

The Highland Community Planning Partnership
Community Planning Board - 13 October 2014

Agenda Item	8
Report No	

Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure, Highland Council

Summary

This report updates the Board on the new Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 and seeks approval of the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan, to be submitted to the Scottish Government.

1. Background

- 1.1 The 2007-2013 Highland LEADER Programme is effectively complete and closed with 371 projects securing grant to the sum of £15.32m. Total Programme expenditure is estimated at £30.6m.
- 1.2 In August 2013 the Council submitted on behalf of the Highland CPP an expression of interest to manage a new LEADER Programme across Highland. This expression of interest was accepted by the Scottish Government and the Council/Highland LEADER team has been active in preparing for the new Programme. A shadow Local Advisory Group (LAG) on which all Highland CPP partners were represented was established to oversee this work. At the time of writing this report members of the shadow LAG are offering detailed comment on the final Local Development Strategy and Business Plan. If any significant changes are recommended a verbal update will be given to the Board.
- 1.3 In accordance with Scottish Government's timetable a draft final Local Development Strategy and Business Plan was submitted on 1st October 2014. However, it has been agreed with the Scottish Government that the final Local Development Strategy and Business Plan will only be submitted after the Highland Community Planning Board have considered and approved the submission.

2. New Programme

- 2.1 Appendix 1 provides an Executive Summary of the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan. A copy of the draft final Strategy and Business Plan (225 pages including appendices) is available on request from fiona.cameron4@highland.gov.uk
- 2.2 Preparation of the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan has been very challenging, given the complexities of Highland's geography and the need/desire to adopt a devolved delivery approach. A two phased public/

stakeholder engagement exercise has been adopted, accompanied by a series of specialist consultancy commissions which reviewed aspects of the 2007-13 Programme and brought forward proposals for incorporation in the 2014-2020 Programme.

- 2.3 Aspects of the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan remain as yet to be finalised – as further focused consultation is required on detailed Fisheries and Enterprise proposals. As all the other new European funded programmes 2014-2020 are currently being finalised, this will also enable LEADER activity to be co-ordinated and integrated.
- 2.4 It is anticipated that feedback will be given by the Scottish Government on the submitted Strategy and Business Plan before Christmas and Highland Programme funding allocation then given. The new programme is therefore planned to commence spring 2015.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The new LEADER Programme affords an opportunity to build on the successful 2007-13 Programme and further empower local communities across Highland. The approach sought seeks to encourage and support community led and ‘bottom-up’ projects yet at the same time ensure that a greater emphasis is placed on achieving the outcomes set out in the Local Development Strategy.
- 3.2 Once the Highland Local Development Strategy and Business Plan are approved by the Scottish Government, delivery will be overseen and managed by the Strategic Local Action Group. As LEADER is a Highland CPP Programme it is proposed that an annual report on progress will be brought to the Highland Community Planning Board. The Council, as the formal lead partner, will provide additional financial governance.

Recommendation

Highland Community Planning Board to approve the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 Local Development Strategy and Business Plan.

An annual report on progress with the Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 will be presented to the Highland Community Planning Board.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 6 October 2014

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Appendix 1

Executive Summary: Highland LEADER Programme 2014-20

Introduction

LEADER (Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de l'Économie Rurale/Links between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) is a rural community development programme that operates across every member state of the European Union. Originally launched in 1991, the 2014-2020 Programme is the fifth incarnation of this funding stream and is designed to be a bottom up method of delivering rural development. At the local level the Programme is based around a Local Development Strategy and it provides capital and revenue grants for private, community or public sector small and medium sized projects which support the delivery of the Local Development Strategy.

It is managed by a Local Action Group which comprises at least 51% private/third sector and community representatives. An 'accountable body' is appointed and is responsible for the administration and financial management of the Programme.

Highland LEADER Programme

The Programme will cover the whole of Highland excluding the City of Inverness and the area of Badenoch and Strathspey that falls within the Cairngorms National Park LEADER Programme.

Given the size of Highland, the number of distinct communities and the ethos of LEADER to be community based and local, the Highland Programme will adopt a devolved decision-making structure. The required Local Area Group will be a Highland wide strategic one and will be complemented by 11 Local Area Partnerships and a Fisheries and an Enterprise Group.

Membership of all groups will accord with LEADER requirements of at least 51% private/third sector and community representatives. In accordance with Scottish Government guidance, the Chair of each group will not be a representative of the accountable body - The Highland Council.

Local Development Strategy

The Local Development Strategy was prepared after an extensive two phased public/stakeholder engagement exercise including public meetings across Highland, TV/press/radio coverage, targeted interviews, electronic survey etc. This involved Highland and local SWOT analysis, reviews of the 2007-2013 LEADER Programme, testing Programme priorities and eligible activities and seeking views on delivery arrangements.

The resulting Vision agreed for the new Programme is twofold:

- Stronger communities leading to improved quality of life for those who live in them
- Growth and diversification of the local economy

In support of the achievement of this vision, four Themes have been identified and ranked in importance:

1. Stronger and more resilient communities
2. A growing and diversified economy that promotes sustainability
3. Increased and sustained local services and activities
4. Enhanced cultural, natural and heritage assets

Allied to this, five cross-cutting themes have also been identified: Fairer Highland – advancing equality; Innovation; Sustainability/Legacy; Carbon Clever; and Skills Development.

In order that the Highland LEADER Programme is outcome focused and the projects it supports are directly linked to the Local Development Strategy, 10 Outcomes have been developed with clearly defined eligible activities identified.

1. Improved access for residents and visitors to cultural and natural assets
2. Improved management/conservation/sustainability of cultural and natural assets
3. People have better access to local services and activities
4. Increased community ownership/control of assets and services/activities
5. Improvements in the visitor experience
6. Increased income from local produce through adding value
7. Increased employment through small enterprises
8. Volunteers are better supported
9. Increased partnership working between community groups (within and across areas)
10. Improved measuring of the benefits/impacts of projects

Programme Delivery

The Highland LEADER Programme will be applicant-led with grant award decision-making taking place as appropriate at the strategic or local level. At the outset of the Programme, open calls for applications will be made and a two phased assessment process undertaken – giving prospective applicants support and guidance when developing their project before formal application via the Scottish Government's IT system and assessment/decision-making.

Real time project monitoring and evaluation will take place to determine how well the funded projects are delivering on the Local Development Strategy. If the required projects are not forthcoming, targeted calls for applications may be made; direct project activity initiated, and/or Local Development Strategy revised.

Accompanying this, the Local Area Partnerships and the Fisheries and Enterprise Groups will be given a funding allocation – based on the methodology adopted by the Scottish Government for the disbursement of LEADER (and Fisheries) grant across Scotland. This will be phased in order that it can be targeted as required by the real time project monitoring and evaluation.