

Minutes of a meeting of the Scottish Environment LINK Board held on 24 January 2008, Perth

Present

Trustees: John Mayhew (Chair), Lloyd Austin, David Downie (Treasurer), Andrew Fairbairn, Jonny Hughes, Deborah Long (Vice-Chair), Ian McCall, Mike Robinson
Staff: Jen Anderson, Hugh Green, Eilidh Macpherson, Alice Walsh

Introductions

On behalf of trustees, John Mayhew welcomed Mike Robinson, newly co-opted to the Board. Mike is Head of Development with Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, has previous experience in LINK (through RSPB) as founder and convenor of the fundraising task force, and is actively involved as trustee of other organisations, and currently chairs the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland network.

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Dan Barlow, Francoise van Buuren, Ian Findlay and Eila Macqueen.

2. Minutes of the last meeting (28 October 2007)

These were approved as an accurate record.

3. Strategic planning issues

3.1 Operational planning

The main concern emerging from discussions of autumn 2007 amongst staff, trustees and management consultant Tom Thomson, was to ensure feasible workload for the organisation, including its small staff, through formal appraisal of network aspirations against available resources and more rigorous prioritisation. This was particularly important given LINK's devolved structure and relatively permissive ethos. The Board approved the proposal that LINK (including all groups and projects) extend its annual planning horizon to 18 months, establish an annual resource planning meeting in the current cycle (late autumn) to prepare an annual operational plan for consultation with members and task force convenors, and approval at the January Board alongside the draft budget for the next financial year. There would be opportunity to revise the operational plan during the year to take account of new or unforeseen developments, with significant new proposals coming to the Board. The changes would facilitate decision-making on priority work and underpin LINK's reporting requirements as a charity. If members wish to pursue what is deemed 'non priority' for LINK there are opportunities for collaboration outwith LINK.

3.2 Key performance indicators, evaluation and forward strategy

The Board agreed that a subgroup should meet a.s.a.p. to develop KPIs for the current corporate strategy, involving Jonny Hughes, Lloyd Austin, Deborah Long, Andy Fairbairn, John Mayhew and Andy Dorin (SNH), possibly Jacqui MacDowell (Evaluation Support Scotland). KPIs for LINK should include one on funding and resourcability, as well as one on ongoing evaluation. JHM would draft a starter paper and contact A Dorin about dates for Jen to circulate. **Action: JHM**

The meeting discussed the need for assessment of the objectives and progress against strategy by convenors. The meeting agreed to invite convenors in future to report to the Board at either one of the two six-monthly convenor networking meetings; where necessary, the discussions could be followed up by one-to-one telephone conversations with convenors to clarify; it was agreed that a quorum of trustees should be present for these meetings in future. **Action: JHM, Trustees**

The Board decided to start work a.s.a.p. in 2008, with Bruce Britton if possible, on developing LINK's corporate strategy for the period April 2009 to March 2012. As the current strategy was still valid at many levels this should be more of a refresher than a completely new start; the Board was keen that the process included the setting of KPIs for the period and consultation with members and task forces. Staff anticipated that funding could be secured to meet at least some of the costs. The budget for 08/09 included a degree of as yet unspecified project work, of which this would form one package. **Action: JA**

3.3 Future of LINK parliamentary roles

In the wake of Jane Herbstritt's request that LINK consider her returning to work on a part-time basis, the Board was asked to consider various options for the parliamentary service in future to inform further discussion by the Employment subgroup. Trustees were agreed that members would not want to see the service reduced: despite growth of capacity across the network the LINK role remained important to all members and should continue to offer coordination, monitoring of opportunities, advocacy and profile-building. The impact of a minority administration may be greater workload with more focus on committees, inquiries and debates as well as the need to make connection with non-environmental agendas such as health or jobs. The instinct of Officers in the post was that whilst legislative priorities will always dictate part of the workload, a significant part of the work should involve contact with task forces on non-legislative areas and capacity to respond to smaller organisations looking for advice. The Board agreed that the Employment subgroup should explore options for maintaining the service at more-or-less current capacity, considering the impacts of job-share on the service, provision for overlap in a job-share scenario, also looking at balancing current roles between two staff, and the knock-on effect of all options on the Administrative Officer. The preference was for the ESG to bring thinking back to the Board before consulting more widely with the network. **Action: JA, DD, ESG**

4. Work programme

4.1 Proposed 'Single Environmental and Rural Service' ('SEARS')

The meeting learned that an announcement by the First Minister was expected on 30.1.08 and agreed to either release the LINK statement just ahead of this or to coordinate responses to the official announcement using the LINK statement as a basis. There was broad support for the draft statement which Deborah had prepared; Ian McCall would draft a sentence to include on LINK's continuing concern about the outdoor recreation remit, and Deborah would revise the introduction to assert that any change must result in improvement to environmental governance. The importance of maintaining SNH's statutory advisory role (and independent advice) to be highlighted too. The meeting noted that LINK would need to respond to specific issues in

subsequent debate. Lloyd, Deborah and Jonny would coordinate on tactics for response and comment.

Action: DL, LWA, JH

4.2 Update on parliamentary work and plans

The report by Eilidh and good work on various fronts was noted, including the excellent NIMAs publication coordinated by Calum Duncan. Eilidh clarified that possible climate actions included a proposal for LINK/SCCS townhall events on the SG's climate change bill consultation. Jen hoped the parliamentary forum might be able to clarify parameters of work on calling parties to account before the resource planning meeting in mid Feb.

Mike Robinson observed that continuing discussion between SCCS and LINK on working together would be important: John agreed that this was essential and so encouraged Mike and other SCCS reps to keep in touch.

4.3 Climate and behaviour change agenda

In the wake of 2007's discussions the Board considered next steps. On the basis of shortage of staff capacity there were real concerns with Jen's proposal that the Board encourage Heads of Admin, and PR and Comms officers, to coordinate a gameplan for internal and public-facing action or encourage discussion at the CEO or Chair level. The meeting agreed to set up a Subgroup involving trustees, as well as some of the existing 2020 group, appropriate representation of smaller organisations within LINK, climate TF and SCCS representation, to work out an appropriate programme, sophisticated in its selection of priorities for LINK as opposed to other players in the debate, and sensitive to the network's capacity. A priority would be to re-name the work more appropriately. John would coordinate this as a priority, with Jen's support, also updating member bodies on progress with this area of work. Hugh suggested that the conclusions might best be framed as a project, with project management (eg by LINK/SCCS/new player) for the Board to consider as part of the ongoing planning process.

Action: JHM, JA

It was agreed to continue to rely on Simon Pepper if available, at a modest level of investment, to maintain the dialogue with Government on our behalf.

Action: JA

Resource planning on 14 February would note that a refined proposal was pending.

Action: 14 February group

5. Financial issues

5.1 Budget outturn to 31.12.07, forecast to year end

Hugh reported that £30,000 was still anticipated as the available reserve at the year end. Subscription income would be lower than estimated given movement between bands by some members; however all subscription income was now in; Sustrans had moved to band 1. Miscellaneous income was high: this was where accountants advised that refunded maternity pay should be shown. He reported on the status of restricted projects including those using discretionary project funds, which were being encouraged to spend by the financial year end. The meeting noted the situation and thanked Hugh for his work.

5.2 VAT situation

The Board was pleased by the outcome of investigations into VAT (re: subscription income and grants) which confirmed that LINK did not yet need to register for VAT and thanked Hugh and the FSG for their work. It was agreed that LINK should monitor the level of sponsorship income as this grows, eg for SEW and similar initiatives where there is clear benefit to funders such as advertising, was agreed. Hugh would copy the correspondence to member reps for information.

Action: FSG watching brief

5.3 Honorarium for the Chair

John had now left NTS employment and was acting as LINK Chair on a voluntary basis. He had therefore raised the issue of whether it might be possible for LINK to pay its Chair a modest honorarium, which would require a change to the Memorandum and Articles. He noted that the Board must consider what was best for LINK irrespective of his own personal circumstances; his instinct was that the task of identifying individuals in a position to give up the required time for the role of chair in future would be made easier by an ability to remunerate. He understood that the Board should consider affordability as well as precedents and sought their view. John then withdrew from the meeting and Deborah chaired the ensuing discussion which considered experience of other organisations, the legal framework for remuneration of any sort, as well as precedents.

The conclusion was that LINK would benefit from the ability to remunerate the positions of president and chair, that legal advice was needed on how to make provision so as to ensure a clear link with roles and responsibilities, and that LINK should incorporate important restrictions on applicability to prevent possible misuse. The Board agreed that remuneration should not be available where a member body fields the individual and that each case must be considered on its merits. Colin Liddell's advice would be sought on appropriate wording of the relevant additions to LINK's Memorandum and Articles to provide for remuneration and on a remuneration agreement. Pre-consultation would be carried out with members so as to address questions in time to take the final proposal to the AGM on 26 June. The remits for both roles would be revisited in conjunction with this.

Action: JA, DD

5.4 Fresh claims on our Discretionary Project Fund

The Board approved the Funding subgroup's recommendation in favour of three further bids to the 2007/08 fund, subject to receipt of completed proformas. John declared an interest as a former member of the Landscape Task Force. As LINK's delegate to the EEB, Jonny Hughes suggested discretionary funding would be appropriate for research into LINK's options for influencing environmental policy at EU level. Jonny would complete and submit a bid to the Funding subgroup.

Action: JA, JH, Helen M

5.5 Budget Scenario, Draft budget 08/09, subscriptions proposal 08/09

Hugh presented the update 5-year budget scenario and accompanying draft budget for 2008/09. Staff had based the draft on the latest forecast for 2007/08 and known needs for 2008/09. The draft was supported by detailed notes: in general a 3% inflationary rise had been applied to headings

unless otherwise specified. The Board noted that projects were covered in the budget in terms of a generic heading and estimate figure until further discussions within LINK clarified the extent of this part of the work; also that there was as yet no provision for any additional cost in terms of parliamentary work; and that the 'salary contingency' included might be needed for other parts of the core workload. The Board supported the draft budget as proposed and approved the recommendation by staff that, pending a response to LINK's EFF bid, none of the funds balance available at 31 March should be allocated, thus providing a reserve on which to draw if core fundraising proved challenging.

The Board approved the schedule of subscription bands and rates for 2008/09 presented in the light of Funding subgroup discussions of 2007 about fairness to organisations with smaller budgets. The schedule was in line with LINK's goal of raising 50% of essential costs from subscription income by 2011 and was based on a prudent assessment of decisions which associate members could make on whether to continue as full members or leave LINK in 2008 when the category closed. The schedule would be taken to the AGM for approval. The meeting noted that all associate members would shortly receive a reminder about the arrangements for closing the category. **Action: HG, JA**

5.6 Independent Accountants' Report for 2007-08

Subject to checks with LINK's main funders about their requirements, the Board approved the Funding subgroup's recommendation, based on accountants Morris and Young's recent advice, that, due to the size of LINK's turnover and latest company audit laws, the organisation should opt for an annual independent accountants' report rather than the full audit of previous years. The independent accountants' report was a rigorous year-end financial process, less time-consuming than a full audit, in line with LINK's constitutional requirements and would mean a faster accounts 'close', less staff workload at year-end and potentially a smaller accountants' bill. **Action: AW**

Afternote: HG subsequently discovered from scrutiny of OSCR guidance that LINK in fact continues to require a full audit, given current income level.

6. Matters arising

6.1 President search

The meeting heard a situation report and noted that the searchgroup would reconvene shortly, to agree, amongst other things, to meet Fred Dinning. **Action: JA**

6.2 Approaches to potential 'Friends'

The meeting approved the suggestion to approach a few individuals at a time, to avoid creating too broad an expectation. **Action: AW**

6.3 Ministerial liaison

The meeting noted that, having now raised the proposal with Government that LINK might withdraw from the G5 series once the new series of meetings was established, John would prefer not to have to commit time to both series. It was agreed to wait until the series was established (one or two meetings) before taking any action. **Action: JHM**

6.4 Contact with SNH

The meeting also discussed current contact with SNH over work programme, policy areas and ministerial dialogue. The view of trustees was that it is in the interests of LINK and SNH that the network maintains independence in terms of wider dialogue with government and decision-makers, albeit that LINK would continue to encourage contact between task force convenors and their policy counterparts in the Agency.

6.5 Diversity strategy – Subgroup report

The Board approved the proposal to invite BEN to run a training event for LINK member body staff and LINK staff, in the autumn – for which it was agreed to collect names during the summer. BEN can facilitate links between organisations and black and ethnic minorities and members were being encouraged by staff now to keep BEN informed of their relevant events, sites, projects. Whether or not fees were payable should be checked by the organisations involved. **Action: Staff**

The Subgroup recognised that BEN only dealt with one aspect of diversity, but felt there was no easy solution to making better links with other minorities / sectors of the population; the BEN training would offer generic ideas; otherwise the challenge should be addressed by the next strategic plan.

7. Any other business

7.1 Funds from dormant charities

Jen flagged up the current debate over allocation of funds from dormant charities. The meeting noted that several bodies within LINK were lobbying for a wider allocation than to youth work (as originally proposed) and that SEFF was looking at the issue.

7.2 Links Devolution Seminar in October 2008

Trustee involvement was encouraged. Trustees to respond to Jen's email. **Action: Trustees**

7.3 Board meetings schedule

The meeting noted that Board meetings were increasingly long, despite efforts to focus and contain discussion. There was general acceptance of the need for greater investment of time and it was agreed that the April and October meetings should run from 10am-4pm, to include one in-depth discussion each, whilst the January and June meetings would continue as morning-only, to be followed by the Convenor/Board Networking at which a quorum of trustees would be important.

Action: Trustees, JA

8. Dates of core LINK Meetings in 2008

Febr. 14	Resource use planning, morning, Perth
March 27	Half-year Review and Forward Planning meeting, all day, Perth
April 24	Board meeting, 10am-4pm, Perth
June 26	Board meeting, morning, Perth
	Board and Convenors' Networking, afternoon, Perth
	AGM, timing tbc, optional speaker/supper/presentation tbc, Perth

Oct 23 Board meeting, 10am-4pm, Perth
Oct 30 Annual Review and Forward Planning meeting, all day
Nov tbc Annual resource use planning meeting
Nov tbc Congress
Dec 17 (tbc) Festive Reception, evening, Edinburgh

Draft/JA, January 2008
With comments by JHM 20 February 2008