

Minute of the LINK Board meeting held on 30 January 2020 at the WTS office, Edinburgh.

Attending: Charles Dundas (Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Paul Walton, Beryl Leatherland, Mary Scott, Craig Macadam (Vice-Chair) via Zoom, Helen Senn, via Zoom, Lucy Graham, Kevin Lelland.

Apologies: Clare Symonds, Sam Gardner.

Charles welcomed Mary and Kevin to their first Board meeting. Introductions followed. Mary's background is in hospitality and financial services. Kevin's is in fundraising, marketing, organisational development work, currently supporting funding and comms teams at JMT. Charles would shortly be on secondment leading the Borders Forest Trust for 18 months from March. He will continue to chair the Board.

1. Minutes, Matters and Reports.

1.1 Minutes of October 2019 meeting were approved. Proposed by Tim, seconded by Beryl.

1.2 Actions and Matters Arising. Actions were as noted. FSG will report to the April Board. Calum Langdale's report on the Species Champions initiative's options for the future was circulated to trustees before Christmas. A new SC coordinator Juliet Caldwell is in post until May 2021, to the end of the current Parliamentary term. Deborah proposed looking at broadening the initiative post election.

Charles noted thanks to Clare Symonds for continuing as a trustee.

Vhairi Tollan's briefing on the Programme for Govt, which followed the Autumn Political Strategy Report, included comment on why there was no Environment Act in the Programme. Both are available on the members part of the website.

2. Budget and Financials (Paper C).

This meeting was the first of the set of themed Board meetings and the subject was finances. The meeting would agree the budget for 2020-21, and look at forward budgets in particular pressures from 2022 onwards.

Tim outlined the big picture first. LINK is currently financially healthy, due to the Esmée Fairbairn grant of £250k over 3 years from July 2018 to June 2021. We need to look ahead to when it ends, use that funding carefully and as best we can. We can have no expectation that it will be continued. The grant from the William Grant Foundation of £20k will end in June. We have good relationships with the Foundation, and good feedback from its trustees, but as yet no assurance it will continue. Essentially LINK is budgeting to spend the EFF grant, and then retrench. Even so in last two years of the 5 year projection (to 2024-25) we anticipate £40k deficits. We will have to retrench further unless we get new funding in place. We are planning now to take appropriate steps to meet it.

Current year: to end March 2020 the forecast is near break even for unrestricted, and a £15k transfer from restricted. Income is slightly up, spend slightly down. There is nothing requiring the Boards attention for this year. There allocation of 5k for the Thought Space will be carried forward. £83k is being spent on salaries and Discretionary Project Fund. The DPF has historically been circa £8-10k per year. With the EFF grant, this fund was increased to £38k, for groups to spend energetically. This year it will be spent out, without fierce competition for more, on a lot of worthwhile projects.

The line for rental income will be removed from April. Beryl suggested member bodies, who have free use of it, be encouraged to make a donation for each use.

On unrestricted income Membership subscriptions is the most important of all the single income lines. The new system is now embedded, which the Board does not propose to change for 2020-21 and possibly 2021-22. This line is sensitive to membership level and shifts in their income.

Paul noted that SNH's budget is likely to be cut, and is an important source for LINK. Buglife had a letter warning them of a cut. The LINK grant has been maintained level for years, although with no year on year certainty, as with the SGovt component. There is a meeting ahead (10 Feb) to discuss the future of the SGovt component. The LINK grant is not significant in SG/SNH terms. LINK will keep them in mind of what it delivers for them as a network. Paul considered that the understanding of officials of eNGOs delivery for nature is low, with some taking credit for the work delivered by RSPB and others. He asked if there is a role for setting out how eNGOs are delivering for them on biodiversity. This allies to LINK's wider funding advocacy, where there is capacity problem.

Charles noted the increase in travel and subsistence line, a measure of LINK's increased activity and engagement.

Discretionary Project Fund. The year had started with £38k for groups to bid for. The fund is currently at £9k with a bid for £8k from the Wildlife Group for an animation of the National Ecological Network on hold. Any surplus will be carried forward into next year's allocation. The Board was not forcing timebound spend. Regarding indications of bids for 2020-21, groups were in the process of work planning during February.

Tim recommended the budget for 2020-21 to the Board. Deborah asked for some discussion of the DPF, noting that funding for the Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign post salary has been moved from it until the end of March 2021, whether this can be extended, at the same hours, to May 2021, to cover this Parliamentary term. Paul noted that with the COPs in 2020 there will be calls on the DPF. Kevin asked if there way to understand how the finances join up to delivery of the next strategy. Lucy agreed. Beryl noted that the DPF application form makes the link to strategic objectives clearer, and should focus minds, and encourage groups to look for other sources too. Trustees supported keeping the FFSN post. Should more funding be available for it, from WWF or other sources, the funding could be reallocated to the DPF. All the DPF bids this year were for important strategic work. It also relates to the EFF grant and its purpose, to ensure that environmental protections post Brexit are at least as good as before it. There was the potential to top up the DPF with the forecast £6k underspend for 2019-20, though agreed it would be prudent to wait until the situation with other grants for 2020-21 was clearer. The checks and balances were ongoing. Tim noted that a cautious approach in previous years has allowed surpluses to accumulate, which can be spent. The 2020-21 budget was approved.

Looking ahead, trustees were asked to think of new sources of funding, and what other possible trusts and giving bodies are out there. Funding is needed for marine, species champions and core.

Action: Trustees were encouraged to contact Alice with ideas and useful contacts.

Tim noted it is difficult to make predictions 5 years ahead. There is some uncertainty for 2021, and even more uncertainty beyond that. The assumption is that public sector grants remains level; that the WGF grant is renewed; and there is no extension of EFF beyond July 2021. Staffing will reduce after 2021. The DPF will reduce, and there will be increasing use of reserves. It is unlikely the need for LINK will decrease in the medium term, and that demand for services will continue and possibly increase, including campaigns which raise our issues up the agenda, and available resources decrease. Trustees were asked for ideas that the staff team can work up to look at options beyond 2022.

Finance workshop:

Specific funding sources to consider:

- Adopt a species, at a level of c£1k per species by individuals and businesses.
- An increase in membership fees.
- Individual donations eg Go Fund Me.
- Full Cost Recovery – how stringent are we? Not enough, but it is the starting principle.
- EFF is thinking about core funding organisations.

Actions to consider:

1. Show funders we are addressing a social need or trend in society – Glocalisation. The world view and information to inform action at the local level. How LINK can support.
2. Paul referred to discussion with Caroline Clark of NLHF who commented on the sector baulking at a people based approach, that there are no funds for biodiversity itself. There is potential LINK and its bodies to join up with others on social welfare type issues on a manageable basis. She has offered a workshop on this to look at examples.
3. Jim Hume, former MP chairs a rural mental health network could be approached.
4. It's not about slicing up the environmental funding already available, it's about increasing our share of it.
5. Package up a core activities as projects, can be easier to get funding.
6. 2021 is the beginning of the un decade of ecosystem restoration. We need to see this as the beginning of a decade. The idea that Scotland can become a world leader in nature based solutions to climate change. LINK is in a unique position to deliver on this, no one else is, a sales pitch to funders. Where we locate ourselves.
7. Trustees are willing to help at funder meetings.
8. Important to retain relationship with funders even after the funding has ended.
9. Kevin asked what other issues the sector struggles with. JMT is thinking about inclusion, an issue for the entire sector. JMT sponsored an event on inclusion in the mountains. Are there examples? We very quickly hit capacity issues. LINK works best when there is some capacity in the member bodies, it has limits in making the weather.
10. There are huge audiences we are not making traction with on our issues. Once you get them on board they are interested, eg the JMT award.

Action: Deborah will bring a paper back to the Board. We will organise a workshop with Caroline Clark.

3. Operations (Paper D)

New staff and the extended contracts discussed above were noted.

Trustees were asked to approve the Strategic Plan, circulated. This will be underpinned by group work plans being developed this quarter. Deborah is helping each group complete the plans begun at December's strategic planning meeting. The operational plan should be ready by the April Board meeting. There will be a summary (a draft was tabled). Trustees had some suggestions for amendments, which they would email asap. Deborah would then circulate the final version, with a 4 day turnaround. **Action:** Deborah, trustees

Paul noted the risk in certain instances that LINK can diminish as well as amplify the sector's voice, eg the new SBS structures where Scottish Government allocated LINK one space, and 8 for the landowning sector. **Action:** This point will be added to the risk register.

Advocacy update: FFSN campaign. The workshop was held on 16 January, on nature recovery targets, and was being written up.

Membership. Keep Scotland Beautiful was still interested in membership. The application has not yet been submitted. Once it has the Board will go through the normal process of checking governance issues before recommending it to the membership. There have been some historic issues which Deborah considered should not be revisited. There is their administration of the Scottish Climate Fund to consider with regard to income. Deborah sought the Board's view on inclusion of funds that are disbursed. In this case it wouldn't be double counting between members. Charles happy to discount it. Tim agreed. LINK operates an honour system, they are clear about their situation. We can discount money that is just disbursed. There are similarities with project funding. All members money for projects is restricted. In this instance it is not KSB that is doing the projects. Lucy noted there is a parallel with SWT's Living Landscape project, and potential for SWT and RSPB to reduce their subscriptions. Buglife receives other funding from SWT. SWT also gives out other grants to other recipients that are not member bodies. Kevin in a previous trusteeship at Firstport made that made that distinction when applying for other funds. Tim reiterated that if there is double counting, members are free to write and explain the case. LINK is very receptive to reasonable arguments, so if there is any particular argument, raise it. Some bodies do not have a separate Scottish income. We are not asking for undue precision, income is self-declared. The Board agreed to the principle.

Communications: brand, website. Staff have had their training, with some small issues to be improved on the website by the developer. Deborah was looking for volunteers to help with the LINK blog. Kevin volunteered. Kevin has also offered to help out with the LINK media forum, which has offered to provide some support to the Groups with their press work. All the work areas would be invited to write a piece. Deborah explained that the Group/Subgroup structure is now flattened out, all work areas are now called groups. **Action:** Deborah.

Funding. Much of this was covered in earlier discussions. There was no feedback from funders as to why recent bids were unsuccessful.

5. Governance (Paper F)

The risk register was reviewed and updated by some trustees. Paul's earlier point would be added. There was discussion of the rise of some risks over time, these may low within a short period, though greater over the longer term. Trustees approved it, pending the changes discussed.

Action: update and circulate the risk register

Presidential search. To note. The search group would reconvene. Meantime we will approach the most appropriate Fellow for discrete tasks. There is no constitutional requirement to fill the post.

Action: Search Group

Board meeting themes. The next one on 23 April will be on Sustainable Scotland.

6. AOB

CNPA senior staff have requested a Board to Board meeting. Trustees approved. Tim reported that the Audit Commission is investigating the justification for funding of the Cairngorm funicular. Tim would like to be part of that delegation.

Action: Deborah

ELUK proposal on diversity. Deborah sought the Board's view on a proposal from WCL CO to submit a bid to NLHF to support a set of employed posts in each LINK to act as a launchpad for young

enthusiastic people to enter the profession, creating opportunities for ethnic minorities, and organising citizen assembly events. Discussion covered the benefits of a new member of staff if it contributes to LINK's strategic aims; and the potential of such a post to address gaps in voice and reaching new sections of society. The early career aspect could be useful, but engaging all ethnic minorities in the environment less so. If going ahead, Scotland would need its own oversight. There were other organisations that should be in partnership. Care would be needed on comms, eg Lake District NP was heavily criticised on social media for raising the issue of user diversity. Craig thought a joint project was an interesting idea to have a joint project, but this may not be it. Paul agreed.

Action: Deborah will explore further and keep trustees posted.

Beryl raised the frequency of trustee and member interviews, given we have new trustees and new members. The next round of member / trustee meetings should be considered for 2021.

7. Next Board meeting: 23 April. Venue TBC.

Action points summary

Issue	Actions	Timing
New Funding sources for LINK	Trustees contact Alice with ideas and useful contacts	Ongoing
	Deborah write up ideas and bring paper back to Board	By April Board
Network improve social inclusion dimension in funding bids	Deborah organise workshop with Caroline Clark	During 2020.
LINK Blogs	Deborah to invite Groups to write one each	ongoing
Strategic Plan sign off	Trustees to email changes. Trustees to sign off	February
Risk Register amendments	Karen to edit, circulate to Trustees	February
President search	Deborah reconvene Subgroup	By June Board meeting.
Organise Board to Board meeting with CNPA	Deborah	By Summer.
ELUK Diversity Bid	Deborah keep trustees posted	Ongoing