

**THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**  
**PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
**COMMITTEE**

Agenda Item	18
Report No	PDI 39/15

**3 JUNE 2015**

**HIGHLAND LEADER PROGRAMME**

**Report by Director of Development and Infrastructure**

**Summary**

This paper provides an update on the emerging LEADER Programme 2014-2020, and outlines Member involvement in the Programme at a strategic and local level.

The LEADER Programme supports bottom-up community development, and therefore is central to the Council's commitment to empower communities, and to support associated community, business and infrastructural developments.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 is part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas.
- 1.2 The Highland Council will be the accountable body for the scheme, and, as such, will employ staff and take overall responsibility for the administration of the Programme.

**2. Programme Development and Approval**

- 2.1 As reported to the February 2015 PDI Committee, the Local Development Strategy (LDS), and the Business Plan for the new Highland LEADER Programme 2014-2020 were submitted to the Scottish Government in October 2014 following approval by the Shadow Local Advisory Group (LAG), and Highland Community Planning Partnership. The LDS and Business Plan were then subjected to internal, Scottish Government, and external, scrutiny panels, and feedback given in early December 2014. In summary, the panels positively commented on the LDS and Business Plan (with a number of clarifications requested), but made one key observation regarding the strategic and local decision making structure, requiring a reduction in the number of Local Area Partnerships (LAP's) in the Inner Moray Firth.
- 2.2 Following changes to the LAP structure and the other clarifications required, informal feedback has been provided by the Scottish Government that the resubmission was acceptable. Formal approval and confirmation of the funding allocation will be made by the Scottish Government once European approval for the Scottish Rural Development Programme has been received.

### **3 Decision Making Groups and Member Involvement**

- 3.1 The overall responsibility for the implementation of the LDS will rest with a strategic Local Action Group (LAG) that will oversee delivery of the Programme across Highland. The first meeting of the Strategic LAG took place on 29 April 2015. In line with processes outlined in the Business Plan, membership of the LAG was firstly sourced through a formal nomination process from a number of identified sectors related to the themes of the LDS. The LAG is currently going through a process of identifying the skills and geographies covered by members to identify any gaps, and will agree how any gaps should be addressed at their next meeting. In order to have Highland Council representation on the LAG, Members are asked to formally appoint a named representative and substitute to sit on this group. Cllr. David Alston represented the Council on the shadow LAG with Cllr. George Farlow his substitute.
- 3.2 Seven LAPs will also be established to oversee the delivery of the Programme in their local area. A process for establishing these groups was agreed by the LAG at their meeting in April, and work will begin on this in early June 2015. One of the first tasks for each LAP will be to produce a Local Area Action Plan to set out the priorities for funding in their area. It is anticipated that work will be completed on these plans by August/September 2015 and, upon approval by the LAG, this will devolve a budget to each LAP for local Programme delivery.
- 3.3 The first step in establishing Local Area Partnerships will be to hold a meeting in each of the LAP areas to agree funding priorities based on the extensive community engagement work undertaken during 2014. This will then allow for development of a steering group, which will eventually agree the final priorities for funding along with the required final membership of the LAP's for each area.
- 3.4 In the 2007-13 Programme, Members were involved in the Programme at a local level to varying degrees. Some areas had full representation from Members as voting members of the LAPs, others had Members sit on the LAPs in an advisory capacity and others chose to nominate only some of the local Members to participate in the LAPs and feedback through Ward Business Meetings to other Members in their area. All Highland Council Members will be invited to the initial meetings in their area to establish the steering groups for the LAPs. It will be up to each area to determine at a local level the degree to which Members will be involved. The only stipulation will be that the final membership of the LAP must comply with EU regulations, in that no more than 49% of the LAP members represent the public sector.

### **4. Implications**

#### **4.1 Resource/Risk/Legal**

There are no implications arising directly from the establishment of the LEADER Local Area Group and Local Area Partnerships as 100% of the grant is sourced. The Council, as accountable body for the LEADER Programme, will have a number of financial and legal obligations resting on it. Work is currently ongoing with the Scottish Government and CoSLA to identify and address any issues arising before the Council enters into a Service Level Agreement with the Scottish Government for

the delivery of the LEADER Programme.

4.2 Equalities, Climate Change/Carbon Clever, and Gaelic

There are no equality, climate change/carbon clever or Gaelic implications arising directly from this report, however, in its assessment of individual projects which seek LEADER funding, the LEADER team will consider economic, social and environmental sustainability. In addition each project will be assessed for its impact on equal opportunities and Gaelic.

4.3 Rural

The LEADER Programme is aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas. It is a bottom up method of delivering support for rural development aimed primarily at small and medium sized community driven projects that are pilots and innovative in nature. All parts of the Highland area are included in the Programme with the exception of the City of Inverness, and the Badenoch and Strathspey area which is included within the Cairngorm National Park LEADER Programme.

**Recommendation**

Members are asked to:

- note progress with preparation for the 2014-2020 Highland LEADER Programme;
- appoint Cllr. David Alston as named representative, and Cllr. George Farlow as substitute, to represent Highland Council on the Highland strategic LAG; and
- note the process of establishing LAPs and the potential for Member involvement in the Programme at a local level.

Designation: Director of Development and Infrastructure

Date: 14 May 2015

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