

**MINUTE OF JOINT NALAG/SALAG MEETING  
THURSDAY, 9 JULY 2015 AT 1.00 PM  
COUNCIL CHAMBER, GORDON HOUSE, INVERURIE**

**Present**

James Bream	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland
Gina Ford	Scottish Enterprise
Gerald Banks (sub)	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Simon Blackett	Scottish Land and Estates
Jim Booth	SAOS
Neil Christison (sub)	Visit Scotland
Roisin Daly (sub)	Marr Rural Partnership
David Hekelaar	Formartine Community Councils
Jean Henretty	Marr Rural Partnership
Zillah Jamieson	Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership
Calvin Little	NHS Grampian
John Loder	Formartine Partnership
Robin Maddock (sub)	Banffshire Partnership
Belinda Miller	Aberdeenshire Council
Eleanor Morris	Udny Community Trust
David Nelson	Kincardineshire Development Partnership
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Liz Scott	Buchan Development Partnership
Anne Simpson	Garioch Rural Partnership
Liam Smyth	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Chris White	Aberdeenshire Council

**Officers in Attendance**

Martin Brebner	Team Manager – European Programmes & Policy
Anne MacLennan	European Programmes Claims Officer

**Apologies**

Duncan Abernethy	North East Scotland College
Martin Auld	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland
Kyrsten Black	Scotland's Rural College
Iain Cocker	North East Scotland College
Catriona Dougherty	Garioch Community Councils
David Fyffe	Scottish Land and Estates
Moira Gash	Visit Royal Deeside
Duncan Leece	Banffshire Partnership
Joyce Lovie	Marr Community Councils
Irene Rowe	Buchan Community Councils
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Business
David Wood	Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

- 1.1 Robin Maddock, acting Chairperson, welcomed those present and

introductions were made round the table.

1.2 Apologies were noted as above.

## **2. Minutes of NALAG/SALAG Meeting 11/03/15**

2.1 Item 5.1 – North Aberdeenshire Question 2 regarding Commissioning. John Loder queried bullet point “Could 100% fund activity”. Martin Brebner confirmed theoretically this is possible but clarification will be sought from Scottish Government.

2.2 Item 2.1, the sentence “Members want to keep the public informed but not at the expense of breaking SG rules” John Loder asked for “SG rules” to be amended to read “SG guidance”.

2.3 Item 2.2 regarding the setting up of an enquiry database, John Loder asked for clarification on where this database is being stored. Martin Brebner reported that this information is being stored on an electronic database on the Council server.

2.4 Item 2.3 stated that clarification was requested regarding items 5.2 and 5.4 in the minute of 16/01/15. John Loder asked for the actual text from points 5.2 and 5.4 to be added to the minute to clarify what was actually referred to in the previous minute – LAG members will not then have the work of referring back to copies of earlier minutes.

These amendments were noted and the minute was approved on the proposal of Jean Henretty, seconded by Anne Simpson.

## **3. Progress Update and Timetable**

3.1 Martin’s Progress Update (paper 2) was circulated in advance of the meeting.

3.2 Letters recently received from Scottish Government have answered some of the questions raised in the report.

3.3 Various issues are impacting on timescale, namely:

- Delay with the new SG IT system
- No guidance documents received as yet regarding LAG operation
- Service Level Agreement currently with Aberdeenshire Council Legal Services
- European Maritime and Fisheries Programme (EMFF) not likely to be signed off by the Commission until October 2015.

3.4 An indicative timetable was issued as Appendix 1.

3.5 With regard to the North Co-ordinator post, Martin confirmed that the job advert went live today (09/07/15). It is hoped to have the post filled by the end of September.

- 3.6 It is anticipated that the new website and the design of marketing materials and logos will be well underway in advance of the new Co-ordinator being in post.
- 3.7 As per the timetable, the first application round is scheduled for December. However, with no live IT system and the possibility of accepting paper applications, this date will be subject to change.
- 3.8 The next NALAG/SALAG meeting is likely to be held in October but dates for future meetings in 2016 will be subject to the dates set for funding rounds.
- 3.7 These delays are causing some concerns for LAG members and the following points were discussed:
- The LAG would prefer to wait for the IT system to go live in order to minimise difficulties with back capturing of data. However, it was agreed that, due to the possibility of further delays being encountered, there is no option but to launch the programme on a paper based application system. It will be important to check if claims can also be paid via a paper based system.
  - A joint launch of the three funds was considered. Due to the likely delay with the fisheries fund and a different target audience, it was agreed that a joint launch would not be practical.
  - The area covered by the NESFLAG includes North and South Aberdeenshire and Angus. It was confirmed that NESFLAG is a separate body with its own funding allocation. Marine Scotland will be processing all claims for the fisheries fund. NESFLAG will operate separately from NALAG/SALAG but there will be some need for co-operation, for example, it is likely that administration will be shared. Martin and David John have volunteered to assist Marine Scotland with writing guidance documents.
  - Will those submitting a funding application be directed to the most appropriate source of funding, i.e. Rural or Fisheries?
  - Will the application form be the same for both Rural and Fisheries? SG is currently still working on the application form.
  - South Co-ordinator return from secondment - it might be possible for Alasdair Cunningham to undertake a phased return but it is not likely that the secondment to SG will be further extended.
  - North and South LAGs are anxious to get going however, as yet, the programme has not been formally launched by Scottish Ministers. It was suggested that the LAGs write a letter to SG raising a number of points of concern and asking if a formal ministerial announcement is to be expected.

#### **4. Staffing**

- 4.1 According to SG guidance the following require LAG approval:
- Location of the secretariat.
  - Transfer of current staff to the new programme.

As per the SG guidelines, staff have to spend 100% of their time on

LEADER in order to be eligible to re-claim expenditure from SG. Martin's time is currently split with only 50% being allocated to LEADER. It may be possible to build in a 15% flat rate management cost but clarification will be sought from SG regarding this.

Anne and Martin left the room to allow LAG discussion.

The LAG endorsed the transfer of existing staff and agreed that the office would be located in Gordon House, Inverurie.

The formal start date for claiming staffing costs will be once the SLA is signed off. The deadline for returning the signed SLA is 3 August 2015.

## **5. Workshop – Application Assessment**

- 5.1 The aim of the workshop is to give LAG members an insight into procedures and processes associated with assessing applications.

As the new application form has not yet been provided, three dummy application scenarios were circulated using the old programme application form. The assessment form used is also Martin's interpretation of what the new form could be like.

LAGs decided to remain as one large group to assess the dummy application forms.

The group will also consider the full decision making structure. Do we want a Project Assessment Committee (PAC) similar to the structure in the last programme? It may be that the PAC does the application scoring. NESFLAG has already approved a PAC structure.

Today's workshop is a trial to help LAG members think about their decisions on approving applications.

- 5.2 Martin discussed the technical assessments which take the following into account:

- Eligibility
- Fit with Local Development Strategy
- Deliverability
- Value For Money
- Innovation
- Sustainability
- Equalities
- Community Empowerment and Capacity Building

## **5.3 Rural Housing Project**

The first application is for the refurbishment of a derelict 3 bedroom cottage on a farm estate to rent out as private rented accommodation.

#### Comments and Questions:

- Is a barn conversion the best use of LEADER money?
- Where is the benefit in this?
- Nothing innovative about this project.
- Why would the public sector want to get involved with this type of project?
- Private sector could fund this - more suited to a bank loan.
- Individual business opportunity rather than community benefit.
- Old LEADER did not support business schemes but the new programme is moving away from community benefit only.
- However, rural diversification is a fit.
- Social housing is a fit.
- Could be a better fit if presented as a holiday letting
- This would be an asset for a social housing group.
- Funding should produce a legacy effect.
- LEADER did not have farm diversification in the last programme.
- The new programme can now support the generation of profit.
- It's all about stimulating the local economy.
- In a project like this, some consideration must be given to the high costs of heating old buildings.

This application is based on an actual EOI and represents the type of issues that the LAG will face.

No guidance on farm diversification has been received as yet. Much depends on whether the application meets the criteria set out in the business plan.

There will be a fine balance between being accessible to private business and opening the flood gates.

Applicant must show that there is demand for the service they are providing.

In the last programme LEADER was the catalyst but the new programme will be the last brick in the funding wall.

It is anticipated that there will be a huge variation in the level of detail of applications which are submitted.

The direction of the new programme means that the LAG must support farm diversification and rural business.

LAG was reminded that 10% of the budget is for farm diversification. This equates to £330k for the North and £280k for the South.

#### 5.4 **Village Hall Improvement**

The second application is to upgrade a village hall to make it a more attractive venue to hold other functions and activities. The application

also includes the resurfacing of the hall car park.

Comments and Questions:

- Missing financial info for enhancement or improvement.
- Need to see a detailed cash-flow.
- Must demonstrate that the investment represents economic viability.
- Further information required regarding volunteers – what are their skills?
- This application is a standard village hall upgrade.
- No innovation.
- Are village halls the best use of funds for the new programme?
- From the last programme, some village hall applications were very sustainable and others not.
- More detailed targets, outputs and outcomes required.

Monitoring in the new programme will focus more on evidence of outputs. Project managers will be required to submit a formal change request if the outputs and outcomes change through the life of the project. Grant will only be paid out when set outcomes are achieved.

LAG agreed that the application form does not lend itself to submitting a good application. A new application form will be prescribed by SG. Applicants will be encouraged to submit further supplementary information such as a business plan to enhance their application.

In the last programme some applications did come to the PAC with significant gaps. Following PAC assessment, with assistance and advice from the Co-ordinator, applicants were given the opportunity to submit additional detail in advance of the LAG meeting.

It was agreed that continuing the PAC & LAG structure would be beneficial for the new programme.

LAG members are aware that, in the majority of cases, volunteers are completing the application forms.

In the new programme, if the applicant does not make the best pitch, even with assistance, then the application will be rejected by the LAG. If applicants do not have the skills to complete an application form, then it is possible that they will find it difficult to undertake a project.

As a LAG it would be useful to have some clear documentation to assist applicants for example a 'user manual'. It will be helpful if the LAG can signpost applicants to where they can access guidance and assistance which is already available out there.

## 5.5 **Folk Festival**

The third application is to hold a folk festival to showcase both experienced session musicians and singers alongside young performers.

Highlights of the event will be filmed and a DVD of the event will be produced. The Festival will also highlight locally sourced food from Deeside.

Comments and Questions:

- Application is dependent on very few people taking the project forward.
- Limited innovation as the event is a repeat of a similar event held the previous year.
- Sustainability was questioned.
- Last year's event did not generate enough income to cover this year's event.
- Income dependent on ticket sales.

How can the LAG help applicants think about having genuine innovation in their projects?

At present there are too many unanswered questions. Something simple, realistic, thorough and practical in the form of guidance will be required. Much of this is subject to receiving SG technical guidance and the scoring structure. It was agreed that it will probably be beneficial for the LAG to have a similar dummy application round once the guidance has been received.

The LAG wants to attract as many applications as possible and, as applicants are not expert application writers, LAG members, with their individual local knowledge, will be willing to assist where possible.

The LAG has the authority to make changes or make exceptions and can decide on the minimum and maximum project size. Achievable parameters need to be set. The same rigour will be applied to a £6k application as to an £89k application.

The LAG does not want to make the process so restrictive that hardly any applications come forward.

## **7. AOCB**

- 7.1 It was agreed that NALAG and SALAG would benefit from having the PAC structure.
- 7.2 Liam Smyth suggested that it could be helpful for new members to see some project case studies from the last programme, highlighting why these projects were good and what they achieved.

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

- 8.1 It is hoped that the next meeting can be held towards the end of September. Items on the agenda will include:

- Setting a date and agreeing a format for the programme launch
- Setting up a PAC and agreeing membership
- LAG Terms of Reference
- Meeting the new Co-ordinator

It is anticipated that SG guidance will be received in advance of the next meeting.