

Oxfordshire LEADER Programme

Local Action Group Terms of Reference

Introduction

The Oxfordshire LEADER programme provides funding and support to promote rural economic growth within a defined area of Oxfordshire. The programme is funded by DEFRA and the European Union through the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE). The Local Action Group (LAG) made up public, community and private sector representatives has delegated powers from DEFRA and the European Union to agree the local strategy and bring forward, support, fund and monitor projects in line with the strategy and RDPE objectives.

The LAG is a dynamic body which adapts itself to local needs. It is not a formally constituted group and its members are volunteers. As such it operates under a set of Terms of Reference (TOR) but as a body it has no legal responsibility or liability. The accountable body South Oxfordshire District Council, is responsible for the delivery of the programme on behalf of the LAG.

Membership

LAG membership is open and flexible, ensuring representation of the key sectors including farming, forestry, rural businesses and rural communities. An emphasis is placed on the private/ community sector rather than representation from public bodies, with no one sector making up more than 49% of the membership. This model puts the responsibility for local action with local people, acting in partnership with other organisations. It also helps to ensure that a balanced mix of local knowledge and other relevant expertise is brought together to deliver the programme's Local Development Strategy.

A maximum Local Action Group membership of 25 ensures that the group can effectively represent the broad range of interests across the area, whilst allowing all members to fully participate in meetings. Non-members can be invited to observe meetings.

There is no fixed length of term for LAG members and members are encouraged to remain engaged for the lifetime of the programme. However, if members do step down, replacement representatives will be recruited from the appropriate sector. New members will also be welcomed to join the LAG throughout the programme's delivery, especially if they bring a particular skill, background, interest, or knowledge to the group that will support the programme's delivery.

The LAG will regularly reflect on the group's membership and meeting attendance to ensure that it actively represents the local area, its communities and their needs.

A Local Action Network acts as a forum to engage with other stakeholders from across the LEADER area. The Network provides an opportunity for new LAG members to come forward.

If interest warrants it, a formal membership election could be coordinated at a Local Action Network meeting to ensure that the LAG membership represents the wider local area. The need for such an election will be reviewed on an annual basis.

Chairing

The LAG appoints or elects a chairman and vice chairman at its first meeting and annually thereafter.

Meeting frequency

The LAG meets at least four times a year. A calendar of meetings will be agreed each year for the next twelve months. A meeting can be cancelled or postponed at the discretion of the chairman.

A quorate meeting will be attended by at least six members including the chairman or vice chairman. If a meeting is not quorate it can proceed on the basis that it will not make decisions.

Delegated decisions

If a decision needs to be made with some urgency and a quorate meeting cannot be convened (or the nature of the decision does not merit the convening of a meeting) LAG members will be notified by email of the matter that needs to be decided and invited to comment within five working days. The chairman will then make a decision based on any comments submitted and in consultation with the programme staff and Accountable Body.

Accountability of the LAG and members' conduct

- LAG members commit to attending LAG meetings
- LAG members will ensure that the sector that they represent has an effective voice at meetings. However LAG members commit to act in the interest of the programme, and not just their own organisations or personal interests.
- LAG members will listen and take into consideration views and concerns expressed by others when making decisions.
- All LAG members will take joint responsibility for decisions made by the group.
- The LAG must be able and willing to justify decisions to others if needs be.
- LAG members will work effectively with the Accountable Body and Defra and follow the Defra Code of Conduct for working well together.

LAG role and responsibilities

- Encourage the community to come forward with innovative projects that will help to deliver the strategy
- Oversee the strategic direction, coherence, and effectiveness of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme.
- Oversee delivery of the LDS and ensure activity is relevant to the strategy's priorities and objectives.
- Ensure the programme takes full account of local needs and opportunities.
- Help to develop and endorse the programme's annual business plan.
- Oversee the programme's over-arching delivery including:
 - financial budget
 - outputs and outcomes delivered
 - monitoring and evaluation
- Oversee the programme communications strategy, within this:
 - Publicise and communicate the invitation for grant applications.
 - Utilise own networks to raise awareness of the programme and to create community involvement.
- Work with Defra to ensure compliance with LEADER and RDPE rules and regulations
- Work with the Accountable Body to maintain accurate and timely financial management.
- Support and guide the programme manager's work.
- Support programme delivery by offering insight and expertise, for example;
 - Support projects within a member's own field or sector in order to develop strong applications.
 - Offer technical advice or expertise during the appraisal stage of the application.
 - Offer monitoring advice and ongoing support to successful projects.
 - Provide knowledge of key policy matters to the LAG.
- Build strategic links with appropriate partners and encourage joint projects that build collaboration with similar and complementary interests.

Executive Decision Making Group

A small Executive Decision Making Group makes funding decisions and reviews applications. This group consists of a maximum of six members of the LAG, including members representing farming, forestry or rural communities. Members are selected by the chair on an annual rotating basis, with agreement of the LAG.

- There is a minimum quorum of three for any decision making meeting.
- All members have an equal vote.
- The outcome of the vote will be taken on a majority, in the event of a tied vote every effort will be made to resolve issues and come to a consensus by discussion. As a last resort the chair will have the casting vote.

Executive Decision Making Group role and responsibilities:

- To consider project full application and appraisal reports, and related recommendations (Members need to have gained a technical understanding of the projects being discussed).
- To consider presentations by project applicants and ask the applicant and appraiser relevant questions about the project.
- To approve or decline applications in line with established procedures (as set out in the Defra National Operating Manual).
- To feedback to the full LAG, to ensure all members are aware of decisions made.
- To undertake monitoring by carrying out project visits and inspections.

Role and responsibilities of Accountable Body (South Oxfordshire District Council)

- Ensure compliance with RDPE operating procedures including; selection and approval of individual projects and processing grant payments against approved claims.
- Responsible for maintaining records of each project to provide an audit trail, and regularly monitoring the progress of the projects.
- Responsible for evidencing decision making process e.g. minutes of meetings, attendance lists etc.
- South Oxfordshire District Council will provide:
 - Project management skills
 - Financial management skills
 - Ability to employ staff
 - Ability to procure

LEADER programme management staff

The programme has the equivalent of two members of staff, the Programme Manager and the Finance Monitoring Officer. They are employed and managed by the Accountable Body in accordance with the Accountable Body's terms and conditions.

They are responsible for the day to day activities of the programme including all of the grant applications and claims administration, communicating with applicants and stakeholders and keeping the LAG, Accountable Body and Defra briefed on all programme activities.

Role of Local Action Network (wider stakeholder network)

- To encourage the community to come forward with innovative projects that will help to deliver the strategy
- To provide networking opportunities for all partners / stakeholders within the LEADER area.
- To encourage knowledge exchange and learning, and the sharing of best practice.
- To act as a consultative body to ensure the scheme is taking full account of local needs and opportunities and delivering on behalf of the area's rural communities and businesses.
- To act as an awareness raising network, to increase understanding of the Oxfordshire LEADER programme and the role of the Local Action Group.
- To raise the area's community capacity, and provide opportunities for joint working.

Structure and decision making process

