

FISHERIES WORKING GROUP – 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

BULLETIN: EVALUATIONS OF COMMUNITY LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT (CLLD) PROGRAMMES

1 Reason for Report / Summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this Report is to update the Group on the evaluation of the Aberdeenshire CLLD programmes, principally NESFLAG.

2 Recommendations

The Group is recommended to:

2.1 Note the findings of the evaluations of the North and South Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategies

3 Purpose and Decision-Making Route

- 3.1 CLLD programmes such as Leader and NESFLAG aim to provide ‘bottom up’ support in rural communities by providing funding to partnerships of community, private and public representatives known as Local Action Groups (LAGs/FLAGs) to deliver a place-based Local Development Strategy (LDS).
- 3.2 Aberdeenshire Council acts as ‘Accountable Body’ for two LDS programmes – one for North Aberdeenshire and one for South Aberdeenshire. It also acts as ‘Lead Partner’ for the North East Scotland Fisheries Local Action Group (NESFLAG) which received an allocation of funds from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).
- 3.5 Two separate evaluations were carried out – one for the [North Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy](#) and one for the [South Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategy](#). The geography of the former covers approximately the Banff and Buchan, Buchan and Formartine Administrative Areas and the latter the Garioch, Kincardine and Mearns and Marr Administrative Areas, excluding the Cairngorms National Park.

4 Discussion

- 4.1 Following a procurement exercise by the Council, EKOS Ltd was appointed by the Council to carry out an external evaluation of the North and South Aberdeenshire Local Development Strategies. **The main findings of the evaluation are set out below.**
- 4.1.1 **Programme commitment and spend took longer than anticipated**, with a hiatus in new grant allocations following the EU referendum in 2016 and the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020 having impacts, respectively. Overall, the majority of programme budgets have been committed and spent.

- 4.1.2 **The programmes have funded a good mix of projects aligned to their five strategic priorities.** Where there were limited ‘challenge fund’ bids received in certain priority areas, the Local Action Groups filled these gaps by directly commissioning projects.
- 4.1.3 **The blended approach between a competitive challenge fund and commissioning of project to address gaps in delivery was viewed a sensible approach.** Appendix 1 to this report provides an overview of the projects ultimately supported by the NESFLAG programme. Commissioned projects were generally administered by Aberdeenshire Council as the Accountable Body on behalf of the Local Action Groups.
- 4.1.4 **There are well-established processes and systems in place that support the administration of the Programmes,** including a systematic and robust application process involving assessment against appropriate criteria. The two-stage process involves an initial Expression of Interest (EOI) followed by a project application. This was assessed as a sensible approach so as to filter out unsuitable projects before significant resources are spent on developing full applications.
- 4.1.5 **However, challenges were identified with the efficacy of the application process,** namely that:
- **the application process was considered to be too onerous and complex** (particularly for Leader)
 - **a one-size-fits-all approach lacks proportion** (i.e., single application process for projects seeking funding regardless of amount of funding sought)
 - the application process was considered **more suitable for larger organisations** or those with paid staff and acted as a barrier for smaller organisations;
 - **significant hand-holding support was required** for many (smaller) applicants – for example by the Programme team, by local support agencies, and/or by external consultants.
- 4.1.6 **The evaluation also noted that other parts of the process were viewed as complex,** such as procurement, claims, changes requests and audit (and the online system used for applications/claims).
- 4.1.7 **The Programme team were said to be committed, effective and efficient** – both in terms of their role in supporting the Local Action Groups, but also in terms of the support provided to applicants for project funding (“critical friend”) and to project sponsors once projects have been approved. There was positive feedback provided by Local Action Groups, members, and applicants regarding the support funding applicants received at different stages in the process.

4.1.8 **The evaluation found that there are well-established processes and systems for governance, decision-making, finance and administration.** Aberdeenshire Council was felt to be an appropriate Lead Partner, with a long track record of fulfilling this function, and considerable expertise of managing and delivering EU-funded programmes (and managing the associated risks that this funding can bring). The evaluation concluded that the Council has fulfilled its administrative and financial duties and obligations efficiently and effectively.

4.1.9 **The Local Action Groups were also considered to operate effectively.** Here, there was particularly positive feedback regarding:

- the commitment and engagement of members;
- the diversity of sectors, skills, perspectives and experience round the table; and
- the spirit of goodwill and openness.

4.1.10 **Performance against targets was assessed as good**, with the caveat that project sponsors will have likely interpreted Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in different ways. As such, there is likely to be a lack of consistency in terms of what and how data is collected. Furthermore, many of the projects were still “live” at the time of evaluation, and in many cases, impacts are not expected to be achieved until a few years down the line.

4.1.11 Primary research, carried out by the consultants with grant recipients, found **further evidence of impact and legacy**, including:

- **Internal organisational benefits**
 - improved financial planning;
 - increased knowledge of funding sources;
 - developed new partnerships;
 - strengthened existing partnerships, and
 - improved project planning skills.
- **Economic benefits/impacts**
 - increased visits to facilities/attractions;
 - creation of new products or services; and
 - development or enhancement of community facilities;
- **Social, cultural or environmental benefits/impacts**
 - enhanced cultural heritage, tourism and leisure activities; and

- local residents and businesses having access to improved services and infrastructure.
- Very **high levels of additionality** associated with the project funding from LEADER/ European Maritime and Fisheries Fund; and
- All grant recipients reported that their project would have **a lasting legacy** for the development of rural and/or coastal communities within Aberdeenshire.

4.1.12 Feedback from grant recipients and stakeholders was that **the funding has made a real difference**, and that it has stimulated the development of rural, coastal and fishing communities, specifically:

- the **enhancement of community facilities** (e.g., new, renovation, expansion);
- **ensuring buildings have a productive use(s)** and future-proofing community assets;
- local people (and visitors) having access to **improved (or new) cultural heritage, tourism and leisure provision**, stimulating the local economy;
- **business and social enterprise development** that leads to a vibrant local economy, improved infrastructure, job creation and volunteer engagement; and
- increased **income generation opportunities** that help enhance financial sustainability, resulting from:
 - delivering more and better products/services;
 - reconfiguring buildings to improve use of space, increasing capacity and/or improving overall flexibility, versatility and functionality of buildings/spaces;
 - attracting more customers/users;
 - catering for wider uses;
 - business expansion;
 - creation of retail outlets;
 - business diversification, entering new markets; and
 - building networks and partnerships for the long-term.

4.1.13 With regards to any **future Community Led Local Development programmes**, strong support was expressed for the underpinning principles of a Community Led Local Development bottom-up approach, the Local Action Group model, and flexible and responsive area-based Local Development Strategies . A decentralised approach was favoured, recognising the importance of local democracy and decision-making and clear divisions of roles and responsibilities between key national and local actors. There was also support for long-term multi-annual funding (more than the current seven years) for stability, continuity, security and for lasting change and impact to be achieved. Such an approach was viewed to also support better planning and programming.

5 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

5.1 The following Council priorities are relevant to this report:

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Education Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Infrastructure Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economy & Enterprise

The LEADER and EMFF programmes have helped to deliver a wide range of projects which support the above Council priorities and it is anticipated that any replacement funding will continue to do so.

5.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed:

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial	X		
Staffing	X		
Equalities		X	
Fairer Scotland Duty		X	
Town Centre First		X	
Sustainability		X	
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing		X	

5.3 An integrated impact assessment is not required because the evaluation of the LEADER programme does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

5.4 The staffing and financial implications of this report are that the Council presently employs 2 FTE Co-ordinators and 1 FTE Claims Officer to support the

work of the (F)LAGs. The Scottish Government has indicated that funding will be made available for LEADER-related work until at least 31 March 2021. Until such time as the work is quantified, staff are working part-time on the LEADER programme and part-time on other funding programmes for which administration/capacity funding has been secured (e.g. Aberdeenshire Coastal Communities Challenge Fund; Levelling Up Fund).

5.5 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a [Corporate Level](#):

- ACORP001 - Budget Pressures
- ACORP005 - Working with other organisations (e.g. supply chains, outsourcing and partnership working)

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a [Strategic Level](#):

- BSSR003 - We live within our means and use public money to maximise outcomes for our communities

6 Scheme of Governance

6.1 The Group is able to consider this item in terms of Section F7.4. of part 2A of the Council's Scheme of Governance 'to form working groups or other groups and hold meetings as necessary in order to fulfil its remit' as the programmes in question are managed by Economic Development and Protective Services.

Paul Macari, Head of Service – Planning & Environment

Report prepared by Martin Brebner, Team Manager – Economic Strategy & Policy
14 September 2021

List of Appendices –

Appendix 1 – Projects Supported (EMFF only)

APPENDIX 1 – PROJECTS SUPPORTED (EMFF)

Fund	Project	Recipient	Grant (North)	Grant (South)	Area(s)
EMFF	Buchanhaven Boat Shed	Buchanhaven Harbour	£28,568.89	£0	B
EMFF	Coatings Removal UHP Multi-Worker	Davidsons Marine and Industrial Painters	£67,488.60	£0	B
EMFF	Leisure-Commercial Pontoons at Port Henry Marina, Peterhead	Peterhead Port Authority	£44,176.19	£0	B
EMFF	Peterhead Seafood Festival 2019*	Rediscover Peterhead Ltd	£31,173.50	£0	B
EMFF	Seafood Training Centre	Scottish Seafood Association	£60,147.36	£0	B
EMFF	Aquarium Touch Pool and Interpretation Upgrade	Aberdeenshire Council	£32,315.58	£0	BB
EMFF	Banff Harbour Improvements	Aberdeenshire Council	£65,713.80	£0	BB
EMFF	Enabling Works to Enhance Access for Vessels at Pennan Harbour	Pennan Harbour Trust	£20,938.00	£0	BB
EMFF	Fish Landing & Catch Quality facilities improvements.	Rosehearty Harbour and Inshore Fisherman's Association	£69,576.64	£0	BB
EMFF	Fish Market Ice and Chill	Whitehills Inshore Fishermen's Association	£41,354.40	£0	BB
EMFF	Insulated Mackerel Bins	North East Creel & Line Association	£9,970.20	£0	BB

Fund	Project	Recipient	Grant (North)	Grant (South)	Area(s)
EMFF	Modular Access Towers for Vessels at Shiplift	Fraserburgh Harbour	£55,500.00	£0	BB
EMFF	New Corrosion Protection Equipment for the Fishing Industry	PBP Services	£36,346.76	£0	BB
EMFF	New Materials Handler for Inshore Fleet	Fraserburgh Harbour	£41,210.50	£0	BB
EMFF	Peartree Coffee House & Bistro	Peartree Fraserburgh Ltd	£29,073.30	£0	BB
EMFF	Portsoy Traditional Boatbuilder*	Portsoy Community Enterprise	£43,168.00	£0	BB
EMFF	Purchase and installation of Crane and create a changing facility at the Harbour	Gardenstown Harbour Commissioners	£17,273.92	£0	BB
EMFF	Reflective Tracer Buoys	North East Creel & Line Association	£13,525.20	£0	BB
EMFF	Rosehearty Community Boat Club - New Rosehearty Clubhouse	Rosehearty Community Boat Club	£63,048.51	£0	BB
EMFF	Sandhaven & Pitullie Harbour Redevelopment	Sandhaven & Pitullie Harbour Trust	£23,650.00	£0	BB
EMFF	The Captain's Table	The Captain's Table	£2,160.00	£0	BB
EMFF	The first accredited gluten free fish diner in North East Scotland	Findlay's Fish Bar and Diner	£17,299.94	£0	BB
EMFF	Waste Management & Environmental Impact Reduction	Fraserburgh Harbour	£29,189.16	£0	BB
EMFF	Whitehills Harbour Heritage Project*	Whitehills Harbour Commissioners	£79,983.78	£0	BB
EMFF	McBay's Shellfish Shop	Murray McBay & Co.	£0	£40,786.48	KM

Fund	Project	Recipient	Grant (North)	Grant (South)	Area(s)
EMFF	Mearns Coastal Maritime Heritage Trail*	Tangleha Artists Collective Ltd	£0	£19,061.00	KM
EMFF	MERCHAT: Extra Support for the Red Rocks Restoration*	Tangleha Artists Collective Limited	£0	£13,918.30	KM
EMFF	Seafood Bothy Trailer*	Maria Lewis T/A Seafood Bothy	£0	£12,496.71	KM
EMFF	South Harbours Improvement Actions*	Aberdeenshire Council	£0	£51,447.22	KM
EMFF	South Harbours Improvement Plan	Aberdeenshire Council	£0	£19,600.00	KM
EMFF	Stonehaven Boardwalk Fishing Heritage Project*	Aberdeenshire Council	£0	£44,858.68	KM
EMFF	Stonehaven Paddleboarding	Stonehaven Paddleboarding	£0	£7,402.50	KM
EMFF	Stonehaven Sea Safari	Stonehaven Sea Safari Ltd.	£0	£52,410.81	KM
EMFF	Stonehaven Tolbooth Museum - Development Phase	Stonehaven Tollbooth Association	£0	£12,375.14	KM
EMFF	EGCP Beach Litter Campaign	EGCP Ltd.	£26,628.37	£15,977.02	Multiple: B, BB, F, KM
EMFF	EGCP 'Discovering the Aberdeenshire Coast'*	EGCP Ltd.	£23,670.25	£14,108.35	Multiple: B, BB, F, KM
EMFF	Strategic Analysis of the North East Scotland Seafood Industry	Aberdeenshire Council	£25,633.13	£8,544.38	Multiple: BB, B, F, KM

*Project is still live or final claim to be paid – final grant amount to be determined

B – Buchan
BB – Banff & Buchan
F – Formartine
G – Garioch
KM – Kincardine & Mearns
M - Marr