

MINUTES of LINK Board's meeting held on 21 August 2014 in Perth

PRESENT

Trustees Deborah Long (Chair), Helen Todd (Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Acting Treasurer), Beryl Leatherland, Craig Macadam, Charles Dundas, Paul Walton

In attendance Ross Finnie - President

Jen Anderson, Andy Myles, Alice Walsh - Staff

WELCOME, INTROS AND APOLOGIES

Introductions were made round the table.

The meeting welcomed Tim Ambrose, who had been co-opted in July by the Board as a Trustee and to act as Treasurer until this could be formalised by the AGM. Tim succeeded Paul Ritchie who had retired from the Board in the spring. Tim outlined his professional background and his active engagement in the network over a number of years. Tim's Trustee Declarations were made available for Trustees to inspect.

Apologies had been received from Trustees Ian Findlay, Simon Jones, Mandy Orr, Mike Robinson, and from Hugh Green on the staff.

1. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS (Papers circulated by email)

Nourish Scotland - The meeting noted that the Board's instinct, canvassed by email, had been to recommend approval, and that members were responding positively to that, on the whole. A concern had been flagged that Nourish Scotland's constitutional objects did not indicated direct crossover with LINK's and in this technical respect the Board wished to follow precedent (*re: SAGS' application some years earlier*) and to ask Nourish to make the appropriate change in their constitution within a reasonable timeframe. On the basis of such an undertaking, Nourish could be admitted as soon as there was support from two thirds of LINK members.

Action: JA to liaise with Pete Ritchie at Nourish

Geodiversity Forum - Was considering making an application to LINK.

Scotland against Spin - The meeting understood that an application was unlikely.

2. MINUTES OF APRIL MEETING (Paper 2)

These were approved as an accurate record of the discussion.

3. MATTERS ARISING & REPORTS BACK (Paper 3)

3.1 Preparation for the AGM on 28 November

The Board reviewed skills needs noting Beryl's suggestion to aim to have 3 trustees competent per key skills area. Likely areas where levels would drop shortly were equal opportunities and disability. These would be highlighted when encouraging nominations of individuals with a range of relevant skills.

Action: JA circulate invitation to members

The Board approved the proposal to co-opt Mike Robinson and Mandy Orr after the AGM so as to continue to be able to draw on their skills in fundraising, marketing and more. The Board agreed to propose Dave Morris as an Honorary Fellow, following his retirement from RS in September and to mark Dave's long contribution to LINK and to the development of Scotland's very good public access arrangements.

Action: JA finalise preparations

3.2 Advisory roles

The Board concluded an earlier discussion by agreeing to invite Lloyd Austin to act as Legal Governance Advisor in relation to LINK's interest in things environmental. This would formalise the role (advisory, representational) which Lloyd currently sometimes undertook and on occasion might involve his attending a board meeting.

Action: DL to liaise with LWA

3.3 Honorary Fellows

Deborah reported on feedback received from around half of LINK's HFs to LINK's invitation to them to consider how they would like to be involved, and to provide biographies and photos for the website.

Action: DL to remind most other HFs to feed back; PW to talk with Jill Harden.

3.4 Environmental narrative

JA and PW reported that the process was taking time and thought and that there was value in reviving the proposal for a group of LINK players broadly representing the network's interests to agree a short narrative which others in LINK could readily support. This would focus on improving rather than conserving, illustrating the intrinsic value beyond the utilitarian, the public interest, aiming to make the case that, as a community the NGOs (and others) have not managed to make sufficiently. The existing DPF allocation of £800 might cover costs of a workshop to prepare the document though the Board acknowledged that further support could be required within the financial year. ABM and PW would provide a preparatory paper to members ahead of strategic planning. The workshop of 'ten' would be organised for December, with HF input.

Action: PW & ABM draft paper for 31 October; JA arrange workshop

3.5 Strategic liaison

A summary of recent liaison had been circulated.

LLTNPA - HT reported the meeting with LLTNPA had focussed on wild camping on which the Park Board appears to have taken NGO advice, ie to manage the problem and facilities without bylaws. LINK's NPTF would invite Gordon Watson (Dir of Ops) to meet. LINK Board supported the need for the Park and the NGOs to debate the issue, and hoped that RSPB and NTS would be involved in that discussion.

SEPA's James Curran would take up a different role in the Agency once a successor as CEO was appointed.

Government - Charles would work with Lloyd Austin (Governance) to develop a broad agenda for the meeting with Bob McIntosh which was to be rescheduled after the independence referendum.

SLE - Andy's and Phoebe's initial, informal chat with Andrew Midgeley SLE to explore parameters for strategic discussion had been postponed till late August.

NFUS - The meeting revisited the plan to open dialogue, noting the challenge of separating the agenda from the tensions around the cycle of CAP review. The ATF's current review and stocktake made this a good time to meet. Their interest in opening up channels with small farmers and crofters related also. LINK's agricultural vision paper, and economics papers should provide themes for discussion. It was agreed that Ross, Paul, Andy, John Thomson and Diarmid/Vicki should teleconference.

Action: Staff to organise a telecall

Business forums - JA reported this aspiration had been a step too far for staff and network capacity. However, the carbon bubble paper would be suitable content for a forum with the financial sector, and the ETF would consider this in the financial year 2015-16, after the proposed February economics workshop for members. The Board

was supportive of this plan and noted that DPF support might be needed in 2015-16 for the forum.

In terms of other targets for liaison, the post referendum period would require LINK's engagement in whatever processes were established, to pursue environmental outcomes.

European connections- The Board noted the proposal for LINK to write to EEB following the referendum either to seek membership as a Scottish network, or to suggest work to improvements to routes for UK representation on EEB. The draft letters were tabled and approved. It was also agreed to review LINK's ability to engage effectively as a network within other networks at the October board meeting.

Action: ABM to despatch relevant letter; JA paper for October Board

4. CURRENT OPERATIONS

4.1 Progress with strategic objectives (Paper 4.1)

The meeting considered the following points flagged in the report:

a. LINK's impact and (related) robustness of advocacy and negotiations - It was agreed to review this in more detail at the October board meeting.

Action: staff to coordinate prep of a short paper as basis for discussion

b. whether LINK should update its positioning on the range of energy issues - Whilst there was some case for update and development the Board felt that that investment would not resolve areas of difference among members; since LINK was making progress in terms of positioning on marine renewables and via the LTF on landscape and energy, trustees advised that network resources should be applied to areas where LINK can make a difference. This would be reported to members at the network meeting.

c. LINK staff roles in relation to today's/tomorrow's demands - JA recommended a review of demands, needs, and skills. The Board supported this and proposed that the Employment Subgroup help to oversee the review. It should consider total LINK job/function and skills needs, as well as size of staff complement. Timing preferably sooner than later.

Action: JA to plan for an ESG-led review

4.2. Local Links Next Steps (Paper 4.2) - The meeting gave its approval, with a strong message of caution, for the subgroup's proposal that LINK trial a basic matchmaking facility (for local to national contact), whose intentions, as well as its trial nature, should be communicated very clearly at the outset and throughout the trial, and which is complemented by several workshops, hosted or supported by LINK, to bring local and national players together over issues in LINK's portfolio (marine, peatlands, woodlands). JA proposed the trial run from January to December 2015 with a review at winter 2015/16.

Action: JA to draft project plan

4.3 Report on member contact meetings (Paper 4.3) - The interim report on meetings held over the summer was noted and some of the points emerging, were briefly discussed. The note did not cover two very recent contact meetings and a few members still awaited their opportunity. It was agreed therefore to consider a full report at either the October or the January Board meeting, and to make sure that issues already emerging were raised at relevant forums and moments in LINK.

Action: Trustees to complete contact meetings with interested members; report to be finalised; staff to flag emerging issues at relevant forums

4.4 Risk reviewed (Paper 4.4)

The register was discussed and the meeting agreed this should be reviewed twice yearly with key risks (top ten) presented up front so as to become part of LINK's mind-set.

The meeting agreed that trustees need to be familiar with the register in detail, rather than rely on traffic light signposting. However it would be coded and made available for members on the private webpages so that they too are aware.

Specific points were considered as follows:

- Members' policies & carbon footprint: LINK publishes carbon accounts and encourages members to do so; while LINK has not authority to insist to members, it's important to keep reminding them of risk to network reputation of not following good practice.
- TF workload: the Board would take a strong advisory stance with all TFs for *a de minimus* of numbers participating actively (and doing things for the TF) and for every TFC to be supported by a Depute who does reporting and helps set up meetings, leaving the TFC free to chair, plan, and drive things forward.
- Equal Opportunities, Data Protection: BL's offer to research and advise, was welcomed.

Action: BL

- OSCR compliance changes: Staff would check this.

Action: Staff

5. FINANCE, FUNDING AND BUSINESS STRATEGY

5.1 Overview (Paper 5.1)

The Board noted progress against the business strategy which flagged pressures on staff and continuing uncertainties around core funding, as well as some very positive fundraising successes on the project side of LINK's work, and plans by Wildlife Forum and potentially Planning TF involving fundraising for new projects and officers.

Noting the Funding Subgroup's discussion around membership subscriptions the Board decided to propose a rise of 3% for 2015-16; this took account of members' financial situations, LINK's currently reasonable health, but also the broader uncertainties over funding and importance of LINK's membership support to its operations and independence of voice.

The meeting also noted that the review of staffing (see above) would inform budget need ahead and approved the staff proposal to recruit a part-time (up to 14 hours per week) admin support post from late 2014, to ensure adequate basic admin cover for the organisation. This would increase the salary line by £5,000-6,000 per annum. The post would be based in Perth.

Action: Staff recruitment

b. DPF spending proposals for decision (Paper 5.2) – JA outlined some changes to what appeared in Paper 5.2 owing to discussions by the groups, subsequent to the paper being prepared. The DPF currently stood at £9,200 and not £10,000. The actual requests for support were for: approximately £3,000 to run the local Links trial as detailed in the paper; a further £1,000 to develop the carbon bubble paper for publication in line with ETF discussion of giving this optimum impact. The requests for support with LINK's narrative work (for marketing expertise) and with a forum with business (now postponed to next year – see above) were withdrawn. The Board approved the local Links and carbon bubble requests in principle pending detailed bids from the groups involved.

Action: Local Links subgroup & ETF CB commissioning group to circulate detailed bids to Board

c. Outturn for first quarter for reference (Paper 5.3)

The outturn to 30 June, circulated to trustees in July, was briefly discussed. This did not show the £2,500 received for Congress from Crown Estate, or the impact of proposed spend on a new admin support post. LINK was in good health with a forecast outturn of

£25,000 or so in unrestricted reserves at the year end. Tim Ambrose flagged the membership figure of around £93,000 where the difference between a 3% and 5% rise for next year would be small, further justifying a less aggressive rise.

Looking further ahead there was no certainty around other sources of core funding, and the meeting noted that several of the big Trusts were operating cautiously pending outcome of the independence referendum; some were not open for applications from intermediaries. Trusts and Lottery (small grants) would be explored for support with local Links work.

Projects (restricted forecast) were noted and TFs would be reminded that there remained DPF of around £5,000.

Action: JA to email TF Convenors

6. AOB

The meeting recorded a very big vote of thanks to Deborah Long for her service to LINK over the past ten years as a Trustee, as Vice Chair, and particularly in the role of Chair. Deborah's investment had been very good news for LINK - representing the organisation, heading up strategic liaison, overseeing a wide range of governance responsibilities, supporting members and staff, helping to make LINK a stronger partnership. Deborah was presented with a gift of Tiso tokens and a map of the area in Nepal where she was going on sabbatical during October and November.

The meeting noted that Helen Todd would take over as Acting Chair from the end of September, with Simon Jones succeeding her as Acting Vice Chair at that stage.