**HIGHLAND LEADER 2014-2020 PROGRAMME**

**MINUTES OF SHADOW LOCAL AREA GROUP MEETING**

**10.00AM, 13 AUGUST 2014, COUNCIL HQ, INVERNESS**

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|  | Present:

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| Frances Gunn (Chair) | CVS North | Private |
| David Alston | Highland Councillor | Public |
| Robert Muir | H&I Enterprise | Public |
| John MacMillan | Mallaig Harbour Authority | Private |
| David Richardson | H&I Federation of Small Business’s | Private |
| Stewart Sandison | SNH | Public |
| Margaret Somerville | NHS | Public |
| Alistair Swanson | NFU | Private |
| Mharie Whyllie | Highland Third Sector Interface | Private |

Apologies:

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| Kathleen Wolton | UHI | Public |

In Attendance:

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| Fiona Cameron | THC, LEADER |  |
| Andy McCann  | THC, LEADER |  |
| Judith Wainwright | THC, LEADER |  |
| Nicole Wallace | THC, Environment & Fisheries |  |
| GlenysWatt  | Consultant |  |
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**1 WELCOME**

 Frances opened the meeting and introductions were made.

**2 BUSINESS PLAN ISSUES**

Andy talked through the paper and structure chart that had been circulated ahead of the meeting. Based on the last programme, they also incorporate guidance issued to date for the new programme. The main requirements relate to governance, funding the ‘right’ projects to deliver the LDS strategic outcomes/priorities, and ensuring mechanisms are in place to deliver these projects.

2.1 Governance

 Andy drew attention to a number of key points:

* the key requirement is to balance local decision making with delivery of the strategy,
* Scottish Government guidance suggests there will be more emphasis on governance, so LAP members will have clearer roles/responsibilities and it will be necessary for them to have the right balance of skills,
* criteria will be put in place to ensure applicants are clear about the types of projects that could be funded (see also section 4),
* there will be two new sub groups (Business and Fisheries),
* the approval processes for business and fisheries projects will be considered when more guidance is available, but at this stage it is assumed they will be administered on a Highland-wide basis.

In response to points raised by the group,

* Andy advised that there will be maximum devolvement of decision making, but there will need to be some mechanism for the Strategic LAG and the Lead Partner to review decisions, e.g. if they do not take account of strategy,
* Fiona confirmed that it is intended to have a pre-application stage so that the LEADER team can provide feedback to applicants before they spend time completing an application,
* Fiona also advised that the application process will be automated. It was agreed that access to the system will need to be considered, but for applicants who cannot gain access there will be a paper based application. Margaret suggested that consideration should be given to providing system access through community based agencies.

There was also a suggestion that the Strategic LAG have more involvement in audit issues in the new Programme – perhaps through a dedicated sub group.

2.2 Funding and delivering the ‘right’ projects

 Andy advised that the Scottish Government allocation of funding for the new programme will take account of deprivation, in addition to geography and population. Further details are awaited but the Strategic LAG may wish to adopt the same formula to set the allocations at a devolved level.

Andy suggested that the criteria for funding projects needs to be tighter than in the last programme to ensure applicants are clear at the outset as to what could and could not be funded. This will be a key part of the formal phase of LDS consultation.

He also invited discussion as to whether funding should be allocated against the four key themes -25% each, with perhaps giving local groups 10% leeway to reflect local priorities.

It was also recognised that there will be times when a ‘very good’ project comes along which may not fully meet the criteria.

There was general discussion around these points and the consensus of the meeting, which will be reviewed during the next round of community consultations, was that the criteria for projects to be funded should be tight and that financial allocations against the themes should be set by the Strategic LAG and initially provided to LAPs by way of guidance. As funding will be phased; the strategy and criteria should be reviewed after 18 – 24 months and revised if necessary. Imbalances in the funding allocated during the initial phase could then be addressed. Ongoing systematic monitoring against outcomes and priorities will be required to facilitate this.

Fiona advised that the Business Plan will address how unsuccessful applicants can appeal and how others can appeal against a decision to approve a project. If a view is taken that appeals are essentially complaints then it may be that the appeals process is dealt with through the Lead Partner complaints framework.

Other key points raised during this discussion to be addressed for the new programme:

* where gaps (project types, outcomes, priorities) are identified, groups should be encouraged to bring forward projects which address these,
* need to avoid applicants having to apply to more than one area for projects which overlap LAP boundaries.

Communications were seen to be key to successful delivery and a number of suggestions were made (Highland wide meetings for LAG and LAP members, award ceremonies to recognise project successes, programme of engagement with neighbouring LAPs). It was agreed that the local press was not an effective mechanism for communicating good news on its own and that publicity had not been a strength of the previous Programme. Fiona confirmed that that a Communication Strategy would form part of the LDS. Andy noted that there have been discussions with the Cairngorms LAG about the potential for a co-operation project between neighbouring LAGs to share a communications resource.

Robert suggested that the Communication Strategy should include how information flows between the Strategic LAG and the LAPs and technical solutions should be explored.

**3 LAP/LAG SUB GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

A draft paper had been issued prior to the meeting and Andy asked for any written feedback. At the last meeting it had been agreed that the Strategic LAG should be in place by the end of September to approve the LDS and Business Plan before its submission to the Scottish Government.

 **ACTION: All to feedback to Andy by 29/08/2014**

In response to queries, Andy advised that:

* both private and public members should be able to vote; guidance suggests that a mix of skills from both sectors is required,
* if an open call for LAG/LAP membership is agreed, the Public Appointments guidance could be adopted and this will be reflected in the Business Plan,
* it is intended that the business sub group will link with existing advisory services, e.g. Business Gateway,
* an initial suggestion for quorum of meetings is that a minimum of five members will be required at each vote (3 private/2 public).

**4 LDS OUTCOMES**

A copy of the latest version of Chapter 4, containing the themes and outputs had been circulated before the meeting. From the previous draft, the outcomes have been reduced to 10, covering four themes. Glenys asked the meeting to consider whether they were comfortable with the 10 outcomes and whether it was felt that the themes and outputs provided clear enough rationale for projects that would be eligible.

Feedback will be sought on the outcomes and themes in the next round of community consultations.

Discussion focused on the examples of eligible projects provided and a number of suggestions were made:

* examples of projects that don’t fit the criteria should be included,
* supporting volunteers should not be restricted to ‘youth’ volunteers, as many 16-65 s use volunteering as a route into paid employment,
* Greater clarity is required over projects aiming to ‘provide better access to local services and activities’, e.g. any geographic boundaries for community transport schemes,
* consider more focus on projects which may not be able to seek alternative funding, e.g. village halls,
* Clearer outcomes for ‘increased partnership working between community groups’ and clarity on what could be included,
* Clarify that ‘improved measuring of the benefits/impact of funded projects’ is to be achieved as part of an application, not standalone,
* when providing guidance to applicants to enable them to determine whether their project is eligible, need to ensure:
* they have demonstrated how the project aligns to the strategy

- most appropriate funding sources have been explored (e.g. SRDP for footpaths)

* Projects should be able to demonstrate that they fit with relevant wider strategies, for example projects aimed at tourism should be aligned with the Highland Tourism Strategy
* skills (development) to be included; consider as a cross cutting theme.

**5 NEXT STEPS**

Draft Business Plan to be submitted 18/08/2014.

 Pack to be pulled together to go out in next round on community consultations.

**6 NEXT MEETING**

Will be held at 10.00am on Tuesday 2 September.