

Orkney LAG is being part-financed by the Scottish Government and the European Community
LEADER 2014-2020 Programme



Scottish Rural
Development
Programme



**Minutes: LEADER Programme 2007-2013
Local Action Group Meeting**

Monday 17 August 2015 (11:00) at St Magnus Suite, Pickaquooy Centre.

Present: Phyllis Harvey, Alister Brown, Barbara Foulkes, Bill Innes, Francesca Couperwhite, Edgar Balfour, Brian Cromarty, Hannah Ker, Fiona Matheson, Issy Grieve, Steve Ray, Keith Dobney, Kerry Wilson (attending for Kirsty Mainland), Mark Hull, Paul Ross, Amy Esslemont, Julie Murphy (minutes)

1. Welcome

Phyllis Harvey welcomed everybody to this “shadow” LAG/FLAG meeting and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to update the Local Action Group on the current situation regarding the LEADER 2014-2020 Programme. She advised that the new programme was not able to launch yet as signature of the Service Level Agreement had not been finalised. Phyllis introduced herself, and the new LEADER team, and then asked each of the LAG members to introduce themselves.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Amy Thomson, Nic Thake, Sarah Sankey, Susan Pirie and Stewart Crichton.

Kerry Wilson confirmed that she was attending on behalf of Kirsty Mainland, of the Orkney Tourism Group. Bill Innes confirmed that he would be a temporary substitute for Kerry Spence on behalf of Orkney Islands Council’s Community Education.

Phyllis passed on Andy Knight’s message of best wishes to the new LAG – Andy had been a member of the LAG for the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme.

3. Appointment of Chair & Vice-Chair

Phyllis Harvey explained to the group that it was not possible for an employee of the local authority to be the Chair for the LAG/FLAG, but that it was acceptable for a Council employee to be elected as a Vice-Chair.

She also explained that the Chair of the LAG would be expected to be the main contact for the Scottish Government, and that the post would also involve attendance of meetings outwith Orkney.

Proposals for Chair were invited, and Barbara Foulkes proposed that Francesca Couperwhite be elected and this was seconded by Bill Innes. Francesca confirmed that she was happy to accept the position.

Proposals for the Vice-Chair were invited, Francesca Couperwhite proposed Phyllis Harvey and this was seconded simultaneously by Barbara Foulkes and Mark Hull. Phyllis confirmed her acceptance. Phyllis then asked Francesca if she wished to chair the rest of the meeting. Francesca said that she was happy for Phyllis to fill this role, as she had not been involved in the compilation of the agenda.

4. Induction

a. Draft Constitution and Hospitality & Gifts Policy

Amy Esslemont, LEADER Development Officer, advised that the Constitution document was in draft form, and it outlined the objectives and procedures for the LAG. The document was submitted for information and could not be finalised until the Local Development Strategy has been signed off.

Amy explained that if any member had any specific queries about the Hospitality and Gifts Policy of Orkney LEADER Local Action Group, then these would need to be referred to the Chair.

The LAG were advised that in order for a meeting to take place, and conduct business, the public sector representation must not exceed 49%. Amy advised that in order to fulfil this requirement it would be helpful if members would ensure that they advise the LEADER Team if they are able to attend.

Members enquired if a proxy could be used at meetings, and they were advised that this would be possible, if they advised the LEADER Team, by e-mail, prior to the meeting.

Members enquired how many attendees were needed to make the meeting quorate, and were advised that 5 was the minimum number required.

b. Register of Interest

The necessity and reasons for a register of interest were explained to the LAG. They were advised that they would be e-mailed a register of interest form, which should be completed, signed and returned to the LEADER Team.

5. Introduction to LEADER

Phyllis advised the meeting that the Service Level Agreement (SLA) had to be signed before the Scottish Government would release further guidance. Phyllis added that concerns had been raised about some parts of this document, and that she was waiting for the Scottish Government's reply.

Amy then gave a presentation to the meeting:

a. LEADER Background

Amy explained the background of LEADER, and the LEADER approach, as a refresher for some returning members from the 2007-2013 Programme, and to inform the new members of the LAG.

b. Role of the LAG

Amy urged members to become involved in LEADER, and advised that their role is to actively promote LEADER within their networks, and to offer guidance to any interested groups/individuals with community project ideas.

c. Remit and Agreement of Lead Partner

It was confirmed that the Accountable Body would be responsible for the support of the operation of the programme including staffing, administration and financial requirements.

The LAG agreed that Orkney Islands Council should continue to be the Accountable Body.

It was also agreed by the LAG that the existing staff from the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme should be transferred to the 2014-2020 LEADER Programme.

The LAG agreed that the location of the LEADER Team's office should remain the same - i.e.: within the Council Offices, School Place, Kirkwall.

d. Example of projects from the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme

Amy showed the group some examples of projects from the 2007-2013 Programme, in order to highlight the variety of projects that were approved and the match funding which had been invested.

Amy pointed out that for the new programme in-kind match funding would no longer be eligible.

A member enquired about in-kind for the staffing of a project, and whether this could still be claimed, and was advised that the LEADER Team would need some clear guidance from the Scottish Government on this.

Amy explained that there would still be a requirement for match funding to be in place when applying for LEADER funding, or at least a strong indication of it, in order for the LAG to calculate the LEADER assistance required.

6. Timeline for Programme

Amy advised that the latest timelines received from the Scottish Government were not definitive.

Amy also advised that the Scottish Government had launched an Expression of Interest form on their website, and would be holding these until the SLA has been completely signed-off. She recommended that any interested parties should therefore be advised to contact the LEADER Team direct with their projects ideas. However, it was pointed out that the Team would not be able to advise applicants on eligibility criteria.

Amy advised the LAG that application guidance had been scheduled for release at end August/early September, and this timeline was already looking unlikely.

Amy confirmed that the first applications would have to be submitted on manual forms, as the web-based Local Actions in Rural Communities system (LARCS) is still being developed, and may not be available until mid-April 2016. Also, no approval of projects can occur after December 2019, and all project claims are to be paid by the LAG by the end of December 2020.

Phyllis explained that the compressed expenditure, and the compacted timeline, was quite a change from previous programmes. Amy said that it would be important for any capital projects to apply as early as possible.

7. Business Plan & Local Development Strategy

a. Priorities for Funding

Amy advised that the Scottish Government may require the Business Plan to be changed as required.

She confirmed that the overall aim was:

“To achieve an increase in sustainable employment and incomes, and in social cohesion and quality of life; and to conserve and enhance the high quality of the heritage and environment while maximising the benefits in economic, social and environmentally friendly terms”

Amy then outlined the five core themes, explaining that a project must be able to demonstrate a strong link to at least one of these themes:

- Support small business and enterprise growth and farm diversification
- Support for Orkney's tourism, cultural heritage, crafts and food and drinks sector
- Support for Orkney's community services and facilities
- Support for Orkney's natural environment and development and sustainable energy
- Support development of Orkney's fisheries sector

With regards to the portion of the programme budget to be allocated to each theme, Amy advised that these figures could be amended as the programme progressed, and would be managed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

LAG members asked for clarification in relation to business development and farm diversification. They were advised that both were to have a minimum of 10% of the total LEADER funding (i.e.: £250,000 each). Phyllis explained that a Business Local Action Group (BLAG) may need to be set up at a later date.

There was some discussion as to what types of projects would be funded given that the 10% allocation was quite small. It was suggested that for business development it would make no sense to duplicate any business-type funding already available within Orkney.

Members were advised that in relation to farm diversification, more guidance would be required from the Scottish Government.

There was further discussion on the core theme "Support small business and enterprise growth and farm diversification". It was decided that a paper would be presented to the LAG at the next meeting with ideas on the ways in which LEADER might support small businesses, and also detailing other funding already available for businesses within Orkney.

Amy advised that all LEADER funding was to be reviewed in 2016, and may decrease, and this would be dependent on the final expenditure figure for the 2007-2013 programme. Alister Brown (previously LDO for LEADER 2007-2013 programme) said that at the last LEADER Co-coordinators' meeting he attended the indicative allocation of funds was discussed, and he felt that more realistic allocation of funds throughout Scotland had been made in comparison to the previous programme.

Regarding the core theme "support development of Orkney's fisheries sector", the LAG were advised that this theme was to be funded by the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), and to-date there was no allocation information available, and it had not been signed-off at European level yet.

b. Programme Budget

The LAG asked about the programme budget's administration and staffing figure and was advised that this amount was an absolute maximum. This figure would be reviewed annually, and where possible any excess could be utilised by projects. It was confirmed that the Council finance staff have in the past supplied their services to the LEADER Programme in-kind.

Co-operation projects were discussed and Amy advised that the 10% of the fund allocated for this was a minimum amount. It was agreed that how co-operation would be achieved should be discussed further at a future LAG meeting. Phyllis advised that clarification was needed regarding what could actually be classed as a co-operation project and whether or not there could be co-operation within Orkney, between some of the isles, for example. Phyllis confirmed that Orkney LEADER had not been involved in

any of these types of projects during the last programme. It was noted that additional support and guidance would be required from the Scottish Government on this.

8. Application Process and Assessment Criteria

Amy presented the LAG with a flowchart to illustrate the application processes for all applications for LEADER grant. She explained that applications for £10,000 or more would have to be decided at a LAG meeting, and those under £10,000 could be fast-tracked.

Amy explained that the fast-track process would involve the LAG Chair and LEADER Development Officer jointly scoring the application using the assessment criteria. The scoring would then be e-mailed to all LAG members for their review or comments. She confirmed that there would need to be an adequate number of responses which agreed with the scoring, and that the 49/51 rule would still apply. Should these requirements not be met, the application would have to be deferred to the next LAG meeting.

The LAG were informed that Council projects had never been fast-tracked in the previous programme, and that, in the new programme, the Scottish Government intended to inspect 5% of any Council Projects prior to approval being granted.

Amy advised that as a change from the previous programme, each applicant would have to submit a business or project plan, which the LAG would be required to assess as part of the project's application.

Amy informed the LAG that part of their remit was to develop their own assessment criteria, and she presented them with a briefing paper for consideration.

After discussion it was suggested that the draft document should be amended as follows:

- layout of the document should be amended to show each assessment question together with the corresponding scoring options.
- scoring for the criteria "Is the project plan/business plan viable?" should be split further to clearly show points for:

- Viability
- Objectives & Milestones
- Identifying the Barriers & Risks
- How the Barriers & Risks will be addressed

It was agreed that the amended assessment criteria would be presented for consideration at the next LAG meeting.

Questions and comments were made on the scoring criteria for "How innovative is the project in its focus and methodology?" Amy explained that the scoring system did not require the whole project to be innovative, and that an element of it could be considered as innovative.

Phyllis advised that the LAG members had previously operated a joint scoring system and that this had worked well. Amy added that if any LAG member had any specific queries regarding applications, or other agenda items, then it would be best to raise these with the LEADER Team prior to the meeting.

9. Enquires to Date

The LAG were given a list of all of the enquiries which have been received to-date for their information. Amy asked the LAG to assist these potential applicants and encourage potential applicants to speak with

her as soon as possible. Amy confirmed that any information collected in the early stages of a project application would also be required by any match funders.

10. Proposed Dates for Next LAG Meetings

The LAG was given a list of provisional dates for LAG meetings covering 2015 and 2016. It was pointed out that the dates could only be provisional, due to the lack of application guidelines, but they would be confirmed once guidance was received.

11. A O C B

Alternative ways to participate in future LAG meetings were discussed (Skype, video conferencing, telephone conferencing) and Phyllis said that these would be investigated.

Amy suggested that LAG members who are unable to attend a meeting could always e-mail their comments for consideration at the meeting.

The meeting closed at 12:45.