



Draft minutes of a meeting of the Board held on 24 April 2008, Perth

Present

Trustees: John Mayhew (Chair), Deborah Long (Vice-Chair), David Downie (Treasurer), Lloyd Austin, Dan Barlow, Andrew Fairbairn, Françoise van Buuren, Ian McCall, Eila Macqueen

Staff: Jen Anderson (Chief Officer), Hugh Green (Finance Officer), Alice Walsh (Development Officer)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from trustees Ian Findlay and Jonny Hughes and from Eilidh Macpherson (Parliamentary Officer).

2. Minutes of the last meeting (28 January 2008)

These were approved as a correct record of the meeting. Most matters were covered by the April agenda. The Joint Links seminar on devolution was going ahead on 8/9 October 2008 in Birmingham and details would be circulated to members shortly.

3. Application from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Although the Board agreed that the Trust was eligible for membership, staff were asked to clarify the Trust's budgeted expenditure for Scottish operations and to discuss this with the Funding Subgroup in May. The objective was to ensure consistency in the application of LINK's 'ten percent' rule in relation to member bodies which are UK in scope. If the FSG were satisfied with the BCT response, a recommendation would be made directly to members to admit the Trust. However, it was noted that the Trust might decide not to pay a higher subscription.

Action: JA

4. Financials

4.1 Budget outturn for the year ended 31 March 2008 HG summarized the financial position at the year end indicating that the figures in the circulated outturn were within a few £s of those now finally approved by Morris & Young (Accountants). The year had ended with around £37,080 in unrestricted reserves, higher than intended though explained by some underspend and some fundraising successes. The Board noted that a modest deficit budget was planned for 2008/09, so that some of the surplus from 2007/08 would be ploughed back into operations. This would be communicated to members at the AGM. The contingency reserve (£53,500) was noted and would be reviewed again shortly by the FSG for the coming year. Fixed assets for 2007/08 had stood at £5,273.

HG reported that seven projects running over the year had closed, whilst most of the projects with balances at the year-end were progressing and would complete by the summer; the marine project had over a year to run. The discretionary project fund had closed with a balance of £7,822, higher than anticipated, because of Alice's success in

raising £5,000 from the Craignish Trust, which would now go towards climate related project work. The Board noted underspend on training and encouraged staff to take up relevant opportunities; JA indicated that higher spend was likely in 2008/09 with group training in personal effectiveness planned, besides other one-off trainings.

The Board approved the outturn, thanked HG and staff for their prudent financial management and thanked FSG members for their advice over the year.

4.2 Revised forecast for 2008/09

The Board considered the forecast for 2008/09 which HG and JA had now revised in the light of the previous year's outturn. Expenditure was much the same as projected in January, with IT costs up in relation to the current investigations into out-sourcing support so as to reduce demand on the AO post and £2,500 allocated for web development relating to recent communications discussions by the Board.

The project expenditure forecast, now £141,000, was backed up by detailed project budgets and represented all that was known at this stage. These figures would be adjusted as plans developed. The meeting noted that the marine task force had raised further project income from the UK fighting fund and was discussing whether or not to seek an extension to the project in relation to the longer legislative time-scale which now appeared likely for Scottish as opposed to UK legislation. Also under projects the meeting approved the transfers that staff had made to the projects for Congress 2008 and review of corporate strategy (where it was noted that more funding might yet be needed).

The revised forecast showed discretionary project funds of £7,822 (ie the balance carried forward from 2007/08). The Board agreed to hold the fund at this level and to review it later in the year in relation to LINK's overall budget health, if demand was significant.

The close of WWF Scotland's core grant was noted and the Board recorded thanks to WWFS for their grant support of twenty years' standing, for core and project activity (especially early fishfarming officer posts). The Board was very pleased to note EFF grant support at £25,000; though lower than the bid, this was important core support.

Forecast subscription income was now lower than originally projected given the RZSS's decision not to pay full membership rates, and Soil Association Scotland's decision to demit for a year. The Board noted that further ex-associate members might yet decide not to pay the full rate when invoices were circulated in the summer. The graph circulated assumed one new small subscription and one further small organization resigning; LINK was currently on a trajectory to raise 45% of essential expenditure by 2011 rather than the targeted 50%, ie anticipating a shortfall in that year of £13,000. The Board felt that rises above what had been proposed in 2005 would be difficult for the membership to accept but agreed that as a membership organization LINK had to be able to rely on this income stream. The FSG would review the three-year scenario to 2011 during the coming year.

The Board approved the deficit budget, on the basis that the surplus from 2007/08 would help to maintain healthy finances over the year and that, at this stage, the forecast was for over £30,000 in unrestricted reserves in March 2009.

The Board agreed to invite BTCV to rejoin LINK, given the overlap of agendas especially on climate work.

Action: Deborah Long

4.3 Remuneration of trustees

JHM introduced the item, noting that the Board rightly wished to discuss further feedback from the meeting JA and DD had had with Colin Liddell. JHM asked Deborah Long to chair this part of the meeting and left the room.

Deborah summarized the Board's January discussion, the main findings of the subsequent meeting with Colin Liddell and invited trustees' views.

Though sympathetic to John's current personal circumstances, the meeting agreed that for reasons of equality amongst the trustees, the value of protecting the voluntary ethos, practical issues relating to funders and funding, and the fact that remuneration unless it is significant would be unlikely to succeed in resolving the challenge of recruiting honorary officers (which is nearly always more an issue of time rather than money), LINK should not establish a policy to remunerate. The returns in terms of personal development for trustees were noted.

However, the meeting also agreed that LINK should continue to make every effort to cover any and all out-of-pocket costs incurred by trustees who are not reimbursed by their employer. The Board determined to revisit the trustee responsibility table and to try to spread workload amongst trustees as far as possible, as this would help the current Chair as well as help to attract future incumbents.

In relation to one-off contracts being carried out for LINK by John Mayhew (for the biodiversity task force) and Michael Scott (honorary fellow, for the 2020 group), the meeting noted that consultants' briefs had been issued and LINK's return to OSCR would report these as required.

DL and DD outlined the Board's decision to JHM, who returned to chair the meeting. JHM thanked the Board for considering this issue in such detail; he indicated that he understood why this decision had been reached, and that he would consider this in relation to the balance of the remainder of his term in office and keep the Board advised of his decision.

Action: JHM

5. Updates regarding current Work Programme

5.1 Parliamentary updates

Scottish Environment Week (SEW) In EM's absence, JA briefly summarized recent evaluation by staff (with member input) of SEW 2008 and plans to fundraise for £30,000 for SEW 2009. The meeting supported a replay of the business breakfast and noted that the scope for LINK players in these events should be kept under review. It was also suggested that sponsorship for the event might be attracted from bodies which support communications, liaison with parliament, and interaction amongst civic society. The health agenda was currently relevant and a potential source of support.

Training Day LINK parliamentary staff planned a training day for members during recess on using the parliament and on how the information centre (SPICe) can support NGOs.

Election work The meeting also noted discussion at LINK's forward planning meeting in March on election work. From that there was an action for staff to canvass members about their interests in, resources for and plans for any election work (both EU and UK). Staff would bring conclusions to the June Board & Convenor networking meetings. The decision

of the campaigning review (2007) would be borne in mind: this was that whilst LINK might use elections as an opportunity for advocacy around key issues, elections should not necessarily be seen as the trigger for campaigns in future. The network's appetite and capacity for joint initiative would be included in the survey.

Action: Staff

5.2 2020 continuity Trustees approved the proposals from the continuity group which had met in March as requested by the Board in January. Ongoing work aimed to keep a foot in the door of wider Scottish dialogue about climate and behaviour change and to identify the part which the LINK network could usefully play and resource within a wider, government-led partnership. The meeting supported the proposal that the group which had met in March provide a continuing Board-level lead and watching brief on behalf of LINK. Michael Scott's audit of members' plans would be discussed by that group, with a recommendation on any action then coming to the Board for discussion and decision on next steps (June). Since discussions amongst NGOs, DEFRA and others had now also begun in the south, JA would propose this to the Joint Links as an area worth discussion at the October seminar.

Action: JA

6. Strategic and operational planning

6.1 KPIs Draft ideas developed by a subgroup for the Board were discussed and a set of KPIs signed off for the current strategy (to 2009). With LINK's key role being that of facilitation, the emphasis on setting up opportunities for members and on inputs and outputs, rather than on outcomes, was generally approved.

6.2 Draft operating plan and process The meeting discussed the draft prepared mainly by Alice Walsh, suggesting practical ways of improving this, including an A4 layout if possible, combining the KPIs with targets columns, introducing the purpose upfront, clarification of the term 'scale', carry-over of headings from page to page. The indicators of progress should be measurable and a few of these for the whole plan (key areas) might suffice. The proforma which task forces complete on their plans and activities must relate to headings in the plan and the document should convince users of its value. The plan should be as strategic as possible – it cannot usefully encompass everything. A lead player was preferred to several such players, and the support role could include honorary fellows. The document should highlight wherever staff are involved. The meeting discussed whether there should be a separate document for TF activity, noting the Board Subgroup's strong recommendation that this should be a single document used by everyone involved in LINK.

Also agreed:

- New suggestions for activity should be weighed against current work, but this is a role for the full Board rather than an Ideas Development Group. The Board needs to capture aspirations from the network, assess these and weigh them against the plan, taking recommendations back to members.
- LINK should address the current fragility/workload issues for TFs, which have knock-on impacts on staff, via a training workshop for TFs. This should aim to clarify to Convenors what is achievable in LINK. The meeting agreed this could be run as a workshop at Congress, and advised that staff should canvass for Convenors and Deputies for issues they would like to see addressed.
- LINK must ensure better induction for Convenors and Deputies in future.
- LINK should in future roll the annual forward planning meeting into Congress, holding these as back-to-back meetings with the normal social networking.

A further meeting of the operational planning group would be organized shortly.

Action: Alice, Jen

6.3 Parliamentary post The Board discussed the situation (maternity leave is ongoing) noting action being taken to ensure the service will be maintained at current strength and supporting the employment sub-group's examination of options for future delivery. Jen Anderson would continue to keep in touch with Jane Herbstritt.

Action: JA

6.4 Governance It was agreed to defer this item to the June meeting. OSCR's rolling review is to complete by end 2009.

6.5 AGM 2008 The Board noted the planning already underway on financials, annual reporting (ie the trustees' annual report) and nominations.

Jen would liaise with several trustees to ensure the annual rotation on the Board was maintained. Jen was also asked to invite members to nominate for the Board.

The meeting noted that a successor to John as Chair would need to be identified within the year, possibly sooner, preferably from the current trustees.

The President Searchgroup planned to meet two to three individuals shortly with a view to recommending someone to the Board later in May and possibly in time for a Board recommendation to members for the AGM.

The potential need to identify a successor as Treasurer to David Downie with the 'hands-on' role of finance for their own organization was discussed briefly; David Downie had left the meeting by this point.

The meeting agreed that the role of line manager (for the CO) should belong to someone already familiar with and involved in the network; this might have to revert to chair or vice-chair, or other trustee, depending on speed of search in identifying the next Treasurer.

The Board agreed to discuss board membership more fully in June with any names on the table for the year ahead.

Action: JHM, JA

7. Communicating the benefits of membership

Two papers had been tabled by Alice.

One summarized the outcomes of several months' discussion by the communications subgroup. Its recommendations were:

- to assess how people use the information they currently receive
- to reduce duplication of bulletin and newsletter as far as possible
- to produce three instead of four newsletters and for some of the audience to provide these as e-bulletins
- to produce a persuasive annual review for autumn as a package with CD review. To include statistics (what you get/what we do), highlights, achievements, quotes and photos demonstrating the value of LINK. The meeting noted that the trustees' annual report for OSCR would be a separate exercise, though parts of it, eg finances, would be summarized in the members' version

- to develop the website so that as well as providing its useful 'filing-cabinet' role for members, it also acts as more of a 'shopfront' to convince the member users of its value as well as to appeal to other specific users (funders and MSPs, for example), some of whom need to be driven to use the site more than at present; if doing so, promote the website address more than at present.

Various points were noted in relation for staff to take forward with FvB's advice.

Action: AW, AL, SG, FvB

The other paper usefully illustrated the spread of member organisations' engagement across the network's activities, including Board, membership events, task forces, stakeholder representation and more. This would be maintained for information.

Action: AW

8. Matters arising and other reports

8.2 A 'Friends' category The meeting noted that rather than develop a new category, which would require some level of servicing, Convenors and staff would be informed about people identified in the past year's search for a president, who might wish to support LINK in one-off capacities in future, and would be encouraged to contact them as needed, whilst stressing that in most cases no approach had yet been made to them. **Action: JA**

8.3 Ministerial liaison The challenges of selecting a delegation for the LINK/Ministerial meetings which does not duplicate 'G6' bodies and a few other organisations was noted. The Board supported JA's proposal to invite member bodies to submit one item per meeting which is not a collective issue but which does not contradict LINK collective positions (it was agreed that the Board can quash if necessary). In this way access might be more easily opened up to smaller member organizations. The Board advised that some overlap with G6 organisations is justifiable and even inevitable given LINK's structure, convenorship trends and the overlap of agendas. It was again noted that an important goal is that the meetings are useful to Ministers and demonstrate the contribution which LINK can make.

Action: LWA, JA

LINK's continued place at G6 meetings was discussed, with consensus in favour of retaining this given the unknowns surrounding access to ministers in future and the importance of grasping all opportunities made available to LINK. The meeting agreed that rather than have this fall automatically to the Chair, the place should be fielded to relevant players including President, trustees or convenors, who can talk to the issues from a LINK perspective. It was agreed that LINK staff should be kept informed about these meetings in order to help identify the LINK player and that the LINK player must report back to LINK. The Board's views would be conveyed to members at the AGM.

Action: JHM/LWA

8.6 Crown Estates Liaison Group, Scottish Legacy Board

Crown Estates Liaison Group The meeting noted the cross-sectoral role of this new forum, supported SWT's offer to represent LINK and advised that, at least initially, Simon Milne might wish to attend the meetings.

Scottish Legacy Board The meeting noted that JA, in error, had not circulated this opportunity to all members. Three trustees had offered to represent LINK, at present for just one place, and of these the Board felt WWFS and RAS made strong cases to bring different LINK perspectives to the table. Wider membership of the Legacy Board was thin in

environmental terms, though it would draw on subgroups on which further environmental representation could be available; in some cases these already involved some LINK members. The meeting agreed that since LINK had successfully made the case for two people to attend at least the first meeting, Dan and Ian should attend and advance the argument for two places. If successful, JA would inform wider members of these two nominations. If LINK were restricted to one nominee the ballot will be extended to all members.

Action: DB, IM, JA

Dan and Ian were asked to consider whether to press release any environmental concerns after the first meeting, and the Board also advised they maintain the stance already set out by several LINK players, ie avoiding having our involvement used inappropriately to appear to 'green' processes which may be unsustainable.

Action: DB, IM

9. AOB

9.1 Climate Challenge Fund grants panel

LINK had just been invited to nominate someone to the panel. The Board advised that further information be sought on membership and criteria for eligibility and noted that the 2020 group should be asked to comment. The ballot should be put to the whole of LINK.

Action: JA

9.2 CoSLA

Cllr Alison Hay, spokesperson for environment, was interested in meeting LINK Chair. The Board noted various issues worth raising with Cllr Hay including: support for SEW; biodiversity duty on local authorities; spending on paths/access; potentially other funding issues; procurement; FSC certification.

Action: JA

9.3 Listening dinners

SNH had invited LINK to attend a dinner in May re 2008/2010 targets (SSSI). Deborah could not attend but would consider an alternative LINK rep from the BTF.

Action: DL

Drafted by Jen Anderson, May 2008