

**NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP**

**COMMITTEE ROOM 5, WOODHILL HOUSE, ABERDEEN**

**WEDNESDAY, 25 SEPTEMBER, 2019**

- Present:** **Aberdeenshire Council** – Provost W Howatson (Chair), Councillors S Duncan, J Hutchison, J Ingram, D Robertson, I Taylor and J Whyte.  
**Aberdeen City Council** – Councillor N MacGregor  
**Angus Council** - Councillors K Braes and B Myles.  
**James Hutton Institute** – Prof K Thomson.  
**LANTRA** – L Barron-Majerik  
**NFUS** - A Connon and A Simpson  
**ONE** – P Cook  
**RSPB Scotland** – M Prosdocihi  
**SAC Consulting** – D Ross  
**SAOS** – J Booth  
**Scottish Enterprise** – G Ford and S Harrison  
**Scottish Forestry** – J Nott  
**Scottish Government** – J Stuart  
**Scottish Land & Estates** – D Fyffe  
**SRUC** – C Daniels
- Apologies:** **Aberdeen City Council** – Councillors B Crockett and A MacKenzie.  
**Angus Council** – Councillors C Brown and A MacMillan Douglas  
**Moray Council** – Councillors D Bremner and T Eagle  
**ANM Group Ltd** – G Rogerson  
**Visit Scotland** - J Robinson
- Officers:** D McDonald, Industry Support Executive ED & PS (Aberdeenshire Council)  
M Kennie, Members' Support Administrator,(Aberdeenshire Council)  
J McRobbie, Committee Officer (Aberdeenshire Council)

**1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting. Members were asked if they had interests to declare. No declarations of interest were intimated.

**2. PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY**

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

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
  - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and

- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment had been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

### **3. MINUTE OF MEETING OF 24 APRIL, 2019**

The Minute of of 24 April 2019 had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record

### **4. MATTERS ARISING**

There had been circulated a report by Industry Support Executive, Aberdeenshire Council on actions arising at the last meeting on 24 April 2019. Speaker presentations had been circulated to members (actions 1 and 3). Action 2 was the proposed tour of the James Hutton Institute and the Group was advised that the meeting on 27 November would be hosted by the Institute. In respect of action 4, it was highlighted that Steve Harrison, Project Manager, Scottish Enterprise, was in attendance to give a further presentation on Technology Enabled Farming.

### **5. PRESENTATION: LANTRA: A USER'S GUIDE - LIZ BARRON-MAJERIK, SCOTLAND DIRECTOR, LANTRA**

On behalf of the Partnership, the Chair welcomed Liz Barron-Majerik, Scotland Director of LANTRA to the meeting.

The Partnership heard from Ms Barron-Majerik that Lantra had been established to provide training and qualifications for land-based industries, as a one-stop shop to signpost and access a network of approved training providers, from foundation to advanced level training.

There was discussion of how Lantra operates within Scotland and elsewhere in the UK; the challenges in maintaining an effective network of trained instructors; the funding of the organisation in Scotland and how it works with other training providers to widen the options available to those employed in land-based industries and aquaculture; the evolution of, and continuing support for, modern apprenticeships; consideration of the "pre-apprenticeship" programme; the need to upskill the new workforce for future challenges of 2020 when it was estimated that 33,500 additional workers would be required; the potential requirements to modify land management practices to meet climate change obligations, and the range of land use activities for which careers information and an employer's toolkit were being developed.

The Chair, on behalf of the Partnership, thanked Ms Barron-Majerik for a very detailed and informative presentation.

#### **Action point 1: D McDonald to circulate further Lantra information**

### **6. UPDATE: TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED FARMING AND THE RURAL ECONOMY IN SCOTLAND BY STEVE HARRISON, PROJECT MANAGER, SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of 24 April, 2019 (Item 8), the Chair, on behalf of the Partnership, welcomed Steve Harrison, Project Manager, Scottish Enterprise back to the meeting to provide an update on technology enabled farming and the rural economy.

Mr Harrison spoke of the joint initiatives which were being considered, including the development of a funding bid to the Scottish Government, to address the challenges of operating in an increasingly digital world, within a geography where connectivity may be very limited and with technology potentially lacking robustness (sensors) or not easy to utilise.

Many aspects would require to be considered, including raising the awareness of the costs to users and return on investment; the needs of the land managers; testing and implementing potential technological solutions; and identifying sources of finance. Innovative applications

would need to be developed in consultation with prospective users, and input from a range of stakeholders, including NESAG members, was invited.

The rural economy is much wider than land-use related activities alone and digital innovation must also encompass areas such as health, tourism, food and drink manufacturing and service provision, which will require a clear steer to technology providers to develop tailored solutions to meet evidence-based needs and to exploit potential opportunities.

There was discussion of the costs; the time concerns over trying to choose, learn, and implement new technology, especially in land-use activities; the range of data currently available and its ownership in any future developments and also identifying potential management efficiencies arising from the use of remote sensing and monitoring equipment.

The Group, noting the request from Mr Harrison for 'pathfinders' to come forward and help develop proposals, **agreed:**

- (1) to thank Mr Harrison for an interesting and informative update; and
- (2) that all interested members contact Mr Harrison at Scottish Enterprise

**Action point 2: Derek McDonald to circulate the presentation slides;**

**Action Point 3: Interested members to contact Steve Harrison**

## **7. PRESENTATION: ONE – PETER COOK**

The Chair, on behalf of the Group, welcomed Mr Peter Cook, Director of Food, Drink and Agriculture, ONE (Opportunity North East) to the meeting to provide a progress update on the work of ONE in strengthening the economy of North East Scotland and its future plans in relation to the land-based sector. Mr Cook firstly provided an overview of ONE's five priority areas and referred to the new Digital Tech Hub in Aberdeen, the ongoing construction of a Bio-Hub at Foresterhill, Aberdeen and plans for a Food Hub near Craibstone which has secured £10M from the Aberdeen City Region Deal. The Food Hub is expected to reinvigorate the wider food and drink sector in NE Scotland, nurturing new and existing enterprises by stimulating new product development, innovation and automation and improving market awareness and responsiveness. Many local food businesses tend to be labour intensive and focused on relatively low-value primary produce. The ONE Business Growth Programme is delivering tangible support to those with added-value growth ambitions. Continuing close engagement with the sector is planned to ensure all ONE activity meets local needs.

LEADER funding has been secured by ONE to support its food tourism agenda while its ambitions for local businesses to exploit opportunities in overseas markets are supported by a network of in-market specialists around the world in partnership with Scotland Food and Drink. A Food Hub Director had recently been appointed to develop the project.

During the question and answer session there was discussion of the declining market share of meat as a source of protein and the implications for primary producers and processors; the need for balance in media reports to set out the realities of agricultural production in Scotland and where appropriate to counter generalised campaigns promoting vegetarian or vegan food choices at the expense of low intensity production in the cool uplands of Northern Europe; and of potential quality and sustainability concerns arising from the importation of food from warmer, drier climates instead of more local, sustainable and seasonable sources.

The Partnership **agreed:-**

- (1) that a specific presentation on the developing Food Hub be requested at a future date; and
- (2) to thank Mr Cook for an interesting and informative presentation.

**Action Point 4: Director of the ONE Food Hub to be invited to present to a future meeting**

## 8. BULLETIN: DIMBLEBY REVIEW OF UK FOOD & DRINKS SECTOR

There had been circulated a report dated 18 September, 2019 by the Director of Infrastructure Services, Aberdeenshire Council, providing an update on the Dimbleby Review of the UK Food and Drink Sector, the first in 75 years and which may lead to the development of a UK food strategy.

The Review remit is very wide ranging and plans to consider (a) the delivery of safe, healthy, affordable food, regardless of where people live, or how much they earn; (b) the sector's robustness in the face of future shocks; (c) how to restore and enhance the natural environment for the next generation; (d) the sector's foundations on a resilient and sustainable agriculture sector; (e) its contribution to our urban and rural economies, delivering well-paid jobs and supporting innovative producers and manufacturers; and (f) whether it could be undertaken in a more efficient and cost-effective way.

Noting that the findings of the Dimbleby Review seem likely to have a strong influence on the future shape of structural fund support for food and drink in the UK post-Brexit; that a call for evidence is anticipated later in 2019; and that much food & drink research has already been undertaken in NE Scotland, including studies commissioned by NESAAG, the Group **agreed:-**

- (1) that when evidence is sought, NESAAG should respond directly;
- (2) that a member of the Dimbleby Review team be invited to present to NESAAG; and
- (3) to note, in all other respects, the terms of the report.

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**Action Point 5: invite a Dimbleby Review team member to a future meeting of NESAAG**

## 9. BULLETIN: EU:MERCOSUR TRADE AGREEMENT

There had been circulated a report dated 18 September, 2019, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, Aberdeenshire Council, providing information regarding the signing on 28 June 2019 of a revised EU trade agreement with Mercosur, which was the largest deal ever struck in tariff reduction terms, with some estimates anticipating a reduction in EU export duty to Mercosur of around €4bn per annum. It was highlighted that whilst agricultural produce was identified as a key component when negotiations began around 20 years ago, and access on competitive terms to EU markets for beef, poultry, sugar, coffee, fruit, orange juice and ethanol has been eagerly anticipated by Mercosur producers, serious concerns have been expressed on the implication for beef market stability in Europe and the potential impact on already slim financial margins. Environmental concerns over the conversion of rainforest to pasture in S America have also been raised. It was **agreed** to note the information contained in the report.

## 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mrs Ford, Scottish Enterprise, spoke of a piece of engagement work, into which participation was invited, looking at the positive impacts which access to funds under the LEADER project had fostered in North East Scotland, and invited input from any who had experienced the system as an enabling process. The Partnership **agreed** welcoming the study, to encourage the sharing of experiences to support the survey. No other business was raised.

## 11. DATE OF FUTURE MEETING

It was **noted** that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 27th November, 2019, meeting at the James Hutton Institute at 10.00 a.m.