

Note of the LINK Board Meeting held on 24 October at the RSGS office in Perth.

Present: Craig Macadam (Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Sam Gardner, Beryl Leatherland, Clare Symonds, Deborah Long (CO), Alice Walsh (DO), Karen Paterson (FAM) for item 3.

1. **Apologies** were received from Charles Dundas, Helen Senn, Paul Walton and Lucy Graham. Vhairi Tollan (AM).

Background papers referred to are on [sharepoint](#).

This meeting followed a morning session on the new corporate strategy.

2. Minutes, Matters and Reports

2.1 Minutes of the August 2019 Board meeting were approved.

2.2. Actions from the last meeting were outlined on Paper B.

The first two would be completed in January.

Deborah updated the Board on the successful outcomes of recruitment for the two new posts of Programme Manager and Development Manager for the Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland.

Out of a strong field, Ian Cowan and Shivali Fifield were offered these posts respectively.

Trustees were asked to update the Skills Audit asap. **Action: Trustees**

3. Financials (Paper F).

3.1 Budget outturn to 31.09.2019 and adjusted 5-year projection. For noting.

Tim reported that the Funding Subgroup had met. The new system for membership subscriptions was working as we hoped, and no issues of unfairness raised by members. We expect c£100k from subscription income this year. The FSG proposed no change to numbers or systems for the next year at least; the intention was to keep it the same for the first 3 years. SNH and Government funding had stayed level – some issues with the administration of it remain and a meeting is ahead with Scottish Government on the prospects for next year. Income is on track, may be £4,500 higher than forecast. On expenditure, nothing unexpected. It was of comfort to know there will be sufficient funds even after contingencies, and be confident of solvency ahead.

In answer to Clare's question about the purpose of the contingency fund and the level of built up reserves, Tim answered that the reserves policy was outlined in the statutory accounts. LINK has built up a surplus over 30 years. In case of a loss of grant we could continue operations, including an orderly run-down. Clare noted that LINK has relatively large reserves in comparison to some members who are struggling, and that this could be seen as hoarding. Tim agreed it was worth thinking about. The substantial grant from Esmée Fairbairn Foundation was for 3 years until 2021, and we need to look forward beyond that, to the 5-year scenario. In general, income in any one year was spent out. This year we were expecting a small deficit. We want to spend money wisely, for Groups to bid for funding to carry out work, and to have the comfort LINK can operate over 5 years. The reserve will be needed if any of the current funders do not renew. Clare agreed with this rationale.

3.2 DPF Update – spend to date and amount remaining for note.

Project managers names would be updated in light of Daphne's departure. There was a balance of c£9400 in the DPF. Bids approved and known potential bids coming forward exceed this amount, just halfway through the year. The FSG discussed what would happen should a good bid come in after the fund was completely allocated, deciding it was not appropriate to keep another pot. LINK has

reminded convenors to let staff know if bids were coming in and advised them to get bids in early for the next financial year.

Sam considered there was an argument for providing a window for bids, in the planning phase of the year. This would remove the discretionary element of it, but might compel Groups to be more strategic. Tim replied that the FSG didn't want to be too rigid, and referring to Clare's previous point about reserves being available for priorities. Craig agreed the benefit in having a planning phase of the year, and to take the approach that if there is a good plan LINK can use reserves. We would not want to completely close off the possibility of unplanned work.

There was discussion around giving groups a budget at the planning phase of the year, to reinforce the need for planning then, requesting their plans and their requests of the project fund. This was not generally agreed, though it was agreed that LINK needed to sharpen Group's forward planning and this would start at December's Strategic Planning day.

4. Operations (Paper C)

Staffing and Board updates: Vhairi Tollan started work on 9 September, has hit the ground running, been very effective and working really well with Edinburgh team. Calum Langdale has left. He worked full time for 2 weeks to complete the Species Champions review. Funding is needed to secure that post. An application is with Scottish Power Foundation, outcome expected by the end of October. Calum's post was funded until the end of March 2020. We would not recruit until we had heard from SPF. Staff were covering immediate SC enquiries. Secondment was being explored.

The FFSN campaign coordinator post (Miriam Ross) ends early January. Planning for the next stage was happening (see Paper D, FFSN Longer term). The Board agreed as an interim measure to fund the post until the end of March with salary save from the Advocacy Manager post. If LINK was to get into the mindset of developing and embedding campaigns the staff team would require campaigns capacity, as was coming through from the corporate strategy discussions. The Board will need to make a good case for this and get member support. The role would need careful consideration going forward. There was discussion of the effectiveness of the Species Champions initiative. Participating members value it. Over 50 of the Champions have signed up to support FFSN. Calum had been asked to consider how to widen it out to support advocacy priorities. **Action: Deborah to circulate Calum's report around the Board.**

Trustees: There was one space open for elected at the AGM. The call would go to members. Trustees were asked to revisit the skills audit to identify gaps, and to advise Deborah asap if planning to stand down.

Christmas holidays: This was approved.

The proposed Annual Increment: was approved.

Fidra membership application: Trustees supported the application and would recommend approval to members.

Keep Scotland Beautiful would be putting a proposal to its Board to apply to LINK.

Craig flagged that Fisheries Management Scotland (Alan Wells) enquired about membership.

LINK Communications, Branding, website. Progressing as reported.

Congress. There was good feedback on both parts of it. The note of the evening will be a blog. The event reached over 250,000 on social media.

Funding update. The SEFF event was attended by 53 people, hosted by Hugh Raven as chair of the Environmental Funders Network. The film [This is Scotland](#) is on LINK's Youtube channel, and was submitted to the charity film awards. Deborah was setting up a meeting with EFN, SNH, NHLF to take things forward, and that also builds on a workshop LINK and SNH ran for NLHF.

Political Strategy report. Paper D. Daphne prepared this up to mid July, Vhairi completed it. Trustees were asked to note the FFSN update. Miriam and Vhairi and the campaign group have looked at the next phase. Until there is more clarity on Brexit the focus on the first 2 asks. There is more work to do on the 3rd ask, for which the campaign group needs to be revitalised, and relating it to the CBD and the COP.

There has been no formal analysis of the UK Environment Bill yet. Lloyd noted there is more about an environmental improvement plan in the UK Bill than features in SG's plans, and a stronger biodiversity duty.

The analysis of the Programme for Government will go to members and groups, including some more assessment of why it did not include commitment to an Environment Act – there are 11 bills included so why not, to what extent are we being fobbed off by Brexit uncertainty. Deborah will ask Vhairi to include. Beryl was pleased hilltracks was mentioned, and Craig that there was mention of what could be a national ecological network.

5. Governance (Paper E)

President search. Individuals are being approached.

AGM preparation: Honorary Fellow suggestions to put forward for the AGM were discussed Jen Anderson and Jonny Hughes have already been asked, so will go forward. Of the names suggested, the Board agreed to put forward Joyce McMillan, Andrew Bachell, Richard Luxmore, Barbara Young and David Miller.

2020 Board meeting dates and themes: Dates (below) will be circulated by outlook invitation. Themes were suggested at a previous meeting to consider progress towards strategic objectives, could involve a presentation from a critical friend, look at progress to date, targets and actions.

The theme for January would be the forward plan, finance and budget planning.

7. Meeting ahead

Strategic Planning, AGM and Festive Reception – Thursday 12 December.

2020 Board meetings:

30 January, morning, WTS office Edinburgh.

23 April, morning venue tbc

20 August, morning, venue tbc

22 October, all date, venue tbc.

6 May, Scottish Environment Evening Reception: Nature based solutions to change.