Moray LAG Meeting Minutes
Thursday 24th March 2016 at 2pm
Committee Room, Moray Council HQ, Elgin

Present:
Fabio Villani tsiMORAY
Debbie Herron
Drew McFarlane-Slack, Scottish Land and Estates
Tracey Gervaise, Moray Health and Social Care Partnership
Janne Pirie
Alastair Kennedy, Joint Community Councils of Moray
Gordon Methven
Andrea Fuller, Moray Federation of Community Halls and Associations
Jana Hutt
Franziska Smith
Alex Walker
Dr Bea Jefferson
Aileen Buchanan
Iain Findlay

In Attendance:
Jim Grant, Head of Development Services, Moray Council
Reni Milburn, Principal Officer, Economic Development, Moray Council
Iain Catto, LEADER Programme Co-ordinator

1.   **Welcome**

Jim Grant welcomed everyone to the meeting. It was agreed that until a chair was appointed for the LAG (later on the agenda) that he should chair the meeting. Everyone introduced themselves.

2.   **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

- Margery MacLennan, Moray Chamber of Commerce
- Fiona Robb, Highlands & Islands Enterprise
- Gavin Clark, Scottish Natural Heritage
- Ian Cowe, Forestry Commission Scotland

3.   **Local Development Strategy and Business Plan**

Reni Milburn spoke to the previously circulated briefing note.   She also explained the process by which tsiMORAY had been invited to become the accountable body for the new LEADER Programme. During discussion it was clarified that if tsiMORAY becomes the accountable body, the involvement of Moray Council with the new programme would be restricted to nominating someone to be on the LAG, if the LAG asked for a representative. Jim Grant and Reni Milburn would support tsiMORAY and the LAG through the set-up process.

4.   **Accountable Body Status**

Fabio Villani indicated that the board of tsiMORAY was interested in becoming the accountable body, as LEADER sits well with the rest of what tsiMORAY does. However managing an EU funding programme is not simple. Negotiating with the Scottish Government Rural Communities Team has been complicated by a change in personnel at its head, from Alistair Prior to Gillian Macdonald. tsiMORAY could build a positive relationship with the LAG. However due to tsiMORAY's size, if there was any significant disallowance or fine imposed by the Scottish Government, tsiMORAY could not cope with that. There is willingness on all sides for this to proceed, including support from Moray Council officers. He had a meeting with Gillian MacDonald on Tuesday of this week, and she needs to follow up on certain things. The aim is to have the Service Level Agreement (SLA) between tsiMORAY and the Scottish Government in place by the end of June. A Memorandum of Understanding between tsiMORAY and the LAG would then be put in place, staff could then be recruited and funding could be made available to projects by the end of the year.

In response to a question, Fabio Villani indicated that if the willingness which Gillian Macdonald has exhibited is echoed at higher levels in the Scottish Government then it is likely to happen. Jim Grant indicated that if tsiMORAY did not come to an agreement with the Scottish Government, then it would be up to the LAG to decide who it then wanted as its accountable body, and if the Council was asked it would consider that request, but it would be a decision of the Council itself. There may be other groups out there who might take it on. There is no fee charged by the accountable body, but all the administration costs are met out of the Scottish Government /EU allocation to the LAG.

In response to a question, Fabio Villani indicated that tsiMORAY would have the capacity to administer the LEADER programme, even bearing in mind the additional responsibilities it has taken on recently. He further indicated that tsiMORAY would not be providing in-kind support in the way that Moray Council had done so, and he would offer hours as chief officer, which would be logged and the costs claimed back from the Scottish Government both for those hours and for administrative support.

Fabio Villani indicated that the Memorandum of Understanding would not be on as strict a basis as it would be as with Moray Council, for example in relation to premises, staff recruitment etc. tsiMORAY's role would be to manage what the LAG wants to do.

At this point Drew McFarlane-Slack joined the meeting.

The LAG expressed disappointment at the slow progress being made, and compared this with for example Highland area. Iain Catto explained that the development of the Scottish Government computer system LARCS, had not been completed, and any LAG elsewhere that was proceeding with applications and awards, was having to do this largely on a paper-based system, with the risk of it being done incorrectly being taken by the accountable body concerned.

Fabio Villani indicated that there were two major issues – (1) cashflow – tsiMORAY could not afford to be out of pocket for projects in advance of tsiMORAY receiving money from the Scottish Government; (2) disallowance – if there was any payment to a projects subsequently ruled ineligible, then tsiMORAY could not afford to meet that financial cost. To resolve these issues, the Scottish Government could give a straight advance to tsiMORAY and then top that up as claims were made. Alternatively tsiMORAY could take on the staff team costs and get

them reimbursed within 90 days, but with the money for payment to projects coming from the Scottish Government direct. The Scottish Government wants to minimise the risk of disallowance. Double-checking of all claims will be necessary. If something goes wrong, why? If the guidance was discovered to be wrong then that should be the responsibility of the Scottish Government.

Fabio further explained that some of the conversations taking place may not have included all of the relevant people at the Scottish Government yet. It was agreed that the LAG could help move this on by it confirming that it wishes tsiMORAY to be the accountable body, but it would like to see things move faster. Iain Catto will write on behalf of the LAG in those terms.

Action: Iain Catto to write to the Scottish Government.

5. **Fisheries**

A paper had previously been circulated updating the position in respect of Marine Scotland and the Fisheries LAG (FLAG), and Reni MIlburn spoke to that paper. Although originally the Moray local development strategy (LDS) was intended to cover both LEADER and Fisheries, Marine Scotland under pressure from the EU Commission to reduce the number of FLAGS, had decided after negotiations with Moray, that there should be a combined Highland and Moray FLAG. Arrangements for this had been proceeding, and over £1 million would be allocated to the FLAG. Up to 25% of that could be used for administration costs, and that element which was previously included in the allocation for the Moray LDS would be transferred. She had been identifying from the Moray LDS the Fisheries elements and with colleagues in Highland combining them with their Highland equivalent in order to make an operational plan for the FLAG. There were still a couple of things to resolve with Marine Scotland before this could all be finalised. Marine Scotland would be handling all project claims centrally, unlike for LEADER. Expressions of interest for funding applications would be invited in June. All the members of the last Moray FLAG will form a local advisory group to the Highlands and Moray FLAG, and four of its number will actually sit on the FLAG.

Projects will either be Fisheries or LEADER. Fisheries outputs will feed into the LDS figures, and there will be need to be good communication at staff level with LEADER. She suggested that the Moray LAG could have an event where they invite FLAG members along. For the Fisheries funds community groups would be eligible but it would be primarily for businesses. Any applications must "smell of fish".

6. **Structure of the LAG**

Iain Catto reported that the Business Plan had indicated that the LAG would be an unincorporated voluntary association, and he highlighted that the constitution for that still had to be drafted. It awaited the signing of the SLA. Fabio Villani indicated that in his view the Business Plan would have to be amended, both to update it to cover the fact that tsiMORAY would be the accountable body, and he also suggested that there should be a discussion as to whether the LAG should still be an unincorporated voluntary association, or an incorporated body. In response to a question Reni Milburn confirmed that the LDS is driven by a focus on economic development, and that the LAG might wish to invite a representative from the Moray Community Planning Partnership (CPP) to be a member. The relationship between the CPP and the LAG needs to be worked out.

It was queried whether or not being unincorporated restricted the LAG in applying for other funds. It was pointed out that the LAG could commission work. Cairngorms LAG has set up a trust, and it is able to access other funds as a result.

7.   **Terms of Reference and LAG Policies**

Iain Catto reported that these had to be produced. He had circulated drafts of the following policies to govern the work of LAG members (based on the LAG Members' Handbook from the previous Programme), in order to allow LAG members to start thinking about the issues involved:

- Code of conduct;
- Declaration of interest;
- Confidentiality;
- Knowledge of projects;
- Meeting protocols.

It was agreed that these could be considered further at the next meeting.

8.   **LAG Membership**

The minutes of the Selection Panel for the LAG had been circulated, with recommendations made by the Panel as follows:

- It was hoped that those members from the public sector would bring to the LAG the benefit of their contacts and networks from within their organisation;

- No further recruitment for LAG members should be carried out at this stage in the Forres and Findhorn areas as there was enough geographical representation from those areas.

  - The LAG should consider seeking representation from the following areas/sectors:
    - Lossiemouth, Buckie, Keith;
    - Under 25s;
    - People with disabilities;
    - Military personnel (or their spouses);
    - Farming/agriculture;
    - Private business.

    and should consider issuing an invitation to The Moray Council, Moray College UHI, and Moray Strategic Business Forum to each nominate a representative to the LAG.

Iain Catto suggested that a small group for young people, with funds to disburse under the jurisdiction of the LAG, would be a sure way of getting them involved, rather than inviting someone to sit round the LAG table. It was pointed out that they would certainly need training. Jim Grant suggested the LAG should appoint a small group to consider further the gaps in membership.

9.   **Appointment of a Chair and Vice-Chair of the LAG**

The calling notice for the meeting had invited nominations for the position of Chair and Vice-Chair of the LAG. There had been no volunteers. Fabio Villani suggested that as people did not really know each other very well, that the Chair of the previous LAG might be invited to continue as an interim Chair, until someone could be found to take up that post. It was pointed out by other members that there was more than enough ability and experience around the table to fill the posts.

Following further discussion, it was agreed that LAG members would welcome a development day before the LAG held a further meeting, at a date and venue to be confirmed. Iain Catto asked about payment of the costs for the development day, as it would likely take place prior to the SLA being signed. Fabio Villani had raised this with Gillian MacDonald, and she thought that it would be possible for the Scottish Government to pay.

Reni Milburn pointed out the Iain Catto's contract ended on 31st March, and that the Council had no funds to extend it. tsiMORAY had no funds for this either, and would not have until the SLA was signed.

It was agreed that Gillian MacDonald should be contacted to indicate that the LAG would like to hold a development day, hosted by tsiMORAY, and asking the Government to pay for it.

Drew McFarlane-Slack asked who is to be advising the LAG and acting as honest broker in respect of the negotiations with the Government and tsiMORAY? Jim Grant indicated that the Council (Jim Grant and Reni Milburn) would support the LAG in the interim. It was suggested that Alice Mayne from Cairngorms LEADER programme be asked to help facilitate the day, and someone from the Scottish Government (preferably Gillian MacDonald) be invited to it.

Action: Gillian MacDonald and Alice Mayne to be contacted regarding a development day – Iain Catto and Fabio Villani to liaise.

10. **Training and Support**

There was to be a training session to be hosted by the Scottish Government in Edinburgh on Monitoring and Evaluation on 29th March. Bea Jefferson and Alastair Kennedy volunteered to attend if it was not too late to arrange for a place, and Iain Findlay indicated that if it could be video streamed, he would be interested in participating.

Action: Iain Catto to contact the Scottish Government with names for the training session

11. **Memorandum of Understanding**

A Memorandum of Understanding between the accountable body and the LAG would need to be drafted. One had been prepared by the Council when it was planned it would be the accountable body, but a fresh one would be required for tsiMORAY. Fabio Villani would be responsible for the initial drafting.

Action: Fabio Villani to initiate drafting of a Memorandum of Understanding once the SLA had been signed.

12. **Staffing and Recruitment**

Jim Grant indicated that staff could not be recruited by the accountable body until the SLA had been signed. The LAG will have to soldier on until staffing support is in place.

13. **Dates for Meetings for 2016-17**

A paper had been circulated with suggested dates. It was pointed out the need to avoid clashes with Cairngorms LAG, South Aberdeenshire LAG and North Aberdeenshire LAG, as there are members who sit on more than one LAG. It was agreed that Thursdays were the preferred day, with mornings being slightly preferable.

The development day was the first priority, and it should be held over lunch, and should be for around 4 to 5 hours in duration. Suggestions for topics for the development day should be sent to Jim Grant or Fabio Villani for the agenda.

Action: Fabio Villani and Jim Grant to draft an agenda for the development day.

14. **National Conference**

Those members of the LAG who had been present at the LEADER National Conference in Aviemore recently gave brief verbal reports:

Janne Pirie had attended the marketplace on the Thursday. There were various speakers on the Friday and also a video from Richard Lochhead, the Cabinet Secretary. She had attended a workshop on the commissioning of projects which was very interesting and also one on enterprise where the focus was on jobs, growth and micro-enterprise. On the Saturday she had gone on project visits to Nethybridge Community Centre and Castle Roy. These helped show the diversity of projects funded by LEADER.

Franziska Smith echoed Janne's comments. She had attended a workshop on communication, and that focused on what other areas were doing in respect of their websites. She obtained materials for the LAG's future use. It was also a good opportunity for her to catch up with former HIE colleagues. The catering facilities were fantastic and the mix of people and information sharing was very valuable.

Drew McFarlane-Slack had also attended the enterprise workshop. There were two good case studies with interesting outputs. One was Moray Firth Ganseys (a former Moray LEADER project). The co-operation workshop had been poor. There were too many people there who had no experience of LEADER, and the workshop was pitched at too high a level. He suggested that the Moray LAG should have a sub-group for cooperation projects. The opportunity for networking was fantastic, and if you get the opportunity to go in future, do take it.

Alex Walker reported that the atmosphere was very informal and seemed familiar to him. He enjoyed it and noted that we needed to spend a certain percentage on co-operation projects, and he thought there were lots of possibilities.

Fabio Villani had learned about commissioning projects, and noted that there were good ideas but also pitfalls.

Iain Catto will circulate their online video of the conference once it is made available by the Scottish Government.

Action: Iain Catto to circulate the online video of the conference.

Jana Hutt left the meeting at this point.

15.   Visit to Swedish Rural Parliament

The Scottish Government had intimated that it would pay the costs for two LAG members from Scotland to attend the Swedish Rural Parliament late in May this year. Gordon Methven and Fabio Villani were both interested in putting their names forward.

Action: Iain Catto to forward the two names to the Scottish Government.

16.   Any Other Business

16.1 It was noted that with the formation of the LAG, the role of the Moray LDS Working Group had come to an end. The LAG thanked the members of the Working Group and especially those members of the Moray LDS Focus Group, its sub-group, for all the work they had contributed in developing the LDS and Business Plan for the new Programme. The LAG asked Iain Catto to write to these members intimating the thanks of the new LAG.

16.2 Iain Catto indicated that as he was leaving the Council at the end of this month, this would be his last LAG meeting. He thanked both members of the previous LAG of the new LAG for all their help and support to him in his time in the post. Jim Grant and Drew McFarlane-Slack on behalf of the LAG thanked Iain for all his hard work in his time with the Council.

16.3 Alex Walker asked about the quorum for the LAG. Iain Catto advised that it was for the LAG to set, and it had not been set as yet, and was not specified in the Business Plan. The quorum was seven during the last Programme.

16.4 The meeting closed with thanks to Jim Grant for chairing it.

Action: Iain Catto to write to members of the Moray LDS Working Group to thank them for their work.