

Draft Minutes of a meeting of the LINK Board held on 23 January 2009, in Perth

Present

President: Helen Zealley

Trustees: John Mayhew (Chair), Deborah Long (Vice-Chair), David Downie (Treasurer), Lloyd Austin, Dan Barlow, Jonny Hughes, Ian McCall

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

1. Apologies

Received from Trustees Ian Findlay, Eila Macqueen, Andrew Fairbairn.

2. **Minutes** of last meeting (22 October 2008) were approved as an accurate record.

3. Financials

3.1 Budget 2008/09 Outturn (to 31.12.08)

HG reported that finances were in good order with a healthy available funds balance forecast for the end of year; this was largely due to underspend in core given a two month staff post gap, and lower spend for newsletter, web overhaul, IT maintenance and office repairs. Relevant longer term patterns were factored into the 09/10 budget. The deficit of around £23k in operating terms mainly owed to some projects spending out funds carried forward at the start of the year as well as to challenges in securing SEW sponsorship. The Board approved allocation of remaining funds from LINK 2020 and Climate Revised LINK policy to Climate emissions good practice. Most projects would close by 31 March apart from Marine. The Board had agreed discretionary funding should not be allocated this late in any financial year. HG would check there was no threat to SNH grant-funding resulting from the underspend and confirm the wording in Note 13. The outturn was approved and the Board thanked HG and David Downie for their financial work.

Action: HG

3.2 Draft LINK Budget for 2009/10

The tabled draft presented a surplus in unrestricted funds and a deficit in restricted, mainly on the current basis of the marine budget potentially completing (and not taking account of project extension plans at this stage). The draft included forecast project spend on the basis of the information available to staff and estimates made in comparison with the previous year.

Points covered in discussion were:

SEW funding – despite difficulties this year staff proposed adherence to the policy that the Week is saleable, though noted that guidance on the funding philosophy in relation to sponsorship of seminars would be useful for TFs; the Week provides opportunities for business to network with the eNGO sector and others.

Congress – staff recommended this as an opportunity for corporate sponsorship, sought as early in the year as choice of theme allows.

Marine Project – the current discussion was noted towards a contingency to support project staff through any short gap which might occur in trusts funding this summer: the

offer of £2k by LINK towards this was considered appropriate; this would be included in the draft.

Action: HG

Subscriptions – whilst there were no known risks, and Soil Association was known to be considering rejoining from 2009, effects of the financial crisis could limit eNGO budgets with the possibility that some members would drop a subscription band(s). Potential joiners were not likely to be large well-resourced NGOs. HG would review the trajectory with these points in mind for the FSG meeting in February which would look at subscription income longer term.

Action: HG

HG to amend Notes 3 and 4.

Action: HG

The draft was approved on this basis.

4.1 Draft Corporate Strategy 2009-12

The 2006-09 strategy, refreshed in consultation in 2008 now required was ready for Board then member body endorsement. JHM thanked the steering group for their oversight of the process. LWA commended the strategy to the Board. The Board agreed that Bruce Britton had done an excellent job.

Various amendments were agreed, particularly:

- inclusion of LINK's role in calling Governments to account and pursuing follow-through;
- use of term 'sustainability' rather than 'environmental sustainability' throughout;
- improved wording around LINK relationship with media; and
- better reflection of networking meetings and their evaluative role.

Bruce Britton's proposed KPIs (newly received) were tabled and the task of signing these off was remitted to the KPIs subgroup of 2008. There was a consensus in favour of using outputs rather than outcomes more, given LINK's facilitating role, though it was felt there may be some opportunity for qualitative measures too.

Subject to these amendments the Board endorsed the document for member body sign-up by March, asking staff to clarify on circulation that silence must be taken as assent. The Board would be circulated with any comments of substance received from members and asked to sign the strategy off, by email in March.

Action: JA

5. Operating plan

5.1 Operating Plan 2008/09 Quarter 3 Report – KPIs

The Board approved the quarterly progress report. The ability of smaller member bodies to engage across the range of work was considered; the Board advised the relevant KPI be refined to reflect proportionate ability, or the target be reduced, or the wording in reports should indicate 'as appropriate'. The objective of 90% engagement across the members in Congress, the major membership event of the year, was good and progress was in the right direction.

Action: AW

The Board noted in relation to the subscription target (50% essential costs) that 2011 is the target date, progress is in the right direction, and the Funding Subgroup will turn its thoughts to the period beyond 2011, shortly.

5.2 Operating Plan 2008/09 Quarter 3 Report – Issues emerging

a. Audit Scotland – Dan and Lloyd when approached individually had directed Audit Scotland to channel enquiries through LINK. AudScot sought a rep on the advisory group, and comments on brief, for a study of how Scotland's environment is protected and

improved; the Board agreed Dan, Lloyd and Deborah would coordinate LINK input and select representation. Staff would email reps and convenors. **Action: AL**

b. 24 April for next Board The meeting agreed a change to 24 April for next Board meeting instead of 23 April the scheduled LINK meeting with the Minister.

c. Reporting on the two ministerial series Staff circulate reports on LINK and G6 meetings as soon as possible though this relies on the (changing) LINK rep at G6 meetings to find time to feed back.

d. Political strategy development and reporting The Board approved the proposal that the PO should pull together a report twice yearly, with inputs from parliamentary forum and others including those trustees and reps working in the parliamentary field. This will include content agreed every now and then with the Board and be disseminated to Networking meetings and the membership after the April and October Board meetings.

Action: AM

e. Election work The Board noted Parliamentary Forum proposal that LINK limit EU-election work to contributing key papers to manifesto writers. Also, for the UK elections (possibly as early as June 2009) that an election group put together asks on key issues relevant to Westminster-Holyrood relationship. LWA, DB, IM and potentially HM interested.

Action: AM

f. Europe work Our engagement in things of an European nature is loose, given stretched resources across the eNGOs, though it seems to be working well. The aim of joint action has to be that acting as LINK will be more effective than as individual NGOs. AM proposed our rule of thumb should be that we should accept invitations to give evidence. JA suggested we firm up the circulation arrangements for draft submissions relating to things European. Certainly the membership (Birnam, Oct) agreed LINK needs to address things happening at European level which Scotland does not seem to fully address; the ATF's plans for a conference on what we want of farming and land use were a good example. The current discussion between the Links in the UK about using membership of EEB more actively (in relation to EEB UK) was noted: we could do more if resources can be found to support this.

g. SCVO policy committee The Board was happy to nominate Andy Myles. *JA note: Andy's appointment confirmed mid February.*

h. HEF membership The Board proposed LINK try for two reps on this forum, to alternate. Importance of Highland base for nominees noted. *JA note: HC ultimately offered LINK two places, going to Hebe Carus MCoS and George Campbell RSPB, both based in Inverness.*

i. Climate comms work With a caution to be realistic as to the likely extent of member engagement, the Board supported the Climate Comms steering group's recommendation for discussion with Comms Officers of the headings identified in November for eNGOs to use to encourage lifestyle choices among their members. All five headings could have an impact on species and on the environment.

Action: CC steering group, JA

j. Financial paradigms LINK's Birnam discussions (Oct 08) proposed an opinion pieces followed by a seminar. JA was uncertain about the extent of likely engagement in the latter. The Board advised proceeding with the opinion piece and seeking opportunities such as SDC's 'defining prosperity' agenda, giving evidence on EU budget review, and similar, which allow promotion of alternative models and principles. Keeping members alerted to these opportunities was key.

Action: All

5.2 Towards the operating plan 2009/10

There was no time for discussion. The plan was in prep for circulation by March. Various issues to be firmed up at this afternoon's networking meeting.

6. Matters arising

Points discussed were:

6.3 Succession planning

John would meet with David and Jen soon to take forward.

Action: JHM

6.4 Diversity training

BEN's offer to outline training provision to members was postponed owing to BEN funding issues. The Board felt LINK was too stretched to take further action at this stage.

6.5 Commemorating Fred Edwards

The Board approved the subgroup's proposal, tentative at this stage, to liaise with Mary Edwards to develop a concept in discussion with other parties.

Action: LWA

7. AOB

7.1 SCNP request for LINK letter in support of EFF application

The Board advised LINK's role should be to facilitate a process to solicit indications of support for SCNP's bid from member bodies in a collective letter, or to advise these members to write individually to EFF if they preferred.

Action: JA

7.2 Access to justice for eNGOs

Frances McCartney of the Environmental Law Centre offered a half-day workshop for eNGOs on how to use the law better in relation to Protective Costs Orders. Staff would email all reps.

Action: JA

7.3 LINK & Freedom of information

The meeting briefly discussed the availability of minutes of LINK Board and Networking meetings, in relation to FoI thinking and likely developments, agreeing to consider this at the next meeting.

Action: Next meeting

8. Dates for LINK meetings during 2009

24 April, Board, Networking (change from 23 April given conflicting ministerial date)

25 June, Board (10-1230), Networking (1315-1615), AGM (1700)

22 Oct, Board all-day meeting

Thu & Fri in Oct/Nov (tbc), combined Congress & Annual planning