

Minutes of a Meeting of the LINK Board held on 22 October 2009, in Perth

PRESENT

Trustees: Ian McCall (Chair), Deborah Long (Vice Chair), David Downie (Treasurer), Andrew Fairbairn, Vicky Junik, Ian Findlay, Mike Robinson, Lloyd Austin, Jonny Hughes

Staff: Jen Anderson (Chief Officer), Andy Myles (Parliamentary Officer), Alice Walsh (Development Officer), Hugh Green (Finance Officer, part of meeting)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from trustees Dan Barlow and Eila Macqueen and from Helen Zealley (President).

2. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING (25 JUNE)

The June meeting had not been quorate; minutes had been circulated in draft; these were now homologated. The minutes were also approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Succession planning

Paul Ritchie (SWT) had not yet made a decision re treasuring but had asked to be kept informed and Jen would forward Board papers to him. The meeting agreed that Paul would be welcome to attend meetings between now and the AGM in June as an observer.

3.2 Wider Board membership

Ian proposed the Board consider skills needs, table of rotation, and gaps / balance at the January meeting.

3.3 Skills review

Several trustees were reminded to respond to Jen's August circulation.

3.3 Review of membership & affiliation

The meeting considered the report on a meeting of several trustees and staff proposing a category of affiliation for bodies not eligible for membership but with aims in common with LINK members and often greater resources than the eNGOs; the quasi NGO sector was a good example.

The meeting supported the proposal to develop, launch and actively promote the new category of *corporate sponsor* advising that the proposal should include profile. They noted that the consultancy sector and some private sector bodies could be interested and advised that staff explore with Colin Liddell whether to update LINK's M&A and at what point. The meeting agreed that sufficient effort should be invested in preparing the product and organising a launch event. The Board also noted and endorsed the recommendation that trustees in future should consider all proposals to co-opt ineligible organisations to task forces and workstreams in LINK.

Actions: AW & AM to take advice and bring final proposal & list to January Board

3.4 Commemorating Fred Edwards

The subgroup of LINK-ers and other friends or colleagues of Fred's was preparing to launch the initiative in May 2010 and it was hoped also establish the trust which would take its work forward. The Board noted the plans having earlier approved £1,000 from LINK discretionary funding, likely to be matched by funding from Capability Scotland.

4. FINANCIALS

4.1 Budget outturn

Hugh Green reported finances in good shape.

Under income £5000 had been secured from Craignish Trust for work on sustainable land use (SLU) which would replace discretionary funds allocated previously as well as support further SLU work. The SEW sponsorship forecast had been reduced to £7000 given the challenge of attracting support and staff costs & overheads would not all be met from sponsorship. The meeting agreed that although SEW may need to be underwritten by £7000 this year, the policy should be to continue to seek as much income as possible to the project each year, and to try to cover all / some of the staff time and overheads involved. Subscription income was healthy and, with RZSS rejoining, would go beyond the KPI. The fundraising forecast included marine monies now sought from Tubney and EFF for phase 4 of the project. Income also included £2500 (part year) from hosting Community Energy Scotland at the Perth office from early November 2009. Staff confirmed that insurance arrangements had been updated and CES staff informed of security-insurance issues at the office.

Under expenditure the budget had been revised (mainly down) twice with several small revisions to various lines. Reserves were high at £162,000 though mainly because of unspent marine project funding. The deficit to date was likely to spend out as projects went forward and transfers between un- and restricted headings were made. The likely outcome of SEW this year had been noted (above).

The Board accepted and approved the ESG's recommendation to reinstate incremental awards to staff for the year 2009/10 and keep to the salaries structure proposed by Bob Brown (independent consultant) in 2007.

4.2 Fundraising update

An update had been circulated reporting on all efforts to attract funds for LINK projects and core work, to date. This was noted.

4.3.1 FSG recommendations for discretionary project spend

FSG final recommendations for spend of the 2009/10 fund were approved by the meeting. The Board had previously supported the FSG's advice to freeze spend.

The final payments to be made were for:

- further funding of £300 towards design of the SOAs report;
- funding of £5000 for SEW (in addition to existing allocation);
- funding of £500 for the proposed seminar with LBAP officers.

The Craignish funds (see 4.1 above) would replace the SLU allocation.

4.3.2 FSG recommendation and query on subscriptions for 2010-11

Aware that subscription income might well go beyond the KPI (ie., 50% of essential spend, which currently represents around 35% of total unrestricted spend) the FSG planned to re-analyse subscription policy for the years beyond 2011. The Board shared FSG concern that an increase in subscription rates for the coming year could be

inappropriate as some member bodies were struggling. However, uncertainty over LINK's future funding (esp. Scottish Government and SNH, which could make no commitment to funding from 2011) was reason to be cautious. The view of the meeting was to try to retain members, not to go far beyond the current KPI and either to freeze rates again or only increase these slightly; the Board was against any reduction in subscriptions for the signal this might give members and other funders. The FSG would have proposals ready for January so that members could be advised of the 2010-11 rates in the first quarter of 2010.

4.4 Co-op Bank resolution

The Board approved as good practice the proposal that LINK open a new deposit account with Co-op Bank to spread reserves; Triodos can guarantee up to 100,000 Euros but this leaves LINK vulnerable, especially when project income is newly in.

4.5 Perspectives on support for the third sector

Mike Robinson reported on DInC (Dynamic & Inclusive Communities Forum) discussion towards defining community infrastructure so as to usefully fund its development to the tune of £20m over a 5 year period. 10 projects were to be invited in due course and another 10 determined by DInC, and the Forum would set the guidelines.

Mike advised that strong voices were needed from the parts of the sector which SCVO does not so readily represent, including environment, and invited proposals to take to the Forum. Ideas suggested were (i) administering and organising the management of volunteers and (ii) provision of fundraising advice on consultancy. The meeting also noted that LINK might usefully contact SG, SCVO and BLF to express concern that the environment part of the sector misses out on such support.

Actions: Trustees to consider and contact Mike; Mike to circulate a wider call; LINK to write to SCVO, SG and BLF

5. OPERATIONS

5.1 KPI report to October 2009

JA spoke to the report circulated, covering half of the year. No concerns were noted. The potential to 'exceed' the KPI on income had been noted above. There was brief discussion of an *ad hoc* approach to some of LINK's policy work, concluding that *ad hoc* groupings to take action forward on new issues are a reasonable mechanism.

5.2 OP Operating Plan 2009/10 Q2 report

The following discussion points were noted in relation to the circulated report.

Engage NGO heads in events that have agendas, rather than for own sake; and bear in mind the other conduits to these people, eg via LINK trustees (to their line managers), member body staff to their own organisations' councils, etc.

Engagement across LINK has diminished; this may be partly recession-driven; there may be other factors. Probably for an amber coding in our reports rather than red.

Was our lack of action following up SEA, or absence of a FWTF, issues for concern?

Behaviour change remains an issue; communication on this should be integrated with the communications members anyway have to their memberships. Is SCCS better placed given its remit to push for political space and communicate with the public? Or should LINK and members take the opportunity to be seen as natural leader / players? The Board felt there is an opportunity, even if eNGOs are excluded from climate challenge funding, to help create political space. Some members keen to have guidance on how to take action. Funding is needed.

Surveys to confirm LINK effectiveness – difficult given LINK as collective; danger of beating ourselves up; party conferences etc indicate that members of all parties know about LINK; the bulk of councillors and party members don't but that is not our failure; survey monkey could be useful as tool; questions would need to be formulated to encourage respondents to focus on LINK as a network rather than on the work of particular members who are well-known to respondents; these should also be reportable and standardised to same positions in organisations.

Actions :

Behaviour change – LINK Congress to identify possible sources of funding. Mike Robinson and Andy Myles would meet to discuss shortly.

Environmental policy – JA to discuss with relevant trustees.

Surveying – Staff consider further in relation to LINK needs and re reports to funders.

5.3 Political Strategy Report

AM spoke to his shorter-than-previous report, including its review of our engagement with Europe. Points noted regarding his highlighted questions for trustees, were:

Follow-up on legislation we (and others) have secured, especially where there is insufficient implementation: Whether we can address this kind of area as a network depends on whether members are willing to not do other things. Bear in mind that non-implementation can be addressed sectorally by TFs. We should consider to what extent we can encourage Parliament itself to review that implementation. Larger members with a range of policy expertise within their staff are probably key to this work, though capacity is an issue for them too, and LINK should encourage all members to monitor. Limited legislative plans of Government for 2010-11 gives opportunity for post-legislative inquiries and to lobby Committee members to press for these too. We could identify key issues where monitoring is required; identify someone who can do this monitoring; identify whether we need to pay a consultant/PhD to cover gaps. **Action: AM to circulate request to members and TFs for top 5 issues worthy of inquiry, then circulate the top five**

Government agencies called to have their annual reports scrutinised is another area. This and the above consideration are issues for LINK manifesto. **Action: AM**

Trustees cautioned against further investment in collaboration with other Links for UK elections, other than staying in touch; the meeting noted that a WCL parliamentary post (under consideration) would be helpful to this kind of work; trustees felt there is scope for partnership initiatives with UK NGOs in terms of keeping people aware of UK vs. devolved issues.

Trustees supported the proposals for work at the European level though noted this would be resource dependent, with a need to pick our/our members top issues and parliamentary staff advice on any others. The TF route is one of the best ways of engaging with EU though not one that many TFs often consider. Was there an issue of consistency? **Action: JA and AM to discuss mechanism for coordination if needed.**

AM hoped staff in the organisations would read the section on EU and that the network could up its game this way in relation to EU legislation. The Board felt this was an important area which LINK has neglected to a great extent. **Action: AM to circulate PSR with Board commentary to the network shortly.**

5.3 (A) Draft Manifesto plans

AM had circulated his proposals for a spinal manifesto document for use in local, Scottish, UK and Eu elections. This was discussed briefly. The manifesto was an opportunity to address some of the 'gaps' such as transport and energy issues, esp where there is a larger organisation with policy expertise, which can take a lead on LINK's behalf. AM

indicated that the manifesto text was to be drafted up by such policy experts and then circulated for sign-up. **Action: AM**

5.4 Policy and internal structures

The Board discussed the paper presented by senior staff suggesting that LINK structures for policy work be kept under more regular review. A report on discussion and conclusions is appended to these minutes.

5.5 Structure / agenda for November forward planning meeting

Ian and staff would refine this in the light of the discussion above.

6. WIDER ISSUES

6.1 Civic society role – SCVO paper

Stephen Maxwell SCVO had contacted LINK and other intermediaries with a proposal for broad voluntary sector action to address a range of economic, social and environmental challenges. His paper had been circulated to the Board. Whilst trustees agreed with some of the concerns outlined they felt LINK and its member bodies could not sign up to all the issues addressed, or to the action proposed; the agenda outlined was appropriate for a fully funded civic forum inclusive of all the sectors; the Board believed there was a need for this kind of forum as a space for national debate from which decisions / resolutions can be taken up by Parliament and Government.

Action: JA to respond to SCVO along these lines

6.2 Carbon Accounting

SCVO had developed the carbon accounting approach which Hugh Green had drawn up on the back of Jolin Warren's guidance for LINK members. SCVO were encountering similar issues of capacity and sign-up across the sector and looking for ways of encouraging members to trial carbon accounting. Because it was clear that not all LINK bodies had embarked on this work yet, the Board agreed to encourage action, by re-circulating the carbon accounting spreadsheet, with Board endorsement and outlining its value to the wider sector.

Action: IM / Staff

7. AOB

None raised.

8. DATES FOR LINK BOARD MEETINGS 2010

21 January (morning) linked to Networking (afternoon)

22 April (morning) linked to Networking (afternoon)

24 June (morning) linked to Networking (afternoon), and to the AGM (early evening)

21 October (day meeting)

LINK's internal structures for policy work, reviewed by the Board, October 2009

Staff paper on concerns with suggestions for reform, circulated to Board

Discussion points

LINK at work is a coalition of the willing (generally!) - Respect its organic approach
 Note meeting fatigue / need for new mechanisms for today's issues / fewer meetings
 Single-issue focus potentially tars us with the 'silo' brush

Gaps - Where there are gaps in LINK's policy coverage, members may be working on these individually or in other coalitions and the network should be able to communicate that and point interested parties in the right directions. Or members may have made decisions not to. There is a role for LINK Board in flagging such gaps, and even giving rallying calls to members on the pitfalls of ignoring some of these areas.

Don't underestimate tactics such as mini-campaigns to sharpen delivery of aims

Value the longer-standing groups (eg Bio TF, Agri TF) which often generate shorter term tasks/products and have undoubted value as information forums; be clearer about which are simply for information and discussion, and where/when there is joint work/product involved, a clear timescale and dedicated member resources for that purpose

Aim of fewer meetings also points to fewer forums (eg land use policy, habitats and species), perhaps with task groups coming and going underneath these, which generate the workplan for members and staff - which the Board overviews for stresses / resources / control

Be conscious of the part which our manifesto-preparation plays: with less resource across the member bodies, this offers opportunity for members not active on an issue to sign up to statements/positions on these

Conclusions

Ensure **well managed strategic discussion each year amongst the network** to drive process of **review of opportunities and priorities**

identify **gaps**, some flagged by Board, others emerging in discussion

consider whether/ how these can be addressed eg via groups of members not working under LINK but nonetheless chasing the issues

agree **best vehicles** (forum, task group)

clarify **tactics** (watchdog, submissions, reports, events) and **timescales**

As part of annual round of core meetings and twice a year (Nov/April):

Encourage **heads of policy, forum & task group reps, main reps** to take part

Communicate within and beyond LINK how any 'gaps' are being covered elsewhere in the movement (than via LINK)

Treat as task groups in future some workstreams such as (at 2009/10) WNE, SOAs – where there is momentum round an issue with well defined task and timescales

Support the trend to shorter-lived task groups, more focussed, ephemeral TFs, managed with project discipline

Encourage a distinction of groups into either forums for information-exchange and discussion (non-reporting) **or task groups** actively pursuing tasks in set timescale (reporting to & representing LINK). Note that some would stem from the forums, others emerge from separate discussions; expect both.