**Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020**

**Shadow Local Advisory Group**

Present: Frances Gunn, CVS North, Chair

David Alston, The Highland Council

David Richardson, Federation of Small Businesses

Moira Paton, NHS

Mhairi Wylie, Third Sector Interface

Stewart Sandison, SNH

Robert Muir, HIE

In Attendance

Andy McCann, The Highland Council

Fiona Cameron, Highland LEADER

Wendy Anderson, Highland LEADER

Glenys Watt, Blake Stevenson

Apologies were received from Alistair Swanson (SNFU) and Kathleen Wolton (UHI). It was noted Fiona Larg (UHI), representative on CPP, was contacted and has nominated Kathleen Wolton to sit on the shadow LAG. John MacMillan was contacted as the FLAG representative but no response had been received.

1. **PURPOSE: SHADOW LAG/LEADER LAG**

Andy explained a short life Shadow Local Advisory Group (LAG) was required to provide strategic direction to the development of the new Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020.

The Shadow LAG would adopt the following:

* Core LEADER requirements (51%/49% min split between public and private/community membership, no one interest group with more than 49%, open election of Chair (not Highland Council as per lead partner Scot Govt. guidance), membership reflects core skills/competencies required).
* Would comment and provide strategic oversight of Local Development Strategy (LDS) consultation/engagement process
* Would agree strategic themes and geography to be incorporated in consultation
* Would agree and provide oversight of the appointment of members to the LAG to act as pilot for appointment to the Local Area Partnerships (LAP’s), to the Fisheries LAG and other groups which may be set-up to undertake delegated functions with the delivery of the LDS

Once the Highland LEADER LAG is established it would take over responsibility for the finalisation of the LDS and associated Business Plan including:

* alignment/coherence of LDS with SOA, EU and national funds and local needs/opportunities and theme prioritisation
* integration of Highland LDS with local area/industry sector LDS’s
* decision-making and delegation processes for rural (LAG) and fisheries (FLAG)
* oversee appointment of members to LAP, FLAG and other delegated groups
* delivery arrangements, by applicant groups and direct by LAG/LAP/FLAG and appointed partners
* cross cutting themes, for example, equalities
* financial allocation – by priority, by geography
* communications plan
* programme launch
* programme monitoring and evaluation, including audit

It was noted that the Fisheries Regulations were currently lagging behind LEADER. The Scottish Government were looking for one Local Development Strategy, which included Fisheries. From an EU perspective the 2 funds are different, with Fisheries being a UK fund and LEADER being a Scottish fund but as there is no administration budget attached to the Fisheries fund, it would be run through LEADER with separate reporting functions. The consultation period will capture what the fisheries dependent communities need, but follow-up focused engagement with sector is anticipated.

It was decided the Shadow LAG remain in place until the draft consultation report and business plan is agreed, approximately late August/early September.

1. **LOCAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**
2. **BUSINESS PLAN**

Fiona Cameron explained guidance had been issued by the Scottish Government, which had been broken down into 5 phases:

* Expression of Interest
* Local Development Strategy
* Business Plan
* Approval
* Budget Allocation

It was explained that it was an iterative process with the required structure and content including area covered & population structure, analysis of development needs and opportunities through SWOT analysis, description & objectives of the strategy, description of engagement at preparation and implementation stages, how objectives are turned into practical actions, business plan.

The guidance stated any areas of delegated decision making required an equivalent LDS to be included.

A first draft Highland LDS had been submitted by the deadline of 31 March 2014 to Scottish Government which included the approach Highland would take and the feedback received was to be clear what you want out of the programme, clear & evidenced intervention logic and clear on where LDS sits relative to ESF and ERDF.

Blake Stevenson had just been appointment to assist with the LDS support contract. The overall development of the Highland LDS will be driven by the Shadow LAG and it was suggested that the Shadow LAG should meet at the end of each of the phases (engagement, consolidation, consultation and submission) to agree progress to date and to direct the subsequent phase.

The key outputs for the LDS Support Contract (Phase1) can be summarised as follows:

* SWOT analysis at Highland and local area level
* Aims and objectives of strategy
* Strategy outcomes
* Overview of available match funding
* List of priority projects/initiatives
* Recommendations on LAG/LAP membership & structure

During the consolidation phase these will be combined with the outputs of the other pieces of work undertaken at this time to provide a consultation draft Highland wide LDS with component chapters for each of the local/sectoral areas with delegated decision making authority. This will then provide the basis for wide consultation across all areas. Time is then set aside at the submission stage to make any amendments arising from this consultation prior to sign off by the LAG/CPP and submission to Scottish Government.

Draft Business Plan guidance had been issued and it was hoped the final guidance would be issued the beginning of June. The first draft business plan is due to be submitted by 31 July 2014.

Further clarity is still required from Scottish Government/Marine Scotland as to how EMFF and LEADER is to be integrated.

It was noted the LDS would work on SG guidance and EU requirements and capture lessons learnt from previous programme. SG are currently running 4 workstreams, which include Guidance, Co-operation, Finance and IT. These workstreams are a chance for existing LEADER programmes to feed into the requirements of the next Programme.

It was anticipated the following pieces of work would also be commissioned with further pieces of work being carried out in house. The existing LEADER team will give support to all commissioned pieces of work:

**Business Plan Contract**

This piece of work will be undertaken by externally appointed consultants and managed/supported by the LEADER team. A draft scope has been written for this, which now needs to be cross referenced with the draft business plan guidance issued by Scottish Government. This piece of work will set out the overall structure for the Programme in Highland and how the programme will be managed and delivered, it will cover all internal processes and will provide a monitoring and evaluation framework as required by Scottish Government. The initial deadline for a first draft business plan to be submitted to Scottish Government is 31st July, although it is expected there will be some slippage with this.

**Communications Contract**

This initial piece of work is intended to be delivered by a professional expert during the engagement phase to ensure maximum opportunity for engagement with stakeholders and to also address the need to change the perception in Highland of LEADER. A report will be produced at the end of this which will provide the basis for how communications will be dealt with during the remainder of the LDS development and on into the LDS implementation, to be actioned by the existing LEADER team. Further information on communications will be dealt with under agenda item 6.

**Review of Co-operation**

Undertaken in house by the LEADER team to review how this was delivered in the previous programme and to make links with other LAG areas to explore common themes for the new Programme.

**Establishment of Equalities Reference Group**

A piece of work will be commissioned to review how equalities was dealt with in the previous programme and to explore the potential for establishing a Highland Wide Equalities Reference Group that will advise on equalities issues as part of the project development and appraisal process. This work will also make recommendations on target groups for the next Programme and will undertake the Equalities Impact Assessment required for the LDS

**Community Capacity Review**

Externally commissioned piece of work to review what support applicants feel they could have benefitted from in the previous programme and to make recommendations on how this could be taken forward in the new Programme

**Benchmarking Evaluation**

Externally commissioned piece of work looking at the overall achievements against the targets from the previous Programme. Review of projects in the previous Programme to provide material for case studies and best practice learning that will inform the communications strategy and business plan in the new Programme.

**Stats**

Undertaken in house by Highland Council to provide the information at datazone level required for the LDS. Robert Muir offered support from HIE to assist with this work as required.

**LDS Support Contract Phase 2**

Externallly led process of consultation on the LDS at Highland and local level with all stakeholders. Detail on this for local areas will arise depending on the different requirements of each area.

It was noted that the consultation phase was very tight as it was over the summer holiday period and it would be preferred if this phase could be moved to end of September with a submission date of October and approval at the end of November.

The LAG queried how the Community Capacity review that is proposed will fit with the requirement for the CPP to produce a three year Community Learning and Development (CLD) plan. The timetable for the CLD plan to be produced is by September 2015 therefore it is hoped this work undertaken by LEADER can feed in to this.

There is currently an Equalities Group in place through the CPP which could be utilised and HIE have just completed updating stats which could be accessed to assist where necessary.

1. **SUGGESTED STRATEGIC THEMES**

The suggested themes were devised from strategic and local influences, with the strategic influences being Single Outcome Agreement, EU and Scottish Government. The draft suggested themes are:

**Strategic Themes**

1. **Strong and resilient communities**

(including com. Learning/dev., knowledge transfer, severe weather resilience etc.)

1. **Diversification of the rural economy**

(including growing businesses and locally significant sectors)

1. **Skills for Work**

(including lab. Mkt. participation for all, youth priority)

1. **A connected Highland**

(including broadband access/usage, transport)

1. **Rural Services**

(including older people, early years)

1. **Carbon clever**

(including renewables, energy efficiency, waste reduction etc.)

1. **Cultural and natural assets**

(including preservation and enhancement)

**Cross Cutting:**

* Equality across and for all in Highland
* Innovation/sustainability
* Community Engagement

It was agreed that the community consultations should be given this structure framework to start with and any additional suggestions could be included.

The consultations will start in LAP areas with open consultations and public events. Additional contact will be made with more specific groups who are unable to attend the meetings.

It was suggested contacts could also be accessed through the Council’s Citizens Panel who currently have a database of approximately 2700 names and the Third Sector database of contacts.

There was a suggestion made to expand themes to include young people through working life. This could be included within the cross cutting list.

1. **LAG/LAP/SUB GROUP GEOGRAPHY/MEMBERSHIP**

Geography: As any proposed devolved decision making requires a “local” LDS, it was anticipated that LAP boundary issue would arise during the engagement phase and a position needed to be taken to aid the Consultant/LEADER team.

Andy handed round a paper which showed current LAP areas, District boundaries and Area Committee boundaries and where any alignment occurred. It was clear there was no direct alignment between the existing boundaries.

Adopting the structure of the District partnerships would mean less LAP’s to service and therefore less of a resourcing requirement; however, this structure may not be how communities would necessarily organise themselves. It is important that the structure suits communities rather than just agencies.

It was noted there will be a reduction in Councillors, which would result in a reduction in Wards and area boundaries in 2017 therefore there would be a risk in LEADER adopting the Area Committee structure as this may change.

One of the successes from the Highland LEADER 2007-2013 Programme was the LAPs and the ability to engage at local level.

It was hoped the consultation process would capture the views from the public as to the appropriate boundaries for the Programme. The shadow LAG to consider following the engagement phase and comments received.

Membership: 50 public/50 private split would still be required at local level. In the previous Programme, LAPs were made up of representatives from local groups but there was no reason why individuals couldn’t apply in their own right and the LDS guidance states groups should have right people with appropriate skills to make decisions on projects. This could be managed by following the Public Appointments guidance.

Dumfries and Galloway LEADER and Black Isle LAP had adopted the same approach but had openly advertised for group members. It was proposed to keep the structures as current but ensure it was possible, if LAG or LAPs wanted to open up to any individuals who may want to join.

**6 COMMUNICATIONS**

Scottish Government guidance requires that the LDS/Business plan includes a communications plan covering both the development and implementation phases of the LDS. More importantly; however, we would want to be clear that we are addressing communications properly to ensure that we are able to fully engage across all of the Programme area and that as many people as possible are aware of the new Programme and are able to contribute to its development. Once operational, an effective communications strategy should ensure that the Secretariat, Council Members and staff, partner organisations, the LAG/FLAG/LAP’s and local groups/communities of interest (eg business community) are up to speed on the Programme and kept informed of progress, as well as understanding their roles and responsibilities. An effective communications strategy is essential to the Programme’s ability to deliver and all information must be available in easy to understand formats for all sections of the community served.

In the short term there are a number of actions that will be taken forward by the existing LEADER team:

* update the current LEADER website for use as a focal point during the engagement phase of the LDS development.
* There is also an extensive database available containing contact details of everyone who applied/was involved in the LAG/LAPs during the previous Programme and it is suggested that using these details a letter is sent to all from the Chair of the Shadow LAG to update on Programme closure, headline achievements and first steps for the next Programme.
* An external contract will be let to run alongside the first phase LDS Support Contract to ensure professional support to reach as wide an audience as possible and maximise the opportunities for all to engage in this process. It is intended that this process will use traditional methods such as local press and drawing on networks within partner organisations but will also explore the potential for people to become involved in the LDS development through less traditional means, such as twitter and web forums. This contract should also advise on and establish a branding for the new Programme to ensure consistency across all media from the outset. The final output of this contract will be a report to inform the development of a communications strategy for the remainder of the LDS development phase and on into the implementation phase, identifying clear actions required by the existing staff team to continue this level of engagement.

The communications strategy will also draw on work done around Co-operation and Business Planning to look at the potential for networking between areas both within and wider than Highland. There is a job to be done in changing how LEADER is currently viewed in the Highlands due to the adverse effect that changing audit requirements had on the perception of LEADER during the previous Programme - this will need to be addressed from the outset.

The Programme should aim to communicate as widely as possible throughout the Highlands, Scotland, the UK and Europe. It would however make sense to prioritise resources by focusing effort within the Highland Area to help build up local support and knowledge about the Programme in the first instance. In order to do this, target audiences have to be established and the Shadow LAG are asked to comment on/add to the starting list provided

The following is examples under each heading rather than a full list.

External Audiences

* General Public
* Community Councils
* Community groups, trusts and boards
* Agencies (Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Forestry Commission Scotland,)
* Organisations (Scottish Communities Foundation, National Farmers Union)
* Voluntary Organisations (through Highland TSI, SCVO)
* Previous LEADER applicants
* Local media/specialist media
* Other initiatives (Local Biodiversity Partnerships, Youth Forums, CAM Officers)
* Wider organisations, not currently identified such as Shelter
* Other funder’s

Internal Audiences

* The Lead Partner – The Highland Council (Councillors, Ward Managers, Rangers)
* Community Planning Partnership
* Members of the Highland LAG/FLAG/LAPs – potential for establishing a network within Highland and/or with neighbouring LAG’s
* Other ESI funds
* Scottish Government

1. **AOCB**

SG guidance issued stated 10% of any budget allocation was to be used for Action 2 projects (trans-regional/trans-national). A suggestion was made that the allocation be used for inter-LAP projects, if permitted. Andy McCann to take forward with Chair of Shadow LAG/Leader of Highland Council

At this moment the budget allocation is unknown. There is approximately £20m available across Scotland for Small Rural Business grants and it in anticipated there will be a further £500k available for fisheries. Agreed that there was a need to undertake early lobbying to ensure Highland secures a fair share of the Scottish LEADER, Small Rural Business and Fisheries Fund. Andy McCann to take forward with Chair of Shadow LAG/Leader of Highland Council.

1. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

TBC