



COMMUNITY-LED LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2024-25

Report by Chief Officer, Economic & Community Regeneration

PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of the Report is to provide the Comhairle with a review of the 2024-25 Scottish Government Community Led Local Development (CLLD) Programme and an update on the 2025-26 CLLD Programme.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 In 2024-25, Scottish Government (SG) allocated £12.2m to support CLLD across Scotland, of which an initial allocation of £219,077 was made available to the Outer Hebrides' Local Action Group (LAG) to administer – £120,554 of which was revenue and £98,522 capital. At the end of November 2024, the LAG received a further £137,172 of revenue in addition to £49,725 (revenue) ringfenced for Youth LAG (YLAG) activity, bringing the total annual budget to £405,975. The Comhairle acts as Accountable Body (AB) to SG, and the CLLD Coordinator implements the CLLD Programme – which the LAG sets out in its Community Led Vision (CLV)
- 2.2 The 2024-25 Outer Hebrides CLLD LAG delivered four distinct project strands: Community Engagement; Grant Scheme(s); Strategy Development; and continued support for the Outer Hebrides YLAG. A fifth budget-line – Admin & Animation – covered the necessary support in administering and animating the project strands. Outer Hebrides CLLD also worked with the other five CLLD areas with YLAGs to strengthen links between YLAGs and participate in the first Rural Youth Action Network (RYAN) residential. The 2024-25 Programme was delivered successfully and has been fully wound-up.
- 2.3 Following the Scottish Budget announcement in December 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform & Islands (RALRI) confirmed a further £9m to support CLLD delivery in 2025-26.
- 2.4 In April 2025, the Outer Hebrides LAG received confirmation of an initial allocation for 2025-26 of £225.139 – of which £100,000.00 is revenue and £125,139 of capital funding. Additional funding may once again become available in future through further tranches and is expected to be exclusively capital. The LAG has agreed its planned programme for 2025-26, with the latest CLV submitted to SG in May and activity anticipated to commence imminently.

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 2024-25; and
 - b) continue its function as Accountable Body for the Outer Hebrides Local Action Group (LAG) for the CLLD Programme 2025-26.

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Appendices: Appendix 1 – 2024-25 CLLD Strategy overview
Appendix 2 – 2025-26 CLLD Strategy overview

Background Papers: Report to Sustainable Development Committee September 2024 – 2024-25
Community Led Local Development Programme Update

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 and spent £406k from the Scottish Government CLLD fund in 2024-25. An initial allocation of approximately £225k has been received for 2025-26 and it may once again be possible to increase this during the coming 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 also be engaged in ensuring its compliance.
Staffing	All staffing costs are covered within the £100k revenue allocation. The existing CLLD Coordinator remains in post and additional administrative support may also be recruited if required and feasible.
Assets and Property	None.
Strategic Implications	Implications/ None
Risk	N/A, as this report only provides an update on the CLLD 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. The LAG has identified "Working towards Net Zero" as one of their priorities.
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.• Through the LAG's membership, a good cross-section of geographical communities and sectors in the Outer Hebrides are represented.

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 The previous EU-funded LEADER Programme ended following the UK's exit from the European Union. Since then, Scottish Government (SG) has been investigating and testing new ways to support and deliver future Community Led Local Development (CLLD) across Scotland.
- 5.2 As was the case with the previous EU-funded LEADER Programme, each geographic area is managed by a LAG comprising public, private and third-sector representatives. The annual CLLD Programme – set by the LAG and agreed with SG – is administered by a CLLD Coordinator, employed by the Comhairle in the Outer Hebrides. While the LAG's intention was to recruit part-time administrative support, the initial allocation did not justify additional staffing – and by the time Tranche-2 funding was received there was insufficient time for a recruitment process to be undertaken.

- 5.3 The Comhairle acts as Accountable Body (AB) 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.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill – which is expected to come into force during 2025 – will provide further clarity over future CLLD Programmes. For this purpose, SG is currently undertaking a review of its rural funding-streams covering LAGs, the Scottish Rural Network (SRN) and Scottish Rural Action (SRA). LAG members and the CLLD Coordinator are supporting ongoing research and scrutiny as appropriate. After several years of uncertainty, the Programme appears to be on a more stable footing, with an initial allocation for 2025-26 received earlier than in previous years.
- 5.5 In 2024-25, SG allocated £12.2m to support CLLD in Scotland, of which an initial allocation of £219k was made available to the Outer Hebrides' CLLD Local Action Group (LAG). Funds increased to £405k with the award of Tranche-2 funding.

2024-25 CLLD PROGRAMME

- 6.1 In 2024-25, SG allocated an initial £6.9m of funding to support CLLD across Scotland – of which £219,077 was made available to the Outer Hebrides LAG. This allocation consisted of £120.5k of revenue funding and £98.5k of capital. The LAG received a further £137k of revenue at the end of November 2024 in addition to £49.7k (revenue) ringfenced for YLAG activity, bringing the total 2024-25 budget to £405,975.
- 6.2 The LAG used feedback from earlier programmes, input from communities, and their personal knowledge and experience to prepare a local development programme – known as the 'Community Led Vision' (CLV) – which the CLLD Coordinator was tasked with administering and implementing. The 2024-24 CLV initially identified four distinct strands: Community Engagement; Grant Scheme(s); YLAG; and Strategy Development. These were supported by a fifth budget line for Admin. & Animation.

1. Community Engagement

In recognition of communities being at the heart of CLLD, the LAG increased efforts to raise CLLD's public profile. For this purpose, an overview of 2023-24 activity was published in the local press and a concerted social media campaign developed to highlight how CLLD funding contributed to local initiatives. A number of projects supported were put forward – and selected – for video case-studies commissioned by SRN, which can be viewed here: [Case studies Archive - Scottish Rural Network](#).

During January 2025, the CLLD Coordinator, supported by LAG members, visited several communities and organisations in Uist and Barra to strengthen connections, gain a better understanding of community activity and raise the profile of CLLD in the area. The LAG also took the decision to publish details of its membership going forward, to demonstrate a greater level of transparency, visibility, and accountability.

2. Grant Scheme(s)

Two grant schemes were offered in 2024-25, the '2024-25 CLLD (Capital) Fund' and the '2024-25 CLLD Revenue Fund' – the latter being a direct result of the receipt of additional Tranche-2 funding.

Both grant schemes encouraged applications for projects which aligned with the LAG's overarching ambition of "*Collaboration and Community Empowerment through inclusion, equality and diversity*" and supported at least one of its priorities of Community Wealth Building; Supporting children and young people; Dùthchas and Dualchas (with a focus on identifying new approaches that lead to economic benefits); Working towards Net Zero; Transport; and Fair Work

& Employability. Between two funding rounds 61 applications were received requesting almost £700k. Of these, 28 projects were either fully or partially supported, receiving over £283k in total.

3. **YOUTH LOCAL ACTION GROUP (YLAG)**

The LAG initially devolved a budget of £25k to the local YLAG, giving it autonomy (within reason) as to how to spend this. When SG made almost £50k available to the Outer Hebrides LAG for YLAG activity in November 2024, the LAG decided to claw back its initial YLAG allocation (£25k) and have the YLAG make use of the £50k SG allocation instead. Despite the tight timescale, the YLAG was able to use these funds in full by 31 March 2025. The YLAG's activities for 2024-25 consisted of:

a) YLAG Fund

Following a model developed over recent years, the YLAG offered two funding rounds – the latter as a direct result of its Tranche-2 allocation. Applications were sought for projects that benefitted young people (i.e. under 30) in the Outer Hebrides and aligned with at least one of the YLAG's priorities of: Empowering Young People; Dùthchas & Dualchas: Entrepreneurship; Mental Health; and Personal & Professional Development. Over two funding rounds the YLAG supported 15 projects fully or partially – allocating over £38k. This was a significant increase from previous years when £8-10k was awarded and compared to previous funding rounds, several applications received were for projects of a longer-term impact.

Uptake during the first funding round was poorer than anticipated, possibly due to there being too much overlap with the main LAG funding round which was open concurrently and offered larger sums. Measures have been implemented to avoid a recurrence of this in 2025-26.

b) YLAG Development & capacity building

With the YLAG's membership having been consolidated initially during 2023-24, the YLAG used 2024-25 to formalise its role and ambitions. This was achieved through informal group workshops and by undertaking a leadership course through the Social Enterprise Academy. This resulted in a mission statement, a planned programme for 2025-26, ideas for long-term developments and a much stronger group ethos. The YLAG also identified some weaknesses, especially a heavy Lewis-bias among its membership, and agreed steps to try to tackle these. As well as the benefits to the YLAG as a group, members felt the leadership course benefitted them as individuals by highlighting knowledge and abilities they already possess and teaching them useful transferable skills and techniques.

c) Networking, lobbying and profile-raising

YLAG members attended, hosted, and contributed to several events during 2024-25 to network, lobby and raise their profile. Among these were meeting with the local MSP, attending the UHI NWH Freshers Fayre, presenting at OH COP and participating in the first RYAN residential which was attended by several cross-party MSPs including the Cabinet Secretary, RALRI.

A YLAG member has also been accepted onto the steering group for the European Rural Youth Parliament due to take place in Aberdeenshire in October, which will be the first time the European Rural Parliament will have a youth-specific event.

4. **Strategy Development**

The LAG is aware that over recent years its focus has been on delivery, though – with CLLD Programme funds appearing to be on a more stable footing – efforts were made to develop a more strategic approach to activity. An initial overview of this is provided in the 2024-25 CLLD strategy overview graphic at Appendix 1 to this report. To support the aims of this strand, the LAG reviewed its membership and invited two new members, reviewed and refreshed its project scoring sheet/ process, and gathered for a day-long workshop where they reviewed recent activity and identified future LAG priorities.

Inputs delivered by the Comhairle's Community Engagement Unit and a representative of Borders CLLD provided a better understanding about other funding streams and how CLLD might be aligned with these.

The late award of Tranche-2 funding resulted in much of the time allocated to Strategy Development being spent on administration of a further funding round and progress on this strand therefore perhaps was not as far-reaching as had been intended. The LAG has identified several strategic actions it intends to follow up, with Strategy Development remaining within the 2025-26 CLV.

- 6.5 All 2024-25 CLLD activities have ceased, the finances rolled up, and a final report submitted to SG. An evaluation of the national CLLD Programme will be undertaken once again by the Social Value Engine – which is currently underway. All data required from the Outer Hebrides has also been submitted.

THE 2025-26 CLLD PROGRAMME

- 7.1 The Scottish Budget announcement in December 2024 confirmed a budget of £9m to support CLLD delivery in 2025-26. This presents a significant cut from previous years' budgets; however, the statutory Tranche-1 allocation remains similar. An initial allocation was awarded earlier than in previous years and some processes were also relaxed, allowing more time for implementation.
- 7.2 The Outer Hebrides LAG received confirmation of an initial allocation for 2025-26 of £225,139, of which £100,000 is revenue funding and £125,139 of capital. Additional funding may again become available through further Tranches. Additional funds are likely to be capital in nature and – unlike previous years – SG do not expect to set aside budgets specifically for YLAG and/ or collaboration activity, though LAGs are encouraged to engage in these through their main funding allocation.
- 7.3 The LAG agreed its 2025-26 CLV which was submitted to SG. The Programme presents a refresh of the 2024-25 CLV, with the 2025-26 CLLD strategy overview graphic at Appendix 2 to the report providing useful detail. The LAG's ambition remains to increase *"collaboration and community empowerment through inclusion, equality and diversity,"* though its priorities have been updated to include:
- Community Wealth Building.
 - Dùthchas & Dualchas (with a focus on identifying new approaches leading to economic benefits).
 - Working towards Net Zero.
 - Connectivity and efficient & sustainable Transport; and
 - Supporting children and young people via the YLAG.
- 7.4 Implementation is anticipated to commence in June 2025 and the LAG's immediate focus will be on launching the 2025-26 grant fund(s). Wider ambitions for the year are to develop closer links with the YLAG and work with other funders to attempt to map current funds available in addition to identifying ways of aligning CLLD with these to ensure that available funds achieve maximum impact.

CONCLUSIONS

- 8.1 The 2024-25 CLLD Programme – while condensed into a short timescale, with a late Tranche-2 funding award adding an unanticipated burden – was delivered successfully and within budget, in line with what was proposed in the LAG's original CLV.
- 8.2 In 2024-25 CLLD brought in almost £406k SG funding to the Outer Hebrides, of which over £320k was awarded to various community groups through a range of grant schemes as detailed in the report.
- 8.3 Whilst some uncertainty remains around future CLLD Programmes, these appear to be on a more stable footing currently and it is anticipated the 2025 Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill, and the current SG-funded review of rural policy delivery will provide more certainty in due course.