

## RURAL AFFAIRS WORKING GROUP

### COMMITTEE ROOM 4, WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN

WEDNESDAY, 8<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER, 2017

- Present:** Councillors M Buchan, S Duncan, V Harper, A Hassan (as a substitute for Cllr Simpson), W Howatson, J Ingram, I Taylor and J Whyte.
- Apologies:** Councillor A Simpson.
- Officers:** D McDonald, Industry Support Executive (Rural and Maritime); A Cunningham, European Programmes Co-Ordinator, and A Ziarkowska, Committee Officer.
- In presence of:** Mr Steven Thomson and Mr Ken Rundle (SRUC)

#### 1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

This being the first meeting of the Rural Affairs Working Group after the local government election in May 2017, nominations for the Chair were requested, after which Councillor Howatson was **appointed** by majority vote as Chair of the Working Group.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Members were asked if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No interests were intimated.

#### 3. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Working Group **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:-

- (1) have due regard to the need to:-
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation,
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,
  - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) consider the contents of equality impact assessments, where provided, and to take those into account when reaching a decision.

#### 4. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2017

The Minute of Meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2017 was circulated and **approved** as a correct record.

#### 5. MATTERS ARISING

Derek McDonald went through the action sheet from the last meeting to provide an update on progress in respect of each point. There were no further matters arising.

## **6. PRESENTATION: BREXIT AND SCOTTISH AGRICULTURE – SOME CONSIDERATIONS’ BY STEVEN THOMSON**

The Chair invited Mr Steven Thomson, Senior Agricultural Economist & Communities Sectoral Lead for SEFARI (Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes) at SRUC to deliver a presentation on ‘Brexit and Scottish Agriculture.’ Mr Thomson gave a brief overview of the current agriculture framework. He highlighted the importance of EU payments to the agricultural sector using diagrams to illustrate the Regional and Sectoral Split of the CAP budget in Scotland. Mr Thomson commented on the huge uncertainty over the future for agriculture in Scotland and identified the main issues facing the sector including access to EU single market in post-Brexit period, access to finance and labour. Mr Thomson then summarised the role of regulation and trade in the functioning agricultural framework and outlined a timeline for Brexit negotiations. He also reported that Government intend to adopt a New Agricultural Policy in April 2019 and issue a Command Paper setting out new principles for Agricultural Policy by the end of 2017 with delivery mechanisms detailed in a White Paper in Spring/Summer 2018.

During discussion Members expressed their concern over the future financial viability of the agricultural sector in Scotland and asked Mr Thomson what Council can do to ensure local interests are properly represented in EU - UK negotiations.

The Chair thanked Mr Thomson for informative presentation. Thereafter, it was **agreed** to note the information provided in the presentation.

## **7. PRESENTATION ON THE EU LEADER PROGRAMME IN ABERDEENSHIRE BY ALASDAIR CUNNINGHAM.**

The Chair invited Mr Alasdair Cunningham, European Programmes Co-Ordinator at Aberdeenshire Council, to deliver a presentation on the EU Leader Programme in Aberdeenshire. Mr Cunningham gave a brief overview of the current ‘Community-Led Local Development’ (Leader) programme which is funded by European Union and Scottish Government. It was noted that the programme was designed to implement local development strategies and is managed by Local Action Groups. Members were advised that each project must address at least one of the cross-cutting themes, namely Innovation, Sustainability, Equal Opportunities and Community Empowerment & Social Capital. Mr Cunningham outlined the examples of successful projects including rural stores and outlets, a centre for provision of advanced veterinary services, Strathhorn Riding School and Aberdeenshire Highland Beef.

The Chair thanked Mr Cunningham for informative presentation. Thereafter, it was **agreed** to note the information provided in the presentation.

## **8. VERBAL REPORT: THE LAND BASED SECTOR IN NE SCOTLAND – FACING THE FUTURE**

There had been circulated a report on the Land Based Sector in North East Scotland which provided Members with an analysis of the industry. Derek McDonald advised that NESAAAG had commissioned the study and it had been delivered in March 2016 by a team of led by Peter Cook, an independent agricultural economist at the time; now Director of Agriculture Food and Drink at Opportunity North East. The study had been funded by Aberdeenshire, Angus and Moray Councils, Scottish Enterprise, HIE Moray and Forestry Commission Scotland and covered the local authority areas of Aberdeenshire, Angus and Moray from 2007

to 2014. Derek McDonald drew members' attention to the report's recommendations and provided a verbal progress update.

After consideration, it was **agreed** to note the information provided.

#### **9. RINGLINK INTERNSHIP/PRE-APPRENTICESHIP - BULLETIN REPORT**

There had been circulated a report dated 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2017 by the Head of Economic Development, which provided members with an update on Ringlink Internship project. The report gave an overview of the Internship Scheme and described its objectives, priorities, funding sources and structure. It was reported that the Internship started in 2013 with financial assistance from the council and is designed to provide young people with a structured introduction to a career in the rural sector through a programme of training and a mentored, paid work placement. The internship is currently the only training programme in Scotland actively recruiting young people into the land-based industry with no prior experience and which provides the opportunity to 'try the job' before committing longer term to the industry. The Internship has been recently accredited by SRUC as a Pre-apprenticeship programme (from 2018 onwards) and since its creation has trained and developed 59 trainees who have gone on to a career in the sector. The internship format is a 3 week induction period which includes Health & Safety, First Aid, manual handling training and site visits, followed by a 6 month paid and mentored work placement.

During discussion, Members considered how best to secure the long-term viability of the Internship programme and how to encourage new mentors to participate in the scheme.

After consideration, it was **agreed** to note the information provided.

#### **10. DAIRY PROCESSING PROJECT - VERBAL REPORT**

Derek McDonald provided Members with a verbal update on the NE dairy situation and the project currently underway in support of the local dairy sector. Since the Muller Wiseman dairy processing plant in Tullos had closed in July 2016 locally produced milk was now being transported (at a cost to dairy farmers of 1.75 pence per litre) to Bellshill near Glasgow for processing, which put local producers at a major commercial disadvantage. ONE and Aberdeenshire Council had jointly funded a project to examine the viability of alternative processing options to help secure the future of local dairy production and try to find parties willing to invest. Negotiations were ongoing. Meanwhile local dairy farmers had founded NE Milk Producers Association to represent their interests and to create a vehicle for grant applications. The new association had raised funds from members based on their milk production levels and had appointed a specialist dairy consultant to carry out a detailed feasibility study and business case assessment of a potential dairy processing facility in North East Scotland. Derek McDonald advised that the association was currently working on an application to the Food Processing Marketing and Cooperation (FPMC) grant scheme and was engaging closely with existing buyers of dairy products to determine potential markets and product requirements with a view to future supply contracts. Derek McDonald concluded by advising that a further update would follow at the next meeting of the group.

After consideration, it was **agreed** to note the information provided in the update.

### **11. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

Derek McDonald advised Members to put their suggestions for Group site visits next year. It was also reported that presentations from the meeting would be circulated to Members via email.

### **12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was **noted** that the next meeting of the Group will be held on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2018 and calendar invites would be issued to Members in due course.