

DRAFT MINUTES of the LINK Board meeting held on 28 June, in Edinburgh

Present Deborah Long, Lloyd Austin, Andy Fairbairn, Ian Findlay, Eila Macqueen, Helen Todd
In attendance Staff - Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh, Andy Myles

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from trustees Dan Barlow, Paul Ritchie, Jonny Hughes and Mike Robinson, and from Helen Zealley (President) and Hugh Green (Staff).

2. Minutes of last meeting (21 April 2011)

These were approved for accuracy subject to one change at 7.5 which should read 'reclaiming SD' instead of 'Rescuing/Revaluing SD'.

3. Funding strategy

The meeting considered the report and recommendations from the Response Team meeting of 8 June. Eila Macqueen reported on that discussion with staff which had considered that LINK's challenging situation with regard to raising funds, despite very good work by Alice Walsh; further core support from EFF seemed less likely and the meeting had felt that to sustain LINK as a membership organisation, the strategy should be to step up subscription income at least until the economic situation improves. On the basis of a proposal that the ratio of LINK's benefit might be 66-75% for members : 25-34% for wider audiences - the subgroup proposed that the Board consider setting a 65% target for income from membership subscriptions over the 5 years to 2014.

The Board discussed this, agreeing the following:

- a. There could be a high risk in raising subscriptions significantly on this basis; further detailed discussion of a number of factors would be a pre-requisite.
- b. The argument that as an intermediary, LINK merits funding from government which helps to limit the extent to which it is relying on sources available to its members, is worth making strongly to the Minister and Scottish Government including benefits of LINK to other agencies from which no support is forthcoming and the differential in spend on economic and social cf. environment.
- c. Notwithstanding a degree of risk of loss of members, it is unsustainable to continue further years of zero rises. LINK should let members know soonest that there must be a return to inflationary rises from April 2012. The Board anticipated that these would be at least 3-4%, though possibly higher, eg 4-6%, and agreed that the level of rise should be determined through more detailed discussion and based on same timing as previously.
- d. The Board should reassess whether there are large eligible bodies in civic Scotland whose missions overlap and which could be canvassed as future members; BTCV was considered to have become potentially less eligible; others such as Seabird Centre may be worth contacting; also RZSS re-joining in future.
- e. The Response Team might explore whether David Downie would be able to lend support to this review given his detailed knowledge of how LINK's funding position has been established, and his experience of the previous review and discussions with members.
- f. LINK should continue routine fundraising strategy which expects to raise a reasonable balance of total income via approaches to trusts, lottery, and other sources. This will involve a greater investment of staff-time in fundraising and correspondingly less time for other core support work. (Fundraising via events was rejected given the investment of time (ie cost) to run events which would meet the current high standards for fundraising purposes.)
- g. LINK should revisit the possibility of relying on greater financial input from members to run projects in the LINK calendar.

- h. Increases to subscriptions additional to inflation should first be considered by the Board on the basis of detailed scenarios prepared by the FSG for the Board in October. That discussion should take account of various factors including:
- i. The ratio of the benefit of LINK should be considered by the full Board with some rigour as part of the review. The meeting was not convinced by the above ratio.
 - ii. The review of subscriptions should be explicitly linked to the strategic review (survey of members going out this summer) so that members are aware that LINK cannot deliver all services without building in inflationary cost rises.
 - iii. Setting rises above inflation may ask more than is appropriate of bodies whose situations are also affected by recession; losses of a number of smaller members, or medium-sized bodies less aware of LINK's value, would be regrettable in terms of network operations and could be counter-productive to LINK's financial KPI.
 - iv. Whatever target is set by the Board for coming years should clearly relate either to total core operations, or (as currently) to our essential costs
 - v. The target should be based on expenditure forecasts which take into account further cuts which LINK could make to operations, so as to reduce the total costs.
 - vi. In setting this, the Board might choose revisit the question of whether the larger bodies would be more prepared to take on a greater share of the burden, though this has been discussed in detail in the past and the principle of 'fair share' established in the last review

Actions:

Response Team to develop detailed scenarios taking account of the above factors

Board to discuss Response Team recommendations in October

Staff to organise meeting with ScotGovt sponsor contact; to ensure item on next Ministerial agenda; to alert members by autumn to inflationary rises from 2012; to continue wider fundraising

4. Matters arising from last meeting

4.1 AGM and Succession Planning

The paper circulated in advance had outlined progress towards the AGM highlighting areas for discussion which were discussed as follows:

4.1.1 Board recruitment in relation to likely skills gaps

With retirements of Andy Fairbairn and Dan Barlow this year and of Lloyd Austin in 2012 the meeting considered the likely skills need for succeeding years using the revised LINK skills audit as a basis. Potential gaps were identified in terms of: Financial Management; Fundraising; Knowledge of Community (esp political); Legal in relation to the law and the environment; Promotions PR & Media. The call to members and others for nominations would flag these skills. Helen Todd and Eila Macqueen would approach contacts in the arts sector.

Actions: Jen Anderson, Helen Todd, Eila Macqueen

The meeting hoped that member organisations with larger resources such as WWFS, WTS, RSPB and NTS if nominating over the next two years would consider these skills gaps in particular.

The Board was keen to re-co-opt Ian Findlay and Mike Robinson who were willing to continue if their skills continued to be needed. The opportunity (open to LINK via the constitution) and value of drawing trustees from a wide Scottish pool and broader perspectives was noted, though it was acknowledged that familiarity with the network and understanding of its aims is important to governance. While the current practice of drawing the majority of LINK trustees from amongst the membership ensured that 'finger on the pulse', the skills matrix could also be proactively employed to ensure this happens in relation to a wider 'pool'.

Some amendments and updates were noted for the current skills register.

Action Jen Anderson

4.1.2 President search update and next steps

Helen Zealley would retire in November. A status update on the search for Helen's successor was tabled indicating that the searchgroup was pursuing the 'A list' drawn from a wider longlist which members had seen and commented on. Three individuals on the A list had declined owing mainly to other commitments in their lives (Richard Holloway, Jan Bebbington, John Summers) and replies were awaited from Ross Finnie, Sally Magnusson. Dougie Vipond, Hugh Raven and Louise Batchelor were still to be contacted. The meeting briefly considered LINK's 'B list' proposing that Ruth Wishart, Muriel Gray and Joyce MacMillan be included as 'A' list and approached at this stage. The meeting also agreed that Jane Wood and Sheena Wurthmann should be removed from the list in relation to our current brief.

Actions: Jen Anderson, Dan Barlow, Deborah Long

4.1.3 Honorary Fellows

The meeting agreed to approach Alastair Lavery and Helen Zealley with a view to recommending their appointment to members for decision at the AGM.

Action: Staff

4.2 Review of LINK's Organisational Supporter Pilot

The pilot list had been pursued since the autumn of 2010 as far as possible by staff and trustees; two organisations had signed up; a number had declined either on basis of cost or this bringing them inappropriately close to LINK. On the basis that 2-3 OS's covers outlay (4 would bring modest profit) the Board agreed there should be no abrupt ending to the strategy, LINK should proceed to its next (B) list and then continue with opportunistic promotion as suggestions of potential targets emerge. Deer management groups would be demoted to a new C list, and effort at this stage would be focussed on others in the B list and on relevant consultants. It was agreed to keep CSGN on the C list, given the inevitable trend for a network to share resources amongst players, which could deprive LINK of potentially approaching some of these players direct. The meeting noted that SEARS bodies in Government are likely to resist joining as OS given the emphasis on efficiencies. The Board asked to be kept informed of progress with the rolling programme and encouraged staff to come back with any questions about eligibility etc.

Action: Staff

4.3 Potential to develop a category of commercial supporters

The meeting considered a proposal that LINK might seek commercial donors on the basis of a similar package to Organisational Supporters. The meeting felt that the benefits to such donors should be different to and separate from those reserved for organisations with more compatible missions and stronger empathy with LINK's. The decision was that LINK should not develop a 'Corporate Supporter' category.

The meeting felt LINK had been too cautious about corporate sponsorship in the past and could increase effort offering a range of commercial organisations advertising opportunity though not influence, seeking corporate sponsors on a one-off basis likely to be more attractive to the corporate sector looking for promotional opportunities. Trustees considered that it was quite possible to ensure support is given and received without affecting the right of the recipient to criticise the giver's policy and operations. The Board advised that any list of non-suitable organisations be kept short, and be informed by an ethical policy. LINK should be clear in its guidance that its corporate sponsors / supporters do not necessarily share LINK's views and vice versa as well as indicating that these have been identified through an ethical process. Ian Findlay offered to circulate PFA's policy to trustees for comment and development for LINK purposes. Given the investment of time needed for this kind of relationship to bear fruit, it was noted that LINK could only pursue corporate sponsorship on the current basis as projects arise, perhaps being quicker off the mark to approach would-be sponsors with the germ of the idea, so as to have the necessary lead-in time to develop the relationship.

Action: Ian Findlay

4.4 LINK strategic review

Draft questions were tabled which it was proposed be circulated by LINK to members this summer with an outline of current services and benefits of the network. The review would also include an independent review of LINK's impact and influence, as perceived by audiences as well as members. The meeting proposed to use Survey Monkey for the first part of the survey and for results to be passed to the consultant responsible for the independent survey, to collate with the 'impact' results and report on. Though anonymous, contributors would be asked the length of their membership, the subscription band they are in and whether responding as

a member rep, TF participant, or other category, and be directed to relevant further questions accordingly. The draft questions would be circulated to trustees for feedback soon.

Action: Jen Anderson

4.5 Mapping LINK's connections

The January meeting had agreed to map LINK's connections with other debates, forums and sectors to identify where the network could proactively improve relationships. Andy Myles had produced a useful map of the wider policy community briefly showing how well or otherwise connections of LINK or its members are. The meeting welcomed this noting its relevance to the strategic review going ahead in August and inviting Andy to develop a more detailed page/template where LINK players could note what the connections are, where, whether mainly positive, or otherwise. Andy's template would be circulated to trustees, convenors and reps to complete. The next step would be to analyse whether eNGOS are making the most of existing connections and how to address key gaps.

Action: Andy Myles

5. Operations

5.1 Progressing outcomes of June networking meeting

Staff sought guidance in taking forward some actions agreed at LINK's June networking discussion, esp proposed work on indicators and the proposed member seminar on the 'beyond GDP' agenda – areas which fell outside the remits of current task forces.

30 August Seminar

The meeting advised that the seminar identifies as a goal, how LINK will take forward its intention to influence this debate and to develop SD/Bio/other indicators as contribution to any review of the National Performance Framework, and in what timeframe. To that end there should be effort in advance of August to identify governmental processes intended to progress the NPF forward. **Action: Andy/Jen**

The meeting advised that the Indicators workshop during the seminar should identify points for LINK to make either to an official committee/process asked to refresh the NPF, or if no such process is established, to address in proactive correspondence with the Cabinet Secretary for Sustainability. After presentations and some discussion opportunity, the seminar should break into workshop groups on the various themes, followed by a break when external participants would leave, and capped with a plenary for LINK members only to agree the LINK strategy and timeframe for taking things forward. External participants should include SCVO (name tbc), Gareth Heavisides Scottish Government, Clive Mitchell/Kat Jones SNH, Jo Greene SEPA and Graeme Cooke SPICe. Andy suggested that Andy Kerr of the new Climate Forum also be invited. Staff were encouraged to seek Jonny Hughes' advice about a TEEB speaker and to invite Dan to make the presentation on the Carnegie report.

Actions: Kate MacColl

Linkages with our theme and agenda for Congress in November were noted; a steering group call was being organised to take that forward.

Action: Alice Walsh

Taking forward work on Governance

The networking meeting had agreed that the report should be circulated to others in civic Scotland to explore the degree of support for its views and recommendations and Andy would take this forward over the summer. The meeting had also identified 4 priorities for LINK to focus on, and staff sought Board advice on these. The Board advised that staff and TFs focus on two areas: first, the 'scrutiny' recommendations, using our contacts to encourage Committees to take this on board and then monitoring the degree to which this is apparent over the summer; and second, developing the proposal for a new civic forum and a strategy to promote this (possibly dinner/discussion with R Holloway where discussion agrees how to promote more effectively and considers the possibility of coalition eg with Fred Edwards Trust) within LINK.

Actions:

Andy to circulate report widely in later August exploring others' interest in taking its proposals forward.

Andy & TFs to encourage Committees w.r.t. scrutiny, and then to monitor whether this is happening.

Andy, Deborah, Lloyd to develop the civic forum thinking to take to wider civic Scotland, if wider sector feedback is less than positive about joint work on this.

5.2 SEPA liaison

Alice Walsh outlined proposals for the agenda for the strategic liaison meeting set for 8 August and sought Board views. The meeting agreed that there were no other strategic issues for LINK to add, Alice to investigate whether flooding consultation needed to be added (*AW note: no*).

6. AOB

6.1 Discussions with CNPA – Trustees who had attended the meeting were asked to respond to Jen Anderson's email on follow-up points.

6.2 FoES new Director – Deborah and Jen were to meet with new CEO Stan Blackley that week. *JA note: this was a positive discussion with Stan and with Francis Stuart; FoES are now mandated to work more closely with networks eg LINK; their work will fall under the themes of environmental justice and low carbon; they expressed interest in LINK plans on governance, scrutiny, beyond GDP; FoES will also look to sign up to other issues on occasion eg TF presswork / submissions.*

6.3 LINK party conference strategy for autumn 2011 – The Board noted and approved Andy Myles' proposal to organise a summer meeting of the Parli Forum to develop a party conference strategy around fringe meetings on governance issues.

Action: Andy Myles

7. Next meeting

The scheduled date of 20 October now clashes with SNP's conference, likely to affect some trustees. The Board asked staff to circulate alternative dates.

Action: Jen Anderson

Draft/JA.6.7.11