

DRAFT MINUTES OF BOARD MEETING HELD 22 OCTOBER 2013 AT LINK IN PERTH

PRESENT

Trustees - Deborah Long (Chair), Helen Todd (Vice Chair), Paul Ritchie (Treasurer), Lloyd Austin, Beryl Leatherland, Simon Jones

In attendance - Ross Finnie - President

Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh, Andy Myles - LINK Staff

Angus Yarwood had been in touch with staff; he would not be in Scotland before Christmas so would not attend Congress or the AGM; he sent best wishes to all at LINK. Jen would organise a message of thanks to Angus on behalf of the Board around the time of the AGM.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Angus Yarwood, Mandy Orr, Ian Findlay and Mike Robinson (Trustees) and from Hugh Green (LINK staff).

2. MINUTES OF OCTOBER MEETING

The draft minutes were proposed and approved as an accurate record of the meeting. Jen reported briefly on items not covered on the agenda, ie:

Friends of the Scotsman - ABM to take forward, lining up articles and alerting all to timing of opportunities

Member access to trustees - JA to liaise with Deborah to issue an invitation

Media training - Needs some fundraising as a first step which in turn needs time (JA)

3. MATTERS ARISING & REPORTS BACK

3.1 Matters arising

Business liaison - no progress made owing to other commitments in the period; the first forum was most likely to be organised by the economics forum in 2014.

Membership, OS, BS - ARC were to decide imminently on whether to apply for membership. British Ecological Society was also interested. Nourish Scotland, People & Planet were still 'possibles', subject to clearing budgets and making decisions. Business Supporter promotion would go ahead from December post overhaul of the website.

Local-national interface - Elizabeth Leighton had submitted a strong bid and would meet with the steering group shortly. Volunteers for the group were invited; Beryl offered to consider. Ian was another suggestion. The steering group would brief the consultant, and the final report was anticipated in January.

Congress - Alice updated on preparations for Congress asking trustees to use any contacts with community groups to encourage attendance.

SNH chair recruitment - now being advertised for a March 2014 start; criteria noted. The meeting thought it was worth asking Simon Pepper if he would be applying and letting members know.

3.2 Reports Back

EEB - Andy had attended EEB's conference on finance and reported very interesting contributions from a wide range of organisations, with an international audience including TUs, banks and financial institutions, EC, EU institutions and ENGOs. A lot of experience seemed to echo LINK's concerns and Andy had inputted to promote LINK work and profile. He felt our work resonated with activity across EU and that in many ways LINK is ahead of the game. The EEB AGM covered several work programme issues including working with Ireland, fracking, nuclear, and discussion about the

need for the EEB umbrella to embrace marine policy too. Two major issues were about who can join the EEB (eastern Europe and Africa & Levant - relevant to Mediterranean policy) and a name change (though in the end there is likely not to be a change).

IUCN - Trustees were reminded of the Council Agenda and encouraged to feed back to Jonny Hughes.

SCVO - There were frustrations in LINK and elsewhere in the sector with SCVO's 'representation' of shared concerns and its focus on the social agenda; LINK had raised this in a letter to SCVO's Convenor, though to little avail. The meeting agreed that Deborah, Andy and Jen should consider how best LINK should approach this and bring a recommendation to the Board in January. **Action; Deborah and staff**

KSB - Jen reported on recent further meeting with CEO Derek Robertson, keen that LINK understand the now different nature and status of KSB, no longer under the direction of Government. He had expressed interest in recognition from, collaboration with and even membership of LINK. The meeting saw similarities to the final days of Forward Scotland, after Government had withdrawn support. LINK had encouraged several KSB staff to attend Congress so that they could talk with network reps further and had urged Derek to KSB join as an Org Supporter. Ross felt the channelling of funding to WRAP/Zero Waste Scotland could give cause for concern; it was agreed to keep a watching brief on this area.

AGM prep - Dan Barlow appreciated being considered for HF-ship (and confirmed he was happy for us to proceed with the proposal to members) though might not be there at the AGM. Meantime the call to members for nominations to the Board had circulated in early September and staff were encouraging several players who had indicated a willingness to consider this in recent months or years. AGM papers must circulate to members in the first full week of November.

Scotland against Spin - Potential interest by SAS in membership of LINK was briefly discussed; a membership application would require member approval, and given SAS's limiting position on wind energy, this could be a problem within LINK. Beryl reported that an SAS member had recently joined SWLG and would be attending an upcoming SWLG meeting.

National Performance Framework Roundtable - Deborah reported on progress and the setting up of 4 subgroups to look at indicator sets. LINK, Carnegie, an ecological health consultant, and STUC, were involved, along with SG's chief statistician, among others. Andy reported on the EET Committee's recent confusing report and special advisors continuing to stick to the 'sustainable economic growth' mantra.

Influencers dinners - Deborah and Helen reported on the two dinners with the two campaigns which they had recently attended along with others in the voluntary sector; useful to be there; some good exchanges; some insights.

4. FINANCIAL

4.1 Half-year finance report, revised forecast, DPF (Paper 4.1)

In summary, the financial position was very good and £3K better than seen in August.

In terms of income subscription income was up 14%, core grants were all solid for the year, there was an increase in cost recovery of salaries and overheads from HLF funding and economics project funds from Friends Provident Foundation. Restricted income included marine and economics grant-aid successes.

In expenditure, some headings had been reviewed downward; the forecast for IT had been increased by £2K to include additional but necessary website development costs. Overall a £15K unrestricted surplus was forecast for the year-end which would increase LINK reserves to £123K. For restricted projects the updated forecast showed spending out and closing of all DPF projects by the year-end, leaving the two new externally-funded multi-year projects (Marine phase 3 and Economics advocacy) to carry over a total of £73K in Restricted funds. The new marine project year ran from 1st October, and the Economics project from 1st January. Recovery of £15K in salary and overhead costs was anticipated for this financial year.

The DPF stood at £1300, with no demand from TFs at this stage. It was agreed to email trustees if there was a flurry of demand which indicated need for additional allocation to the fund. **Action: staff to trustees as needed**

4.2 Report against business strategy (Paper 4.2)

Progress against many targets in the business strategy was very good; however, there were still unknowns around the future of some traditional funding streams, and no major new player identified to replace EFF's core support, when that ceased in 2014. Spending was being managed carefully, Alice had secured project funding for LINK's economics work, and membership income had seen a boost with the return of RZSS to LINK. Cost recovery options were 'a mixed bag', none offering 100%. The need to keep the size of the core staff team under review in relation to services was noted. The meeting agreed that members' willingness to pay LINK subs, with increases, and successes in recruitment, in the current climate, were evidence of how members and others valued the network.

4.3 The 5 year funding projection (Paper 4.3)

The meeting noted an increase to 'Other Income', because of cost recovery forecast for the next 3 years. This has improved the outlook, with surpluses now possible until 2016: the period when DPF expenditure would be possible had been extended in line with this. The Reserves 'horizon' was similarly improved, looking comfortable to the end of 2018. Paul reminded the meeting of certain assumptions behind the horizon including the plans of core funders. Alice explained that current negotiations with SNH were for just one year (2014-15 - decision expected before Christmas) and that further grant negotiations would be necessary during 2014, to secure the next 3-year cycle of support from both SG and SNH (channelled via SNH); the 5-year forecast assumed drops of 20% in government funding, ahead.

The meeting noted that although others in the sector receive a higher degree of funding from government, this comes 'with strings': the KPIs to which LINK works for its government funding are in line with LINK's own KPIs which leaves the network fairly free in terms of spending the funding, though gathering the data to report against KPIs was important.

Simon Jones asked about coordination between members and LINK in relation to fundraising from shared sources. Historically LINK's board had felt LINK should operate freely in the same funding field as members. LINK had explored (with SEFF - fundraisers forum) whether member bodies could commit a small percentage of their time/success to LINK; however, this had been rejected as unrealistic. The meeting discussed whether to seek support - for LINK's intermediary role particularly, helping to keep the sector strong and healthy - through other parts of Government (eg Third Sector Unit). Ross advised that this might play into the hands of Governments increasingly keen on exerting greater control over fundees. We agreed to continue to profile environment as an important part of the civic sector but not to push at/for new doors at this stage.

5. POLITICAL STRATEGY REPORT & HOLYROOD EVENTS 'RULE' (PAPER 5)

Andy's draft report with questions was considered, with key discussion points as follows:

Elections - LINK is doing more than many NGOs/forums. There seems little intention among the parties around the EU elections; economics is the dominant issue. Deborah reported on a habitats focussed meeting at which there had been appetite for Links-wide action; Andy advised that it was late in the day but worth some action, potentially in tandem with EEB. **Action: ABM**

Local government - The meeting felt there was a real capacity issue and no major hunger among members to engage again with Councils at this stage. Some members had been willing for a conversation around the latest round of SOAs, though there had been no time to organise this yet. The decision was to see what emerges from Congress and LINK's local study, and to follow up with CoSLA. **Action: early 2014**

Budget bill - Opportunities for scrutiny were being missed by Parliament and committees, and a wider parliamentary process to scrutinise the subject committee reports was needed. However,

LINK could flag this in the context of the National Performance Framework roundtable process and suggest that it is embarrassing for Government to have missed targets; pointing out that there is scope for some change. **Action: Economics Forum discussion**

Lobbying legislation - There was considerable disquiet with UK proposals in which the Scottish civic sector was active including some LINK members (via their UK ends); some politicians feel civic society is 'too big for boots' and not representative (because not elected); inhouse lobbyists on staffs of companies are not covered by the UK Bill, whilst NGOs would be in the direct firing line. A commission chaired by a Lord was now meeting around GB and feeding in to the amendments process; Part II of the UK Bill needs to be dropped or delayed for analysis and consultation. The LINK board meeting supported an active watching brief, considering action as needed and signing up to others' efforts. These concerns, and Government's plans in respect of pre-legislative consultation for the Scottish Bill, would be flagged to the Minister by LINK in November. **Action: LINK's Governance Group keep an eye on the Bills**

Fossil Fuel Divestment - partly a reserved issue, but with Scottish context also. The Board noted that Stop Climate Chaos Scotland was not addressing this and asked staff as a medium level priority to commission a discussion paper on how to go forward, working better together on such issues within the UK. Simon Jones added that this would be important for recruitment of new members. **Action: staff commission discussion paper if time allows**

Events rule at Holyrood - The parliamentary events team indicated that no organisation could book more than 2 meetings per year, which rule could result in LINK's having to book some of its meetings via members in future. However, this had come up when LINK staff were dealing with a different member or parliamentary staff from normal and Andy thought it likely that there would be way round the issue.

6. PLANS AND PROGRESS

6.1 Network plan (mainly for information, Paper 6.2)

The report on collective work was noted; no questions were raised.

6.2 Strategic plan (discussion, inc. wildlife management work, Paper 6.2)

Active Travel - The proposed meeting had not taken place, although several members were engaged in discussions chaired by Sustrans and it was therefore agreed to let this action rest, and to assume that if statements with wider LINK support were needed, these would be facilitated with LINK staff support. **Action: support active NGOs as and when requested**

Dispute between RSPB and RS - The meeting agreed LINK should continue to offer support/brokering alongside Simon Pepper's parallel efforts. The new guidance would be issued to members, with a view to encouraging prevention in future, and a degree of monitoring by all to identify issues upstream would be needed and, if necessary, criticism where 'clear breach' of LINK guidance being made by any members. **Action: December bulletin, keep an eye**

Deer management - Mike Daniels (JMT) had been leading on drafting a full review of the situation and concerns of members over the voluntary code of management, impacts on habitats and land uses. Simon Pepper (for Forest Policy Group - also working on this) had advised LINK to focus on habitats, so LINK's wider report was on the back boiler at this point. RACCE had now invited JMT, SWT and RSPB to give evidence and were interested in NGO land management practices. RACCE planned to produce their report to time with a scheduled review of Government's wild deer strategy, to demonstrate the vulnerability of things and the need for change in strategy, post referendum. The meeting noted that NTS's line was currently more conservative than others' in LINK, though this was being presented with care externally, and suggested that staff make contact with Diarmid Hearn at NTS. Members were in active contact with Roger Burton at SNH

Renewables review meeting - There had been discussion in early 2013 of convenors meeting to review LINK's renewables positioning and Jen would re-assess soon. Beryl reported that she now had for Landscape TF joint responsibility with John Mayhew to finalise their statement on energy and landscape, which had emerged from LINK's workshop of autumn 2012; the meeting noted that

the workshop had helped to re-establish contact and a degree of understanding and trust amongst members, even if differences of view had not been resolved. **Action: Jen**

Services vs. capacity - Deborah and Jen flagged the need for more prioritisation so as to match capacity. In addition, if LINK were to go down the project route more in future, the impact on core staff (fundraising, management and reporting) would need to be taken in to account, and other responsibilities downgraded to free up that time. There could be a staffing capacity issue ahead, which would not be answered simply by increasing a few staff hours here or there, but would need re-examination of roles and remits. **Action: keep under review**

6.3 Evaluation (paper circulated)

Over half of the TFs and Forums had submitted their evaluations of the contribution of their work to LINK's KPIs, looking back over the last 6 months. This was the first time they had formally been asked to assess the qualitative impact of their policy advocacy. Whilst only 55-60% had replied, trustees felt this was a good response rate, esp. when quite a leap was being asked of Convenors in making this type of evaluation; also that the overall picture is that LINK is making progress in pursuing and achieving several of its strategic objectives for policy development and sustainable development advocacy and more. The meeting encouraged staff to be supportive with the reporting process, as well as continuing to be permissive of numbers and nomenclature of active TFs/Forums. Some reduction in detail of questions would be helpful and feedback from those who had responded about improvements which can be made to the pro-forma could be helpful.

In terms of supporting Convenors and TFs more, going forward the meeting agreed to:

- Create a culture in which Deputies know they must report twice a year, if their Convenor is busy, and establish this right across these groups. This will leave Convenors free to lead and not be weighed down by the reporting burden too. Make sure players see the connection between what the TF is doing and how that contributes to the organisation's very strategic objective. A workshop to explore examples from eg Evaluation Support Scotland could help get the ball rolling. And use a targeted section of networking meetings to capture some evaluations, rotating between TFs over the course of a year or more.
- Ensure the TFs see the outcome of their reports to LINK.
- An objective assessment each three years to support these internal evaluations to be commissioned.

Meantime, staff can resist chasing for the missing 20-30% and take a more relaxed approach. And the idea of Convenors-only meetings was not favoured; not all would attend; we want them to attend networking where to some degree this evaluation happens.

Action: report to strategic planning and take forward above proposals

6.4 Horizon scanning

Policy development:

What really is the future for fossil fuels (carbon bubble): Economics Forum agenda?

The people-state relationship, the 'quasi' issue and government control of civic society.

The referendum and being 'on the case'.

Land (reform) debate.

Ecosystem services; our economics project will recognise natural capital.

Wider stakeholder relations:

The pressure for de-regulation, from almost all sides, linked to GDP alternatives: Economics Forum?

Urban audiences caring politically and potential for urban green support/ back urban greenspace.

To what extent is our greater inclusion recently on stakeholder groups etc just a sop to keep us happy as opposed to our views really being taken on board?

Public profile of environmental issues:

What led to the recession and what will get us out of it (quick fixes vs green measures), repetitive messaging and the need for more champions within Government?

Non implementation of legislation: is that will or funding or just not rocking the boat ahead of the referendum?

Action: report to and include at strategic planning

7. LINK MEMBERS & SCOTLAND'S CONSTITUTION

There was discussion around the content and objectives of the 23 January discussion and advance preparation needed. We would include the 'referendum challenge' initiative in mind, commissioning an analysis of the campaigns' replies in advance and developing plans to promote our RC agenda thoroughly in advance of the vote. We would look at how members and LINK can better plan for the initial administrative/employer, fundraising and financial outcomes of a vote of either nature, including implementation anyway of the Scotland Act, presenting optional outcomes in form of a flowchart. Consider management of NGOs and why NGOs should challenge the referendum. We would spend some time on the future of relationships inside UK and EU, how we will cooperate as NGOs, and what of relations with key parts of Governments. The event should target people responsible for running organisations - CEOs, Finance officers and trustees - those with senior management functions. External experts if at all might include Centre for Scottish Governance as well as particular trustees within the LINK network. Consider employing a reporter for the day.

Action: Lloyd, Andy, Jen to take forward

8. AOB

8.1 A big vote of thanks was recorded to Lloyd Austin, standing down after a lot of years' contributing on the board and previously LINK's management team, sometimes as Chair, and also as CO's line manager. Deborah hoped that Lloyd would consider the role of legal (environment and the law) advisor, in the same spirit as Jonny Hughes now sometimes advised on international opportunities.

9. Meetings dates for 2014

16 January - Board and Networking
 23 January - Members' Discussion on the Constitution and Charity Operations in Scotland & UK
 4 February - Evening Reception Holyrood (part of the Scottish Environment Festival programme)
 24 February (eve) - Referendum Challenge DEBATE
 17 April - Board & Networking
 14 August - Board & Networking
 21st October - Board full day discussion
 20 November - Congress
 21 November - Strategic Planning & AGM
 17 December (eve) - Festive Reception