

LINK meeting with Bridget Campbell, Head of SG Environment and Forestry Directorate, 14 April 2016

Participating

*LINK - Helen Todd Chair, Charles Dundas Vice Chair, Lloyd Austin Governance Convener, Bruce Wilson Economics Vice Convener, Deborah Long Land Convener; Jen Anderson, Daphne Vlastari, Phoebe Cochrane - Staff
SG Environment Directorate - Bridget Campbell & Keith Connal*

Introductions

Intros performed round the table, with LINK players outlining their LINK roles as well as organisational hats.

HT advised officials of LINK's ongoing transition from multiple TFs to fewer priority themes, reflecting integration which members hope Government is also seeking, LINK's intent to connect to social and economic agendas, and in doing less, have better impact. Noted the challenge wrt. transport and agriculture. Reported LINK engagement in Fairer Scotland asking how environment will figure.

BC thought LINK's transition very much in tune with what she is trying to achieve in Government, thanked LINK for its interest in her thoughts at Congress 2015, agreed there are other areas of overlap in the policy agenda which offer opportunity for joining up. Noting LINK's comments on the environmental links into the Fairer Scotland agenda she would identify someone to keep an eye on progress there. She thought LINK's manifesto appropriate and encouraged LINK to focus efforts wrt. integration on others than the Environment Minister.

Rural Affairs Forestry and Environment (RAFE) delivery board and progress

LA sought update on June 2015's discussions of the new RAFE delivery board indicating LINK's interest in integration between the various strategies and plans which set out Government's vision for Scotland and their being measured as outcomes in the national performance framework. LINK supported the latter as a very good tool for management and was engaged in the round table.

BC confirmed the Performance Framework is the spine. Though its centrality varies, progress in integration was coming along well, with an outcomes approach growing, albeit impacted by political priorities. Alison Stafford chairs the Performance Board pulling together Justice, Environment, Health, Regeneration and Active Scotland (among others?). BC felt implementation of the logic of this overarching approach would continue whatever outcome of the election. With priorities varying politically, Fairer Scotland holds top spot just now, hopefully leading to an overarching strategy.

RAFE covers all the Env't, Climate Change & Land Reform portfolio, so is broader than environment. Some of its work is commitment from 5 years ago - not ideal, higher level approach would be better. From recent RESAS work on outcomes and new powers under Smith Commission, there are plans to expand the operational work of Government (eg. on welfare) putting squeeze on all budgets. The plan that BC agrees with the Minister will therefore cover less, with the Directorate moving away from having standing experts in each team/area and towards staff moving from issue to issue according to prioritisation and need in key areas.

BC agreed with LINK's view that there is real potential to exploit scope for integration between Marine Plan, Planning Framework and Land Use strategy in terms of spatial and policy visions of how to manage - making these more powerful. In terms of impacts, LA agreed the LUS needs most work, though felt the NMP needs more clarification, being more of a wish-list at this stage. BC had long felt the LUS needed confirmation of statutory commitment. KC reported close work with colleagues to harmonise thematic strategies also, with the specific example of Scottish Planning Policy.

PC asked what relation there is between Government's vision for the circular economy and its economics strategy. BC referred to efforts to persuade the group of economists who steer strategy of the importance of the circular economy but agreed there was an ambition to revise the strategy.

KC expressed concerns that the time officials spend in providing answers to MSPs' questions has implications for the progress Government can make at the higher level of integration. BC agreed resources are stretched, noted the value of supportive initiative such as SWT's initiative on natural capital, the standing of the circular economy at EU level, the work of LINK's representative on NPF roundtable (DL) in getting more environmental indicators. Ideas have to be sufficiently helpful, she reminded, to bring about different decisions.

Incorporating agriculture, marine, transport

LA noted the challenge of integrating agriculture, eg. with LU outcomes falling outside of planning.

KC reported interests including Scottish Rural Parliament seeing the rural agenda as sufficiently different to merit its own strategy.

BC said she now felt closer to agriculture now and would pursue this in the coming year. Her lead on Land Reform (since January, because Jonathan Price's time committed to the agriculture payments IT issue) is likely to continue and should help with join-up.

She reported closer integration with climate change officials: RAFE is taking a programmatic approach so as to draw in contributors to the CC agenda – peat, waste, agriculture, forestry.

BC supports, in principle, Marine Scotland's being involved in RAFE; MS is now a member of the delivery board, though a problem is that MS functions very operationally and under a lot of challenges.

Picking up on transport, BC said she is able to, and has, taken transport to task; felt the appointment of Liz Ditchburn as incoming Director General (Enterprise, Environment and Innovation Directorate) would be helpful. **BC robustly urged the ENGOs to get more involved in advocating to transport officials too.** BC felt Ministers understand what is needed and the lack of progress from transport is therefore all the more of an issue.

Leaders forum, growing size of RAFE

The recent Battleby event was discussed. BC confirmed this was the leaders group (alias 'advisory forum') in its first manifestation. She felt it had been a quite good start and wished to orchestrate such wider discussion, every 4-6 months, of issues the RAFE delivery board faces. She noted LINK's suggestion that it would help for delegates to see papers a little in advance in future so as to contribute better at events.

BC said the Leaders Forum involves a mix of organisations such as those in LINK and a top tier of statutory organisations and academics. The development of outcomes and priorities is a major achievement in terms of LINK's concerns. These will inform how RAFE prioritises. Pack review has been dealt with, most recs discharged; digital strategy is getting attention; collaborative areas have been identified. What the delivery board achieves is development of a closer way of working between all the relevant bodies. **BC would circulate a paper.** For example: SNH-led work looking at a natural health service presents opportunity; work on broader communications; climate change work; collective work on the Spending Review, so that the process was more nuanced than 'same for all' and resulted in a 1% cut which was better than BC herself had anticipated. She hoped the delivery board would have ministerial support but confirmed it would anyway continue. Non-exec directors are Brian Pack and Linda Hannah: BC noted LINK's suggestion of the addition of a symbolic environmental representative and would pass this on to the Minister.

Wrt. BW's question on how the Scottish Forum on Natural Capital and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Natural Capital Subgroup should report into the delivery board, KC took an action to discuss further with ENGOs. BC observed that the delivery board is not all-encompassing, and really aims to fill the gaps. She hoped there would be a move away from some of the less useful SBS structures and establishment of a structure which attracts appropriate effort to achieve movement.

LA asked if Government had had time to give strategic thought to the numbers of agencies /organisations likely to be involved in RAFE, and the number of overlapping remits – particularly when changes to forestry governance and devolution of the Crown Estate ahead. BC felt that though this was a crowded landscape, there was not so much overlap. The forestry discussion with Keith (later that day) should inform LINK. Ministers were

not keen to invest more time in 'sorting out' structures. There is ministerial support for RAFE and that may have consequences for some of the organisations involved.

Biodiversity 2020 route map

DL asked about intentions for delivery of Scottish biodiversity strategy, referring to recs from Europe, expressing concern about missing links and asking where the lead lay now in Scotland. BC replied that the recent changes were more likely to make delivery happen – she wants to see stronger pressure for delivery, and stronger reporting to Ministers, through the delivery board – therefore via a biodiversity group.

DL noted that there was now a bigger gap in the structure, though time would tell whether or not this was a bad thing. BC reported that SNH was to coordinate, above SNH sat the Management Group and above that the Ministers. BC had been aware that leadership was in question, she expected this to be done by SNH and would advise them thus. As CEO, Ian Jardine has responsibility to coordinate delivery of the 2020 route-map and Pete Rawcliffe has the lead. BC hoped this would be empowering and attractive to SNH.

DL welcomed this confirmation of an SNH lead role and asked about resources. BC replied that SNH has far more resource than the Environment Directorate to do this work and it is central to their area of interest. She had indicated to Ian Jardine the importance of getting biodiversity to the place where climate change now is in the public consciousness. This is about persuading a change in politics and society; however, the involvement of well-known figures in the discussion all helps.

DL and LA asked about plans for the Atlantic Oakwoods project. KC reassured LINK that there was no lack of Government commitment, sums are to be shared, with an intention to take an ENFOR view of the Government resources which should be committed, so as to match-fund the RSPB in order to secure HLF support.

Land Commission

CD noted that behaviour change related also in terms of land reform and proposed Land Rights and Responsibilities statement, and asked what the process would be to setting up the Commission.

BC reported that the same bill team would continue working for her and was seeing the Public Bodies unit regarding steps and timescale; the ambition was to have the SLC established by December. A lot of thought had gone into this and the process ahead would see all parties orchestrated.

Noting LINK members' role in making the case for land rights and responsibilities during passage of the Bill, CD and LA asked what status the draft LRR statement which had formed part of the consultation now had. Though BC was 'unsighted' on this, she was impressed by the bill team's understanding of nuances and therefore not concerned about any potential loss of important progress. She told LINK to expect further opportunities over the draft. **BC would confirm the timetable to LINK.** She had been impressed at the maturity of civic society discussions; society mattered to this debate. CD hoped LINK's contributions had been useful in terms of the inter-relationship of Government structures, eg., wrt. the SLC advising on the LUS.

BC said next steps would include requiring legislation and sorting out what land reform is from among many different and conflicting versions. LINK members observed that clarity from Government about the Commission's objective would be important as contradictions were coming over at this stage. BC said there was a need to build consensus and confirmed that there will be a Government push behind this, moving forward.

Conclusion

BC reiterated her encouragement to LINK and members to interact with other Ministers, MSPs, stakeholders, and to not be put off from that goal. LINK noted that the network has met with other ministers in the past, and this should be a strategic objective. HT observed that if LINK's access to the Cabinet Secretary were improved that would help both the relationship and the mutual aims of Government and LINK in these respects.