



Minutes of LINK Board meeting held 24 August 2017 at LINK in Perth

Present

Trustees: Helen Todd (Chair), Charles Dundas (Vice Chair), Beryl Leatherland, Sam Gardner, Lucy Graham, Paul Walton, Craig Macadam, Ian Findlay

Staff in attendance: Jen Anderson (CO), Alice Walsh (DO), Daphne Vlastari (AO), Karen Paterson

1. Apologies

Received from Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), who was in hospital. The meeting wished Tim well.

2.1 Minuting of Board meetings

The meeting reviewed the style of Board minutes, agreeing that these should explain the context of decisions therefore might need to run to length on occasion, and that minutes should only name contributors where named individuals were introducing an item. **Action: Staff**

2.2 Minutes of last meeting (April)

Helen invited members to approve the draft minute of the April meeting which had been revised to omit names of trustees not specifically introducing items. The draft minute was approved, subject to a change from 'Scottish' to 'World' in the reference to the Forum on Natural Capital. **Action: Staff**

3. Financials

3.1 Outturn to end July and updated 5-year forecast

Karen reported that finances were on track. The William Grant Foundation award was allocated over 4 financial years to July 2021 per Tim's advice, with £10,000 into the current year's budget. LINK had unexpectedly received a donation of over £2,000 from Mamas and Papas. Some savings had been made and membership income was higher than budgeted owing to moves up through bands and despite moves in the opposite direction. Expenditure included an allocation of up to £8,000 of this year's WGF award (with Tim's support) for which the proposal would be discussed at item 6. There was a one-off spend of £5,000 on a short climate coordination contract (Phoebe Cochrane). The budget deficit was projected at around £20,000 although LINK should be healthier in the following financial year, with a small surplus.

3.2 Subscriptions proposals

The meeting noted members' feedback to the Board's consultation on a possible 7% subscription rise in future years, a mixed response with some including small organisations indicating support for this direction of travel while several flagged that 7% would be difficult and unsustainable. LINK had heard via WCL colleagues that one or two organisations which were involved in more than one Link were scrutinising the comparative and total costs of Links membership.

Noting these concerns, Tim and staff had revisited LINK's financial projection, assessing calculations since October 2016 to the present, finding that some costs had been lower than anticipated and, importantly, that public sector income had not dropped as expected; meantime, subscription income had come in higher than budgeted and WGF's award could make a difference in coming years depending on its application. Tim had concluded that the Board could recommend a more modest 4% rise for the 2018-19 year at the AGM in December. He recommended a review of subscriptions structure.

The Board supported the proposals, agreeing to recommend a rise of 4% in subscriptions to members for 2018-19, and asking staff to circulate this proposal swiftly to reassure concerned organisations. The meeting noted that in recent months, for two organisations facing a rise to higher bands, a decision had been to smooth the 'leaps' they faced. This precedent in subs policy would be factored into the review of subscriptions structure by the Funding Subgroup. The FSG would explore other models which might be fairer and provide for smoother transitions upward (e.g. WCL's). The meeting noted that with members signalling constraints around significant subscription rises LINK should again review its business strategy (e.g. around events and products). Helen thanked the FSG in advance for the review it would carry out.

Actions: Staff circulate members; FSG review subscriptions

4. Membership satisfaction

4.1 Member Satisfaction

Helen thanked trustees for their time in liaising with members and returning useful reports, asking all to complete the process as soon as possible. **Action: Trustees**

The meeting considered feedback captured in the circulated spreadsheet. There was much satisfaction, and suggestions including keeping CEOs more informed, the desirability of meetings accessible by teleconferencing, more use of LINK as a forum for visioning, among other. The very positive response from Stuart Brooks for NTS was noted on the need for and value of LINK. Discussion had covered identity issues, competition for funding, policy areas, and areas where members might manage without LINK. NTS saw marine policy as one such, where funding could equally go to a member instead of LINK. Stuart was surprised to hear that NTS had queried LINK protocol in relation to ongoing deer work and the involvement of JMT (a non-member) and had undertaken to come back on this point. His instinct was that the wider good of land management trumped the protocol issue and he would be concerned if an alternative non-LINK group were to be set up, with the potential perception of failed relationships.

The meeting noted that a paradigm shift to beyond compliance might be an area where LINK could usefully develop thinking. The value of continuing to prioritise strictly and maximise impact were noted. The meeting agreed that the plenary session at the network meeting on 7/12 should address these strategic issues. **Action: Plenary in 7/12 agenda**

5. Matters Arising & Reports

5.1 SWBG application for membership

Helen reported the outcome of the member vote on the Board's recommendation not to admit the SWBG to LINK. The outcome had not achieved the required 2/3 majority either in support of the recommendation or for another course of action, and a number of members had commented on

their preference that LINK find a way forward with the SWBG. As this was not a clear resolution, it fell to the Board to progress the application in the direction which the membership appeared to favour, having attended first to governance concerns and reputational risk.

The meeting assessed the breakdown of the vote and the voting process including reminders sent to members and advice received from the lawyer. Although the initial email to members had not included information on abstentions, two reminding emails had flagged that non-votes (abstentions) were in effect votes against the Board recommendation.

The meeting considered two options: a member discussion in November of beaver strategy and reintroductions generally which would inform LINK positioning as well as help towards a resolution of the SWBG application, or: proposing to SWBG that confirmation of their support for the Scottish Code on Species Translocations would allay concerns shared by around half the membership. The meeting favoured the latter course and hoped for a positive outcome, noting that the offer to SWBG to present to members at the LINK meeting on 7 December would remain on the table.

Trustees noted that the process of determining this application had been useful learning for the Board from which LINK should benefit in future.

Actions: Communicate with SWBG; Advise members on Board thinking on next steps

5.2 Ex-member JMT 's continued engagement in LINK deer work

The meeting reviewed the question of LINK protocol vs. JMT's continued involvement in LINK deer work. Andrew Bachell JMT was reported to be supportive of a review of LINK membership with his board though advised December would be the earliest opportunity. He had LINK's offer of a trustees' meeting in advance of that.

Trustees noted: the value of making the strongest case to JMT of what LINK membership delivered; concerns that JMT's reputation with Government was negatively affected by its approach on some issues; the critical stage, politically, which deer advocacy had reached and real risk that insistence on protocol could push deer group members into taking this important work out of LINK with associated negative press; the value of continuing to share this space with JMT in the meantime.

While trustees were not comfortable with hedging LINK protocol they felt this was the more appropriate course of action from point of view of the environmental goals. Paul would check options for deer work with Duncan Orr Ewing (Deer Subgroup leader) after which Ian would pursue dialogue with JMT, possibly to include Charles, ahead of JMT's board review. Trustees were asked to take all opportunities to encourage JMT to reconsider. **Action: Paul; Ian**

5.3 EEB 2017 annual conference co-hosted by LINK

The meeting welcomed the news that LINK's fundraising had successfully secured over £50,000 towards costs of the November conference. Daphne updated the Board on development of the conference programme and line-up speakers & panellists and trustees thanked her for negotiating with EEB to re-include biodiversity within the agenda. The meeting supported Daphne's proposal to coordinate a statement on Brexit among EEB members ahead of the conference, which would be notified to the Cabinet Secretary also in advance.

6. Operations

6.1 Extending LINK's policy advocacy capacity

Staff outlined plans to build on the Board's April agreement that new core funding should be used in part to increase support to group and subgroup work. As WGF funding had been secured, and with Tim's support for part of this year's allocation to be used thus, staff proposed Wildlife and Food & Farming as key priorities for the coming 6-8 months.

The meeting considered the rationale, whether LINK could afford to invest more at this stage, benefits to the network of this increased resource, and rates of pay, before confirming support for these proposals. In financial terms, the decision represented a spend of £8,000 of the year's WGF allocation and £1,000 of DPF, going out to Wildlife Subgroup as £6500 for a Species Champions internship and to Food & Farming Subgroup as £2,500 in funding. It was noted that staff would report to groups and subgroups, ensuring their support for this prioritisation.

The meeting also supported a second proposal for spending of a portion of funding which might be awarded in early 2018, as a result of LINK's proposed bid to EFF, and would also extend policy support capacity across LINK's work areas. It was noted that staff would ensure LINK's readiness to recruit and support a part-time policy advocacy post, should EFF make the award.

Actions: Staff

6.2 AGM 2017

The meeting noted preparations for the AGM on 7 December and discussed the following:

- Skills needs to inform the October call for nominations - Considered skills audit, agreeing that the main areas to flag to members were marketing/communications/campaigning.
- Value of advertising if internal canvassing did not procure skills - Noted problems which previous trustees not from within the network had experienced on the Board and agreed to continue to apply the expectation that trustees will mostly be drawn from the active membership.
- Contacts made to encourage nominations from women and ensure gender balance – Some were giving this their consideration.
- Fellowship - Agreed to propose Stuart Housden's appointment, subject to his willingness.
- Agreed to recommend Joyce McMillan for a further year as President if willing. Noted the year's timeline to find a successor and agreed this should start in the autumn.
- Pending Tim's support would recommend Geoghegans as LINK's IFE.

Actions: Staff circulate call for nominations in October

7. AOB

7.1 Year of Young People 2019 and Year of Coasts and Waters 2020, noted for LINK planning.

7.2 Scottish Land Commission established, has met with LINK. Concerns around possible limits to its powers, which would mitigate against its delivering in spirit of the Act, will need gentle pressure from NGOs to encourage robust and effective delivery of aspirations. An issue to explore with SNH.

7.3 December 7th meeting of funders, launching report on where the green grants went in Scotland, at Edinburgh Zoo, with SEFF members involved.

8. Next meeting – 26 October, 1000-1300, Ramblers Scotland office, Edinburgh.