

MINUTES OF LINK BOARD'S MEETING HELD ON 23 APRIL 2015 IN PERTH

PRESENT Trustees - Helen Todd (Chair), Simon Jones (Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Beryl Leatherland, Sam Gardner, Mandy Orr, Paul Walton

Staff members: Jen Anderson, Andy Myles, Alice Walsh,
Ross Finnie (President)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Trustees Ian Findlay, Charles Dundas and Craig Macadam.

2. STAFFING

A report-back was made by Jen Anderson to the Trustees on issues emerging from the review of staffing functions, to date. The ESG had also considered these and given its recommendations on next steps.

Action: Jen

3. MINUTES OF JANUARY 2015 MEETING

These were approved as an accurate record of the Board's January discussion.

4. MATTERS ARISING & REPORTS BACK

MATTERS

Operating Guidance

Other than clarifying points raised by Beryl, the meeting indicated approval for the proposed updates to LINK guidance which staff had prepared. These would be communicated to members and TFs. On a point of detail Alice reported that there are no co-optees to LINK TFs and have been virtually none in the past. However, if and where there is this kind of engagement these bodies need to receive our bulletin, AMR and other updates so as to keep themselves informed of the context in which they would need to be operating. **Action: Staff to inform Members and TFs of the updated guidance**

Staffing functions review – Jen indicated that this would proceed, taking account of ESG and Board feedback to date, and bringing further thinking back to the Board for consideration. **Action: Staff**

LINK positioning

The Board papers reported on recent contact with NTS and SWT. Simon Jones clarified that SWT's concerns were about the impact of all of LINK's advocacy (across its TFs) and the effect of that on the network and what it is trying to do. SWT accepted that a review might conclude that we should retain current approach, though were keen to see this reviewed. The meeting noted that this might be picked up by the choice of Congress topic potentially – see below. At any rate, it should be considered in the strategic review starting in the summer – see below. **Action: Congress/Review steering groups**

Relations with Government

Jen reported on a very recent email from SG Environment Directorate's Keith Connal, following up LINK's discussions with officials in February in which LINK had made the case for better access to the Cab Sec and for more opportunities (annually, and in terms of informal as well as formal) with the Minister. The meeting noted that SG appeared to be pursuing some of the ENGO 'asks'.

Contact with others across policy community

The meeting agreed that important bases were covered by LINK's current strategic liaison and decided not to plan to do more at this point.

Narrative

The meeting agreed that the appropriate vehicle for LINK's 'clearer' messaging was the 2016 Scottish Parliament election. A succinct document/set of points should be developed for that purpose, with expert comms input, supporting and justifying the LINK asks. Trustees asked that this be a few bullet points, rather than 3 pages, and that the asks themselves should be articulated in clear language at the topline campaigning level, rather than overly caveated at a detailed level – sticking to the general points on which members can agree (albeit that they will be aware of where they disagree internally). **Action: Andy & Parliamentary subgroup**

AGM Preparation

Trustees were asked to contact Helen and Jen by July (15th) if they wished to bring their term on the Board to an end at the AGM. The meeting also noted Colin Liddell's advice that people re-co-opted multiple times might be better to stand for election; the meeting noted that Mike Robinson had indicated in 2014 that this was likely to be his final year on the Board. **Action: Trustees**

Independent financial examiners – The meeting confirmed approval for the staff's proposal to continue to employ the services of Geoghegans.

President recruitment

The recruitment remained live, and details had been re-publicised recently via social media. The meeting asked staff to encourage member bodies to re-publicise also. **Action: Staff**

Honorary Fellows

This item was deferred to the next meeting. **Next meeting**

FET & LINK support for

The meeting approved a modest contribution of funding besides practical support for the FET fellowship, which staff would take forward. **Action: Staff**

REPORTS BACK

Updates from Jonny Hughes and Stuart Brooks on IUCN and IUCN UK were noted; there were no questions. No Trustees could attend the 10 June House of Lords IUCN event.

Paul Walton proffered for the LINK place on IUCN UK to replace Stuart Brooks (following JMT's resignation in March). Staff would report Paul's offer to members and check this had their support. **Action: Staff**

Helen reported on a dinner organised by CNPA during SE Week with various ENGO heads, and SNH, which had signed up to an initiative to promote biodiversity. Helen had passed the detail of this on to Deborah Long, Convenor of LINK's Wildlife Forum who would retain a 'LINK' eye on things.

Beryl reported on a recent Crown Estate event attended which had considered potential changes to CEC's future powers in Scotland.

5. STRATEGIC PROGRESS

KPIs and evaluation reviewed

The meeting considered proposals from staff prepared with advice from Graeme Reekie, Consultant, for revisions to the wording of LINK's strategic outcomes, and to the KPIs, which would streamline data collection and the evaluation process. Trustees approved these, noting Graeme Reekie's view that LINK's existing process is as good as any he has encountered, and that data will continue to need to be gathered as a basis for judgements about effect and influence.

The importance of TFs planning their work, and setting vision and goals, was reiterated, with some of the reporting delegated to Deputes, preferably.

The Board agreed to involve Graeme Reekie in a strategic review starting in the summer. Graeme would attend part of the August meeting.

Staff would revise proformas and notify Convenors and Deputes of the revisions, which would take effect from the current point. **Action: Staff**

Review of Business Supporter Affiliation Scheme

Further to its January discussion of the scheme and contact with JMT reps who had expressed some concern about this, Trustees had been reviewing LINK's approach to corporate sponsorship. JMT had proposed members be given the opportunity to comment on any business slated for approval or approach as a BS. The Board had considered it wiser for decisions to be at Board level given the likely range of differing views across the network of members about particular kinds of company.

Mandy had carried out research for the Board into how members themselves approached corporate sponsorship and her findings indicated that this tends to be on a case by case basis because of the degree of potential risk to reputation. Several members have policies and the rigour of research into companies' credentials related to level of likely sponsorship. With LINK's BS fee set at a maximum of £2k, the risk is limited.

The Board was mindful both of the needs for transparency/democracy and the capacity of LINK in relation to likely income generated from this source. It was agreed that all applications for BS would be flagged with members for feedback (2 weeks). If there were no concerns raised the Board would make its decision. If concerns were raised this would trigger further research along the lines in Mandy's paper with the decision again made by the Board. The process will be put on the members' website. A review would follow in a year's time. Mandy was thanked for her work. **Action: Staff**

Fundraising Overview

Report circulated. This flagged conclusion by Mandy and staff that a staff function was required to overview all fundraising intention and activity in LINK, including by Task Forces for projects, so as to ensure against competing bids, or making calls on core staff time for fundraising in relation to projects. Guidance to be developed and shared with TFs. **Action: Staff**

Meeting hoped that Wildlife Forum would identify resources to proceed with fundraising using the DPF allocation agreed from last year's budget. **Action: Wildlife Forum**

Also noted was the value of a discussion by Wi Forum reps with Mandy and Alice about whether and how SC and BS can be linked. **Action Alice/Mandy, Wi Forum**

Political Strategy Report

The meeting was aware that this paper was to be addressed at afternoon Network Meeting. Trustees had time for brief discussion of the following two points:

- Legal strategy: Andy flagged that strategic consideration by the Board could be important for the network. It was agreed that should this area remain priority in the Network discussion, then it should be an item for full discussion at the August Board. **Action: Review post Networking meeting**
- Review of legislation: The meeting asked about capacity for this, and about some analysis around the purpose of legislation, agreeing to discuss again in August, should this be prioritised by the afternoon's Network meeting. **Action: Review post Networking meeting**

Working with LINK's international memberships

Discussion was deferred to the August meeting owing to a lack of time. Action: **Next meeting**

Other priorities

This brief round-up of progress against other priorities was noted and there were no questions.

Congress

A paper collating several proposals from Reps, Convenors, Staff and Trustees, was briefly discussed. The meeting agreed to look at a theme which incorporated several of the suggestions, in particular 1 and 6. A steering group including Beryl and Andy (and others to be asked later) would convene to agree the approach. **Action: Alice**

6. FINANCIALS

Outturn to 31 March 2015, end of financial year

Hugh Green gave his final report, ahead of his retirement from LINK the following day.

Hugh reported that the outturn matched the balance sheet and had resulted in a surplus of £24000 in unrestricted funds and £5000 in restricted. This was higher than expected in January: LINK had taken in £6000 more and spent £8000 less than anticipated for various reasons which he outlined. There was £128000 available in unrestricted reserves.

Hugh summarised the status of all of LINK's projects, some of which had closed successfully, SEW had closed with receipt of £5500 towards staff costs from sponsorship, and others were rolling forward and in good health.

All DPF for 2014/15 had been allocated, though two projects had refunded some of their monies, to a total of £2100.

The meeting thanked Hugh and discussed the state of LINK's reserves - £125000 in 'contingency' reserve, and £128000 in available reserve. This was quite high. For some years the Board had been preparing for a

sudden dip in public sector funding. Although this 'crunchpoint' had not materialised, grant support was proving challenging to secure, and the public sector could not offer more than a year at a time. Both NIEL and WEL had suffered such cuts in the last 18 months.

LINK's current stated policy reported and OSCAR's advice on reserves was noted. The meeting agreed that LINK's financial situation and reserves **policy should be** reviewed in relation to funders and OSCAR perceptions although with an eye to the possibility of a steep and unforeseen decline in public sector funding in the coming years. **Action: FSG**

Revised forecast for 2015/16

Karen Paterson took the Board through the paper which indicated a forecast of a £4500 deficit at the end of 2015/16, owing to higher consultancy costs (one-off), and a higher project salary line, and inflation, mainly. Karen explained staff assumptions around membership and supporter income, core grant income from existing funders, and extent of reliance on new sources. The contingency reserve was carried forward at the same figure of £125000. There was likely to be a slight drop in the surplus for restricted funding and a small drop in overall funding.

The meeting again considered whether LINK can do anything to ascertain the future of public sector support, concluding that we do what we can, including making a strong case for LINK's keeping pace with other parts of the sector; however, SG Environment is not itself aware of its budget until 'last minute'.

Revised 5-year forecast

Karen took the Board through the revised 5-year forecast which staff had now pushed out to 2019/20. This included best guesses at possible/likely changes in income and expenditure and indicated some ambition around fundraising success from non-public sector sources. From 2016 forward the forecast included no DPF allocation (traditionally agreed year on year as budget allows). The meeting noted that by 2019/20, in this scenario, LINK might have spent a fair amount from its reserves, and hoped that the FSG, in reviewing reserves policy, would address this.

DPF bids

JA note: A bid from LINK's SLU task force for £500 towards and event to review progress with the Land Use Strategy, was circulated subsequent to the Board meeting, and approved by 9/11 trustees.

7. AOB

None raised.

8. NEXT MEETINGS INVOLVING TRUSTEES

Thursday 20 August, All-day, Away-day, details tbc

Thursday 27 August, Networking meeting, Edinburgh, timing tbc

Thursday 22 October

Monday 16 November

Tuesday 17 November