

**MINUTE OF MEETING OF
RURAL ABERDEENSHIRE LEADER
LOCAL ACTION GROUP**

**TUESDAY, 6 DECEMBER 2011 AT 11.00 AM
INSCH INSTITUTE SPORTS HALL**

Present

Belinda Miller	LAG Chairperson
Alistair Prior	Rural Communities & Rural Policy Team Leader
Billy McKenzie	Scottish Government
Charlie Adam	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Shona Anderson	Visit Scotland
Jamie Bell	Scottish Enterprise
Moira Beverley	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Caroline Clark	NHS
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Moira Gordon	SWRI
Reid Hutchison	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Economic Development
Jennifer Kinnaird	Scottish Government Rural Payments Inspection Directorate
Alexander Macleod	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Planning
Scott Petrie	Scottish Land & Estates
Lynne Reid	Aberdeenshire Council – Finance
Matt Young	Forestry Commission Scotland

Officers in Attendance

Vicky Thomson	Aberdeenshire Council
Jamie Wilkinson	Aberdeenshire Council
Anne MacLennan	Aberdeenshire Council

Apologies

Bob Leonard	Aberdeenshire Council – Community Learning & Development
Keith Newton	Aberdeenshire Council - Community Planning
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Robert Phimister	Member of Scottish Youth Parliament
Ruth Sim	Aberdeenshire Community Councils
Maureen Stephen	Aberdeenshire Councils for Voluntary Services
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Businesses

1 WELCOME & APOLOGIES

Belinda Miller welcomed Alistair Prior and Billy McKenzie from Scottish Government and introductions were made round the table. Apologies were noted as above.

2 INSCH INSTITUTE SPORTS HALL PRESENTATION

Belinda welcomed Dennis Heliwell and Michael Biddlecombe, project managers of the Insch Institute Sports Hall project. Dennis gave an informative talk on the highlights and lowlights of managing the build project. Many user groups are now making enquiries to use the new facility. LAG members agreed that the Sports Hall has been furnished to a very high standard and is a valuable asset for the

local community.

3 BANFFSHIRE COAST TOURISM PROGRAMME PRESENTATION

- 3.1 Belinda welcomed Elaine Booth from Scottish Enterprise to the meeting. Elaine gave an informative presentation on the strategic objectives of the three year Banffshire Coast Tourism Programme. The main aims of the project are to improve the quality of products, accommodation, services and the overall visitor experience in the Banffshire coast area; to provide a mechanism to encourage collaborative working within the sector and to deliver an increase in visitor numbers to the area.

Elaine reported on activity to date, the specific projects being undertaken by the Partnership, outcomes achieved to date and the future direction of the project. Following Elaine's presentation, the LAG formally recorded their unanimous endorsement for funding of the project to continue for year 3 and that further reporting over and above the BCTP reports submitted with ongoing claims was not required.

4 MINUTES OF LAST MEETINGS

- 4.1 Draft LAG minute of 12 September 2011 was approved and will be uploaded on LEADER website.
- 4.2 Vicky reported that the Udney Wind Turbine Group received a Highly Commended in the Best Community Project for Scottish Renewables category at the Scottish Power Green Awards event held in Glasgow.

5 COMMUNICATION

- 5.1 Alistair Prior reported on a Scottish Government proposal to produce an 'E-Newsletter'. The purpose of this will be to give regular updates on the work of the Scottish Government regarding LEADER and to give forewarning of new processes which are in the pipeline. It is hoped that in time this E-Newsletter will be a 2-way process.

LAG welcomed this idea which will prove to be a very useful resource.

6 CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE

- 6.1 There are no project applications to be considered at this meeting due to Aberdeenshire's budget being fully committed.

A copy of a report prepared by Alistair Prior for the last LSB meeting regarding revisions to indicative allocations was circulated. All LAGs will be asked to confirm their commitment to date. If allocations are not fully committed by March 2012, it may be prove difficult for LAGs to spend their full budget. Agreement will be sought at the next LSB meeting regarding how best to distribute any balance of funding. It will be essential for Scottish Government to have accurate figures before a final decision can be made regarding re-distribution of funds.

- 6.2 Aberdeenshire LEADER has volunteered to be part of an SRDP evaluation

process. The first meeting of the review is to take place before Christmas. Following on from this meeting, it is anticipated that LEADER Co-ordinators will get together in the New Year.

- 6.4 Belinda is unable to attend the next meeting of the LEADER Strategic Board. Scott Petrie, Scottish Land and Estates will attend on Belinda's behalf.
- 6.5 It is anticipated that Aberdeenshire will be in line for approximately £1.2 million of EFF Axis 4 funding which must be spent within 2 years. This is not yet confirmed but a Ministerial announcement is expected before Christmas.

The job description for the EFF Co-ordinator has been approved. It is hoped that the Co-ordinator will be in post at the beginning of March.

Fifty percent public match must be in place before EFF can be approved. Belinda reported that approval is being sought to re-direct part of Aberdeenshire Council's Regeneration Budget to EFF. This re-alignment of funding would be welcomed as it will go some way towards easing the difficult issue of securing match funding.

Lottery and SITA Trust funding can be considered as public match.

Jamie Bell reported an underspend to date in the £1 million SE rural budget. It may be possible to recycle some of this underspend to EFF, however, projects would be considered on a case by case basis.

7 LEADER CO-ORDINATOR UPDATE

7.1 Financial Update

Fifty seven projects have been completed to date with a total underspend of £46,492. This underspend was factored into the figures presented at the last LAG meeting to enable the approval of round 13 projects

Aberdeenshire's current commitment and spend is on target and should additional resources become available, there will be capacity for the LAG to commit and spend within the programme closure timescale.

At the LAG meeting scheduled for March 2012, it should be possible to ascertain how much funding will be available for new projects.

7.2 Project Update

The number of active projects up to and including round 13 is 116. Eight projects have been de-committed.

7.3 Scottish Government Claims

To date, £1.9 million has been drawn down from Scottish Government. This equates to 42% of the budget.

Total number of grant claims processed is 300 with a value of £1.89 million. This represents 46% of commitment to date.

7.4 Scottish Government Reports

- Monthly report submitted for November 2011.

- Scottish Government Forecasting spreadsheet has now been split into sub-measures.
- Internal Audit was completed in October with the Annual Confirmation Certificate being submitted in November. The audit executive summary was circulated.
- Aberdeenshire reported a claim payment irregularity to Scottish Government with regards to an overpayment made to the Glamourhaugh Allotments project. An advance grant was made for the project and when bank statements were submitted, an overpayment of grant was highlighted. An invoice will be raised to reclaim this overpayment from the Glamourhaugh project.

7.5 **Rural Aberdeenshire Broadband Initiative**

It is hoped that the Kinmuck project should be live by Jan/Feb 2012. The applicant's commitment to this exemplar project has been immense.

The Arbutnott project has been slow due to households being cautious about making a commitment.

Ballogie project has activated its first tranche of subscribers and Boyndie has activated the second tranche.

Aberdeenshire Council has agreed to commit £18 million towards broadband in Aberdeenshire. Following a study undertaken by Mott McDonald, different broadband solutions for differing priorities are being considered, for example, high speed broadband is essential in the peri-urban area and Energetica corridor, while a different solution is being investigated for the more remote rural areas where broadband coverage is patchy. It is hoped that the exemplar project in Kinmuck could be rolled out in other areas.

7.6 **LEADER Promotion**

- The refurbished Millbank Hall was opened by Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead MSP on Saturday 17 September.
- Inch Institute Sports Hall was officially opened by Dennis Robertson MSP on Saturday 12 November.
- Rothienorman Bowling Club was officially opened by Alex Salmond MSP on Monday, 21 November.
- The Enchanted Castle event was held from 23-27 November at Crathes Castle and was very well attended. This year's event ran over five nights. It is hoped that the event will take place again in 2012.

7.7 **Programme Management & Administration**

- The team is continuing to assist project managers with complicated claims.
- Project monitoring is on-going.
- Two on-the-spot checks are to be carried out. Aberdeenshire Council Property Department Surveyors will accompany Jamie to the Scottish Sculpture Workshop in Lumsden, and the Strichen Community Park Café before completing their relevant section of the report.
- It is hoped that a more detailed report regarding underspends and de-commitments will be available for the next LAG meeting. A resolution regarding the LEADER budget, if there is to be a re-allocation of funds, should also be known by then.

- Approximately 15 Expression of Interest forms have been issued to potential applicants with five being completed and returned. It is premature to speculate on potential figures at this stage.

8 APPROVED PROJECT AMENDMENTS

- 8.1 As per the Terms of Reference, the Co-ordinator and the Chairperson have delegated authority to approve project amendments on behalf of the LAG. It is a requirement that the LAG be informed of all project amendments approved.

A table detailing project amendments made since the last LAG meeting was circulated.

8.2 MacRobert Hall – Tarland

The group fought hard to secure their match funding profile. However, some applications were unsuccessful and the applicant has made up the shortfall with other match funders and an increased own contribution. As some of the match funding is time limited, the project had to start in order to draw down funds. Awards for All funding is specifically designated 100% to the stage and lighting category. The LEADER grant will remain the same but, due to the specific requirement by Awards for All, the LEADER intervention rate will rise to 32.9%. LAG gave their approval of this approach being adopted.

9 2012 TIMETABLE

A draft 2012 timetable was circulated. It is proposed that the LAG meetings will take place in the morning with the FLAG continuing in the afternoon. The AEFf dates are still to be confirmed.

Meeting rooms will be provisionally booked in Woodhill house.

10 SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION & EAFRD 2014-2020 PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

Billy McKenzie from Scottish Government led a discussion on SG consultation for the next programming period.

- Online consultation process due to commence in the near future.
- Following consultation, it is hoped to have a way forward by end March 2012.
- Development of SRDP 2014-2020 to commence end March 2012 through sub-groups involving stakeholders.
- Programme to be developed and ready for discussion with Europe by 2013.
- Timescale of 3-6 months to work with Commission.
- Approval by July 2013.
- Aim for programme launch January 2014.
- Scottish Ministers welcome proposals.
- Potential for increased devolved approach which is proven to work very well.
- Common strategic framework to achieve maximum value for money.
- Partnership contract to be developed with the Commission.
- 5% of fund to be reserved – to be released and spent in the final year if

- performance is good.
- Commission will develop quality checks – measuring outcomes will be a challenge.
- Aim to encourage local development, bottom-up approach.
- LEADER Programme will continue to form 5% of overall Rural Development Programme.
- Indicative allocations for new programme unknown as yet.
- Strategy Focus group to meet shortly – a number of LAGs will be involved, including Aberdeenshire.
- Will look at lessons learned from current programme and ways to apply successful methods in the next programme.

Discussion followed regarding LAG's view of LEADER in Aberdeenshire.

LAG response to be drafted following the publication of the Scottish Government consultation.

11 EU FUNDS 2014-2020 PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

Martin Brebner, European Services Executive, Aberdeenshire Council was welcomed to the meeting.

Martin gave a presentation on EU Funds 2014-2020:

- Current programmes are drawing to a close – the formal date is December 2013.
- General Regulation (basic rules for all future funds) published 06/10/11.
- COSLA's view is for a more local delivery methodology of rural development funds – similar to the LEADER approach.
- Increased conditions may apply to 2014-2020 funds.
- New delivery models must ensure programmes meet outputs and targets.
- It is hoped that there can be reduced administration with a move towards flat rate costs.
- Greater ring fencing with 5% of ERDF to go to urban areas.
- Fewer Priorities
- ESF/ERDF thematic priorities most likely in Scotland are: Research & Innovation, SMEs and Low Carbon Economy.
- 80% of ERDF is earmarked for these priorities.
- Details of European Maritime and Fisheries Fund published on 2 December.
- EFF to have a strong focus on sustainability with a move away from subsidising the industry.
- Delivery models proposed by the Commission were explained.
- 51% of voting rights to go to the private sector.

Next Steps

- Best delivery model to be identified.
- Stakeholders to work with Scottish Government.
- Proposals to be developed.
- Build capacity.
- Identify projects and match funding.

12 AOCB

There was no other business.

13 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- 13.1 LAG meeting – Tuesday, 20 March 2012, Committee Room 4, Woodhill House, 10.00 am.