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Scottish Rural
Development
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Minutes: LEADER Programme 2014 - 2020
Local Action Group Meeting

Wednesday 1 June 2016 (11:00) at St Magnus Suite, Pickaquoy Centre, Kirkwall

Present: LAG Members - Francesca Couperwhite (Chair), Phyllis Harvey (Vice Chair), Edgar Balfour, Barbara Foulkes, Issy Grieve, Hannah Ker, Steve Ray, Paul Ross, Sarah Sankey, Nic Thake

LEADER Team - Amy Esslemont (LEADER Development Officer), Julie Murphy (Assistant Project Officer) - minutes

1. Welcome

Francesca Couperwhite, the Chair, welcomed the Local Action Group members (the LAG) to the meeting.

2. Apologies

Apologies were received from Morag Robertson, Keith Dobney, Brian Cromarty, Dawn Flett, and Susan Pirie. Francesca confirmed that the 49/51 private/public split was met.

3. Draft Minutes of the Meeting – 3 December 2015

Francesca offered members the opportunity to make any comments on the draft minutes of the LAG meeting held on 3 December 2015. No comments were made and they were formally approved, proposed by Nic Thake and seconded by Edgar Balfour.

Francesca pointed out the following as matters arising from these minutes:

Item 3 - Phyllis had approached the college regarding using their facilities for future meetings and the college had agreed. Francesca thanked Orkney College for their assistance with this matter.

Item 8 - Amy had circulated the map showing the LAG areas in Scotland to the Orkney LAG members for their information.

Item 9 – Francesca confirmed that since the last meeting there had been a change to the situation regarding the scoring criteria for projects, and the Scottish Government would no longer be providing these, and the LAG would be using their own scoring criteria.

4. Assessment of Round 1 Projects

Francesca suggested that in future a deadline should be set for draft applications before formal submission of the final applications to enable all applications to be processed fairly, efficiently and timeously. Phyllis suggested the deadline should be set at two weeks before the final application deadline. The LAG agreed that this should be added to the LEADER internal procedures.

Declaration of Interest - Francesca advised the LAG that there were 3 projects to assess at the meeting all with Community Development Funding as match funding, therefore the Orkney Islands Council (OIC) employees amongst the LAG members would have to leave before the assessment took place. Francesca asked if there were any other LAG members with a declaration of interest in respect of the projects to be assessed. There were no declarations made. The Chair then suggested that the LAG

discuss the scoring criteria process prior to assessment of Round 1 projects for the benefit of the new members.

Amy advised that the LAG would be expected to make a joint decision on the scoring of a project, utilizing the selection criteria previously agreed by the LAG, with each score awarded justified by a supporting comment. She confirmed that for a project to be successful it would need to have at least 26 points, and if any project was awarded a 0 on any of the criteria then that would automatically result in a failed application. Issy Grieve asked if there needed to be a comment for each of the criteria and Amy confirmed there would. Phyllis stressed that the comment would not be attributable to an individual member but would be a joint comment of the LAG. Francesca explained that members should not discuss the decisions made on projects outwith the meeting and that members should not divulge any individual comments to applicants and/or members of the public.

Amy explained that letters of offer had not been finalised yet. She advised that a draft letter had been sent out in May for Accountable Body legal teams to comment on, so far the Scottish Government had received 8 responses, and there had been no major concerns expressed. Amy said that the Scottish Government had advised that they expect to send out a final version of the letter by the start of next week, however they did add that if any major concerns were received from Accountable Body legal teams, post receipt, that this may delay the process. Amy confirmed that projects could not go ahead until they had signed and returned the letter of offer. Francesca added that delay in receiving the letter of offer may result in amendments having to be made to milestones.

Francesca stated that the LAG would need to decide on the order applications would be assessed, whether that be the order the applications were received, or ordered depending on any declarations of interest applicable. She suggested that they decide at each meeting the order that application would be assessed based on any declarations of interest applicable.

Phyllis Harvey and Issy Grieve (OIC Employees) left the room at this point.

A LAG member queried if the total funds held by the applicants could be provided to help the LAG assess a project as actually needing the LEADER funding, given that LEADER was to be the last brick in the wall. Amy explained it would be difficult to fully assess an applicant's financial situation from only considering a bank balance at a given date as there may be other commitments to consider. Amy added that the application form does not explicitly ask the applicant for the group's financial status, however the financial status is discussed with applicants during completion of the application.

All project applications were assessed using the scoring criteria previously agreed by the LAG (13 criteria with a total of 39 marks available and a pass rate of 26) and against the following, current LAG and Applicant Guidance versions:

- LEADER General Guidance for Applicants, Version 2.0, dated 7 March 2016
- LAG Project Assessment Guidance, Version 1, dated 7 March 2016

The projects were assessed in the following order:

a. St Andrews Community Centre Grounds Improvement (Project Ref: ORK 14 001)

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group, and invited the LAG to discuss. A LAG member commented on the value for money that was evident in the garden improvements, and how these improvements would have a positive environmental impact on the area. The LAG agreed that although consideration had been given to barriers and risks to successful delivery, those identified were not specific enough to the project proposed and required further refinement. The LAG also felt that the project demonstrated limited innovation, and that the applicant could have included more innovative measures.

The project scored less than the required pass mark and therefore it was agreed by the LAG it would be refused.

A LAG member asked if the applicant would be able to resubmit their application and Amy advised that they would be provided with feedback and advised they could resubmit to the next LAG meeting if the areas identified could be addressed.

a. Upgrade of Burray Hall (Project Ref: ORK 14 002) - Decision in Principle

Francesca advised that for this project the LAG could only make a Decision in Principle, as the match funding from the Community Development Fund had not yet been confirmed. She explained that the applicant would be given 60 days, from a decision in principle letter being issued, to provide evidence of the match funding being awarded.

Amy explained that the match funding situation had changed since the application had been received, in that a private grant would not now be received, as the funder was not currently making decisions on applications, and the applicant would be covering this shortfall from their own funds.

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group, and invited the LAG to discuss. A LAG member queried whether the energy efficiency measures outlined in the project were merely those required to bring the hall up to building standards. Amy explained that other measures had been considered but proved not to be value for money in the long-term. The LAG felt that the project would be significant for Burray, allowing the community to keep a community hub in use, and noted that it had been much supported by the community.

The project was approved, subject to confirmation of match funding. On confirmation of match funding the grant to be awarded would be up to £35,033.27 (50% of the approved eligible costs inclusive of VAT).

b. Installation of Artificial Bowling Green at Kirkwall Bowling Club (Project Ref: ORK 14 003)

Amy presented a summary of the project to the group, and invited the LAG to discuss. Amy explained that the club had obtained two quotes to ascertain a cost for the project, but due to the costs involved in the project had subsequently advertised openly on Public Contracts Scotland, the outcome of which was pending. She added that all projects are assessed for reasonableness of cost by an independent member of Council staff. A LAG member stated that they felt reassured about the costs, given that they had been independently assessed. The LAG felt that although there were no environmental benefits of replacing a grass surface with an artificial one, there were strong social benefits for people of all ages.

The project was approved. The grant to be awarded would be up to £68,721 (49.61% of the approved eligible costs inclusive of VAT).

5. Delegated authority in respect of amendments to approved applications

Phyllis Harvey rejoined the meeting and advised that Issy had left due to other commitments. The LAG agreed that in future assessment of projects would be the last item on the agenda to enable members with declared interests to leave the meeting at this point if necessary.

Francesca presented a paper on delegated authority and advised the LAG that the proposal was similar to that used in the last LEADER programme. A LAG member commented that this had previously worked successfully. Francesca proposed that the delegated authority levels as laid out in the paper be adopted for the current programme, and the LAG agreed.

6. Co-operation

Francesca explained that she had attended a Co-operation Café at the LEADER Conference recently and had registered Orkney LAG'S interest in:

- Rural Enterprise Support – concerning women in rural enterprise
- Visitor Management of over-visited sites – Skye was the example used
- Youth Network – involving young people in LEADER

Francesca advised that these ideas would need to be taken forward by an organisation to become a co-operation project, and wondered if Voluntary Action Orkney may be interested in looking at the Youth Network idea. Hannah said that she would discuss this with her colleagues.

Francesca said the paper was circulated for the LAG's information and that guidance on co-operation projects would be required before any progress could be made on any ideas, but that ideas could be flagged up by members at any time. The list in the paper simply recorded the sessions which she had attended and this would not prevent local organisations getting involved in other topics on the list.

7. Enquiries received and anticipated projects

A list of all the LEADER enquiries and potential projects received since the last LAG meeting was circulated with the agenda. Amy summarized that there had been 33 Expressions of Interest since the last LAG meeting in December, 20 of which had been accepted, 4 were pending (requiring further information from applicant), 1 had withdrawn, due to the LEADER and project timescales being incompatible, and 8 had been advised the project was unsuitable to apply for LEADER funding.

Amy advised that the estimated costs provided by anticipated projects to date, equated to over half of the LEADER budget, with the majority linked to the core theme – Support for Orkney's community services and facilities, although enquiries had now been received under all core themes.

A LAG member raised that the Local Development Strategy's outputs and the budget spend would need to be closely monitored to ensure that spend is not used entirely by one theme.

Amy explained that there were specific amounts set against certain types of projects, for example Co-operation, and that the rest of the funding would be at the LAG's discretion.

Francesca said that the LAG must still deliver on the targets as defined in the Local Development Strategy. Phyllis said that this apportionment of funds to specific categories was a difficult aspect to balance, although the Local Development Strategy targets could be reviewed in future if they required revision. Edgar suggested it would be an ongoing process to be monitored.

8. Dates of next meetings

Francesca asked the LAG to note the dates for the next meetings in their diaries:

- Thursday 22 September 2016
- Wednesday 18 January 2017

9. AOCB

• LEADER Co-ordinators' Meeting

Amy confirmed that she attended a LEADER Coordinators' meeting recently and that the LARCS (online LEADER system) was currently being tested in Edinburgh by super users from 7 LAG areas. This would then be reviewed and once completed, training would be given to all users. She advised that as the Claims part of LARCS would not be available until October, claims in the meantime would need to be made in paper form – however, details on the requirements for paper claims had not been provided.

• LEADER Conference 2016

Francesca advised that she had attended the conference along with Phyllis and Amy. She advised that she had found it good networking opportunity. She said she had attended the

workshops on Rural Enterprise and Capacity Building. Phyllis and Amy had attended the workshop on Farm Diversification and commented that there was still a lack of guidance as to these types of project. Phyllis also commented that she felt the Conference had been scheduled too early for any real benefit.

Francesca advised that there was to be a LAG Chair event in Falkirk in June and as she and Phyllis were unable to attend they had suggested that Amy attend in their place – this had been previously agreed by the LAG electronically.

The meeting closed at 13:00.