

**Minutes of Donegal Local Community Development Committee at
4.00pm on 4th July 2023 in County House & Web Conference**

LCDC Members	Clr Niamh Kennedy (Chair), Clr Martin McDermott, Brenda Hegarty, Clr Maire Therese Gallagher, Paul Hannigan, Maria Ferguson, Padraic Fingleton, Charlene Logue, Andrew McNulty, Siobhan McLaughlin, Aengus Kennedy, Máire Uí Mhaolain, James O'Donnell, Anne McHugh, Shauna McClenaghan and Joe Boland
Apologies	John McLaughlin and Micheal Mac Giolla Easpaig
Chief Officer	Paddy Doherty
Attending	Liam Ward, Ciaran Martin and Adrienne Kelly
External Attendees	Micheal Heaney – Friel Meehan & Associates

Welcome

Clr Niamh Kennedy welcomed everyone and thanked those present for participating in the meeting.

Purpose of the Special Meeting – Consideration of the Draft Action Plan of the LDS

Clr Kennedy, as Chair of Donegal LCDC, confirmed that the purpose of the special meeting was to consider the draft Action Plan of the Local Development Strategy 2023-2027 of which has been circulated to members in advance of the meeting.

Niamh welcomed Micheal Heaney from Friel Meehan and Associates to the meeting and advised that he would give a presentation to the members on the proposed objectives and actions within the plan.

Micheal advised the members that the draft plan circulated is based on the feedback provided from the extensive consultation process undertaken in May and June with various in person and online events taking place with stakeholders and the public. He provided a detailed overview of the consultation process and stressed that these discussions have formed an important part of the preparation of the plan and the selection of the local objectives and actions for the county. A decision has been made based on experience and local knowledge to have 11 objectives rather than 13, with some sub-themes being amalgamated but assured members that all sub themes are being addressed within the 11 objectives.

Micheal then gave a detailed presentation to the members on the proposed objectives and actions under each Theme of the LEADER programme and invited those present to comment/provide feedback on the document as circulated and the information provided from the presentation during the course of this afternoon's meeting.

Members made the following comments/suggestions;

Objective 1 – Green Economy

Siobhan McLaughlin referenced the importance of the Community and Voluntary Sector including the PPN and that the sector wasn't strongly enough represented throughout the whole document and suggested that they should be named as a delivery partner in all actions with the guidance/direction of the other delivery partners.

All agreed that Community and Voluntary Sector as well as PPN are named as delivery partners in all actions within the plan.

Objective 2 – Agricultural Diversification/Rural Food

James O'Donnell stressed that there have been so many changes over the last few years in Agriculture, with Rural Tourism being a major issue due to the lack of accommodation in towns. He also expressed concerns regarding the ongoing changes relating to Climate change issues.

Clr. Niamh Kennedy also referred to the fishing industry, which is in serious decline and coastal communities, who depend so much on this industry and asked what could be done to address this going forward.

Micheal stated that these issues came through very strongly in the consultations and will come through within the LECP which is at a more strategic level as LEADER is confined in terms of eligibility of sectors etc. but could potentially fund studies in these areas.

Objective 3 – Rural Tourism and Recreation

Aengus Kennedy extended congratulations to the team for a very comprehensive plan and consultation process. In relation to this objective, he stated he would like to see a section that would state that biodiversity would be risk assessed for each project with no exceptions. Some of the projects in recent years without intention have had an impact on biodiversity in particular on our offshore islands in relation to breeding birds. He also suggested adding the NPWS, Wild Atlantic Life Project and the biodiversity officer that will be coming to Donegal County Council to the delivery partners as they will be able to provide the relevant information to the Local Development Companies.

It was agreed to add the delivery partners and Michael stated that risk assessment for biodiversity/climate change would be included for all projects across the board and this could be dealt with at application stage and that he will be happy to liaise with Aengus on this process.

Objective 4 – Enterprise Development

Siobhan McLaughlin suggested that the LCDC could strengthen the text in relation to encouraging underrepresented groups for example to include Traveller, Roma, BAME communities along with female entrepreneurs.

Brenda Hegarty wanted reference made to additionality and complementarity in relation to existing schemes, and that we might need to be more specific on the areas of focus, to avoid any duplication with the LEO.

All were in agreement, and this will be included within the action descriptions.

Objective 5 – Social, Community, Cooperative Enterprise

Siobhan McLaughlin asked that communities of interest be referenced under action 5.1 to comply with the 10 grounds under the Public Sector Duty, and also added to delivery partners.

Objective 6 – Rural Infrastructure/Accessible Services

Joe Boland stated that it is very hard to entice people back into rural areas as there is nothing there for them due to closures of Garda Stations, Pubs, Post Offices etc. Suggestions have been made for provision of a mobile service units to travel around rural villages to provide services on a regular basis.

Michael stressed that we need come up with innovative ideas on new ways of providing services and share these among communities.

Clr. Niamh Kennedy said that there is not enough emphasis on rural transportation on action 6.1, and this issue has been talked about at every meeting and we need to include the Rural Transport link and possibly Bus Eireann as partners on this action. A study needs to be done to streamline services in all areas.

James O' Donnell expressed concern in relation to planning issues in rural Ireland which mean families cannot build on their own land and are having to leave the area which results in older people having to go into residential care.

Micheal advised that it is very clear from the consultations that until the accommodation issue is dealt with it will be very difficult to achieve the vision for the County as set out in the LECP. We must look at innovative ways to address this issue and the community will have a big part in that.

Maria Ferguson stated that in terms of the quality of life for people living in rural communities, promoting positive health and wellbeing would be something that will greatly benefit people. Community healthcare has made a big investment across the County in infrastructure and Maria suggested that we maximise on any collaboration opportunities based on the investment that the HSE has made to date. She also mentioned the reference of hard to reach communities on one of the objectives and stated that they would be of the view of looking at the totality of the need across the county to support people to live in their areas irrespective of where that might be and also supporting the objectives of Slaintecare. There was also an opportunity to provide a mechanism within the plan to allow the HSE to continue to collaborate with Local Government, Education and Community & Voluntary partners on all these aspects.

Micheal asked that Maria submit the required detail to strengthen the description where necessary.

Objective 7 – Optimising Digital Connectivity

No comments/suggestions from members.

Objective 8 – Rural Youth

Anne McHugh suggested that CYPSC be included here as a partner as they deal with young people up to the age of 24. CYPSC is a great collection of all the partners around the table which would also include schools as the ETB doesn't have direct responsibility for all schools in the County.

Siobhan McLaughlin suggested that other youth service providers such as Involve and Donegal Intercultural Platform who works with BAMEs should also be named as delivery partners.

Andrew McNulty suggested that Creative Industries be added under action 8.2 as it is quite broad and could include anything from tech to arts.

Maria Ferguson stated that this area is very much of interest to the HSE as a collaborating partner from several perspectives. This is the year of the child and we are very much focusing on looking after our young people and the HSE would be interested in promoting the facilities and services that are available across the county for young people many of which are delivered directly by the Community & Voluntary Sector in partnership with the HSE but are also free and accessible to everyone. They are also working on a broader objective around retaining young people in the County for employment opportunities and providing pathways into employment and have developed several initiatives with the ATU in the area of healthcare so would be very keen to collaborate with all of the partners around ways to retain our young people for employment generation.

Clr. Marie Therese Gallagher thanked everyone involved for all the work that has gone into the action plan. She stressed that there are a lot of targeted things that need to be done in the area of Rural Youth. She suggested that we need to be promoting the county and all available opportunities to our secondary level students as they feel there is nothing here for them. We need to initiate a programme collaboratively to educate our youth on what is available and possibilities that are there. Engagement with principals is very important as some schools don't have any practical subjects due to low numbers.

Micheal stated that there are some very strong companies in the County offering good careers as well as emerging sectors and it is very important that young people are made aware of the opportunities that are coming down the line if they would like to stay. Apprenticeships are also a very important part of this.

Anne McHugh stated that there is quite a dramatic change coming nationally in relation to apprenticeships as they are trying to integrate the old craft apprenticeships with the new ones so they will all follow a similar path. This will create a lot of good opportunities for people. The DETB have started to bring in senior cycle students to do a taster of various courses available but there is still work to be done in changing the pathways for some young people.

Aengus Kennedy suggested adding the SEAI as an organisation partner to action 8.3.

Objective 9 – Sustainable Development of Rural Environment

Aengus Kennedy requested that the following are added as delivery partners –
Wild Atlantic Nature Life Project and IPCC to action 9.1
Pollinator Programme is added to action 9.3
Matter of Life project is added to action 9.4

Objective 10 – Climate Change Capacity Building

Siobhan McLaughlin advised that she works with numbers of communities where there is really high levels of poverty and disadvantage and the move to the understanding and knowledge around climate equality, justice and environmental impact is not there due to limited resources being available. Siobhan asked that the LEADER programme look at developing resources that are accessible and available to marginalised communities as there is a reluctance to move away from fossil fuels in homes due to the cost of living. There

is a need to develop a deeper understanding of climate justice and the environmental challenges that we are currently experiencing so that people don't reject them when they are being imposed on them. This could also be linked to health and wellbeing.

Micheal agreed and stressed that Social Inclusion is essential to all aspects of the LEADER programme.

Aengus Kennedy reiterated Siobhan's comments and agreed that education is a key factor. He is also going to email a list of suggested delivery partners to add to this objective.

Objective 11 – Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

Siobhan McLaughlin referred to the area of fashion production and clothing in relation to the circular economy. Donegal, in particular Inishowen, has a huge history in the area of clothing production. She suggested this is an area that we could be more explicit on within the action plan.

Clr. Niamh Kennedy thanked Micheal for his detailed presentation and thanked the members for their feedback.

Micheal thanked the members for their valuable feedback and asked members if they had any other points to note or wished to add anything they could send them to him over the next couple of days.

Liam Ward thanked Micheal for his in-depth presentation on the draft action plan and stated that he was very pleased with the level of engagement from the members today. Subject to the agreed amendments being made a resolution is now required from the LCDC to approve the content of the action plan.

Paddy Doherty advised that the intention would be to circulate a final LDS document in advance of next week's LCDC meeting, and this will be on the agenda for that meeting.

The action plan was approved (subject to agreed amendments) on the proposal of Joe Boland and seconded by James O'Donnell.

Local Development Strategy 2023-2027 Financial Split

Paddy Doherty referred to the report circulated in relation to the proposed financial split for Implementing Partners.

Background: In preparation of the Local Development Strategy 2023-2027 and to facilitate the completion of the Financial Plan for same, a decision was needed from the LCDC members on the proposed IP financial split for the County, as a ratio of the overall budget of €10.4m.

The respective splits of the total budget under the previous Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 had been proposed to the LCDC by the Department and then approved by the LCDC at local level.

A reminder of the splits under the previous Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 were listed as below:

- DLDC – 50.37%
- IDP – 26.47%
- Udarás na Gaeltacht – 17.53%
- Comhar na nOileán – 5.63%

The LCDC had also previously agreed that the above splits would continue to be applied for additional funds received under the REDZ programme as well as both the Transitional and EURI programmes.

Paddy stated that Donegal County Council had contacted the respective IPs on **21st June 2023** seeking their feedback on using the splits listed above as a basis for the new Local Development Strategy 2023-2027.

- Correspondence was received from DLDC seeking an amendment to the previous splits and an increase on budget from 50.37% to 53.3%.
- Verbal feedback was received from Inishowen Development Partnership confirming an agreement with the splits under the previous Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 and articulating resistance to reduce their allocation owing to deprivation levels in the area.
- Correspondence was received from Udarás na Gaeltacht outlining their agreement to continue with the previous Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 splits.
- Correspondence was received from Comhar na nOileán indicating a desire for an increased budget for the islands from 5.63% to 10.21%. This was received in the format of an excel sheet with budget breakdowns.

Paddy explained that the original IP splits with regards the Local Development Strategy 2014-2020 were determined by a programme developed by the Department and an External Consultant (Trutz Haase) at the time and based around several key indicators relating to both population and deprivation scores on available data from 2011.

In 2023, People and Place Ltd prepared a socio-economic profile on behalf of Donegal County Council. The profile confirmed that County Donegal has a resident population of 166,321, an increase from the 2011 Census figure of 161,137. This is a population rise of 3.2% across the county.

The 2023 Social-Economic profile also confirmed that the Pobal HP Index of Affluence and Deprivation, which provides a composite assessment of places' economic and social strengths, indicates that County Donegal continues to be disadvantaged overall (a score of -6.4). All municipal districts in County Donegal record negative scores on the Pobal HP Index, with Glenties recording a score of -10.6, which indicates that the area is 'disadvantaged'. Half the population of the Glenties MD lives in a small area (SA) that is classified as 'disadvantaged'

Most electoral divisions (EDs) in the county record negative scores on the index, and the lowest scores are exhibited in local authority housing estates in the main towns as well as in North Inishowen and several parts of An Gaeltacht.

In the absence of any updated guidance from the DRCD and in view of the modest changes to population within the county, the continuing disadvantage experienced across the county as a whole and with the Local Authority experience of managing the delivery of the Local Development Strategy 2014-2022, Paddy stated it was proposed to apply the IP splits used under the Local Development Strategy 2014-2022 and a decision was sought from the LCDC to approve this as below:

- DLDC – 50.37%
- IDP – 26.47%
- Udarás na Gaeltacht – 17.53%
- Comhar na nOileán– 5.63%

Clr. Niamh Kennedy opened the floor for comment from the members.

Padraic Fingleton, CE of DLDC stated the split for the IPs was always a difficult subject given that the LEADER Programme has such an important role in the running costs of the respective development companies. The programme has been cut by 20% and there is no cooperation money to draw on and no transitional funding. This will have a significant financial impact on all development companies. Internally this will open up conversations about the ability of DLDC to deliver the programme as well as the staffing. Discussions are ongoing with HR regarding the team and the ability to continue their employment.

Padraic stated a proposal has been submitted by DLDC to increase it's allocation to 53% and when you look at the numbers, an extra 1% of budget equates to an extra €5,000 administration and 3% to an extra €15,000 in administration budget. The calculations provided take into consideration the Pobal HP index and levels of deprivation.

The data was obtained from Brendan O'Keefe and there is an ask on the LCDC to take into consideration the new census figures for this new LEADER programme. People deemed marginally above average have been included in the calculations and DLDC believe these people should be included for LEADER as it is an area-based programme. Padraic further advised that the population for people living in deprivation in the DLDC area has risen by 4.9% since the last census, by 4% in the Gaeltacht and 2.3% in Inishowen.

Máire Uí Mhaolain, Comhar na nOileán agreed that this is a very difficult decision given the reduced funding in the programme. There is a focus in this plan on hard-to-reach communities and in the recent Island Policy that was launched "Our Living Islands", the islands and people living there are recognised as the hardest to reach communities. Following discussions in house Máire confirmed that they are happy accept the allocations as per the previous programmes, as any change to the IP allocations t will result in another IP losing funding. She did stress the need for the Administration funding to be 25% across the board for all Implementing Partners.

Shauna McClenaghan, IDP agreed that if there is an increase in allocation to an IP that this will result in a reduction in others. The original IP split was negotiated for the previous programme and should remain as we are already in a situation where we have had cuts and all IPs are trying to make budgets work. Shauna acknowledged Pauric's concerns in relation to costs, staffing etc but stressed that this is an issue across all development companies.

Clr. Martin McDermott highlighted that substantial work has already been undertaken to agree financial apportionment for the Implementing Partners and feels that this was a very fair allocation for each IP and had worked exceptionally well for both the partnerships and the LCDC. He acknowledged that all development companies could argue points of difference and all concerns in relation to issues with shortfalls to cover administration costs should be raised directly with the Department through the DCC admin team. The partners had worked extremely well over the years as an LCDC together with the Implementing Partners and Martin would feel strongly the allocations remain as per previous.

Clr. Marie Therese Gallagher wanted to congratulate each of the four Implementing Partners on the delivery of a very successful LEADER programme which was a learning curve for the LCDC but all had seen the benefits of what the Implementing Partners have achieved. Marie gave a special mention to Comhar na nOileán given the difficulties in encouraging projects to come forward.

Clr. Niamh Kennedy reiterated Clr. Gallaghers comments and looks forward to continuing to work with the four Implementing Partners on the new programme.

After the open discussions concluded, Padraic Fingleton, Shauna McClenaghan, Máire Uí Mhaolain and Liam Ward left the meeting owing to conflicts of interest.

Charlene Logue stressed that it is unfair that there should be disagreement between the Implementing Partners as it is not their fault that the budget allocation is reduced and agreed that a request should be submitted to the Department in relation to costs.

If there is a significant increase in population in the County since the last census, then the Department should be increasing the allocation in line with this. Charlene asked if all Implementing Partners had a standard rate of pay per position or if they all differ.

Paddy Doherty advised that as part of the Local Development Strategy, we must submit the pay scales for each staff member working on the programme to the Department. Based on the agreement of the apportionment here today each IP will know what their Admin budget is (25%) and they will have to apportion that from now to 2029, they don't need to take into account 2023 as the Department have guaranteed Exchequer Funding to the end of this year. Their new allocation will commence in 2024-2027 with reduced amounts for 2028 and 2029. Paddy highlighted that additional monies did become available on the last programme which resulted in additional admin funds being available so Donegal County Council would hope that this could happen again but are not in a position to guarantee anything at this time.

Clr. Niamh Kennedy highlighted that the LCDC has a very good record in relation to our previous allocations which resulted in an additional €500k being allocated to the top ten performing LAGs.

Clr. Marie Therese Gallagher reiterated with Clr. McDermotts previous comments and referred to the Socio-Economic Profile for the County which she described as stark especially in and around Inishowen and the Coastal Communities and this had continued a downward trend. Donegal will never have enough money to do what is needed and policies at a national level have gone against Donegal as a county due to its population. All partners need to work together to come up with strategies to get more investment and to enhance people's lives. She stressed that she does not like to see one part of the county competing against the other and feels very uncomfortable with that.

On the proposal of Clr. Martin McDermott, seconded by James O'Donnell the following percentage allocations were approved;

- DLDC – 50.37%
- IDP – 26.47%
- Udarás na Gaeltacht – 17.53%
- Comhar na nOileán– 5.63%

Clr. Niamh Kennedy thanked everyone for attending and confirmed that the date of the next meeting is **Wednesday 12th July at 10am.**