

**Rural Community Led Local Development (RCLLD) Fund
Local Action Group (LAG) Meeting
Conference Video Call via Microsoft Teams
Tuesday 17th December 2024 1pm to 4pm**

Present:

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|----------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Amanda Roe | Aberdeenshire Council | (Public) |
| Eleanor Morris | Aberdeenshire Council | (Public) |
| Aileen Longino | Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action | (Private) (Vice Chair) |
| Justine Tough | Buchan Development Partnership | (Private) |
| Gina Ford | Fintray Community Council | (Private) (Chair) |
| David Hekelaar | Formartine Community Councils | (Private) |
| Bill Slee | Marr Area Partnership | (Private) |
| Lorna Paterson | National Farmers' Union Scotland | (Private) |
| Duncan Leece | Banffshire Partnership | (Private) |
| John Loder | Formartine Partnership | (Private) (Vice Chair) |
| Dawn Tuckwood | NHS Grampian | (Public) |

Officers in Attendance:

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| Moira Beverley | Investments and Projects Executive |
| Catriona Nicolson | Investments and Projects Officer / Project Officer |
| Martin Brebner | Team Manager |

Apologies:

| | | |
|---------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Mike Duncan | Federation of Small Businesses | (Private) |
| Gerald Banks | National Farmers' Union Scotland | (Private) |
| David Fyffe | Scottish Land & Estates | (Private) |
| David Jackson | Visit Scotland | (Public) |

1 Welcome & Apologies

1.1 The Chair welcomed those present and apologies were noted as above.

2 Declarations of Interest (DOI)

2.1 No declarations of interest were made.

3 Minute of LAG Meeting 24 September 2024

- 3.1 The LAG approved the minute of the meeting on 24 September 2024. This was approved by Bill Slee and seconded by Aileen Longino.

4 Minute of Emergency LAG Meeting 9 December 2024

- 4.1 In section 3.3 (a), the minute will be amended to include “and / or other relevant organisations”.

- 4.2 The minute was then approved by Duncan Leece and seconded by Aileen Longino.

5 Paper 1 - Update on Projects 2024.25

- 5.1 Moira Beverley reported back to the LAG on Paper 1.

- 5.2 Martin Brebner reported back to the LAG on the delivery of funds from tranche 2 for the poverty alleviation project. Grants will be restricted to under £10K to keep below the de minimis threshold. Further checks through the Following The Public Pound (FPP) procedures are required for applicant organisations that received more than £10K from Aberdeenshire Council within a certain timeframe. Potential applicants will be asked about types of activities the organisation delivers to address poverty, what will the funds be used for and how will outputs and outcomes be monitored. Further data like the number of individuals and households supported will be requested. The draft LAG paper presented is to be used as a covering letter for communicating the availability of funds. Microsoft Forms is suggested as the format for submitting applications. The 12th of January is the suggested application submission deadline. A privacy notice will be built into the form. Scoring of applications by the LAG may be difficult due to the tight deadline. Payments could be paid, once Contract is signed, upfront and a report requested at the end of the project.

- 5.3 The LAG discussed various delivery models for the funds. The importance of a fair distribution of funds and maintaining consistency throughout the process was highlighted. Concern was raised on the delays the various internal checks may create. Poverty and inequality was targeted and is an objective in the vision document completed at the beginning of the year to Scottish Government (SG). A formal contract needs to be in place before payments can be released. Generally, there are two payment runs processed each week within Aberdeenshire Council. Concern was raised on the sustainability of the outputs and outcomes, once the funding ends. However, the time of year for the likely beneficiaries of the funds is when the highest pressure is experienced, and receipt of funding would make a big difference for these groups.

- 5.4 The LAG felt that delivery of funds with the constraints imposed by the pattern of funding (for example confirmation timing, tranches and annually) is not an efficient way to delivery community led local development effectively, with delivery of this project as one such example.

- 5.5 It was suggested to reach out to 6 area community planning groups (and / or other relevant organisations) and encourage them, where resources and capacity are in place, to identify a limited number of beneficiary groups within their area up to a specified value (up to £9,999 each) and ask them to put in applications. Alternatively, the area group could act as a conduit to potential beneficiary groups within their area. Groups that apply, and would be receiving funds, require to be constituted and responsible for delivering the funds with a deadline of 12th January 2025. Applications will then be put to the LAG for a decision. With experienced groups, such as community planning, assisting with targeting relevant beneficiary groups scoring of applications by the LAG would not be required. LAG members generally agreed with this proposal.
- 5.6 Other variations of delivery model were felt to be less effective. The LAG was keen to ensure that other areas do not lose out on the opportunity if they did not have the capacity. The Tackling Poverty and Inequalities group is well situated to support and coordinate this type of targeting, and it was suggested for future years to utilise this avenue. Further discussions took place on the method for identifying suitable beneficiaries. For fairness and transparency, the 6 area community planning groups already set up, are best placed, in connection with Area Managers and Community Planning Officers.
- 5.7 The LAG agreed unanimously to the following:
- Approach community planning groups (and / or other relevant organisations), Community Planning Officers, Area Managers and they will advise what groups they think should be approached. These parties will then approach and disseminate an application link to identified beneficiary groups. Groups will come forward and complete the application form. The applications are then collated at this point. The LAG will meet and make any decisions, where relevant, based on the details of applications and funding requested. For example, if the fund is undersubscribed then the LAG can decide on each project based on merits and if oversubscribed then the areas may have to prioritise projects based on their localised knowledge. Then grants and contracts can be issued.

6 Paper 2 - Governance status of LAG

- 6.1 Moira Beverley reported back to the LAG on Paper 2.
- 6.2 Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIO) can be one or two tiered. Responsibilities upon trustees within a SCIO can be substantial and more onerous than the current set up of the LAG. As LAG members are representing organisations and not attending as individuals, permission to become a member / trustee of a SCIO would need to be sought from the various organisations for each LAG member. With the local authority as the accountable body, the delivery of funds is subject to Aberdeenshire Council's procedures and processes, such as proper procurement and subsidy control. It was felt this comes with both benefits and restrictions. It is unlikely that requirements set through the accountable body will change, despite the structure of the LAG potentially changing, as the funds are public money. The local authority offers an integrated

package (covering relevant procedures and processes). Staff resourcing is also limited compared to previous funding programmes.

- 6.3 Further information will be sought on the set up with other SCIOs operating Community Led Local Development funds and the arrangement with SG.
- 6.4 The LAG voted unanimously to remain with the current set up / structure at present and put forward a request to Aberdeenshire Council to confirm their acceptance in continuing as the accountable body for the LAG.
- 6.5 Martin Brebner will take this forward and prepare a paper to put before the relevant committee, ideally before the next financial year. He will look to address any issues with delegations within the paper, where possible.

7 Paper 3 - 2025.26 Strategic Plan (Group discussion)

- 7.1 Moira Beverley reported back to the LAG on Paper 3.
- 7.2 Various discussions and points were made regarding Paper 3. The annualisation and delay in confirmation of funding, severely restricts planning and implementing projects, such as energy retrofit works. It was suggested that the 2025-26 programme could pick up on active travel and tourism works being carried out. Incorporating revenue with capital funds for a challenge fund type round may be a better approach for next year. Consideration must be given to the “No Community Left Behind” in the vision statement. The capacity of the LAG with the reduction of staff resources means that working with communities to develop projects has been reduced. Suggestion was made to allocate revenue funds to address LAG membership, taking into account and targeting geographical reach and skills profiles. Succession planning, new LAG member recruitment and more LAG member led engagement could be beneficial in particular for areas that currently do not have representation. It was highlighted that one of the primary challenges is Just Transition, which is linked with farming and land use change, the residential economy (commuting) and not just oil and gas. As an example, the Deeside nature corridor was suggested as a potential project to investigate further in terms of the local community groups and local trends emerging. Advanced publicity for a fund presents risk in raising expectations, as previous forecast funds may change and have been withdrawn last minute by SG, which in turn prevents effective planning.

8 Date of Next Meeting

- 8.1 The next meeting is likely to be scheduled for January 2025 (date is to be confirmed) in connection with tranche 2 funds. Following that, the next full LAG meeting is to take place on 25th March 2025.

Minute Taker

Catriona Nicolson