

**MINUTE OF JOINT NALAG/SALAG MEETING
THURSDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2015 AT 2.00 PM
COUNCIL CHAMBER, GORDON HOUSE, INVERURIE**

Present

Martin Auld	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds Scotland
Gerald Banks (sub)	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Gavin Clark	Scottish Natural Heritage
Catriona Dougherty	Garioch Community Councils
Gina Ford	Scottish Enterprise
David Fyffe	Scottish Land and Estates
David Hekelaar	Formartine Community Councils
Jean Henretty	Marr Rural Partnership
Zillah Jamieson	Banffshire Coast Tourism Partnership
Duncan Leece	Banffshire Partnership
John Loder	Formartine Partnership
Eleanor Morris	Udny Community Trust
Lorna Paterson	National Farmers' Union Scotland
Anne Simpson	Garioch Rural Partnership
Liam Smyth	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Brian Stewart-Coxon (sub)	Federation of Small Business
Chris White	Aberdeenshire Council

Officers in Attendance

Martin Brebner	Team Manager – European Programmes & Policy
Alasdair Cunningham	European Programmes Co-ordinator (South)
Flick Ibbotson	European Programmes Co-ordinator (North)
Anne MacLennan	European Programmes Claims Officer (North)

Apologies

Duncan Abernethy	North East Scotland College
Kyrsten Black	Scotland's Rural College
Simon Blackett	Scottish Land and Estates
Jim Booth	SAOS
James Bream	Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce
Iain Cocker	North East Scotland College
Ian Cowe	Forestry Commission Scotland
Moira Gash	Visit Royal Deeside
Calvin Little	NHS Grampian
Joyce Lovie	Marr Community Councils
Belinda Miller	Aberdeenshire Council
David Nelson	Kincardineshire Development Partnership
Irene Rowe	Buchan Community Councils
Liz Scott	Buchan Development Partnership
Philip Smith	Visit Scotland
Dawn Tuckwood	NHS Grampian
Andy Willox	Federation of Small Business
David Wood	Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action

1. Welcome & Apologies

- 1.1 Duncan Leece, Chairperson, welcomed those present and introduced Flick Ibbotson, North Co-ordinator, who took up post on Monday 28 September.

Duncan thanked Eleanor Morris who helped short list the applicants and Chris White who was part of the interview panel.

- 1.2 This meeting is likely to be the last joint meeting of the North and South LAGs although it was considered to be good practice to continue to hold joint meetings at least once a year.
- 1.3 Apologies were noted as above.

2. Minutes of NALAG/SALAG Meeting 09/07/15

- 2.1 There were no matters arising. The minute was approved on the proposal of Liam Smyth, seconded by David Hekelaar.

3. Memorandum of Understanding (paper 2)

- 3.1 It is a Scottish Government requirement that Memoranda of Understanding between LAGs and their accountable bodies are drawn up. The draft document, which was circulated in advance of the meeting, clarifies the roles of the LAG and Aberdeenshire Council as the accountable body.
- 3.2 The document states that the Council is responsible for any expenditure incurred. The Memorandum of Understanding is a fairly complex matrix and Martin Auld requested further clarification about the difference between 'accountable' and 'responsible'.
- 3.3 Section 5.3 states: "The accountable body will be empowered to commit expenditure from the administration budget provided that this does not exceed agreed administration budget line amounts". Any variation to budget lines must be agreed by the Aberdeenshire LAG. It is proposed that the LAG delegate authority to the accountable body for minor variations between budget lines to avoid having to go to the LAG for every small change in budget headings. All such changes will be reported to the LAG at the following committee meeting.
- 3.4 It was discovered that a page of Paper 2 was missing. The document was re-printed.
- 3.5 Section 2.3.1 states: "Ensure that the North/South Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy is delivered, along with its accompanying business plan, communications plan and monitoring and evaluation framework".

John Loder suggested that the LAGs may not be able to deliver everything which is stated in the Strategy. Therefore it was agreed to change "ensure" to "enable" and also to add "in line with the business plan

in partnership with the NESFLAG”

Section 2.3.1 now reads: “Enable the delivery of the North/South Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy in line with its accompanying business plan, communications plan and monitoring and evaluation framework, in partnership with the North East of Scotland Fisheries Local Action Group”.

- 3.6 Chris White brought up the issue of confidentiality and the increasing amount of Freedom of Information requests being made to the Council.

Discussion took place regarding the release of business plans and the fact that commercial businesses may not want their business plans seen by competitors.

Businesses need to be made aware if their commercial confidentiality could be breached and Martin will check on whether this is the case.

- 3.7 Section 2.1

The LAG has no formal legal status. LAG members are not individually responsible for this document and need clarity on point 2.1. Martin will feed back to Scottish Government that LAG members are not willing to accept liability as individuals.

- 3.8 Section 2.3.7 states: “Network with other North Aberdeenshire LAGs and stakeholders”. Remove “North Aberdeenshire”.

- 3.9 Section 3.2.8

Define the Managing Authority by adding Scottish Government in brackets.

- 3.10 Section 5.1 & 5.2

Legislation is not the same thing as guidance. Add a comma after the word legislation.

- 3.11 Section 5.4

It was agreed to add “by the LAG” to read “The Accountable Body will be empowered by the LAG to approve changes between budget lines”.

- 3.12 Section 6.1

Liam Smyth questioned the date of 2022 for the duration of the agreement. Why is the LAG being held accountable for a further two years?

- 3.13 Response from Scottish Government on the above issues will be sought within the next couple of weeks as it will be sensible to have clarification before the launch.

4. Terms of Reference (paper 3)

- 4.1 Paper 3, sets out proposed terms of reference for the full configuration of the LAGs.

- 4.2 There will be one committee for the North and one for the South. Content for the terms of reference is taken from the business plan.
- 4.3 The minimum quorum of 5 members for LAG committee meetings is stipulated by Scottish Government. PAC quorum could have proved to be an issue but, following an e-mail reminder, more applications to join the PAC have now been received.

The Project Assessment Committee has more of an advisory role. The structure of meetings is similar but only the full LAG committee has power to approve applications.

The ability to consult and obtain approval via e-mail was challenged. While a quorate meeting would be the ideal, LAGs do not want a funding round to be cancelled or postponed due to quorum not being reached. There is the possibility of video conference facilities for meetings which are held in Council buildings.

Gina Ford suggested that members work in pairs to complete the scoring process. That way, if someone is unable to attend the meeting, the other person will be able to express their scoring partner's view.

It was agreed that, where possible, LAGs steer away from 'number' scoring.

- 4.4 It was clarified that two terms of reference documents will be produced, one will say North and one will say South.
- 4.5 Discussion took place regarding whether a representative from each sector is required to be present at meetings. However, members were reminded that one third public, one third private and one third community was a discipline set by the LAGs. It was confirmed that the only stipulation set by Scottish Government is that the committee must not comprise of more than 49% public sector at any meetings held.
- 4.6 Section 2.1.3 states: "Agree financial allocations and virements between LAG budget lines for areas which are not delegated to the Accountable Body". Indicative allocations will be set for each theme and it will be up to the full committee to vire between themes if necessary. It is highly likely that LAGs will be required to do this.
- 4.7 Section 2.1.5 states: "Agreeing amendments to the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan when required". Members queried what amendments are likely to be required and by whom. Scottish Government will have to approve any amendments to the strategy. It was therefore agreed that "when required" be changed to read "where appropriate".
- 4.8 Members were happy to accept the updated Terms of Reference documents (one for North and one for South) and these were unanimously approved.

5. Project Assessment Committee Appointments (paper 4)

- 5.1 The LAGs had previously agreed to continue with the two tier PAC and LAG approach.

The PAC will consider project applications in depth before they go forward to the full LAG committee.

The deadline for applications to join the PAC was extended and the following additional applications were received:

North

Irene Rowe – Buchan Community Councils
David Hekelaar – Formartine Community Councils
Neil Christison – Visit Scotland

Making a total of 9

South

Gavin Clark - SNH
Dawn Tuckwood – NHS Grampian
Dawn Brown/Anne Simpson (sub) – the Garioch Partnership
Neil Christison – Visit Scotland

Making a total of 6

Liam Smyth considered six members to be a little tight for the South PAC. Any further applications for the South were encouraged.

Jean Henretty, Marr Rural Partnership, put herself forward for the South PAC.

It had been agreed at earlier meetings that specialists with particular additional skills could be called on to attend meetings where necessary. If any skills gaps are identified which the Council can fill, Chris White will undertake to find a suitable person.

Each individual PAC will need to consider their own skills matrix and this should be reviewed on an annual basis.

These positions will be liable to change if someone leaves and it was agreed that this review process should be built into the Memorandum of Understanding.

The LAG Chairs were not keen to also chair the PAC meetings.

It was unanimously agreed to adopt the appointment of PAC members with the addition of the additional names.

6. Programme Launch (paper 5)

- 6.1 Now that funding allocations have been received, the team are focusing on animation and promotion of the programme.

- 6.2 If agreed by the LAGs, it is proposed to launch the programme in November as follows:

North event to be held at the Baden Powell Centre in Turriff from 2–4 pm on Thursday 19 November.

Two South events, one at the Woodend Barn in Banchory from 10-12 in the morning of Wednesday 18 November with a second in the Tullynessle Hall from 2-4pm on the same day.

A networking buffet lunch will be provided at all events.

- 6.3 The format for the events will be an introduction from the LAG Chair, information about the LDS by the Team Manager and an explanation about the application process and eligibility criteria by the Co-ordinators. This will be followed by a question and answer session and some previous programme case studies from projects which fit new programme criteria.

It may also be possible to invite other funders to have a stand at the events.

- 6.4 There will be further promotional events held throughout Aberdeenshire in the coming months.

- 6.5 The North event was agreed.

The South LAG members would prefer to hold one of the events in the K&M area, possibly in an evening.

The team will investigate the possibility of a venue in Stonehaven for an evening event.

- 6.6 It was suggested that copies of the LDS be made available to hand out at the launch events. Guidelines about application timelines could also be issued as it will be important to manage expectation.

- 6.7 It was also suggested that a simple form could be circulated on the day to allow people to submit their contact details and brief information about their project idea. However, people must submit their official expression of interest forms via the Rural Network website.

7. Application and Meeting Timetable (paper 6)

- 7.1 Further delays with the IT system mean that the first application round will be paper based. No hard copy of the application form has been received from Scottish Government as yet. This will be required in advance of the launch events. It will not be possible to pay out any grant until the IT system goes live in April 2016 but round 1 applicants will probably not be in a position to make a claim before that date.

The timetable is not risk free and although members are hesitant to go ahead with unknowns, it was agreed that the timetable is a well thought

through risk and is acceptable. Meeting dates for next year were approved.

- 7.2 A letter has already been sent to Scottish Government officials regarding LAG concerns and it was agreed that a letter from the Chairs should also be sent to the Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead expressing LAG concerns about timescale and further delays with the LARCs IT system, the paper based application form and accompanying guidance documents.

Martin will also feedback to COSLA.

8. Website Demonstration

- 8.1 Martin gave a brief demonstration of the new website. LAG members will be informed when the website goes live. Anne Simpson reminded the Chair about the importance of the website being accessible for all users. Fresh Ideas, the website design company, have a two year maintenance contract and there will be provision to make amendments during that time.

The landing page shows the three funds. Clicking on the North, South or Fisheries tab will take you to the home page for each particular programme.

- 8.2 North and South LAGs are now on social media. Flick has created facebook and twitter accounts.

- 8.3 A press release has also been drafted.

- 8.4 David Fyffe highlighted that there is very little reference made to rural business. The wording is too community orientated and this needs to be addressed in order to strike a balance.

- 8.5 The team will be attending website training in the next couple of weeks to enable them to amend and add new items to the website.

9. Finance Report (paper 7)

- 9.1 Martin updated members on the programme spend to date.

- 9.2 LAG approval is required to vire £2,125 from the staffing budget to the marketing budget. This is due to additional cost incurred with having to go to an external contractor for publicity materials. Aberdeenshire Council internal graphic design services did not have the capacity to undertake the work. Spend on staffing has been significantly lower due to the South Co-ordinator being on secondment and the appointment date for the North Co-ordinator being later than anticipated.

At a recent meeting with Alasdair Prior, it was suggested that the North/South split should be done on a percentage basis rather than an equal basis. This would result in a split of 54% to the North and 46% to the South for any shared costs.

It was decided that this item will be discussed in further detail at the next meeting.

10. Training

- 10.1 Scottish Government has now appointed someone to develop the training programme and training should be available from late November/early December.
- 10.2 Some training will be developed on a Webinar basis. Members would prefer face-to-face training where possible. There is a benefit to being able to address issues through discussion.

11. AOCB

- 11.1 Travel expense claim forms are available from Anne.
- 11.2 To help promote the programme launch, LAG members are asked to forward information about the events to as many of their contacts as possible.

APPROVED