



MINUTES of a meeting of LINK's Board, held in Perth on 21 April 2016

PRESENT

Trustees - Helen Todd (Chair), Charles Dundas (Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Mike Robinson, Beryl Leatherland, Ian Findlay, Sam Gardner, Lucy Graham, Paul Walton

Staff in attendance – Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh

1 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Craig Macadam, Trustee.

2 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Draft minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2016 were approved as an accurate record.

3 MATTERS AND REPORTS-BACK

3.1 Reports-back in addition to those circulated were:

3.1.1 Helen had attended SG's first meeting of stakeholders-cum-advisory forum of the Rural Affairs, Forestry and Environment (RAFE) delivery board at Battleby with various CEOs/ reps of member bodies. Little had been circulated in advance making engagement on the day in the issues trickier. A note of discussions was expected.

3.1.2 In a recent helpful discussion with Bridget Campbell, Head of Environment Directorate, LINK had been encouraged to seek meetings with ministers other than Environment. Helen noted that this would need planning and would be discussed in a review of arrangements for LINK and G6 access. Bridget had supported LINK's re-prioritisation, agreeing that areas such as transport and agriculture are challenging and stating that eNGO effort there would be helpful. Helen indicated that LINK's work on social justice would offer scope for doing more on transport, complementing roles of Transform, SCCS and others, and not demanding a separate LINK grouping. Various opportunities lay ahead.

3.1.3 Helen had accepted an invitation as Chair to the upcoming kirking of the Scottish Parliament.

3.2 Discussion of Matters Arising covered:

3.2.1 Project fundraising targets collectively represented an ambitious £ half million currently.

3.2.2 LINK's economics application to Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust had resulted in an invitation to meet with the Trust in early May. Tim, Matthew and Phoebe were all available to attend.

3.2.3 The fundraising overview role for core staff was proving challenging to implement in some cases. The objective was to ensure enough traction with LINK core operations through relationships with project funding, teams and implementation. Jen advised that if LINK proceeded further down the route of project-funded work areas with dedicated staff there would be a need to keep a closer eye on relationships.

3.2.4 The Board noted that discussions were anticipated with Diarmid Hearn and his colleagues in the Trust, in summer. **Action: Helen**

3.2.5 Trustees were asked to confirm that the application from SAIFCA (farm advisory consultancy) prompted no concerns. It was agreed to proceed with a recommendation to members subject to staff double-checking that all LINK's admission criteria were met. **Action: Alice**

3.2.6 Beryl proposed the Board bear in mind recommendations from 2015's trustee contact with Helen, in particular the potential need for / value of:

- a Board sub-group to evaluate work programme and inform board meetings on progress of the new structure & priorities
- roles for trustees as the contacts for a number of member bodies and potentially also to one external stakeholder body, keeping in touch and managing that liaison
- Trustees engaging with as many parts of the network as possible to understand it more fully
- a LINK-hosted CEO get-together, hosted by Chair and possibly including Hon Fellows

Action: Board to revisit

4. FINANCIALS

4.1 End of year outturn for 2015-16

Tim confirmed this outturn was as per the end of year account submitted to LINK's Accountants. The year's deficit was broadly as budgeted.

Tim and Karen had analysed changes and trends over the last two years. This showed in 2014-15 a drop in core income of £19.5k and a rise of £10k in core costs, followed in 2015-16 by a drop in core income of £20k (loss off EFF together with freeze on subs rates and loss of JMT) and additional spend of £21k on projects including the climate and energy review consultancy. Tim assured trustees that the direction of travel was not plunging downward, and funds were well under control, although he advised that drops in core funding such as EFF's withdrawal from 2015 and public sector decreases represented a gap which could not be filled fast.

Ian asked if LINK's policy on contingency reserves had been reviewed recently to ensure that funders understood that LINK was not 'flush'. Tim reported that the Board had revised its reserves policy in 2015 for this reason; he reminded the meeting of the policy, which read: *"The Board revised its policy on reserves in 2015 and decided the unrestricted funds not designated or invested in tangible fixed assets ("the free reserves") held by the charity should be sufficient to cover 12 months of operating costs in a scenario where we received a significant loss of a major funding stream, together with sufficient funds to close the organisation down should it then prove unviable to continue. This equates to approximately £250,000 in unrestricted funds. At present LINK's free reserves amount to £253,517, which meets this target; however, LINK Trustees maintain a 5-year forward funding scenario which indicates that within the next five years a significant proportion of the current free reserves may have been used to meet operating costs."* This policy was approved again by the meeting.

Ian asked which SORP LINK would opt for in the new arrangements. Tim and Karen had explored options and advised option 102 as most appropriate for LINK, including the cash-flow report and other requirements, as an organisation with no pension liabilities, responsibility for derivatives, etc. Ian supported that decision.

4.2 Budget for 2016-17

Tim introduced the budget, noting the proposed deficit of around £16k was of a similar order to that for 2015-16. Karen outlined detail, in particular cost recovery from projects which would depend very much on whether marine and economics projects received extension funding. Tim reminded the meeting that the deficit would mean that LINK would dip in modestly to its reserves. However, subscriptions were budgeted to rise by 3% and the budget was fairly conservative in its assessment of other income. The meeting approved the budget.

Sam asked if there had been discussion of using LINK reserves to extend contracts of project staff. Jen confirmed that the Board was committed to providing incentives from core funds to all project staff designed to encourage them to enhance staff retention. At a previous juncture in the life of the marine project the Board had considered helping to bridge a short 'gap' in funding of a couple of months. However, the Board had to ensure an equitable approach across a spectrum of LINK work areas in which some TFs/Groups enjoy no dedicated staff or financial support or have short-term internships at most. The meeting felt that LINK reserves should not be used to extend project posts where no alternative funding is offered and asked the Funding Subgroup to review whether and what provision LINK should make to the marine and economics groups this autumn from LINK reserves.

Action: FSG to recommend to full Board

4.3 Updated 5-year forecast

The meeting considered the revised 5-year forecast, which showed that if trends remained broadly as indicated, an annually increasing deficit would eat into LINK's reserves. Whilst reserves could accommodate this for a few years this represented a direction of travel which LINK could not support indefinitely.

Rather than revise the forecast again at this stage on a more pessimistic basis, the Board agreed to continue to keep it under review and to revise trajectories as we hear the latest from each funding stream.

Staff confirmed that the 5-year scenario is not shared beyond LINK, eg with funders, and it was agreed that this should continue to be our practice.

The meeting approved the 5-year forecast on this basis.

5. LINK WORK AND CONTEXT

5.1 Political strategy report

Daphne spoke to the report and invited questions.

The meeting agreed LINK should include Ministers for environment, social issues, travel, economics, planning, environment –at least – in its round of post-election letters of welcome.

The meeting noted where plans stood with LINK's proposed EU referendum challenge and discussed the constraints felt across the UK by charities regulators' advice. Whilst it was agreed LINK should not publicly support UK's membership of the EU, Daphne indicated that evidence and articles could be collated and attention to these encouraged through the media.

EEB's interest in holding its autumn 2017 event in Scotland would require staff-time to help coordinate and help identify funding sources, of which there was brief discussion. The potential to attract the engagement of Government at a high level and for public discussion of various key issues on the LINK agenda was noted.

The Board discussed and supported the developing proposal around how LINK can connect to the social justice agenda. This would be discussed with members in May. Trustees advised that as the debate and the work develop, LINK should work to ensure clarity that members are pursuing their existing objectives rather than presenting as social justice organisations; ie., that access to a quality environment, safe and active travel routes, clean air, and so on, are all environmental justice aspects of social justice. Trustees advised caution around calling for new legislation as LINK's ask, given the issues around slow or patchy implementation of existing laws.

Daphne confirmed the event on species champions would not feature as an all-LINK campaign.

Daphne would circulate a briefing on implications of the Holyrood Lobbying Bill for member organisations.

Action: Daphne

5.2 Climate and energy review recommendations

The Board evaluated the process from which the statement had emerged and considered the core group and consultant recommendations.

30 of 35 members had signed up. The remainder would be encouraged by core group members. The very few additional comments received could be built in to other Groups' future outputs.

Staff and Board should continue to encourage the statement's role/use as a framework to inform outputs of all Groups/Subgroups. The statement had already successfully informed a revision of the landscape and energy statement to be published soon by the land-related Subgroup. **Action: Staff**

Plusses and minuses of publishing were discussed: would publication suggest a body of work and a prioritisation which is not backed by a resourced work area? Was the only important impact the statement's use by Groups to frame outputs? Could the statement be quoted in reactive responses? The meeting asked Daphne to circulate points which she foresaw LINK would want to be free to use in responding to enquiries about its position. **Action: Daphne circulate draft to Board and Conveners**

Helen would contact JMT to invite their support; the meeting was interested to know how the Trust would respond. The relationship with MCoS was felt to be very distant, possibly not justifying a similar approach at this point. **Action: Helen**

5.3 Operational plan & progress

Jen summarised key points from the circulated report. Positive progress was being reported in most areas in relation to LINK KPIs. Transition was ongoing and would need monitoring in terms of:

- the extent to which Groups feel they have time to check read-across and scope for collaboration (the staff's role in this will be the more important)
- practicalities of channelling Subgroup outputs through Groups (no problems with current set of known subgroups/issues though in future with new work areas this could become more of an issue)
- encouraging all groupings to assess and develop their advocacy strategies for best effect

Jen confirmed that the format of pro-formas was still being revised.

It was too soon to judge the overall consequences of the new structures and whether tighter prioritisation was being achieved, whether Groups were able to identify a top priority around which LINK could provide further resources (than the promised level of staff-time to set up and minute 4 meetings per year). The meeting noted that discussions around social justice may be going in the direction of providing a top-line campaign for LINK groups and subgroups.

The next round of reporting and evaluation would happen in autumn to inform Board's October meeting as well as LINK strategic planning in November.

5.4 Forward work programme

The forward plans had been provided by Groups and circulated to the Board. There was no discussion of detail.

5.5 Environment Links UK Draft Memo of Understanding

The meeting was asked for its impressions of the draft which the Links directors and chairs had been developing. Whilst this was couched in legal terminology, trustees agreed Helen could sign it off for LINK as a working document, and advised that we suggest further revision be made to simplify and clarify responsibilities and how the Links should be held to account for these. Jen confirmed that the intention was that Annex 1, updated each year, should continue to form part of the MOU.

6 POLICIES UPDATE (Standing item)

Staff reported that work on data protection was in progress. **Action: Karen**

7 AOB

7.1 Auto enrolment

The meeting heard that LINK's registration date was early 2017, all staff were in pension schemes that were more than compliant, Tim and Karen had a close eye on details and all staff were being kept informed of the changing context.

8. NEXT BOARD MEETING

Next Board meeting, Thursday 18th August. Venue and timing to be confirmed.