

Highland Community Planning Partnership

**Chief Officers Group
22 September 2014**

Agenda Item	8ii
Report No	COG 10/14

Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020

Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure

Summary

This report seeks to update the Chief Officers Group on the new Highland LEADER Programme and proposes that a summary report on the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan is submitted to the CPP Board on 13 October 2014 for their approval.

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. The proposal put forward was that the Highland Programme would adopt a similar strategic and local area structure and cover the same geography (all Highland minus urban Inverness and that part of Badenoch and Strathspey which will be in the Cairngorms National Park LEADER Programme area).
- 1.3 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) has been established to oversee this work. All Highland CPP partners are represented on the shadow LAG. At the current time there is second period of public consultation underway, with the intention that a draft final Local Development Strategy (LDS) and Business Plan is submitted to the Scottish Government at the end of September 2014. It is proposed that a finalised LDS and Business Plan is submitted after they are considered/approved by the CPP Board at their October 2014 meeting.

2. New Programme

- 2.1 There are a number of lessons from the 2007/13 LEADER Programme that have shaped the guidance received from the European Commission and the Scottish Government for the new Programme. While LEADER was primarily applicant-led and therefore funded a wide range of projects, it was considered that the project eligibility/scope was too wide to achieve strategic impact. Some really excellent individual projects secured funding but there was limited

'strategic' delivery to ensure that all the local LEADER development strategy outcomes were achieved.

- 2.2 Accordingly, while LEADER remains an approach that is community led and 'bottom-up', a greater emphasis is now placed on the delivery of the local development strategy and the outcomes sought. To do so therefore requires not only a closer alignment between eligible activities and their contribution to outcome delivery, but also 'real time' robust monitoring systems need to be in place to review delivery of the local development strategy. Allied to this there is a need to ensure that the strategic LAG has the financial levers and mechanisms for direct delivery available to it to target resources and effort to ensure delivery.
- 2.3 In seeking to empower our communities and deliver a planned rural development programme, a two-phased community and stakeholder consultation exercise has been undertaken allied to a series of focused external studies/evaluations. The second phase of consultation is currently underway and is specifically asking for comments on:
- The SWOT analysis for each local area;
 - The strategic themes and outcomes sought (see appendix 1);
 - The types of eligible activities;
 - A phased allocation of funding to each local area
 - The governance and decision-making structure (1 strategic LAG, 11 local area partnerships and 1 Fisheries and 1 Enterprise sub-group)
 - Membership (max. 49% public sector, representative and open call)
 - Preferred methods of communication to aid preparation of Communications Plan.
- 2.4 The new Highland Programme will also differ from the 2007-14 Programme in that management of a fisheries fund (EMFF) and the Rural Small Business fund will be included. This raises a number of issues, including the need for specialist decision-making and a need to ensure that LEADER funded activity is aligned with other European funding and public sector providers of advice and finance. Work is ongoing at both a national and Highland level in this regard, the detail of which may not be finalised before the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan is submitted.
- 2.5 At the current time there is no indication of the value of the LEADER fund, including Fisheries and Rural Business funding, that will be allocated to Highland. The James Hutton Institute has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to develop a financial distribution methodology. It is understood that in addition to population and size of area, a number of 'rural' appropriate social and economic indicators will also be used. The intention, as per the 2007-13 Programme, is to adopt a similar methodology when allocating funds to each of the Local Area Partnerships.
- 2.6 The LEADER programme will require applicants to identify and source match funding. Once the funding allocation for the Programme is known and clarification is received from the Scottish Government on State Aid grant implications, the Strategic LAG will be able to determine the level of match

required. To aid the process to secure the required public sector match, the Programme's strategic themes have been aligned with the Single Outcome Agreement.

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. In particular the new rural business funding will give LEADER specific resource to directly support rural business development – something that the LEADER movement across Scotland has been advocating for over a number of years.
- 3.2 Completion of the Local Development Strategy and Business Plan in the timeline required by the Scottish Government is very challenging given the complexities of Highland's geography and the need/desire to adopt a devolved delivery approach. The Scottish Government recognise that, as LEADER is a Highland CPP project, it is appropriate for the CPP Board to formally consider and approve the submission. Accordingly, approval has been given to submit a finalised Strategy and Business Plan after the next Community Planning Board meeting on 13 October 2014.

Recommendation

- i. Chief Officers Group to note proposals for the new Highland LEADER Programme and to offer comment.
- ii. Agree that a summary report on the Highland LEADER Local Development Strategy and Business Plan is presented to the Community Planning Board on 13 October 2014.

Designation: Director of Planning and Development

Date: 15 September 2014

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Appendix 1

Highland LEADER Programme 2014-20 Strategic Themes and Outcomes (proposed)

Strategic Themes

Based on the first phase of community consultation the following four broad themes have been proposed for the Highland LEADER local development strategy:

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

It is also proposed that there will be five cross cutting themes:

1. Fairer Highland – advancing equality (addresses equality issues or benefits people in groups that are under-represented or disadvantaged)
2. Innovation (a new or different approach is proposed within the area)
3. Sustainability/Legacy (the project outcomes will continue beyond the life of the project)
4. Carbon Clever (the project can demonstrate a positive impact on the environment)
5. Skills Development (the project aims to expand the skills of those involved in implementing the project and/or on its participants)

Outcomes

It is currently proposed there will be ten outcomes for the Programme:

1. Improved access for residents and visitors (physical and through provision of information) to cultural and natural assets
2. Improved management and conservation 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
7. Improved employment opportunities through new business start-ups and business diversification
8. People feel better supported to undertake volunteering activities
9. Increased partnership working between community groups (within and across areas, and between different sections of the community)
10. The benefits/impact of funded projects are better understood by all (eg self-evaluation improved and supported)