

**MINUTE OF JOINT NALAG/SALAG MEETING  
WEDNESDAY, 11 MARCH 2015 AT 1.30 PM  
INVERURIE LOCO WORKS, INVERURIE**

**Present**

Duncan Abernethy	North East Scotland College
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Gina Ford	Scottish Enterprise
David Fyffe	Scottish Land and Estates
Jean Henretty	Marr Rural Partnership
Duncan Leece	Banffshire Rural Partnership
Calvin Little	NHS Grampian
John Loder	Formartine Partnership
Belinda Miller	Aberdeenshire Council
Eleanor Morris	Udny Community Trust
Anne Simpson	Garioch Rural Partnership
Liam Smyth	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian

**Officers in Attendance**

Martin Brebner	Team Manager – European Programmes & Policy
Alasdair Cunningham	European Programmes Co-ordinator
June Jaffrey	European Programmes Claims Officer
Anne MacLennan	European Programmes Claims Officer

**Apologies**

Martin Auld	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland
Kyrsten Black	Scotland's Rural College
Simon Blackett	Scottish Land and Estates
Jim Booth	SAOS
James Bream	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Elaine Brown	Formartine Community Councils
Iain Cocker	North East Scotland College
Moira Gash	Visit Royal Deeside
David Hay	Forestry Commission Scotland
Zillah Jamieson	Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership
Joyce Lovie	Marr Community Councils
Doug Milne	Garioch Community Councils
Willie Munro	Kincardine & Mearns Community Councils
David Nelson	Kincardineshire Development Partnership
Irene Rowe	Buchan Community Councils
Liz Scott	Buchan Development Partnership
Chris White	Buchan Local Community Planning Group
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Business
David Wood	Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

- 1.1 Duncan Leece, NALAG Chairperson, welcomed those present and introductions were made round the table.

- 1.2 Apologies were noted as above.
- 1.3 Liam Smyth is prepared to put his name forward for the position of Chairperson for the South LAG.

Anne Simpson proposed that Liam be appointed as SALAG Chair and this was seconded by Belinda Miller.

Jean Henretty had previously indicated that she would be willing to take up the second vacant SALAG Vice Chair position. Jean was proposed by Gina Ford and seconded by Dawn Tuckwood.

Both appointments were unanimously agreed by SALAG members present at the meeting.

Both positions run for a two year period. Current post holders are eligible to re-apply.

## **2. Minutes of NALAG/SALAG Meeting 16/01/15**

- 2.1 It was stated in item 3.6 of the minute that a press release could be issued to clarify the current state of play with regard to the new programme. Due to the increasing uncertainty about timescales, this was not done. LAGs are aware that potential applicants are anxious to know dates for the first round of applications but it was agreed that it would be wrong to go ahead with advertising the launch of the programme without clear guidance from Scottish Government. Members want to keep the public informed but not at the expense of breaking SG guidance. It was agreed that a press release will be issued once finalised dates have been confirmed.
- 2.2 A database has been set up and all enquiries from potential applicants are currently being recorded. This electronic database is stored on the Council server.
- 2.3 Items 5.2 and 5.4 of the minute appeared to provide conflicting information.

5.2 states: If members have any suggestions about other organisations from the community sector who could bring something to the table, they are asked to inform Martin. These nominated organisations will be approached to establish if they are interested in joining and, if so, the function of the LAGs will be fully explained. Hopefully the gaps in the skills matrix can be filled and a few more groups can be encouraged to get involved, ensuring that a sufficient number of representatives are available to attend the meetings.

5.4 states: Members were not of a mind to progress with an open application process at the moment and, apart from accepting the representatives from the above organisations, it was agreed that membership would not be progressed further at this stage.

Liam Smyth requested clarification.

In summary, it was agreed at the last meeting that, during the planning stage, both LAGs currently have an adequate spread of skills. Any gaps identified will be considered once LAGs move forward to dealing with applications. The membership will be re-assessed at that point.

### **3. Update on LDS Revisions and Timescales**

- 3.1 No further definitive answers on timescale were provided following the meeting with Alistair Prior. Therefore, using information gathered from today's workshops and the workshops held at the meeting on 16 January, Martin will incorporate members' feedback into the draft strategies.
- 3.2 Programme launch is anticipated to be circa June 2015. There will be a four to six month window for LAG training on the assessment of applications and business plans. This will be essential to enable LAG members to competently assess project applications.
- 3.3 The online application process and grant management element of the IT system is due for system testing in September. It is anticipated that staff training on the new IT system will take place from late October. Project applications could be invited from November but it was agreed that it would be too risky to proceed without the IT system being up and running. Accepting paper applications would lead to significant work for staff to back capture information onto the computer system.
- 3.4 Following the ministerial launch of the programme, LAGs will be free to animate and raise awareness about the programme to communities in the Aberdeenshire area.
- 3.5 Achieving milestones will be an important factor for applicants to the new programme. If specified milestones are not met, applicants will be unable to draw down funding. It was suggested that identifying milestones and predicting cashflow could be an area where Rural Partnerships might be able to provide assistance to applicants.
- 3.6 Procedures for recruiting a North Co-ordinator are in place and ready to go. As the recruitment process can take up to three months, LAG members are anxious to have the new person in post in time to enable the successful candidate to get up to speed in advance of the community engagement events and programme launch. However, as funding is only available for current staff members, recruiting cannot commence until the new budget is approved.

Although LAG members are frustrated with the timescale, it was agreed that it is essential to wait for SG guidance. The approved SLA between SG and accountable bodies is an important document as the accountable body will be liable for fines associated with any errors. The level of liability will be open for discussion on a case by case basis with regard to errors identified.

LAGs aim to ensure that by the time of the mid-term review, the new

programme in Aberdeenshire is seen in the same good light as the past programme enabling Aberdeenshire LAGs to be in a position to possibly secure additional funding.

- 3.7 A parallel process is anticipated for the fisheries programme although generic feedback has requested closer association with neighbouring areas of Moray and Angus. Angus is keen to collaborate with Aberdeenshire and join areas to create a North of Scotland 'super flag'. However, as yet there has been no response from Moray. Aberdeenshire will not delay the submission of the strategy if Moray chooses not to engage.

#### **4. Workshop Groups – LDS and Business Plan Feedback**

- 4.1 The meeting was split into two workshops, one comprising of SALAG members and the other of NALAG members. The questions for discussion were:

1. Rural Business and Farm Diversification:
  - i) Should these be delivered through grants, loans or services (e.g. business advisors)?
  - ii) Which sectors should be targeted?
2. To what extent should the LAG commission its own projects?

#### **5. Feedback from Workshop Groups**

- 5.1 North Aberdeenshire

##### Question 1 – Rural Business & Farm Diversification

- Should consider themes not covered by other schemes or services.
- Need to take account of limited size of funding pot (estimated circa £300k each).
- Funding pot percentage a minimum, could be supplemented from core budget.
- Payment of interest on loans could add value.
- Business advisor would be poor value for likely budget and duplicate existing services.
- Desire to retain option for both grants and loans.
- Need to consider risk factors and timescale for loans to fit in with programme timeframe.
- Resources should be used as an enabler for projects, not core fund them.
- Smaller awards favoured over one large scale project.
- Support should not go to businesses which are already in decline.
- Should be open to both private and social enterprises.
- Should be open to all sectors, but bids from tourism and food and drink should be encouraged, as should projects tackling rural isolation.
- Same approach to farming businesses as other rural businesses.

- Look at different models of farm business (e.g. co-operatives).

#### Question 2 – Commissioning

- Evidence of need must exist.
- Scoping and gathering of evidence important.
- Wish to retain the flexibility to commission and use at key points in programme delivery.
- Could 100% fund activity, but should endeavour to draw in match funding.
- Possibility to commission some form of ‘match funding advisory support’. This being key to helping those without resources/time who have a good project but no idea how to raise the necessary match funding.
- Use to target areas in LDS which are problematic.
- Potential themes include social isolation (transport etc.) and pan North Aberdeenshire issues.

#### South Aberdeenshire

#### Question 1 – Rural Business & Farm Diversification

5.2

- Rural business is more than farm businesses – includes SMEs and not-for profit.
- Both funds are distinctively different.
- Scoring of applications should target funds, rather than geographical targeting.
- Particular organisations/sectors to be targeted include hard to reach, isolated locations, tourism & leisure, food and drink, transport & connectivity.
- Scoring could be weighted to take lifestyle/health/wellbeing benefits into account.
- Need to animate in low uptake areas.
- Need to take account of displacement and other rules of other grant schemes such as Support for Aberdeenshire Businesses (SAB).

#### Question 2 – Commissioning

- Do not wish to replicate Dumfries & Galloway approach of commissioning circa 90% of activity.
- To be used to address gaps in delivery of the LDS (reviewed regularly).
- Emphasis on community-led applications.
- Could be used to stimulate and support a CLLD approach (place or issue based).

## 6. Monitoring & Evaluation Framework

- 6.1 Feedback from Scottish Government highlighted a need to develop Monitoring and Evaluation Frameworks for the North and South strategies.

Martin has prepared a draft framework and would welcome members’

comments. The framework came from a toolkit so the final document can be tailor made to suit Aberdeenshire's needs.

LAGs considered the document to be fairly robust and comprehensive although a number of minor terminology amendments were requested. It was considered important to build in qualitative as well as quantitative data.

It was highlighted that the figures in section 8 do not add up. Martin will re-calculate.

The timeline and milestones were considered to be fairly onerous with quarterly and mid-term reviews. Progress reports will be IT driven and it should be possible to run reports without being overly time-consuming for staff.

Martin will update the framework and this will be circulated by e-mail for final comments before being submitted along with the re-drafted LDS and Business Plan. It was agreed that the Chairs would make the final decision.

## **7. AOCB**

7.1 Four LAG members, Jean Henretty, Ian Cowe, David Fyffe and David Nelson, will represent Aberdeenshire at the COSLA Farm Diversification Workshop to be held on 24 March in Edinburgh. Alasdair Cunningham will also be in attendance. Attendees will report back at the next meeting. Anne will re-circulate the meeting agenda.

## **8. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

8.1 No date set for the next meeting as yet. It was agreed that it is beneficial to continue to meet as a joint NALAG/SALAG group for the planning stage.