



**LINK Board Meeting minutes**  
**Thursday 23 April 2020 1000 - 1300**

Online via zoom

*Chair: Charles Dundas*

Attending: Charles Dundas Chair, Tim Ambrose Treasurer, Craig Macadam Vice-Chair, Sam Gardner, Beryl Leatherland, Helen Senn, Paul Walton, Kevin Lelland. Staff: Deborah Long CO, Alice Walsh DO, Karen Paterson (for financial items), Vhairi Tollan (for PSR item).

Welcome and Apologies:

Apologies were received from Lucy Graham, Clare Symonds and Mary Scott.

Charles welcomed everyone to this zoom meeting. Papers were circulated by email.

Minutes, Matters and Reports

1.1 Minutes of January 2020 meeting (Paper A) – For approval

These were provisionally approved subject to trustees coming back with any amendments by midday 24 April. **ACTION: trustees to send any amendments to DL by midday 24 April.**

1.2 Actions and Matters Arising (Paper B) – To note

Deborah noted some actions were postponed due to Covid, and the others had been completed, those that were in the past. The funding subgroup had completed theirs. The trustee skills audit should have been completed to include Kevin's and Mary's skills. **ACTION: To revisit skills audit in October as planned.**

1020 Budget and Financials (Paper C)

1.3 Budget outturn to 31.03.2020 and Adjusted 5-year Projection (paper Ci) - To note

1.4 DPF Update – Spend to 31.03.2020 and 2020 – 2021 DPF – To note

1.5 Covid-19 budget scenarios (Paper Cii) – Action required

Several papers. Tim noted nothing surprising in the outturn paper 2.1. Karen joined for this item. Projections had been discussed by the FSG 2 weeks ago. One can make assumptions on member income and grants, and although the furloughing scheme will affect salaries, it was not by much, so the salary line was not changed. Member subscription income feeds through to the bottom line. We don't know how badly members will be affected. It was good that LINK reserves would enable us to survive this crisis. Karen is getting the figures for the auditors now. An additional £10k was received from P&G council towards covid.

Paper Ci is this year's budget. Paper Cii looks forward and demonstrates where assumptions start to kick in.

**Income modelling:** Helen asked what have the short term impacts on LINK been so far? Nothing yet, but looking forward from what we know of members situations, this demonstrates some potential impact on LINK.



Charles noted the modelling we have been doing for the next 5 years is for a severe case, it may not come to that, but it's good to prepare for when conditions improve. Deborah ran through points in the cover note. Having completed the member survey (see powerpoint summary), we know members are being badly hit, so we modelled 50% decline in subscriptions this year, 30% for next and 20% the year after. We are proposing to keep an eye on this changing situation but would like Board approval of the principles behind the modelling. Ordinarily, we would plan to send out invoices in May/June based on last years accounts. We anticipate that some members will not be able to afford normal subs, which is why we have prepared this provision. Before we send around the invoices, we propose to accompany them with a note offering the option of decreased subscription fees this year in discussion with eh staff team. Any problems will be brought via FSG to the Board. Future years will also include the Covid year reductions in members incomes. Sam commented that the principle seems sensible and will have a long tail to it. It is hard to judge the merit of % of reductions and to judge what is more sensible. Personally speaking it would make sense to apply the worst case scenario. He also suggested that the note should reference the importance of being able to build back; the movement needs LINK to sustain the movement, to resurge after it, not cut ourselves off at the knees. Helen asked if there is an issue on timing for invoicing this year. She suggested there may be merit in delaying the invoices as members may feel more able to pay later in the year. Some organisations have pay freezes at the moment, and may lift them later. For those orgs that depend on visitor income, or other activities, if they have a pay freeze it will get stuck at a high level. Got to judge this well, or speak to people beforehand on when they want to receive the invoice. Deborah confirmed that this had been discussed at FSG, on how far to move it into the future. Karen thought we could write in early June to advise people the invoice will be coming. We can delay as long as a year according to our memo and articles. Deborah suggested issuing an understanding letter to say what we are proposing, then issue the invoice later. Kevin asked for clarification on the LINK approach: is it to hold on to members, or to revenue. The challenge is being consistent across those. Otherwise we could create a self fulfilling prophecy in that members will not want to pay any more. Paul asked if we are getting sufficient responsive contact from members on this? And is it right that all of our projections forward, assume a 2019 level of funding from SG and SNH? Deborah confirmed that SG has confirmed, in a call with Alice, that it will support us this year, and so will SNH. Members are being responsive. Deborah sends a weekly covid update to member CEOs, and when she calls members they are picking up. She was in touch with Hebridean, and Ramblers with queries on the back of their responses to the member survey to gain a good level of understanding of where members are. Paul said this approach was being well received at RSPBs approach. On Kevin's point, we want both. Primary objective is maintaining the membership. Tim confirmed that we have the fee structure that tries to be fair, and proportionate, therefore if the income changes the amount we receive has to change. We see FSG proposal as a slightly more formal extension of what we would do for any member

who is struggling over a year. If it's a pay off between one or the other, it's retention.

Kevin agreed that is the right approach. How far are we willing to go, what tools will we put in place eg payment holidays? There must be a limit. Tim suggested we defer identifying that limit until the situation arises. We want to be flexible. Entirely agree that primary purpose is to keep the members. We can bring this back to future board meetings, but recommended not making any rigid rules yet. It was useful to agree the principles, this is more important than short term money.

Approach was approved.

**On expenditure**, things have moved on slightly on furloughing. The approach proposed by DL and agreed by ESG has been to furlough all staff apart from Karen, Vhairi and Deborah, dropping D's hours slightly. Phoebe has dropped by one day, and ERCS staff will remain. Will be reviewed after 3 weeks, and will bring staff back as needed. Savings are roughly £7k per month, for reallocation later in the year.

Sam, while being conscious of staff on the call, asked if everyone was taking it in their stride? Deborah confirmed that yes, there were no shocks to anyone. Staff have twice a week tea breaks for staff via zoom which will continue. Staff are being very supportive and understanding of the situation.

Helen asked if the furlough was with or without a top up to 100%. Deborah confirmed it was with top up. Helen commented this was great.

Board approval given. **ACTION:** Staff team to continue working with the Employment subgroup to develop the furlough approach and will continue to call on them as situation changes.

**5 year adjusted budget for Covid;** C2 2.111. with modelling discussed, as a finger in the air, to show the impact on the bottom line. Karen detailed that this looked at the operating costs for 12 months and noted that by year 3 we would have eaten into the 12 month operating costs in reserve. By then we would have thought of other reductions to save money. Deborah noted that is the year the EFF support will have ended. The staff Team are in discussion with EFF, and they are very supportive of maintaining support for the Links across the UK. That affects the bottom line more than the membership changes. We do need to remember that grants and trusts get their money from the markets too.

Karen noted that from 2021-22, we will drop salary costs from cutting staff when EFF grant ends.

Tim noted that none of the individual numbers is important in itself. It is the story they tell, which is that we are a going concern and which is very comforting. We should all be extremely grateful for the level of reserves over the years. LINK is unlikely to fall suddenly into a disastrous financial position.

Board was happy to note this.

**DPF.** Paper C 2.2. recalling discussion in January Board about DPF level this year at £15,000. Now started a new round of bids. One is expected from the Governance Group, one from the Food and Farming Group and one from the Land Use Group. The GG one would be less than expected due to a WWF grant, so a decision would need to be turned around quickly subject to the usual scrutiny via FSG. **ACTION:** FSG to proceed with DPF approval process as usual.

## 1120 Operations (Paper D)

There are several papers.

First was an **update on Covid 19** as described. Members are furloughing staff. LINK staff noticing the impact in the groups and expecting it to continue. Deborah is catching up with funders on the back of the survey and also met SNH and NHLF this week. SNH are loosening deadlines, and NHLF have an emergency fund which few of our members are accessing. They are expecting to launch another fund in the autumn for existing beneficiaries. EFF is also looking at emergency funding (later in the meeting noted an offer for £41.5k to LINK). WGF are being supportive, and reassessing their priorities at the moment, subject to market the Foundation's income has plummeted.

Power point shared on the screen which Deborah spoke to: Deborah has shared this with SNH and NHLF this week, and will share with SGovt tomorrow. The main outcome is that the crunch for members is 6 months down the line, after funding for furlough ends, and with income that would normally be generated in Spring and Summer absent. Take up of NHLF and Third Sector Resilience fund is very low – D will explore the barriers to it with relevant members. The powerpoint is backed up by a larger survey report, which will be shared with CEOs and other stakeholders, and posted on the members website.

Of member staff, Deborah estimated that about 70-90% are being furloughed. Helen raised specific point relates to some organisations. For example, RZSS is furloughing about 50% of staff, they cannot furlough more because they have essential roles, so this is not delivering for them as an org. Income from the gate stopped overnight She doesn't know if others are in a similar situation: the zoo sector has been lobbying about this with zoos across the UK and also in relation to visitor centres.

Deborah detailed a call with other links the previous day: WCL talking to the Treasury, and have suggested putting in place a scheme for charities, where staff members can still work, but can claim for salaries. Deborah confirmed that this was happening at uk level and will keep trustees up to speed.

Craig gave the example of Buglife, which has not furloughed anyone, but have got 10 volunteers using people in other jobs on furlough. Desk studies, literature reviews. A good idea.

Kevin noted the report was excellent benchmarking and will share with his team. Thank you. He asked if there is an ask on the back of it? Deborah confirmed that the 6 month down the line ask is the key one and we, as a sector, would not want govt to lose sight of it.

Discussion Deborah has had with SNH and NLHF and tomorrow's meeting with govt, will highlight the crunch point, and desire to see schemes in Scotland atm such as Helen raised, and later some long term assistance so we are not losing charities.

Kevin asked if we could identify how much funds are required and when they are needed: a mapping exercise. Deborah confirmed additional question would start this exercise

Paul noted that this is a really impressive bit of work done very quickly. Were you going to ask them to support the back to work scheme that WCL describing? A very interesting scheme for a lot of our members. Deborah confirmed she will ask them if they are aware of the issue, and that the btw scheme would help. Paul suggested arming yourself with some detail, from the briefing that WCL wrote. If the scheme is barnetised, scotland should be

able to benefit. D will broach it. Helen, that could be a lifesaver. RZSS are looking at really substantial losses and if able to get support for staff who are working, it would make a real difference.

**Political Strategy report:** Paper E. Vhairi joined the meeting to speak to it. Main thing is how much of an uncertain time it has been over last 6 months. Brexit and now Covid, resulting in shifting timelines at Govt. She outlined a number of areas where we have made improvement. Lot of discussions with officials and RC about the need for EG & P are going well, into the continuity bill, although timescale is being shifted. CE Bill, Animals and Welfare Bill, and Ag all paused. Going forward, Govt's main priorities are Ag bill, and the NPF4 response to the call for ideas. Within LINK, main priorities are trying to progress where we can on governance and FFSN, meeting officials, and of course the Green recovery working with the Economics group on our vision for that. Invited questions.

Beryl: thinks we just have to look for opportunities. With a lot being pushed into next year, trying to be positive and looking for opportunities where we can, changes to the way we live and work, and big concern is change in attitude towards env regs, need to be very alert. Keep engaging and communicating.

Vhairi replied that she hoped to see new areas of work emerging.

Sam: thanks for a very comprehensive and easy to read eprot. Interested in seeing the green recovery paper from Economic Group. He commented on the climate commission, which is doing similar work, challenging to get from headlines to the specifics, and contrast them with arguments others are making to shore up their interests.

Sam asked on manifestos and elections update: both labour and Tories are pushing their consultation time line? Are we are feeding into that? He wonders what extent we are thinking of future campaigns, and an effective covid shaped campaign for the manifesto. And when do we think it legit to push for a restart on the policy discussions put on hold, and engage in env regulation points.

Vhairi replied that she is having almost weekly chats with all the link POs to share intel and impressions of where govt and Msps are. Still very much listening to conversations, spads and officials behind the scenes.

What are officials doing? Being re-deployed.

Sam appreciated it's hard to call. We are always very nice in our sector, but plenty of other sectors are already on the front foot in terms of special pleading. Not suggesting we do anything different, but sense check that we are not losing ground, and prepare for the long term.

Paul: the CBD update relates to this. He had a late meeting with Des Thomson to get an update on the Edin declaration. It's been a tough decision for govt, cab sec is really nervous, massive sensitivity on it, but it will now be progressing it on a new timescale. Discussions are ongoing with a wide variety of sub national govts. Current plan is for discussions in May, webinars in June, and still going for an Edinburgh Declaration for a COP 15 in first half of 2021. RC asking us not to publicise it much, it will be going up on the website. Paul had replied that he would put it on the board agenda and asked for a quid quo pro. DT would be willing to give LINK observer status, so he has asked Matthew B provisionally. Flavour is from cab sec is very much about green recovery and resilience. In terms of what Sam said, indications are that the kind of broad messaging progress we got from the pfg and the es, he doesn't think it is dead yet. He feels we should give govt time to do the right thing. He has



to get back to Des and MB quickly though. Are we happy to engage with the cCBD process without making it a campaigning issue?

Vhairi: suppose on observer status that would be good for us to be involved, and potentially would provide us with more opportunity of getting our asks raised by the FM when it does go ahead. Board agreed.

Picking up on Sam's point: Vhairi replied that the manifesto process, will be putting in a response to Labour on climate, they are not asking for nature, aligned with WWF. Annie Wells, Cons, is open to ideas. VT aims to start the drafting of the manifesto from mid May, and approach Annie W again then. And on future campaign and the new situation, no clear talks yet. The Economics group paper will be key with the green recovery front and centre. Agree we need to be sensitive to it in the manifesto.

Economic recovery advisory group announced by F Hyslop. It will be economists on that panel, we will write to her asking for someone with env expertise on it. James Curran could oblige if asked. See where we get to there. The EFW ctte, have a call for evidence, we will put a response in based on results of the survey to the submission.

Sam: admitted he was no longer so involved as when in wwf but asked if the quid pro quo was that if we don't make noise we don't get a seat at the table. We might have had plans: we can still do behind the scenes advocacy, just not public.

Kevin: approach outlined makes sense, and happy with conversation between Sam and Paul. Also thinking about public opinion and whether we can get some evidence of what they would like to see in a recovery, and other sectors also looking for a green recovery. Position ourselves more widely with others, like tourism.

Paul: helpful to have had Board conversation on CBD question. The offer did come from DT, so maybe reasons in CBD minutiae processes why it won't work. However, if it gives us a strategic in to the biodiversity process in Scotland it would be useful, to avoid the block from civil servants. On point of not being stuck in our silo: on where the international development ngos are going: Ben McPherson when ID minister, made a commitment for a policy coherence group for SD in the Scottish govt. This is what we need - a biodiversity ministerial champion. Ben has now moved to finance, his replacement said in mid March it would continue. Paul agreed with Kevin: anything we can do to unsilo our interest, the better.

Vhairi met with the Green Alliance a few months ago and will be contributing to a wiki initiated by Lewis Rider Jones.

Craig asked with the Edinburgh process, what is the output? Are we gagged from commenting when it comes out? What is Des's offer?

Paul replied to say they will be progressing on a new timescale. What they don't want from us is the soft advocacy we would have done if it was happening as was planned, with weekend of events etc. **ACTION: Edinburgh process and Declaration outputs will be (circulated) by Paul.** Craig agrees. Q of whether it is a real offer or not, but reasonable deal. Agreed.

Vhairi will keep all updated about the manifesto.

**FFSN campaign:** decided to be cautious over next few weeks with a focus on celebrating nature. Miriam is updating supporters this pm. Azra as media advisor, had been speaking to Herald who were keen on an op ed piece with the campaign. But we will defer to late May if it's the right time to start speaking publicly. Herald looking for other content atm.



**New member application from KSB.** Deborah referred Board to the details in the paper and reiterated that there is no reason from a Governance perspective why they cannot join. Next step is recommendation from the Board to members for a 2/3 approval. KSHB are aware the decision could be delayed in current circumstances. Staff have been in touch with some members about this, MCS, FoES, and APRS, are in general support. The hope is that the new KSB CEO marks a change in direction and tone. Economics group keen to have their input.

Sam: thanks for the due diligence and providing clear steer. What is the nature of their relationship with SGovt? What is the extent that they will engage in enthusiastic campaigning that holds govt to account? He is conscious they have a service delivery relationship with different partners. AW noted that they have supported the CE and FFSN campaign.

Craig thinks they will engage. He worked with their policy lead while at Scottish Water and he thinks she will make sure they will engage. He also noted we have other members who don't sign up to things, so they would be no different.

Deborah asked if anyone knew Barry Fisher the new CEO? No.

Helen thinks she agrees, as long as they are not part of a surge of members that are mostly funded by SG.

Deborah noted that the only other possibility that might happen is with Paths for All, in a similar position. However that is unlikely. Helen noted that as long as we are comfortable with that.

Paul: if there is no good reason, we have to be open. There is a grey area between service and delivery partner for govt. In that context that would mitigate in favour of govt funded orgs.

Happy to make a board recommendation to accept them. Board agreed.

**ACTION:** staff team to circulate Board recommendation on KSB members application around membership for their approval.

**Communications:** to note. V touched on this earlier with FFSN update. Yesterday we launched an instagram account with #natureconnects. And we won the Charity Film Awards for our film, this is Scotland, very unexpectedly, so expect to see some coverage in the media on that.

**Funding update:** The one update since the papers were written is that we are now going to furlough Esther on recommendation of Marine Steering Group. We also have an offer of £5k from WWF for keeping her on. Without further funding for the post beyond September, we won't be able to deliver Sea Scotland 2021. Board noted this.

**ERCS is applying for status as a SCIO from next Jan.** They seek a service agreement with LINK for a limited time. Board should consider this and decide whether to support or not. Thoughts invited.



Tim asked if Deborah and Karen were happy with, and had capacity for the proposal?. Karen's time would be paid for and Deborah's might be paid for or given as in kind support.

Charles proposed we should agree. All approved.

**LINK Board meeting date and themes.** August is likely to be online meeting. Hopefully by October we can meet around a table. Strong voice for August, and Effective network in October.

### **Workshop: A sustainable Scotland.**

Deborah shared a google doc on screen which trustees inputted into and discussed. She was keen to get trustees ideas of what LINK action should be in the next 4 years, the key milestones towards the desired outcomes of the strategy. **ACTION: DL to write up workshop outcomes.**

1300 AOB and meeting end

Kevin - Within network, some staff are being redeployed, eg at JMT and can help with desk top research. **ACTION: staff to consider how offer of network staff capacity for desk based tasks on the table could be used if needed.**

AW updated the Board on the EFF emergency funding offer of £41.5k. Trustees welcomed this news.

Shared narrative with SNH – was there any update. No, nothing so far. A Doodle poll has been circulated to set up the next LINK SNH Board: Board. **ACTION: trustees to fill in LINK SNH Board : Board doodle poll.** <https://doodle.com/poll/rrkgt28g2mcmbvyx>

## **2. Meetings**

- NEXT BOARD 20 August: online
- Wednesday 6 May: Scottish Environment Evening Reception: Nature based solutions to change. Postponed to 2021
- Thursday 14 May: Spring networking – postponed
- Board meeting: 22 October (full day) Perth TBC.
- AGM, Strategic planning and festive reception: Edinburgh. 9 December.