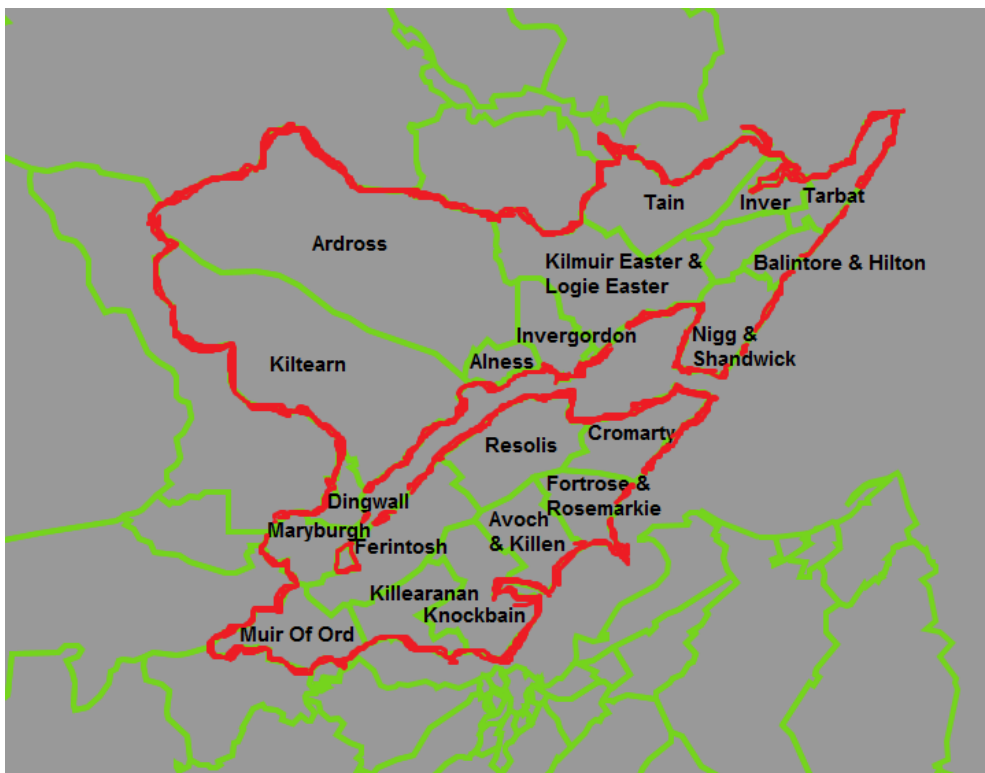
Settlement Pattern

Cromarty Firth is relatively compact in Highland terms, containing a mixture of small towns, with Alness, Invergordon and Evanton being the main centres of population.

Dingwall, is an accessible town at the western edge of the Cromarty Firth, with a drive time of less than 30 minutes to Inverness. There are a number of small but expanding village settlements around the town in the Conon valley.

Tain and Easter Ross contains a mixture of small towns, with the main centres of population being Tain, Edderton, Fearn, Portmahomack, Inver, Milton and Kildary, and the seaboard villages of Shandwick, Balintore and Hilton.

Note: All figures in this section are based on 2011 Census, unless specified otherwise.

In the Black Isle over 50% of the local population live in the village settlements of Fortrose and Rosemarkie, Cromarty, Avoch, North Kessock, and Culbokie, with Fortrose, Rosemarkie and Cromarty providing the main service centres. There is also a large number of small settlements and individual housing in the countryside.

Demographic Profile

IMFN has a population of 44,749 which has risen from 40,833 in 2001. This is an increase of 9.6% compared to the population increase in Highland of 11.1%.

48.9 % of the population in IMFN are over the age of 45 years. 32.6% of the population are aged between 16 and 44 years. This compares to Highland figures of 48.5% over 45 years and 33.7% aged 16-44 years.

In 2001, 20.6% (8412) of the population were aged 15 years or younger. In 2011, 16-29 year olds made up 14.8% (6623) of the population. Whilst these figures are not directly comparable (the census categories span 16 and 14 years respectively, and not all of the people in the 15 years or younger age group in 2001 will have reached the 16-29 year old group by 2011) they do suggest a trend of outward migration of young people over the ten year period, which is consistent with the increasing percentages of older people during the same time period.

Generally the population in IMFN is ageing: in 2001, 43.4% of the population were over 45 years; by 2011 this had risen to 48.9%. There is a similar trend across Highland but with a slightly higher percentage in the older age group; in 2001, 44% of the population was over 45 years and in 2011 this had risen to 51%. Taking account of the overall population growth, the Inner Moray Firth has shown an increase in the population of those aged over 45, of 4,175 over the ten year period – a 23.6% increase, which compares favourably with the Highland average increase of 28.8%. Within IMFN, this increase varies from 27.3% in Black Isle, to just 18.6% in Tain and Easter Ross.

There are three areas in the IMFN that are ranked in the 15% most deprived areas in Scotland; there are 12 areas in the 15% most deprived areas of Highland (see Local Economy section for more detail).

Population

Age Distribution
At just over the Highland average (48.5%), 48.9% of the population is aged over 45. This is higher than the Scotland average of 44.3%.

The percentage of young people aged 0 – 15 years, at 18.5% is higher than both the Highlands average of 17.8% and Scotland average of 17.3%.

The percentage of the population aged 16 to 29, at 14.8% is just lower than the Highlands average of 15% and significantly below the Scotland average of 18.5%.

In the 30 - 44 age group, the percentage of people in IMFN, at 17.7% is below both the Highland average of 18.7% and the Scotland average of 20%.

Percentage of Population by Age
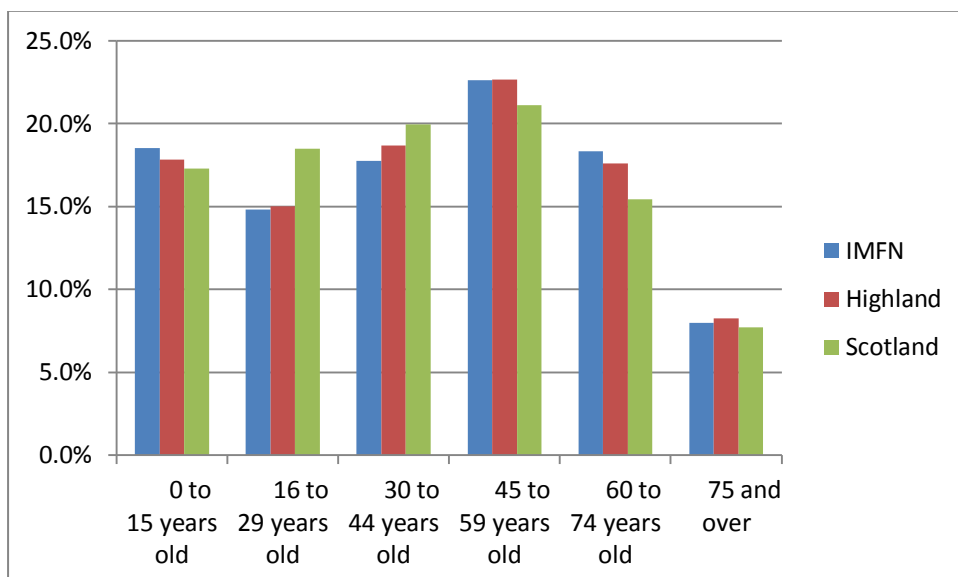
Ethnicity

	IMFN	Highland	Scotland
White - Scottish	82.3%	79.9%	84.0%
White - Other British	13.2%	14.7%	7.9%
White - Irish	0.6%	0.6%	1.0%
White - Polish	1.4%	1.5%	1.2%
White - Other	1.3%	1.9%	1.9%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	0.6%	0.8%	2.7%
Other ethnic groups	0.6%	0.7%	1.4%

98.8% of the Inner Moray Firth population are White, with 1.4% White Polish and 0.6% White Irish. 0.6% of the population are Asian, and 0.6% are Other ethnic groups.

There is a lower percentage of White-Other groups living in IMFN (1.3%) than in Highland and

Scotland (both 1.9%).
Health

83.4% of the population in IMFN rate their health as good or very good. This is comparable to the figures in Highland (84%) and Scotland (82.3%).
18.8% have a long-term health condition that limits their day to day activities.
9.2% of the population provide some unpaid care each week, with 2.4% providing 50 or more hours each week. Similar figures can be seen in Highland and Scotland.

Local Economy

There are three Data Zones* in IMFN with SIMD# ranks in Scotland and 12 with SIMD ranks in Highland (i.e. in the 15% most deprived areas of Scotland or Highland)

| Data Zones in the LAP Area with Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks in Scotland and Highland			
Zones in 15% most deprived shaded			
Data Zone	Data Zone Name	Overall SIMD 2012 Rank in Scotland	Overall SIMD 2012 Rank in Highland
S01003924	Invergordon Strath Avenue	375	5
S01003926	Alness Kirkside	688	10
S01003937	Seaboard South	797	12
S01003907	Dingwall Central	867	14
S01003922	Alness Teaninich	970	17
S01003928	Alness Firhill	1,133	21
S01003935	Milton & Kildary	1,219	22
S01003884	Conon North	1,478	28
S01003923	Invergordon Castle Avenue	1,486	30
S01003931	Alness Obsdale	1,517	31
S01003919	Invergordon Central	1,831	40
S01003940	Tain South Rural	1,854	42
S01003910	Dingwall West	2,137	52
S01003867	Muir of Ord South East	2,219	56
S01003930	Alness Coulhill	2,334	58
S01003921	Alness Dalmore	2,371	62
S01003943	Tain Academy	2,375	64
S01003942	Tain South East	2,446	67
S01003929	Alness Shillinghill	2,630	83
S01003920	Invergordon Cromlet	2,682	85
S01003904	Dingwall South East	2,851	98
S01003925	Invergordon Hospital	2,971	102
S01003908	Dingwall Academy	2,973	103
S01003934	Nigg & Fearn	3,016	107
S01003906	Dingwall South West	3,250	122

S01003941	Tain East Rural	3,377	132
S01003939	Seaboard North	3,539	143
S01003917	Cromarty	3,707	159
S01003944	Tain Central West	3,710	160
S01003927	Ferindonald	3,825	171
S01003918	Evanton	3,908	178
S01003938	Ardross	3,910	179
S01003936	Scotsburn & Barbaraville	3,932	182
S01003947	Portmahomack	3,967	183
S01003901	Rosemarkie	4,146	188
S01003872	Muir of Ord Rural	4,148	189
S01003932	Invergordon Rural	4,232	199
S01003880	Avoch	4,235	200
S01003889	Conon Bridge	4,271	206
S01003912	Dingwall Tulloch	4,319	208
S01003913	Dingwall Rural	4,357	212
S01003903	Killen & Raddery	4,367	213
S01003870	Muir of Ord North West	4,388	216
S01003916	Balblair	4,486	229
S01003864	North Kessock	4,538	238
S01003905	Culbokie	4,731	243
S01003877	Conon Rural	4,754	244
S01003876	Tore & Kinkell	4,819	249
S01003881	Munlochy	4,883	254
S01003895	Maryburgh North West	5,044	261
S01003879	Conon South	5,075	262
S01003868	Black Isle South	5,080	263
S01003897	Fortrose East	5,112	265
S01003893	Fortrose West	5,283	268
S01003909	Dingwall North	5,777	280
S01003945	Tain North West	5,822	281

Data zones are areas that have populations of between 500 and 1,000 household residents. Where possible, they have been made to respect physical boundaries and natural communities. As far as possible they contain households with similar social characteristics.

 # SIMD = Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation

Economic Activity
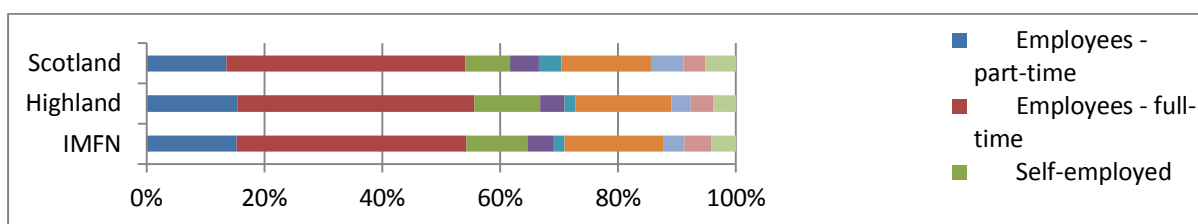
In 2011, 69.7% of the population aged 16 – 74 were economically active, with 4.2% unemployed. This is slightly lower than the Highland average of 71.5%. The percentage of unemployed people in this age range is higher than the Highland average of 4.0%, but lower than the Scotland average of 4.77%. Of those people who are unemployed, In IMFN, 6% have never worked. This contrasts favourably with the Highland average of 9.3% and the Scotland average of 13.9%.
Self-employment at 10.2% is lower than the Highland average of 11%, but both are significantly higher than the Scotland average of just 7.5%.

Benefits

2.6% of the working age population claimed job seekers allowance* in the year November 2012- October 2013. This is the same as the Highland average and lower than the Scottish average of 4%.
There can be seasonal changes to this figure, as many people work in seasonal jobs in Highland.
The 2012/2013 figure has been used as this is the 12 months running up to the introduction of Universal Credit. It can be difficult to make comparisons using Universal Credit as this has not been introduced nationally and it is not clear what benefits are being claimed in the Universal Credit payment.
* Not all unemployed people claim job seekers allowance

Unemployment		IMFN	Highland	Scotland
% Unemployed People in 16 - 74 Year Age Group		4.2%	4.0%	4.77%
Persons aged 16 - 74 who are unemployed	Aged 16 to 24	26.9%	28.5%	30.2%
	Aged 25 to 49	45.4%	48.6%	51.4%
	Aged 50 to 74	27.8%	22.9%	18.4%

Employment

Employment by Industry, 2011
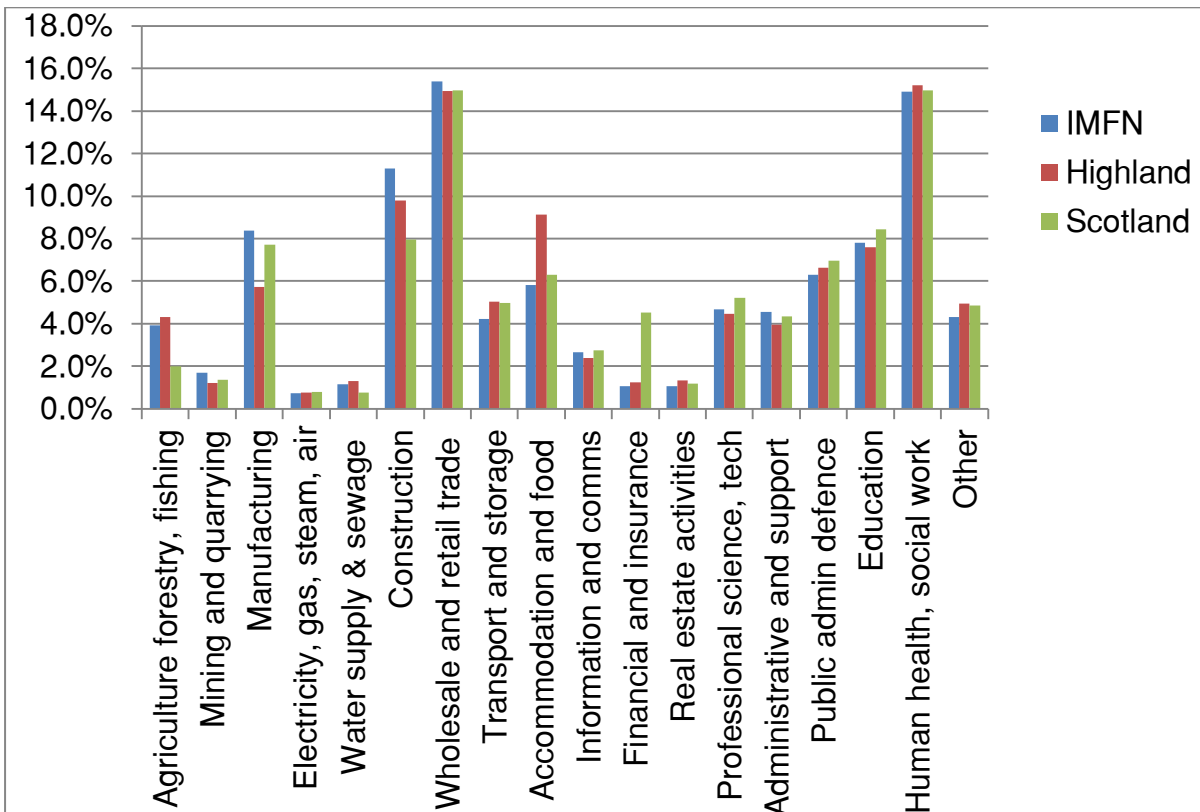
The above graph shows those who are in employment, the percentage employed in each industry/sector.

Looking at employment by industry, IMFN has a higher percentage of people working in manufacturing, construction and the wholesale and retail trade, and a lower percentage of people working in transport and storage, accommodation and food services, and public administration and defence, than Highland or Scotland.

Inner Moray Firth has 5.8% of the population working in accommodation and food services, compared to the Highland average of 9.1%, which implies there are fewer people working in the tourist industry; this may be explained by the proximity of Inverness which acts as a draw for tourists, providing a good variety of restaurants and accommodation from which tourists can make day trips to the IMFN.

In 2011, 16.3% of people in employment in IMFN, worked 49 hours or more a week, which is higher than the Highland average of 15.8% and the Scotland average of 11.7%.

Education

	IMFN	Highland	Scotland
No qualifications	26.9%	25.5%	26.8%
Level 1*	25.5%	24.5%	23.1%
Level 2**	14.1%	14.4%	14.3%
Level 3***	8.9%	9.2%	9.7%
Level 4 and above ****	24.6%	26.4%	26.1%

26.9% of people in Inner Moray Firth North have no qualifications, compared to 25.5% in Highland and 26.8% in Scotland.

A lower percentage hold Level 4 or above qualifications (24.6%) than in Highland (26.4%) and Scotland (26.1%).

*O Grade, Standard Grade, Access 3 Cluster, Intermediate 1 or 2, GCSE, CSE, Senior Certification or equivalent, G SVQ Foundation or Intermediate, SVQ level 1 or 2, SCOTVEC Module, City and Guilds Craft or equivalent; Other school qualifications not already mentioned (including foreign qualifications)
**SCE Higher Grade, Higher, Advanced Higher, CSYS, A Level, AS Level, Advanced Senior Certificate or equivalent, GSVQ Advanced, SVQ Level 3, ONC, OND, SCOTVEC National Diploma, City and Guilds Advanced Craft or equivalent
***HNC, HND, SVQ Level 4 or equivalent; Other post-school but pre-Higher Education qualifications not already mentioned (including foreign qualifications)
****Degree, Postgraduate qualifications, Masters, PhD, SVQ Level 5 or equivalent, Professional qualifications (for example, teaching, nursing, accountancy), other Higher Educations qualifications not already mentioned (including foreign qualifications)

Leaver Destinations (based on Highland Council SLDR 2012/13 (Initial Destination Percentages)

	Alness Academy	Dingwall Academy	Fortrose Academy	Invergordon Academy	Tain Royal Academy	IMFN	Highland
Higher Education	19.50%	35.70%	41.90%	24.70%	25.70%	32.00%	33.70%
Further Education	26.00%	14.60%	19.40%	35.80%	21.40%	21.20%	23.70%
Training	3.90%	0.50%	1.60%	1.20%	4.30%	1.81%	1.90%
Employment	33.80%	39.70%	26.40%	27.20%	37.10%	33.65%	31.20%
Voluntary Work	0.00%	0.00%	3.10%	0.00%	0.00%	0.72%	0.70%
Activity Agreements	1.30%	1.00%	0.00%	2.50%	0.00%	0.90%	1.90%
Unemployed Seeking work	14.30%	7.50%	4.70%	8.60%	8.60%	8.09%	5.60%
Unemployed Not Seeking work	1.30%	1.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.90%	0.90%	0.80%

The majority of school leavers in 2014 carried on to further or higher education in Inner Moray Firth North, although the percentages going on to further and higher education were both slightly lower than for Highland as a whole.

A slightly higher percentage of school leavers went on to employment in the area, than in Highland as a whole.

There are wide variations in leaver destinations between the schools in the area.

SWOT Analysis – Inner Moray Firth North Appendix 2

This SWOT Analysis was undertaken during community meetings in 2014 and refined following feedback from on line questionnaires.

Strengths

- There is a strong and active volunteer pool involved in many initiatives across the area, with a wide range of diverse skills amongst the various indigenous communities as well as the newer ones.

- High levels of volunteering translate into a range of diverse and enthusiastic community organisations.

- The Global Energy Group with its dry dock at Nigg and Fabrication and Marine facilities at neighbouring Invergordon, is a major private sector employer; both sites have shown growth in recent years. There is also a prominent renewable energy industry across the area. The area, therefore, has a significantly higher proportion of workers in manufacturing and construction than other areas in Highland.

- Communities located in Inner Moray Firth lie within the Inverness 'travel to work' area, benefiting from the growth of Inverness and employment opportunities there. Employment in the public sector is higher than the Highland average.

- IMFN is a fertile area with top grade soil and a strong tradition of agricultural industry. There are small, but locally important, fishing businesses. The area also benefits from a number of proactive social enterprises and there is a strong interest in local produce in terms of food and crafts and a growing arts community.

- The area boasts a number of world renowned distilleries, and a number of small local breweries are starting to develop excellent reputations across the UK.

- Marine tourism attracts visitors to the area and is accessible from on shore view points and regular leisure boat trips from Cromarty and Avoch.

- People are generally positive and rate their quality of life as high in IMFN. There are many strong communities, people feel secure and the area is regarded as an attractive place to live and work.

- Many people feel well served by transport networks, with easy access to the A9 and for many, the North Highland rail line. The area also benefits from a half-hourly summer ferry service linking Cromarty and Nigg. (Note: Ferry service recently withdrawn due to lack of a mooring berth in Cromarty)

- The area benefits from several vibrant and attractive towns, good schools, a wide range of leisure facilities and good health and care facilities. Services for older people are generally rated highly. (Note: the impact of recent BI Care Home closure)

- There are many popular golf courses, and walking and cycling routes which provide

recreation for locals and tourists alike.

➤ The IMFN is an area of considerable natural beauty with a varied landscape including farmland, coastline and woodland. There is a range of more formal attractions including conservation areas, sites of scientific interest, a wildlife reserve and view-points valued by local people.

➤ It boasts an interesting historical narrative, for example, the Pictish stones, the route to John O'Groats and the whisky trail, the Viking influence (THING sites) in Dingwall as well as many World War One and Two links.

➤ The area benefits from a well-regarded arts presence.

Weaknesses

➤ There is a concern that those engaged in volunteering and civic life risk 'burn out'. There are concerns about the perceived lack of volunteering amongst the 'middle aged' and recognition that more young people need to be engaged. Lower levels of volunteering were perceived around Dingwall, Seaforth and the Black Isle, than in other parts of the IMFN.

➤ Some people also feel that the voluntary sector could be less fragmented and stronger on collaboration. What appears to be lacking, based upon the consultation programme, is a body of trusts with sustainable income flows to anchor community activity.

➤ There is perhaps a lack of awareness amongst residents of the extent of the voluntary and community sector.

➤ There are concerns about the number of young people who find the transition to independent living difficult and require substantial support before being ready to access training opportunities.

➤ The prevalence of short term contracts at the Nigg/ Invergordon facilities contributes to economic uncertainty while the variance in income levels leads to considerable financial inequality.

➤ There is a limited supply of affordable housing in some parts of the area and a pronounced lack of short term housing for workers. This is compounded by a growing proportion of second homes in some areas, which has an adverse impact on house prices for locals.

➤ Economic activity is undermined by the seasonality of the tourism industry and the range and quality of tourist accommodation is limited, particularly in terms of quality hotels and B&B accommodation. Car parking is limited at some attractions.

➤ A shortage of training and skills opportunities leads to a loss of the younger people needed to renew community structures.

➤ Weaknesses were also identified in terms of limited provision of childcare and retail facilities in some areas.

➢ There is also a perception that area marketing could be better.

➢ The IMFN includes twelve areas (data zones) which are recognised as areas of multiple deprivation, being in the 15% poorest in Highland. Of these, three are in the 15% poorest in Scotland. These areas include parts of Invergordon, Alness and Seaboard.

➢ Quality of life is affected by limited public transport between local towns and more remote communities in the area and it is hard for people (young people without cars especially) to access job opportunities.

➢ Many areas are served by narrow linking roads which have many maintenance problems.

➢ Broadband and mobile access is also very 'patchy' resulting in a 'digital divide' between the wealthier and less well-off communities.

➢ More could be done to improve car parking and cycling opportunities.

➢ There is also a limited supply of training and skills development opportunities for young people which are needed to stabilise populations in some communities. This is exacerbated by what is perceived to be limited curriculum development within the North Highland College.

➢ Qualification levels amongst the population are below the Highland and Scottish averages (with the exception of the Black Isle where they are significantly higher than both).

➢ In some parts of the area, there is an absence of a well-maintained community premises.

➢ It was seen as a weakness that passengers of cruise ships arriving in Invergordon often leave the area to visit the more iconic attractions of the Inverness area. The IMFN area does not capitalise on this market as it potentially could.

Opportunities
➢ There is an opportunity to consider and provide support for new, more co-ordinated and sustainable community structures which provide better collaboration within and between the community, voluntary and private sectors; social media was cited as a particular example of how the sectors might collaborate to enhance community identity and participation and promote activities.

➢ More also needs to be done to work with new incomer communities and young people to engage them in community activities or work with them to develop new ones.

➢ There is scope to improve local employment opportunities. This can be brought about by working more effectively with newer industrial sectors such as the renewable energy sector to develop apprenticeships for young people.

➢ There are opportunities to support employability through development of social enterprise and small businesses which can help provide more opportunities of relevance to young people. In particular, the fertile nature of land and increasing interest in local food production, creates opportunities.

➢ There is considerable scope to improve the economic benefit of tourism across the area, through greater local co-ordination of tourism activity and attractions, and improved marketing and social media activity in support of the sector, possibly through establishment of a tourism group.

➢ There is scope for increased quality of hotel provision and car parking.

➢ There is also potential to develop links to the large cruise liner industry through the port at Invergordon, where a more co-ordinated approach, including a more efficient, online booking system, would benefit local tourism projects and businesses from cruise ships by directing tourists to attractions within the IMFN.

➢ Over a quarter of land on the Black Isle is held by a single agency (the Forestry Commission) and there is scope to explore community ownership models and develop opportunities for local or visitor enjoyment. (add the word for

➢ There are also opportunities to work with the North Highland College to better align its courses with the needs of existing and new employers in the IMFN

➢ More focused projects would help reduce seasonality of tourism; possible projects might include:
  ▪ A Black Isle Regatta,
  ▪ Groam House Museum expansion,
  ▪ Heritage developments led by the Cromarty Courthouse Trust,
  ▪ Development of the Neil Gunn Memorial,
  ▪ Improved links between the RSPB centre and other sites or attractions,
  ▪ Increased walking routes linked to attractions,
  ▪ Cycle routes,
  ▪ Opportunities to increase visitor spend from those visiting Dingwall to attend football games at Ross County FC,
  ▪ Pictish Heritage Trail.

➢ There is scope to develop the existing walk and cycle path network, building on the network of North Sea Cycle Routes and linking this more effectively to existing attractions/between communities. Better links, for example from the Seaboard Villages to Alness and on to towns outside the area such as Ullapool, could be developed.

➢ Quality of life could be enhanced by improving and encouraging access to existing leisure and recreation facilities.

➢ Community ownership and social enterprise could address service gaps such as community transport services in under-served communities.

➢ The value of leisure and recreation as a means of countering isolation, maintaining health and wellbeing and enhancing social capital is recognised and there is scope to

promote more inter-generational projects across the community and voluntary sectors.

➢ The Feis Rois charity – which delivers tuition and events around Gaelic music skills for younger people - provides a means and opportunity to develop a new Gaelic influence arts hub in Dingwall and further develop festivals and events in the town and elsewhere in the area.

➢ An awareness-raising initiative aimed at alerting residents to the scale and significance of the area's cultural heritage and associated activities could result in higher numbers of volunteers coming forward and greater community involvement in the management and ownership of historical heritage.

➢ Opportunities also exist to promote wildlife and marine tourism; - nesting terns, ospreys, otters, red kites, seals and dolphins.

➢ There is also scope for a Pan-Highland, Thomas Telford Trail to promote the engineer's body of work incorporating links with IMFN.

➢ There are also opportunities to better develop the area's naval history- and the coastal fishing heritage of the Black Isle.

➢ More could be done to develop, document and promote wartime remains across the area as well as to develop the THING site in Dingwall (an archaeological site based around a Viking assembly).

➢ There is considerable scope for further development and promotion of the historical and cultural heritage of a number of towns in the area.

Threats

➢ There are threats to community structures. Volunteer fatigue is a continuing risk and there is a lack of succession planning within organisations. This will be exacerbated by funding cuts to the voluntary sector and the cutting of indirect support e.g. community development officers.

➢ Population loss, particularly of young people, has affected the area for a number of years and continues to be a threat.

➢ The effects of public sector cuts will have a major impact in terms of employment and local spending. The current and future cuts to local government services pose a risk across the area, especially to some communities which have a high number of employees engaged in public sector employment and Dingwall, which is home to several public sector functions.

➢ The absence of affordable housing and good quality training and employment opportunities affect the viability of some communities. The presence of absentee landlords in some areas inhibits the potential for economic development.

➢ Some businesses tend to recruit from outwith the area because of skill shortages and low qualification levels in the local workforce.

- ➢ Inverness is seen to be a threat in terms of attracting and retaining tourist visitors to the Highlands.

- ➢ Despite recent falls, fuel and utility costs threaten communities by increasing fuel poverty and the costs of doing business.

- ➢ There is a continued decline in smaller scale industries such as crofting.

- ➢ Poor digital and telephone connectivity impacts quality of life as well as economic growth.

- ➢ Lack of capacity in childcare and care services for the elderly are seen as a risk in some parts of the area.

- ➢ It was identified that there is a risk of heritage not being preserved – both in the physical sense due to funding and other constraints, but also in terms of an ageing population and knowledge passing from living memory.

- ➢ Some coastal communities are also vulnerable to flooding. Climate change is of concern.

Key Priorities for Inner Moray Firth North

During June 2014, the Highland LEADER team engaged consultants Blake Stevenson to facilitate a series of public meetings across Highland. These sessions were aimed at identifying local opportunities for funding in the Highland LEADER 2014 – 2020 Programme. Meetings for IMFN communities were held in Tain (23/06/2014), Alness (24/06/2014), Dingwall (24/06/2014) and Fortrose (25/06/2014).

Further consultation was undertaken in the form of an online questionnaire in September 2014.

Combined output from the meetings and from respondents from this area to the surveys, is attached in the form of a SWOT analysis as Appendix 2.

A review of the SWOT analysis, supported by demographic data, has identified four key challenges for IMFN:

Lack of opportunities for young people

The SWOT analysis highlighted that there is generally a lack of opportunities for young people in the area, with a lack of skills development opportunities, poor amenities in some places and a lack of affordable housing.

Looking at the demographic information, around 21% of young people left the area between 2001 and 2011 but this varies widely between areas: there was a 33.3% reduction in Black Isle but only 11% in Tain and Easter Ross.
It was suggested that there could be an opportunity to work with the North Highland College to develop more further education courses in the IMFN area.

Education and employment

Qualification levels are generally lower in this area than in Highland and Scotland (apart from the Black Isle) and there is a lack of skills development opportunities.

Employment can be seasonal and short term. A higher percentage of people in IMFN work in manufacturing, construction and the wholesale and retail trade than in Highland and Scotland.

Encouraging social enterprises and small businesses may support more sustainable employment opportunities in these areas

Tourism

It was highlighted that there are many opportunities for attracting tourists, such as areas of natural beauty and historical significance as well as distilleries and breweries.

There is the opportunity to capitalise on the tourists that already arrive in the area by cruise ship in Invergordon - these tourists should be encouraged to spend time in the area rather

than travelling directly to Inverness.

Community Development

Although there are strong communities in the area, it was suggested that community and voluntary groups could be better co-ordinated

Community facilities need to be improved, and there needs to be greater recruitment of younger volunteers

Financial Strategy Summary Paper for LAPs Appendix 4

Programme Finance

The Strategic LAG have agreed the following split of the Programme budget:

Administration/Animation	£2,201,347 (25%)
Co-operation between two or more LAG areas	£440,269 (5%)
Co-operation between two or more LAP areas in Highland	£440,269 (5%)
Rural Enterprise	£880,538 (10%)
Farm Diversification	£880,538 (10%)
Pan Highland – Strategic projects across all/most LAP areas in Highland	£500,000
Local Area Projects	£3,462,427
Total indicative allocation	**£8,805,388**

Intervention Rates

Programme/Highland wide intervention rates will be revisited for decision when further clarity is received over how state aid will impact intervention rates across the Programme.

Local Decision Making

The Strategic LAG has indicated that it would like the local areas to have as much local control over what they are funding as is possible within the parameters set out by the EU/Financial Regulations. As such, and providing it is detailed as part of the approved LAAP, LAPs should be able to decide the following locally:

- ➢ Local intervention (pending any limits set by the LAG during discussions over a Highland wide rate)
- ➢ Whether to issue "in principle" offers (for a maximum of three months)
- ➢ Whether to set a limit on maximum grant or project costs
- ➢ Whether to increase the Highland wide limit of a minimum of £5,000 project costs
- ➢ Setting of annual allocations within initial review period

Allocations to LAPs

The LAG agreed the following indicative allocations to LAPs using the methodology that the Scottish Government have adopted across Scotland for the 2014-2020 Programming Period:

ALLOCATIONS TO LAPS	
Caithness	**£497,080.51**
Sutherland	**£633,673.16**
IMF North	**£550,574.97**
Wester Ross	**£506,688.74**
Skye	**£313,745.13**
IMF South	**£412,683.91**
Lochaber	**£547,978.15**
Total	**£3,462,424.57**

Eligible Activities for Prioritised Outcomes (from LDS)

Outcome 1. Increased community ownership/control of assets and services/activities

Eligible Activities:
- all aspects of community ownership from feasibility through to acquisition
- support for future planning and developments to existing community owned and led services
- projects which increase community engagement with community development and planning
- projects that aim to put income earning opportunities within the hands of local communities

Initiatives under this outcome should take account of the potential for displacement and there should be engagement with the business sector to protect businesses that use the asset the community is acquiring. It should also be possible for business in a community be supported to work together and acquire an asset.

Outcome 2. People have better access to local services and activities

Eligible Activities:
- feasibility studies and development costs for new services/activities identified as a need within the community
- local solutions for community transport issues, including ways of integrating transport schemes
- feasibility and development of local internet/WiFi centres for use by residents and visitors
- wider initiatives to tackle increased broadband provision and access
- improved information-sharing locally including local website improvement
- feasibility and development of projects that address access to housing and improved access to job opportunities
- projects that promote inclusion and well-being
- health activities across age groups
- local solutions to address the needs of an ageing population
- services for vulnerable individuals and families including piloting initiatives
- services that tackle re-offending, youth disengagement and substance misuse
- community re-use and recycle IT scheme
- training for basic repairs and maintenance

Outcome 3. Increased employment opportunities locally through new business start-ups and existing business diversification/ development

Eligible Activities:
- feasibility and development of new and existing businesses in terms of capital and revenue
- support for social enterprises
- projects that promote partnership within and across sectors
- support for new businesses
- training and employability skills
- business infrastructure (e.g. business units, chilling facilities)
- support the introduction of more efficient processes including in the wider supply chain.

Outcome 4. Impact of funded projects can be better demonstrated leading to increased capacity to secure future funds

- capacity building around self-evaluation
- resource to support baseline evidence gathering; resource to support external evaluation for projects
- training in digital media evaluation techniques

Outcome 5. Increased partnership working between groups (within and across, including intergenerational partnerships)

Eligible Activities:
- funding for partnership events
- visits between partner area
- one-off facilitation for capacity building around new project ideas
- communication/information/networking tools
- preparatory costs for co-operation projects; development of networks at local and Highland wide level
- shared learning events; mentoring programmes.

Outcome 6. People feel better supported to undertake volunteering opportunities
- capacity building for volunteer managers
- support for new ways to engage younger volunteers
- communication and feedback tools for working with volunteers
- projects that provide volunteers with transferable skills
- provision of tools to help volunteers communicate and support each other
- projects which promote/value community based volunteering or combat volunteer fatigue

LAP Members Job Description

Members of LAPs will be required to deliver agreed outcomes of the Highland Local Development Strategy at local level to ensure that the Highland LEADER 20014 – 2020 Programme delivers on the commitments. Key Responsibilities will be to:

- Develop a Local Area Action Plan (LAAP) which contributes to the themes, outcomes and outputs required to deliver the Highland Local Development Strategy, with focus on local target groups and priorities
- Supported by reports from the Programme Administrative Team, Monitoring & Evaluation Committee and Equalities Review Group, monitor and review delivery of the LAAP
- Make decisions relating to applications for funding
- Identify specific projects to address any gaps in contribution to the themes, outputs and target groups set out in the LAAP
- Promote and reinforce the seven LEADER principles of: area-based local development strategies, bottom-up elaboration and implementation of strategies, Local public-private partnerships (Local Area Groups), integrated and multi-sectoral actions, innovation, co-operation and networking
- Promote and raise awareness and understanding of issues

Additionally, the LAP Chair will attend Strategic LAG meetings as an advisory representative of the LAP.

Person Specification

- Specific skills/knowledge/experience of at least one of the following sectors: agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism, education, small business/enterprise, natural/cultural heritage, community/voluntary, and/or
- Representative of youth organisations, organisations that provide services/support for the elderly or groups of people with protected characteristics
- Keen interest in rural regeneration in the Highlands and willingness to work in co-operation with other LAPs, FLAG, Enterprise Group and members of the Programme Administrative Team to deliver a successful Programme
- Capacity and time to undertake the role. The LAP will meet at least four times a year, in a central location: LAP members will be required to:
  - Read and review all material circulated prior to meetings, to enable be informed decisions to be made at the meetings
  - Attend all meetings, or where this is not possible, ensure that a named substitute attends (travel expenses can be reimbursed for private sector members)
  - Participate in electronic decision making or requests for comment between LAP meetings
  - Act as a two way communication channel between the LAP and local communities, to maximise engagement and interest in the Programme

Engage with individual projects which would benefit from the member's specific skills/ knowledge/experience.

Community Decision Makers Wanted

The EU funded Highland LEADER Programme provides grants for community development projects. In order to ensure local decision making, we are seeking individuals to sit on a Local Partnership which will be responsible for allocating £550,000 of funding across the IMFN over the next four years.

We are seeking at least three people from each of the following Council Ward areas: Tain and Easter Ross, Cromarty Firth, Dingwall and Seaforth, and Black Isle. Applicants should have experience of working in/with community or youth groups and/or business/industry.

The role will require a commitment to:
- actively participate in meetings (which will be approximately 2-3 hours per quarter and held in the area),
- review and make decisions on applications for LEADER funding,
- respond to ad hoc emails and requests for input/views on funding applications between meetings.

Training on assessing LEADER applications will be provided.

The posts are non- salaried, however travel expenses can be reimbursed.

If you would be interested in this role, please contact Joe MacMillan, LEADER Development Officer, Highland Council, on 01463 702439, or by e-mail at Joe.macmillan@highland.gov.uk for further information and an application pack.

The deadline for applications is **5pm on Friday 13th November 2015**

APPENDIX 7: HIGHLAND LEADER (2014-2020) PROGRAMME OPERATING GUIDELINES

1.   Name of Local Action Group
Highland LEADER Local Action Group (LAG)

2.   Objective
In line with the Highland LEADER Local Development Strategy, the Highland LEADER LAG will deliver the Highland LEADER Programme 2014 – 2020 Programme.

The Highland LEADER area will include all of the Highland Council area, except for the Settlement Development Area for Inverness (as given in the 2012 Inverness Local Plan) and the part of the Highland Council area within the Cairngorms National Park.

3.   Structure and Composition
The LEADER Programme will be delivered through the Highland LEADER LAG, which consists of a strategic LAG and a suite of seven LAPs (LAPs), a Fisheries Local Action Group (FLAG) and an Enterprise Group. LAPs will cover the following areas: Caithness, Sutherland, Wester Ross, Skye, Lochaber, IMFN and Inner Moray Firth South).

Two sub groups to the strategic LAG will also be established to advise on Monitoring & Evaluation (Monitor & Evaluation Committee – M&E), and Equalities (Equalities Reference Group - ERG).

4.   Governance

4.1   The Highland Community Planning Partnership (CPP)
The Highland LEADER Programme is a Highland Community Planning Partnership supported initiative which is central to the partners support for community development across the region and the place communities have in the delivery of the Highland Single Outcome Agreement 2013/14 – 2018/19.

The Board of the Highland Community Planning Partnership therefore have an active interest in the success of the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 and have agreed that while the delivery of the Local Development Strategy (LDS) will be overseen and managed by the Strategic LAG, the Board will receive an annual report on progress. The Board's operational involvement with the Programme will be via the Highland Council as the accountable body.

4.2   The Highland Council
The Highland Council, on behalf of the LEADER strategic LAG, has agreed to be the accountable body for the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020. In doing so the Council has accepted delegated responsibility for administering LEADER finances under the terms of a Service Level Agreement that will be entered into with the Scottish Government.

The Council has also accepted that in being the accountable body it will be responsible to the Strategic LAG (including the LAPs and the Fisheries and Enterprise Groups) for supporting the operation of the LEADER Programme and supporting the successful implementation of the Local Development Strategy

4.3   Memorandum of Understanding
In order that all involved in the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 are clear about their respective roles and responsibilities, it is proposed to prepare a Memorandum of Understanding

(MoU). This will build upon the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 Operating Guidelines and the positive and supportive working arrangements already established. The MoU will specifically address the relationships, roles and responsibilities between the:

- Council (as accountable body) and the Strategic LAG;
- Council/Strategic LAG and LAP's and Fisheries and Enterprise Groups

In addition, to aid understanding of the context within which the LEADER Programme operates, the MoU will set out the headline roles and responsibilities contained within the Scottish Government/accountable body Service Level Agreement.

The MoU will be subject to review during the 2014-2020 Programme period.

5.   Decision Making

5.1   Application Approval

Local decision-making on local projects based on a local development strategy is the core principle around which the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2010 will be based. This means essentially, decisions on pan Highland or strategic projects will be taken at the Strategic LAG and decisions on local projects will be taken by the respective LAP. This decision-making approach will be continued and complemented with the Enterprise Group making decisions on enterprise applications and the Fisheries Group making recommendations to Marine Scotland on fisheries applications.

Projects will be considered and assessed as part of a two phased approach, with the first phase being triggered by the submission of an Expression of Interest, allowing early consideration of project proposals by the strategic LAG, LAP's, Fisheries or Enterprise Groups. This will provide the opportunity to identify projects which meet the objectives of the local development strategy and to offer comments during the development of a project and before a formal application is completed and submitted for grant approval.

The Strategic LAG, each of the LAP's and the Enterprise Group will have authority to make grant award decisions on applications that come before them. As per Scottish Government guidance, the FLAG will make recommendations to Marine Scotland on grant award decisions.
Approval of Expressions of Interest and Applications will be assessed against agreed scoring templates

If for any reason any of the LAP's or the Fisheries or Enterprise Groups are unable to determine an request for funding, it will be referred to the Strategic LAG for a final decision.

If the LAP's, Fisheries or Enterprise Groups conclude that a specific project is required to deliver the Local Development Strategy, a partner organisation who is a legal entity, will be invited to develop a project proposal. Such a project will be considered in accordance with the established two phased decision-making process, but amended whereby the decision on grant award (or in the case of EMFF, the recommendation to Marine Scotland) is taken by the Strategic LAG. This division in decision making ensures that the project proposal receives the same level of scrutiny as any other project and cannot receive preferential consideration.

If the Strategic LAG is advocating that a strategic project is developed, a similar process will be followed but amended in that each of the LAP's will be asked to score the application. These scores will be presented to the Strategic LAG to inform their discussion – the final decision on grant award will be made by the strategic LAG. This will help ensure that any strategic project developed will receive local scrutiny and cannot receive preferential consideration.

If a grant award decision is taken by any of the LAP's or the Enterprise Group and the LEADER team

have concerns over the propriety of the decision reached, the grant award will not be acted upon and the matter referred to the Strategic LAG Chair to determine whether the decision taken should be reconsidered or referred to the Strategic LAG for determination. This will also apply to recommendations that the FLAG make to Marine Scotland for grant award decisions.

5.2 Appeals/Complaints
Procedures for appeals will follow national guidance issued by the Scottish Government.

Complaints will be dealt with through the Highland Council complaints process:
http://www.highland.gov.uk/info/670/consultations_complaints_and_compliments/368/make_a_complaint

6. Operational Management and Delivery

6.1 Strategic Local Action Group (Strategic LAG)
The Strategic LAG will be responsible for the overall management and strategic direction of the LDS. It will monitor progress in the delivery of the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 and either through direct action itself or through directing others ensure delivery of the LDS.

Membership of the Strategic LAG will reflect the aims of the LEADER Initiative regarding involvement of community representatives while achieving the necessary balance of statutory, private and community representation, i.e. 49% public maximum with the other 51% drawn from private/community representatives.

Initial formal voting members of the Strategic LAG (membership may change over life of the Programme) will be drawn from the following:
- National Farmers Union
- Tourism Sector
- Forestry Sector
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Crofters Federation
- Third Sector Interface
- Fisheries Local Action Group
- Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Scottish Natural Heritage
- University of Highlands and Islands
- The Highland Council
- NHS Highland

Initial advisory members of the Strategic LAG (membership may change over the life of the Programme) will be drawn from:
- Accountable Body Advisor
- Visit Scotland
- Forestry Commission
- Enterprise Group
- Representative from each LAP
- Monitoring & Evaluation Committee
- Highland Youth Convener
- Highland Council Environment Manager
- Equalities Reference Group
- LEADER Programme Manager and Administrative Team
- Ad-hoc Advisors as required

Strategic LAG members will appoint a Chair and Vice Chair for a two year period, and will appoint/re-appoint the Chair and Vice Chair every two years. The Chair will not be a representative of the accountable body. Best practice will be that where possible the Chair and Vice Chair will not represent the public sector.

The Group will also complete a skills matrix to ensure that it includes representation from key sectors, and target groups which should be given priority for LEADER funding, as well as demonstrating a good geographic and demographic mix. Where any gaps are identified, the Group will call on specialist advisors and/or make a public call for additional membership (using the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies, April 2012). This process will be repeated as required or at least every two years. It may be required if for example consideration of a specific project proposal requires specialist skills or knowledge.

Any requests to join the LAG will be submitted in writing, along with a completed skills matrix, and decided at the next meeting following receipt of the request and in line with the decision making process outlined below.

If a member of the strategic LAG or their substitute does not attend over three consecutive meetings, the presumption is that membership will be terminated at the discretion of the Chair.
The Strategic LAG's role will be to oversee the successful establishment and operation of the Programme throughout the Highland LEADER Programme area. In doing so it will;

- Meet at least 4 times a year (to be reviewed as appropriate).

- Approve, monitor and review as appropriate a financial strategy for the allocation of funding to achieve the aims of the LDS.

- Consider reports from the Programme Manager and the Monitoring & Evaluation Committee concerning the delivery of the Programme. This shall include progress on applications received, approved, grant committed, grant claimed and progress on achieving the agreed output targets.

- Consider annual reports, which will be forwarded to the Scottish Government as part of their monitoring and evaluation process.

- Consider regular financial reports, which will detail expenditure, accrued on the administration and delivery of the Programme and on projects. These will reflect the information submitted to the Scottish Government as quarterly financial claims.

- Maintain liaison with the UK/Scottish LEADER Network and ensure representation at its meetings.

- Review progress made towards achieving targets set in the business plan and if necessary, issue revised guidance to the LAPs, FLAG and Enterprise Group to address any anomalies.

- Advise on communication and publicity strategies.

This Strategic LAG will:
- Take the lead on transnational/trans-regional aspects of the Programme; supported by the Programme Manager and Local Development Officers.

- Seek a link to the Highlands & Islands Transitional Committee (HITC) to ensure consistency and added value.

- Ensure the horizontal themes of Fairer Highland, Innovation, Sustainability/Legacy, Carbon Clever and Skills Development are adhered to.

- Approve Local Area Action Plans which will be prepared by LAPs. The strategic LAG will, after consulting with the relevant LAPs, local groups, or equivalent, assess and approve project applications for individual pan Highland projects or projects that span more than two LAP areas.

Subsidiary groups of the strategic LAG should follow these operating guidelines or establish their own, which should be signed off by the strategic LAG in order to ensure consistency with the LEADER requirements.

As a minimum, operating guidelines for these groups should ensure compliance with LEADER requirements as set out in this document around:
- Membership
- Quorum
- Appeals/complaints
- Chair
- Declarations of Interest
- Decision making
- Delegated authority

And should provide for delivery of the functions as described below:

6.1.1 Monitoring & Evaluation Committee
The main function of the Monitoring & Evaluation Group will be to monitor, assess and report progress against the Monitoring & Evaluation Plan and to ensure that any actions agreed at the Strategic LAG are followed through.

6.1.2 Equalities Reference Group Equalities Reference Group (ERG) - advisory
The main functions of the Equalities Reference Group will be:
- Reviewing applications for projects that have significant equalities issues/impact and providing guidance to applicants, decision making groups and the LEADER Team, including recommendations on project specific conditions to address the issues/impact.

- Providing guidance and support to the LEADER Team in the development of processes, communications and guidance for applicants to ensure equalities issues are considered from the pre-application stage to project completion (for example in relation to Publications & Printed Materials, Websites, Community Engagement, Holding Public Events, Holding Training Events).

- To input to the ongoing EQIA process and monitor actions being taken to address issues arising.

- To keep the Strategic LAG updated by reporting on any trends/key issues, and progress against EQIA actions.

6.2   LAPs (LAPs)
LAPs will provide the local focus for the new LEADER programme, bringing local knowledge and expertise to determine prioritisation and the allocation of funding to project applications and facilitate delivery of the Programme. A transparent process should be used to establish these groups as agreed by the strategic LAG and the following guiding principle will need to be adhered to: groups must reflect public, private and voluntary sector interest in their area

(49% public maximum with the other 51% drawn from private/community representatives) and must be able to demonstrate through the preparation of a local area action plan and its implementation a link with the Highland LEADER Plan.

Local groups will be expected to:
- Co-ordinate the preparation of and implement a local action plan for their area, which meets the aims of the Highland LEADER LDS.

- Work with local groups to exploit opportunities offered through LEADER and other funding streams.

- Meet on a regular basis (as a minimum 4 times per annum, to be reviewed as appropriate).

- Promote the Programme across area.

- Assist and lead as appropriate with the development of local project proposals/plans.

- Once the local action plan is approved consider and make decisions on applications seeking grant assistance.

- Ensure wide community involvement in line with the National Standards of Community Engagement.

- Comment to the strategic LAG on projects which impact locally but are of a pan Highland or are of wider local area coverage.
- Monitor delivery of LEADER funded projects and either through direct action via one of its partner organisations or through the encouragement of others, ensure delivery of the LDS.

6.3   Fisheries Local Area Group (FLAG)

The FLAG will oversee the delivery of the European and Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF) funding in line with the integrated vision of the LDS, bringing local sectoral knowledge and expertise to determine prioritisation and the allocation of funding to project applications and facilitate delivery of the Programme. The FLAG will:

- Work with local groups to exploit opportunities offered through EMFF and other funding streams.

- Meet on a regular basis (as a minimum 4 times per annum, to be reviewed as appropriate).

- Promote the Programme across area.

- Assist and lead as appropriate with the development of local project proposals/plans.

- Consider and make recommendations to Marine Scotland on applications seeking grant assistance.

- Ensure wide community involvement in line with the National Standards of Community Engagement.

- Monitor delivery of EMFF funded projects and either through direct action via one of its partner organisations or through the encouragement of others, ensure delivery of the LDS.

6.4   Enterprise Group

The Enterprise Group will oversee the delivery of the Rural Enterprise funding in line with the

integrated vision of the LDS, bringing local sectoral knowledge and expertise to determine prioritisation and the allocation of funding to project applications and facilitate delivery of the Programme. The Enterprise Group will:

- Co-ordinate the preparation of and implement a local action plan , which meets the aims of the Highland LEADER LDS.

- Work with local groups to exploit opportunities offered through Rural Enterprise funding and other funding streams.

- Meet on a regular basis (as a minimum 4 times per annum to be reviewed as appropriate).

- Promote the Programme across area.

- Assist and lead as appropriate with the development of local project proposals/plans.

- Once the local action plan is approved consider and make decisions on applications seeking grant assistance.
- Ensure wide community involvement in line with the National Standards of Community Engagement.

- Monitor delivery of projects awarded Rural Enterprise funding and either through direct action via one of its partner organisations or through the encouragement of others, ensure delivery of the LDS.

6.5 Partners
Partner organisations across the community, business/third sector and public sectors, in addition to submitting representatives to the strategic LAG, LAP's and Fisheries and Enterprise Groups, will provide overall guidance on policy and project matters and, through its emphasis on ensuring a balanced representation of public sector agencies and community and the voluntary sector, to ensure a bottom up approach based on the ideas of local people, encouraging community involvement, partnership and innovation.

It is the responsibility of partners to communicate with other organisations in the sector which they represent. Organisations will be encouraged to appoint substitutes to attend meetings on their behalf if the usual representatives are unable to attend.

If the strategic LAG, LAP's, FLAG or Enterprise Group considers it necessary to encourage or facilitate direct action to deliver aspects of the LDS, the partners, or The Highland Council, may directly deliver a project/activity on their behalf.

7. Delegated Authority
Authority is delegated to the Secretariat, the Chair/Vice Chair of the LAG and the Accountable Body in respect of changes to approved applications. The following is a non-exhaustive list of example situations where this authority might be exercised:

- Where, during the course of an approved project, expenditure exceeds or is less than the indicative budget set, permission to switch budget between one budget head and another (referred to as project virement), may be granted by the Secretariat. Virement should only be considered if the existing purpose of the project is not affected, the change is complimentary to the project and or brings additional value to the project.

- Where the scale of the change exceed 10% of the total project costs the request for approval will be passed to the strategic LAG Chair and Vice Chair for authorisation. Where the changes are deemed to be significant the strategic LAG or LAP views will be sought.

- Where total project costs increase by up to 10% and provided the increase is within the spirit of the approval, the Programme Manager, Chair and Vice Chair will have delegated authority to approve this change. If the change is in excess of 10%, the request is passed to the original decision making authority for a decision.

- Where a project requires an extension to the finish date or a revision of project milestones the Secretariat may approve a change to that date.

- Where alternative, but sufficient, match funding is proposed, relative to the original application, the Secretariat may approve the necessary changes.

- Any matters of ambiguity around delegated authority will be referred to the Chair, Vice Chair and Accountable Body.

8. Additional Rules Of Procedure For The Strategic LAG

8.1 Conduct of Meetings
- Meetings of the partnership will be arranged to ensure that they are as accessible as possible to all members of the partnership and that timing, venues and the need for video/ teleconferencing are suitable. Meetings will be arranged with a minimum of one month's notice where possible to avoid conflict with other commitments.

- All meetings will be minuted (by the Secretariat) and approved minutes will be freely available and posted on the Highland LEADER website.

8.2 Chair
- The Strategic LAG will appoint a Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. At all meetings of the LAG, the elected Chairperson, or in their absence, the Vice-Chairperson shall preside over the meeting. The Accountable Body will not be appointed to the Chair or Vice Chair position.

- If both are absent, partners will choose a member to preside. Members should respect the authority of the (acting) Chairperson who will decide matters of order, competency, relevancy and urgency.

- The Chairperson's duty is to preserve order and ensure that all members/partners are given a fair hearing. Appointment of the Chair and Vice Chair will be reviewed every two years.

8.3 Quorum
- The Strategic LAG will be quorate when there are at least 5 voting members present – 3 of which must be either community or private/third sector.

- If more than 5 members are present, the required 51/49% split between community, business, third sector and public sector voting members must be achieved.

- Where the meeting is inquorate due to the balance of public/private representation, but the requirement of 5 voting members has been met, the second vote of the Chair/Vice Chair may be used to count towards the quorum.

- If members of the Strategic LAG are unable to attend a meeting, their named substitute should attend.

- For purposes of the quorum, participation of partners by video-conferencing links will be considered as present.

- Where a large number of LAG members declare an interest in an item, leaving the meeting inquorate for that item, the remaining members of the LAG shall be competent to debate and decide that item at the earliest opportunity, using whichever procedure is expedient.

- If the meeting is not quorate no decision can be taken but at the discretion of the Chair/Vice Chair, the meeting can discuss and make recommendations which in turn can be circulated to the wider membership for a decision to be taken by written/electronic procedure.

- Where a quorate response cannot be achieved (either at a meeting or by written procedure) then the LAG/LAP can continue to discuss the item and put forward their recommendation to the Chair and Vice Chair to determine. This approach will only be acceptable if the Chair and Vice Chair positions are not dominated by the Public sector, ie as a minimum there must be a 50:50 split between public and community/private representation.

- Use of video conference/skype/telecommunications will be encouraged to overcome distance/travel barriers and aid discussions/decision-making by the strategic LAG, LAP's and Fisheries and Enterprise Groups.

- The preference will always be to have meetings – be they in person and/or via video conference/skype/telecommunications to encourage dialogue and debate rather than taking decisions by written/electronic procedure; however, decisions taken by written/electronic procedure will be valid.

8.4 Declarations of Interest

All members of the strategic LAG will be required to make declarations of interests. Such declarations of interest are intended to produce transparency in regard to interests which might influence, or be perceived to influence, any actions/decisions taken.

Where an interest has been declared from a member and it is considered as a conflict of interest, then that person should withdraw from the meeting while the item is being discussed and a decision taken.

Representatives from match funders, where they are not the applicant, are only eligible to participate and vote on the discussions relating to an application if the representative does not have direct financial responsibility for funding the project. For example, a Highlands and Islands Enterprise Officer might remain in the meeting if the project under consideration was funded by another part of the organisation for which s/he has no budgetary influence. In such cases the minute of meeting should state that any such person remaining in and participating in the meeting did not have funding responsibilities for the project.

If any elected Members of The Highland Council are members of the strategic LAG, they do not need to declare an interest unless s/he has a direct financial connection with the project or applicant, e.g. is an employee or Director of the applicant body, or has a close relative with a direct connection with the project or applicant, or has a direct budgetary responsibility for some portion of the project's match-funding (including Ward discretionary funds). Such a stance is in accordance with the Standards Commission Scotland's The Councillors' Code of Conduct (3rd edition, December 2010 s.5).

Other members of the Strategic LAG are also required to comply with the above procedure. Interests will be declared and recorded in a formal Register of Interests, which will be maintained by the Programme secretariat.

8.5 Order of Business

The main business of meetings will be to consider the progress of the LEADER Programme and strategic issues and, if required, to consider grant applications.
Notwithstanding this, the items of business will be considered in the following order:

- Those members present and apologies
- Declarations of interest by members
- Minutes of previous meetings will be considered as a correct record
- Matters arising
- Progress Reports
- Consideration of grant applications, as required
- Urgent business intimated at the start of the meeting
- Any other competent business included on the agenda
- Date, Time and Location of next meeting

8.6 Decision Making and Voting
Subject to compliance with the LEADER guidelines as laid down by the European Commission and the Scottish Government as the Managing Authority, all questions coming or arising before the meeting will be decided on a consensus basis or failing this by a majority of the members present.

Views from LAG members submitted in writing or by e-mail prior to the meeting will be accepted and included as part of the discussion.

While efforts will be made to seek a consensus decision, where this proves not possible a vote may be taken by a show of hands. In the event of a tie, the Chairperson will have a second or casting vote. In the case of subsidiary groups to the LAG, the Chair will also have the discretion to refer the matter to the LAG for a final decision.

In terms of scoring stage one and stage two applications for funding, voting members of the LAG present at the meeting will agree an overall score for each of the criteria laid down in the scoring template and this score will be noted in the meeting minutes. Where a consensus score cannot be reached the paragraph above applies.

LAG members will be expected to individually score applications in advance of meetings. Where there are a high number of applications to be considered then scoring members will be paired up and will take the lead on scoring of allocated projects.

The presumption is that decisions on funding applications will be made following discussion at a meeting; however, in exceptional cases decisions on applications can be made by written procedure. In this case, two LAG members (at least one of whom will be will be from the private sector) will work together to agree scores for the application which will then be circulated to the LAG as a recommendation for a decision by written procedure.

8.7 Special Meetings
Special meetings may be called at any time if the strategic LAG or Secretariat receives a request from partners setting out the purpose of the business to be considered at that meeting.