

SHETLAND LEADER 2014 - 2020 LAG

MINUTES OF LAG MEETING HELD IN EDU BOARDROOM AT 9.00AM ON WEDNESDAY 13th MAY 2015.

Present:

Douglas Irvine, SIC
Fiona Stirling, HIE
Tommy Coutts, Shetland College
Wendy Hand, Voluntary Action Shetland
Sally Spence, SIC
Karen Eunson, Citizens Advice Bureau
June Porter, SIC
Bryan Leask, Hjaltland Housing Association
Jeemie Smith, Federation of Small Businesses
Donald Anderson, Shetland Arts
Diana Abernethy, AB Associates Ltd
Sarah Taylor, NHS

Sheila Tulloch, LAG LEADER Co-ordinator

1. Apologies and Introductions

Apologies were received from: Kathleen Sinclair, NFU; Maree Hay, Northmavine Community Development Company; Michael Duncan, SIC; Ann Johnson, Shetland Food Producers; Juan Brown, SNH; and Ruth Henderson, Seafood Shetland.

Douglas Irvine welcomed everyone to the first LAG meeting for the new LEADER programme.

2. Membership Balance

It was explained that to meet the requirements of the LEADER 2014-20 programme the membership of the group had to be skewed in favour of the private/voluntary sector and that, where decisions were to be made, voting members from the private/voluntary sector must always outnumber those from the public sector. The LAG members present were equally balanced between the public and private/voluntary sectors so if a vote had been required then one of the public sector members would have to withdraw. It was noted there were no projects to be approved and no vote would be required.

3. Minutes of 27th August 2014

The minutes were approved by Tommy Coutts and seconded by Donald Anderson.

4. Matters arising

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

5. Financial summaries for the LEADER 2007-13 programme

Sheila summarised the spreadsheets that had been sent out to LAG members: the 2007-13 programme was almost complete with 5 final project claim payments still outstanding. All final claims had now been received (the last one this morning) and were in the hands of project officers. The Scottish Government require the final LAG claim for the 2007-13 LEADER programme to be submitted to them before the end of June.

Sheila explained that it has been difficult to provide a clear cut off between programmes for claims for administration costs as the Scottish Government has been paying all claims out of the new programme funds since October last year when they ran out of funds. Tommy pointed out that the shortfall of funds was due to overspend on other parts of the SRDP rather than LEADER which had not overspent.

6. Election of Chair

Douglas explained that he had to stand down as Chair as the new programme rules do not allow a member or representative of the "Accountable Body" (formerly "Lead Partner"), which in the case of the Shetland LAG is SIC, to be LAG Chair. He briefly outlined the role of the Chair and invited nominations. Karen nominated Fiona. Fiona pointed out that she was really only a proxy for Mhari, who is currently on maternity leave and due back in September, but said that she would discuss it with Mhari. It was noted that Mhari/Fiona is currently Vice Chair.

7. LAG Membership

Douglas thanked all the members of the new LAG for their willingness to commit their time and experience and said that the LAG now had a strong membership. Sheila explained that there are still gaps in the LAG membership as outlined in the Business Plan:

- i) **Agriculture:** The LAG has new responsibilities to assist agricultural diversification but now has only one representative from the agricultural sector (Kathleen Sinclair for the NFU). Sheila has been invited to the next meeting of the local NFU branch on 28th May (along with the LAG Chair or other LAG representative as Douglas is on leave then) to provide an outline of the new LEADER programme. She will ask those present whether another agricultural representative is needed on the LAG and who think would be appropriate. David Cormack from the local RPID office has had to resign from the LAG as, under the new programme, the local RPID office will take on responsibility for inspections of LEADER projects. Douglas noted that it is important that contact with RPID is maintained as projects which are eligible for funding through other SRDP schemes will not be eligible for LEADER so we need to be clear as to what can be funded elsewhere.
- ii) **Youth:** Youth representation was discussed by the previous LAG but there were no obvious candidates and it might not be easy for young people to attend LAG meetings which are held during working/school hours. It was agreed that Sheila

should contact Brenda Leask from SIC Youth Services to ask if she could help find a youth representative to sit on the LAG. Suggestions included MYSPs or representatives of the Global Classroom (which might provide an opportunity for a co-operation project) but it was also agreed that it was important that the LAG try to engage with harder to reach young people.

- iii) **Tourism:** The new requirement that a minimum of 10% of the LEADER allocation should go towards small business support is of particular relevance to tourism businesses in Shetland but there is currently no direct tourism representation on the LAG. The Shetland Tourism Association and Visit Shetland were considered to be the obvious organisations to approach. Visit Shetland would count as public for LAG purposes but Steve Mathieson from Visit Shetland is actively engaged with STA and would be well placed to speak on their behalf. Several LAG members noted that private business representatives have to be particularly committed to the LAG as time is money in a small business and no-one will be paying them to attend meetings whereas members who are employed are able to attend as part of their job. The LAG agreed to leave the subject of a tourism representative open for now.
- iv) **Sport and recreation:** Bryan is Chair of SRT and is happy to represent Shetland Recreational Trust as well as Hjaltland Housing Association on the LAG (both are in the private/ voluntary sector so there is no conflict)
- v) **Employability:** Karen is Chair of Moving On Employment Project and is happy to represent both CAB and MOEP (both voluntary sector).

The LAG agreed that they would not have sub groups to consider business or farm diversification projects separately from other business as they considered that any LAG members could have relevant knowledge pertinent to a particular application.

8. LEADER 2014-2020 update

Douglas noted that we have received notification of Shetland's "indicative allocation" of £2,467,000 but the LDS and related Business Plan have still to be approved. The Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) of which LEADER is a part has still to be approved by the European Commission.

A draft Service Level Agreement (SLA) between the Scottish Government and the Accountable Body (SIC for the Shetland LAG) was sent to "Directors of Finance" in March and is being examined by COSLA on behalf of all the local authorities who are Accountable Bodies. The Scottish Government want the individual SLAs to all be signed by the end of May but the Accountable Bodies are reluctant to sign until all the guidelines are in place (so they are clear about what they are signing up to). There are particular concerns that greater responsibility is being passed down to Accountable Bodies who will bear the full financial liability (EU fines) for any errors (borne by the Scottish Government under the previous programme).

Sheila advised that the Business Plan will have to be updated to incorporate the requirements of the new IT system (LARCs) and Douglas added that it will also have to reflect changes within SIC Economic Development which is currently under review and will impact on staffing for LEADER. Tommy pointed out that the financial tables

will also have to be populated now that we have an indicative allocation of funding. These changes will only affect the operational details and will not alter anything concerning project eligibility or the selection criteria.

Sheila said that “animation” has a higher profile in the new programme and the guidance is that the LAG should be getting involved in engaging with potential applicants and working with them to develop projects and produce robust funding applications. Douglas suggested that the LAG need to think what the first raft of projects will be. This will also help match funders such as SIC and HIE to allocate their budgets.

Several LAG members asked what the LEADER grant rate would be as that is always one of the most important questions for applicants. Sheila said that it could theoretically be up to 100% but the Shetland LEADER Business Plan has suggested a maximum of 50%. The LAG would have the discretion to approve a higher rate if the particular circumstances warranted it. Tommy pointed out that what is important is that the LEADER grant should be the minimum needed to allow the project to proceed. State Aid considerations would limit what could be offered to business applicants. There is no Convergence funding this time and no requirement for public match funding.

Sheila reported that she has to complete a rather complex spreadsheet for the Scottish Government detailing training preferences for LAG members, LAG staff and applicants. Training is required on the new LARCs IT system which will be used by LAG members and applicants as well as by staff each of whom will be given appropriate levels of access. All applications will be on line although the initial “Expression of interest” will be separate and available on a national website. LAG scoring of applications will be done off line and then recorded on the system. A long list of possible training methods have been proposed including classroom, workshop, e-learning, webinar and mentoring. Sarah Taylor said that Shetland NHS had a lot of experience of remote e-learning and it generally worked well, what was needed here was “bespoke blended learning” delivered locally. It was agreed that all LAG training should be done in Shetland and any training for applicants will be delivered locally as required. LAG members offered help in providing appropriate training solutions.

9. Promoting the new programme

Douglas stated that, although the new programme will not be open for applications until well into the autumn (at the earliest), we need to start promoting what will be on offer in order to identify potential projects and allow potential applicants to gather information and start preparing applications. There was a lively discussion as to how this could best be achieved and it was agreed that:

- i) The first essential is to prepare a leaflet summarising eligibility criteria, the kind of projects that can be funded and the information that applicants will be required to provide to support their application. Sheila will prepare a draft and circulate to LAG members.
- ii) The LDS and Business Plan to be put up on the Shetland LEADER website

- iii) We need to make use of social media. A small working group from the LAG should be set up to take this forward; Fiona, June and Wendy volunteered to be part of this.
- iv) Previous successful applicants could act as animators
- v) We should investigate how we could use Promote Shetland to improve our promotion of LEADER.

10. LAG Dates for Meetings

Sheila explained the LAG usually meets every 6 to 8 weeks to discuss updates and projects for approval. Following a survey last year Wednesday was agreed to be the most suitable day for the majority of people. It was agreed that the next meeting should be before the school summer holidays on 1st July and that the following meeting should be after the holidays on 26th August. It was also agreed that LAG meetings should start at 9.00 a.m.

11. AOB

There was no other business.

12. Date of next meeting

Wednesday 1st July, 9.00 a.m. at Solarhus.

Meeting closed at 10.30 am.

