



COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2023-24

Report by Depute Chief Executive

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide the Comhairle with a review of the 2023-24 Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme and an update on the 2024-25 CLLD Programme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 In 2023-24, Scottish Government (SG) allocated £11.6m to support CLLD across Scotland, of which £267,042 was made available for the Outer Hebrides' Local Action Group (LAG) to administer. Through bidding for additional funding - when it became available subsequently - and participating in collaboration projects, the LAG was able to access further finance, bringing the total budget for 2023-24 to £434,136. The Comhairle acts as Accountable Body (AB) to SG and the CLLD Coordinator implements the programme which the LAG set out in its Community Led Vision (CLV).
- 2.2 The 2023-24 Outer Hebrides CLLD LAG delivered six distinct project strands: Design Grant; Capital Fund; Small Grants Scheme; Community Transport Network; LAG Development & Capacity Building; and continued support for the Outer Hebrides Youth Local Action Group (YLAG). Outer Hebrides CLLD also participated in a national YLAG collaboration project and - in collaboration with LAGs, councils and other stakeholders in Orkney and Shetland - commissioned research into potential impacts on island communities of the upcoming Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill. The 2023-24 Programme was delivered successfully and has been fully wound up.
- 2.3 Following the Scottish Budget announcement in December 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs & Islands confirmed a further £12.2m to support CLLD delivery in 2024-25. The Cabinet Secretary also approved a recommendation to extend existing CLLD staff contracts to 31 March 2025.
- 2.4 In May 2024, the Outer Hebrides LAG received confirmation of an initial allocation for 2024-25 of £219,078, of which £120,545 is revenue and £98,523 capital funding. Additional funding may once again become available through further tranches in future. SG are still to issue formal guidance on what LAGs are to cover in their CLV or priorities they are expected to contribute to. Subsequently, the LAG held an initial meeting to discuss its priorities and how to allocate the budget most effectively and expect to formalise their plans in the coming weeks.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle agrees to:
 - a) note the success of the Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme 2023-24; and
 - b) continue its function as Accountable Body for the Outer Hebrides Local Action Group (LAG) for the CLLD Programme 2024-25.

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Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Review of the 2023-24 Outer Hebrides CLLD Programme Appendix 2 – Review of the 2023-24 Outer Hebrides CLLD YLAG Programme Appendix 3 – Newspaper Article Update on the 2023-24 CLLD Programme Appendix 4 – Newspaper Article Reviewing the 2023-24 Programme
Background Papers:	Report to Sustainable Development Committee September 2023 – Community Led Local Development Programme 2023-24

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	The Outer Hebrides LAG area was allocated £267k from the Scottish Government CLLD fund in 2023-24. An initial allocation of around £219,078 has been received for 2024-25 - and it may be possible to once again increase this during the course of the year.
Legal	The Comhairle would continue to function as Accountable Body in the Outer Hebrides and undertake management and financial administration of the fund on behalf of the Local Action Group (LAG). The Comhairle's Legal, Audit and Finance services would be involved in ensuring its compliance.
Staffing	Scottish Government has given assurances that funding is available to retain existing staff for the duration of the 2024-25 CLLD Programme. If time and finance allow, efforts will be made to recruit for a part-time project assistant.
Assets and Property	None.
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	The report only provides an update of the programme.
Equalities	None
Corporate Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be a sustainable and inclusive Council - Communities are empowered and continue to be at the heart of our decision making; • Strengthen the local economy - Increased level of skills across our communities and workforce; and • Support resilient communities and quality of life - The Gaelic language, natural heritage and culture of our communities is supported and promoted.
Environmental Impact	Under the terms of CLLD funding the Scottish Government has stipulated that all support must meet local and national key priorities, including environmental stability.
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input from community groups and organisations, as well as individuals and national groups working locally, has been sought informally.

BACKGROUND

5.1 With the UK's departure from the European Union, the previous EU-funded LEADER Programme ended. Since then, the Scottish Government (SG) has been investigating and testing new ways to support and deliver future Community-led Local Development (CLLD) in Scotland.

- 5.2 For 2022-23, SG allocated £11.6m to support CLLD across Scotland for the first time - of which £267,042 was made available to the Outer Hebrides' CLLD Local Action Group (LAG). It is expected that the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill, due to come into force in 2025, will provide more clarity over future CLLD programmes.

2023-24 CLLD PROGRAMME

- 6.1 For 2023-24, SG allocated an initial £6.7m of revenue funding to support CLLD across Scotland - of which £267,042 was made available to the Outer Hebrides' LAG. By bidding for additional funding and participating in a YLAG collaboration project, the LAG was able to: increase its revenue budget to £323,236; access £94,900 of capital funding; and allocate a £16,000 operating budget to the Youth Local Action Group (YLAG), for which the YLAG had delegated responsibility. The 2023-24 CLLD allocation for the Outer Hebrides therefore came to £434,136 overall.
- 6.2 As was the case with the previous EU-funded LEADER Programme, each CLLD area is managed by a LAG made up of public, private and third-sector representatives. The annual Programme - set by the LAG and agreed with SG - is administered by a CLLD Coordinator employed by the Comhairle. During the year it was hoped to recruit a part-time Project Assistant, though that post could not be filled.
- 6.3 The Comhairle acts as Accountable Body to SG, ensuring finance is in place and that proper audit and legal processes are followed, whilst not having direct control over how CLLD funding is spent.
- 6.4 The LAG used earlier studies, feedback from the 2022-23 programme, input from communities and their personal knowledge and experience to prepare a local development programme - entitled the 'Community Led Vision' (CLV) - which the CLLD Coordinator was tasked with implementing. The 2023-24 CLV initially identified six distinct strands: Design Grant; Small Grants Scheme (using Participatory Budgeting); Youth LAG; Community Transport Network; Reducing Energy & Emissions study; and LAG Development. Once capital funding was secured, a Capital Fund strand was added. The Reducing Energy and Emissions study strand was put on hold as it became apparent that there was significant overlap with work being undertaken by the recently established 'Islands Centre for NetZero'.

1. Design Grant

This grant scheme followed the principles of the previous 2022-23 Design Grant, offering successful applicants up to 100% of the costs associated with the design and development of large-scale capital projects, including buying-in expertise. This strand benefitted significantly from additional revenue leveraged in - with 10 projects receiving a total of almost £207k.

2. Small Grants Scheme (using Participatory Budgeting)

This strand trialled Participatory Budgeting (PB) for the first time. Following an initial vetting process by the LAG to ensure compliance with fund criteria, 20 projects were presented for public vote, with funding allocated in order of most votes achieved until the budget was committed. This strand encountered a number of challenges, firstly through being undersubscribed (as a result of which the budget was reduced) then through the voting platform being affected by the Cyber-attack on the Comhairle. However, the strand was deemed a success, with 11 projects receiving almost £20k - and the LAG agreeing to consider utilising PB again in future.

3. Youth LAG

During 2023-24 YLAG membership increased significantly, with the group becoming better-established and more formalised. A student employed by CnES on a summer placement was instrumental in this - while also further contributing to the LAG's commitment to offer opportunities to the next generation. The YLAG - via the LAG - once again participated in a national collaboration project which provided them with an operating budget of £16k. The YLAG supported:

a) YLAG Fund

The YLAG advertised its own fund for projects aimed at young people in the Outer Hebrides which supported at least one of their priorities for 2023-24: Equity with the mainland; Dùthchas & Dulachas; Economic autonomy; Mental health; and Acquiring skills. Ten applications were received, six of which were successful in being awarded almost £9,000.

b) YLAG Film & Professional Development project (inc. contributing to a national YLAG Film)

The Youth LAG were keen to fund a young local artist to develop their skills and portfolio. To achieve this and due to collaborating with other YLAGs to produce a national film about YLAGs, they developed the 'Youth LAG Film & Professional Development' project which sponsored a young film maker to develop their professional skills while also shooting footage for the national YLAG Film. The successful candidate used the time to develop his documentary film-making skills, as he had been specialising in commercial films previously.

c) Merchandise to help raise the YLAG's profile and strengthen its group identity.

The YLAG developed and purchased a range of promotional materials such as: flyers; pop-up banners; and a branded tablecloth. It also bought branded clothing to be worn when representing the YLAG and to establish a group identity when attending events.

d) Networking, lobbying and capacity-building.

YLAG members attended a number of events during 2023-24 to network, lobby and build their capacity and understanding. Among these were a Youth Climate Camp, the Scottish Rural and Islands Parliament and a ministerial debate in Holyrood. They had the opportunity to present their thoughts and demands to several high-ranking officials, in particular the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Land Reform and the First Minister.

Efforts were also made to establish closer links with other relevant groups, such as Young Islanders Network (YIN) and local CLD staff.

4. Community Transport Network

Following a procurement exercise, the TAS Partnership - who supported the LAG by undertaking a baseline review of Community Transport (CT) in the Outer Hebrides in 2022-23 - were selected to help set up and create a local CT Network, in addition to delivering MiDAS training locally, which was identified as a gap in the 2022-23 report. Contact was made with various CT stakeholders and Network meetings took place. However, engagement wasn't as enthusiastic as hoped, particularly among some key stakeholders - such as the two largest CT providers and the local NHS. Efforts were further hampered when it became apparent that cuts to CnES budgets for 2024-25 would result in a significant reduction in CT finances. However, TAS - through its partnership agreement with the Community Transport Association - hope to continue to offer local providers support and advice in areas such as sustainable charging strategies, despite this contract having ended. MiDAS training was delivered successfully and resulted in four individuals – one in each island group – becoming qualified to deliver minibuss driver training to their organisations and communities.

5. LAG Development and Capacity Building

The LAG held a session in which they undertook a detailed review of recent CLLD activity as well as engaging in in-depth discussions about potential future priorities and strategies. It also discussed current governance arrangements and how these may be strengthened. Due to time constraints and workload, a follow-up meeting to formalise outcomes could not go ahead as planned. Instead - depending on future funding and conditions - the LAG intends to contract an outside consultant in 2024-25 to assist with this strand. During 2023-24 the CLLD Coordinator attended the SRIP and also undertook a leadership course. A LAG member also attended and contributed to the CLLD Network meeting in Glasgow in March.

6. Capital Fund

This strand was added after the CLV had been submitted, when additional capital funding became available from SG. Initially, up to £10k was available - though this was increased when additional funding became available. twelve projects were supported, sharing just short of £95,000.

- 6.5 Further to implementing its own programme, the LAG collaborated with CLLD LAGs, Councils and other stakeholders in Orkney and Shetland to commission research into potential impacts on island communities of the upcoming Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill. This work - worth in the region of £100k - was funded through a separate collaboration budget. It is anticipated that the research findings will have wide-reaching impacts, far beyond those immediately connected to agriculture. Scotland's Rural College (SRUC), which conducted research and compiled the report, visited Lewis to brief LAG members and Primary Industries MOWG members on the main findings. The report has been passed to SG representatives for formal sign-off and is expected to be published in the coming weeks.
- 6.6 The social impact of funding awarded during the 2023-24 programme was assessed using the Social Value Engine (SVE), a tool recommended and funded by SG. This found that the average Social Return on Investment of Outer Hebrides projects came to £4.09 for every £1 invested, which - according to the UK Government Appraisal Guide - is deemed to be "high value for money".
- 6.7 An internal audit was undertaken on the 2023-24 Programme which *"found the documentation provided to us of a high standard and the interaction and communications with the member of staff involved was excellent"*. Just three issues were identified - none of which was classed as "high" risk - and procedures are being implemented to strengthen these in advance of the 2024-25 Programme.
- 6.8 All 2023-24 CLLD activities have ended, and the finances rolled up. Final reports will be submitted, and a formal evaluation conducted in the coming period.

THE 2024-25 CLLD PROGRAMME

- 7.1 The Scottish Budget announcement in December 2023 confirmed a budget of £12.2m to support future CLLD delivery in 2023-24. The Cabinet Secretary also approved a recommendation to extend current CLLD staff contracts until the end of March 2024, in order to retain the skills and expertise of the CLLD coordinator staff network.
- 7.2 In May 2024, the Outer Hebrides LAG received confirmation of an initial allocation for 2024-25 of £219,077, of which £120,545 is revenue and £98,523 capital funding. Additional funding may once again become available through further tranches. SG are still to issue formal guidance on what LAGs are to cover in their CLV or priorities they are expected to contribute to.
- 2.5 The LAG held an initial meeting to discuss its priorities on the assumption that SG priorities will remain similar to those of 2023-24. The LAG expects to focus its activity on three priority areas:
- Supporting children and young people (with and through the OH CLLD YLAG);
 - Community Wealth Building with a particular focus on addressing poverty; and
 - Culture and utilising this as a catalyst for economic development.
- The LAG expects to formalise its plans and decide on project strands in the coming weeks - once further guidance from SG has been received.

CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The 2023-24 CLLD Programme - while condensed into a short timescale and encountering some challenges - was delivered successfully and within budget, in line with what was proposed in the LAG's CLV.
- 8.2 In 2023-24 CLLD brought over £430k in SG funding to the Outer Hebrides, of which over £330k was awarded to various community groups through a range of grant schemes – as detailed above.

- 8.3 A particular highlight of the 2023-24 Programme was the development of the YLAG – which became better established, more confident and proactive in progressing its own agenda during the course of the year.
- 8.4 Whilst there is some uncertainty around future CLLD Programmes, it is anticipated that the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill - due to come into force in 2025 – will provide more certainty.