

Draft Minutes of a meeting of the LINK Board held on 24 April 2009, in Perth

Present

President: Helen Zealley
Trustees: John Mayhew (Chair), Deborah Long (Vice-Chair), Dan Barlow, Ian McCall,
Ian Findlay, Mike Robinson
Staff: Jen Anderson (Chief Officer), Andy Myles (Parliamentary Officer)

1. Apologies

Received from Trustees David Downie (Treasurer), Lloyd Austin, Andrew Fairbairn, Eila Macqueen and Jonny Hughes, and from staff Hugh Green (Finance) and Alice Walsh (Development)

2. Minutes of last meeting (23 January 2009) were approved as an accurate record subject to the addition of Mike Robinson's apologies.

3. AGM preparation

JHM reported. There would be two vacancies on the Board caused by Françoise van Buuren's departure and John's retirement from the Board and chair at the AGM.

A call had been circulated for nominations to ensure newcomers and balance in interests. Since this did not usually result in volunteers, approaches were also being made to several reps including NTS and MCS staff. Mike Robinson's meeting with Kate Mavor NTS seemed to indicate their interest in maintaining policy and political activity.

JA would circulate nomination forms to the five trustees who were this year in rotation required to stand down; however it was understood that all were willing to stand again.

Ian McCall was willing with RAS support to take over the chair from June; no other trustees were willing; and the meeting unanimously approved the recommendation, for members, that Ian should succeed John.

Deborah Long and David Downie were willing to continue as Vice Chair and Treasurer respectively, in David's case for just one further year. John would approach several members with finance staff to explore Treasurer opportunities, including FoES, JMT, SNW, SWT, WTS and perhaps NTS.

Helen Zealley had confirmed willingness to stand again and was glad to have been invited. The meeting welcomed this confirmation and noted appreciation of Helen's work.

The AGM would be held at 1700 hours in the AK Bell Library Perth on 25th June, after the Board and Networking meetings. JHM and JA would watch to ensure if possible a quorum of members present and voting.

Actions: JHM, JA

4. Priorities and programme of work

4.1 Political Strategy Report

The meeting were very positive about this first report, felt it would be increasingly valued by trustees, also in their capacities with Scottish or UK charities, by task force convenors and member reps. Overall, trustees saw it as an excellent resource drawing a number of threads together and looking forward, presenting these as a LINK route map. Some linkage to our strategic objectives, through discussions at two of the quarterly networking meetings per year, would be important. There was acknowledgement that LINK cannot achieve across all the headings and all suggested areas of search covered. Andy noted this, indicating that he had tried to capture strategic issues, would continue

to do so, and hoped this would enable the Board and Networking meetings to give a steer on priorities for his own role and Susan's every six months.

The Board agreed:

LINK's Euro work should remain mainly with the Commission though members should be advised to remain alert to the influence of Europe compared with Westminster & Holyrood;

To prioritise suggested review of our EU involvement in the next 6 months; there is scope to do things better though we need to be resource-canny; aim to encourage best practice in eNGO operations; a review of practice and options supported by our discretionary fund perhaps?

Our UK election group should meet soon to prepare our approach to the elections; if election called soon we will need to prepare a quick set of asks and run hustings;

We prepare asks for the Holyrood 2011 elections this summer;

We review our involvement in local council matters for March 2010, and should be aware of the roles of LBAPs, SSN, SOLACE and others as well as CoSLA;

The theme(s) for autumn conferences should be determined once 'asks' are agreed;

We get ahead in our thinking on a sustainable land use strategy, via summer workshop;

We determine leads for other bills such as crofting, housing when/if appropriate;

We are making the right steps in terms of the health agenda; it is definitely relevant to our objectives

Horizon issues (5b in this PSR) are important, but we cannot address all; TFs would be usefully reminded to keep their eye on the priority areas;

Networking meetings should decide if environmental justice is an ask for Holyrood;

Other strategic issues for a watching brief are social enterprise/ social entrepreneurship / social investment fund

Priorities for parliamentary staff for the coming 6 months are the Eu review work, UK election work & discussion with the Links, and the Scottish election asks.

Other points noted in discussion:

SCVO reviewing efficacy of sector manifestos – will share with LINK

Local government – we should encourage CoSLA's efficacy as well as working with other networks; the single transferrable vote will have impact on ability to influence locally; we can provide materials to local groups; SOAs work will provide asks to use with councillors

Housing Bill – consultation due this summer

Value of a Links discussion soon about potential outcomes of the UK elections, shared control, etc. **Action: AM memo to JMH, DL, JA for comment**

4.2 Operating Plan 2008/09 Quarter 4 Report

Good KPI progress noted; the meeting agreed that we should accept that as much as 10% of our membership may not wish to engage but finds benefits in supporting LINK.

The meeting asked that the colour coding be applied more accurately in future.

Extant SSTF discussed, noting the same players still have informal discussions and occasionally follow things up individually or as LINK; no capacity for more.

The lack of reports/forward plans from a couple of task forces was again noted.

Should LINK Board encourage members to regularly review the TF complement against key issues and contexts? Members' right to 'vote with their feet' in selecting where to invest staff-time is key. Regular political strategy reporting should help to inform choices

about network priorities and the annual planning meeting could review our TF complement and structure in relation to the known priorities and opportunities each year.

The value of the OP was agreed - without it a substitute would be needed. At this stage some tasks could be grouped to reduce length. The process is worth review in two years.

4.3 Operating Plan 2009/10 for sign-off

The Plan, work in progress, was approved. The meeting noted the decision to survey for 'evidence' of LINK's impact as a development for good reasons. *Don't quite understand this sentence - could it be reworded?*

5. Financials

5.1 Budget 2008/09 Outturn to 31.03.09

JA reported for Hugh Green. LINK had closed the year in good shape and close to forecast with £40k available in unrestricted funds (after contingency and fixed assets); this was £4k higher than forecast mainly owing to wrongly posted Statutory Maternity Pay. £31k was carried over in restricted funds, mainly marine project funds. 11 of the 13 restricted funds managed that year were now closed. £6.4k remained in discretionary funding, with a possible bid of £500 from Bob Aitken towards sustainable tourism work (tbc): the meeting approved the funding subgroup recommendation for this level of spend.

The meeting agreed to un-designate the £1.5k previously allocated against work on climate good practice.

5.2 Revised Budget Forecast for 2009/10

It was noted that Scottish Government were offering a 10% rise in grant (£44k pa for 09/10 and 10/11), though could only make commitment for two years at this stage.

Downward revisions to the budget of some £10k, made in the wake of an FSG discussion about recession and impacts on members, were approved. The ESG's proposal to freeze salary increments (for staff on over £18k pa) was supported, although the meeting asked that a 1% inflationary increase should be offered to all staff (from 1 October). Salary spend relates mainly to essential costs to which subscription rates are linked; by keeping these down, LINK would be able to hand on lower subscriptions this year. The meeting was aware that the salary decision would have an impact for some staff. Trustees felt it important to manage the risk of 'stretched' member bodies considering leaving LINK by demonstrating that LINK really is doing what it can to share the challenge. The meeting agreed to apply the salary decision to project as well as core staff.

Trustees approved the proposals for subscriptions, noting that any loss of large members would knock us off target, and that any such impacts would need to be absorbed by reliance on reserves.

If the opportunity arose, LINK would indicate to NTS the very small percentage of their income which the subscription to LINK represents. **Action: Staff, JHM**

BBCT's income and subscription required review. **Action: FSG**

5.3 Carbon Accounting

Hugh's spreadsheet for the latter part of 08/09 which provided the template for ongoing monitoring was welcomed for its clear and explicit presentation and trustees were interested to see the savings experienced. The meeting agreed that some development of commuting figures (ie miles covered) by foot, bike and bus and use of these by staff to reach meetings might be of interest. Both the LINK data, and the spreadsheets (entry level carbon accounting) would be publicised to member bodies and perhaps covered in the newsletter and bulletin. The meeting suggested that in doing so, staff should invite examples of good practice from members and make these available internally. This would remove the need for an earlier proposal to commission research on good practice internally (good practice climate emissions project fund to be un-designated). The meeting agreed that LINK should offer to share the system with SCVO. **Action: Staff**

6. Matters arising from last meeting

6.4 For congress the meeting showed a strong preference for a theme of economics & environment, possibly with some treatment of health and wellbeing ('spirit level'). Possible speakers were Jacqueline McGlade (EEA) and Andy Sims. Whilst LINK had focussed before on economics it was urgent and timely to revisit this, taking a serious look at alternative to GDP, and routes available right now in Scotland. The need to challenge SG's rhetoric of sustainable economic growth provided the rationale.

7. AOB

7.1 Co-optee protocols revisited

Staff had asked the Board to revisit the rules and advise if these remained appropriate, as some TFs were minded to co-opt ex-members and eligible bodies. The rules are that only non-eligible bodies may be co-opted to task forces on the basis that eligible bodies should not be given loopholes through which to engage without paying a subscription. The meeting unanimously agreed LINK should firmly hold the line and avoid a drift away from membership by organisations which secure some of the benefits for free. The meeting suggested that LINK advise all such organisations that they should join and by doing so will be stronger in their advocacy and strengthen the network.

The opportunity for TFs to consult occasionally with non members (who are eligible, but choose not to join, have a close involvement in an issue and whose commentary may help to strengthen LINK's position) was noted though this should be exercised carefully with all the above in mind.

7.2 Membership issues

Mike Robinson offered to contact Hugh Raven re Soil Association's rejoining after its year of demission. **Action: Mike**

Ian Findlay would speak to Russell Hampton about BTCV's re-joining. **Action: Ian F**

7.3 RSGS medals

New RSGS medals being launched: Patrick Geddes for Environment, and Shackleton for citizenship and leadership. Mike would liaise with LINK staff to publicise these. **Action: Mike**

8. Dates for LINK meetings 2009

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

22 Oct, Board all-day meeting

19 & 20 Nov, combined Congress & Annual planning