



APPROVED Minutes of LINK Board Meeting held 25 January 2018, at Woodland Trust Scotland office in Edinburgh

PRESENT:

Trustees: Charles Dundas (Chair), Craig Macadam (Vice Chair), Tim Ambrose (Treasurer), Lucy Graham, Beryl Leatherland, Paul Walton, Helen Senn, Clare Symonds

Staff in attendance: Jen Anderson, Karen Paterson, Daphne Vlastari, Alice Walsh

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Sam Gardner (Trustee).

2. POST-AGM ACTION

2.1 New Trustees and Office Bearers

Charles welcomed everyone and introductions were made round the table.

Helen Senn, a programme leader with RZSS, was happy to be part of the Board. Clare Symonds, chair of PD, community worker and nurse, was keen to get to grips with the board's work.

Charles outlined the new office bearers, welcoming Craig (now Vice-Chair) and Tim (continuing as Treasurer).

2.2 Trustee Declarations

The complete set of declarations had been circulated and was noted by the meeting. This review was carried out annually per legal advice to LINK.

2.3 Board Subgroup membership

Employment Subgroup (ESG): Confirmed membership as Charles, Craig, Tim and Beryl. This subgroup meets infrequently, though is in touch at least annually over the salaries review.

Funding Subgroup: Confirmed membership as Charles, Tim, Lucy, Craig and Beryl. The FSG will meet during 2018 to carry out the subscriptions review.

2.4 Possible co-options

2.4.1 Young person

The AGM proposal to co-opt a young person (18-14 years) during Year of Youth was considered in the context of connections which LINK planned with young people through various aspects of its policy work. Trustees believed the Board would be a lonely place and not the right place for such a co-option and saw Species Champions as the area of LINK's activity which offered most to this connection - access for the young person to relevant issues and experience, and relevance to LINK's aspirations and the opportunity to get the most from the relationship. The species champion work was already looking at this age group and wished to encourage young people to engage on nature and biodiversity issues and make demands on decision makers; this was being discussed in conjunction with the Scottish Youth Parliament and was likely to have a longer-term legacy than the Year of Youth. It was agreed to ask the Wildlife Group to pursue the co-option and have that person report back to the Board.

Action: Craig Macadam & Wildlife Subgroup to take forward the co-option

Trustees hoped a dynamic presentation would be given by a young person at the S E Week event in April.

The meeting noted opportunity to co-opt to LINK's work areas via People & Planet also.

2.4.2 RE: Ian Findlay, Fellow

Charles proposed LINK draw on Ian on occasion for support where his expertise in governance and knowledge of the sector would enhance the Board's understanding. The meeting noted that LINK Articles allowed for non-trustees to be co-opted to Board Subgroups, and that Fellows were welcome to engage at policy groups level, too.

Action: Jen to liaise with Ian Findlay and report back

2.5 Gender among LINK board and Fellows

Gender balance had been flagged at the AGM by a member organisation in relation to office bearers and Fellows.

WRT the Board, Trustees did not see a problem; LINK's office bearers now 2 male to 1 female had been 2 female to 1 male for several years previously; the network seemed well balanced in gender terms; and the staff team tended to female. Trustees agreed that the issue to be avoided was where individuals were unable to progress because of gender barriers; this was not a LINK problem and as a problem it would call for robust application of LINK's equal opportunities policy, rather than for the taking on of more of a particular gender.

WRT gender balance among Fellows, LINK was limited by who leaves the network and merits fellowship; however, it was felt that gender could inform invitations LINK extends to external players though preferably not on a quotas basis.

2.6 Subscriptions

2017's dialogue between Trustees and member Reps had demonstrated that finance was a challenge for most members even if small members felt this less sharply. It was clear that steep rises in subs would not be popular.

The subscriptions proposal at the AGM in December had only just been approved, with a number of members abstaining both at the meeting and in subsequent electronic voting to achieve a quorum. This suggested that LINK might be at the buffers of this income stream for the time being.

The risk of losing members from the higher bands was more significant than it had been, and it appeared that some members in higher bands were less able to engage because of small policy teams and the demand on their staff resources from investing time in LINK.

On the other hand, LINK's presentation of benefits of subscriptions could be improved, e.g., to sell the benefit of access to LINK's advocacy team, and LINK's comms on subscriptions needed to reach CEOs and boards of member organisations where these financial decisions were made.

The Board had agreed in October to review LINK's subscriptions model, thresholds and conditions, including basis of members' total income. The Funding Subgroup would do this during 2018 taking account of all points flagged to date.

Action: Funding Subgroup to review subscriptions model and philosophy

2.7 Annual Report

Staff confirmed that a shorter version (largely infographic) would be produced.

Action: Staff

3.1 MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

Draft minutes of the meeting of October 2017 were proposed by Beryl, seconded by Tim and approved by the meeting.

3.2 MATTERS ARISING

3.2.1 Dialogue with members

Recent reports from members were positive about their LINK engagement; these echoed some of the points gathered in the autumn and summarised to the October Board. One fresh observation was that LINK might need a larger caucus of environmental enthusiasts across the political arena. The Board noted that the 95+ Species Champion MSPs provided this potential and asked that all LINK policy groups and subgroups be kept informed of the Champions and encouraged to flag connections which Species Champions can increasingly make across the political agenda. It was noted that LINK's 'species champions' newsletter was already encouraging these links to be made.

Action: Craig, Daphne to extend awareness of Species Champions across LINK work areas

Reports on trustee dialogue with Soil Association, SWT, RSPB, RZSS, SCAPE and STCS were outstanding.

Action: Relevant Trustee to submit reports a.s.a.p.

The meeting agreed to run this membership dialogue every two years, with the next due in 2019. In the meantime, Trustees would take opportunities to have informal conversations with organisations they had been allocated at LINK and external meetings and would report back on any concerns.

Action: Next formal round of dialogue from early 2019

Action: Trustees talk informally with their allocated reps where opportunity allows

3.2.2 Outcomes of strategic planning (Dec 2017)

The report which had been circulated was noted. Among key areas ahead would be campaigning to ensure public support on LINK's Brexit engagement, the 2020 priorities review and visioning for 2050.

3.2.3 Ex-member JMT

The meeting considered feedback from the recent meeting between LINK and JMT's Andrew Bachell. AB saw no reason in principle against JMT's re-joining and would take a proposal to his board (June). However, he had not strongly signalled a sense of the need to re-join. Issues for AB were value for money and capacity to engage with small policy team. AB had reflected that there was option for deer work to happen outside the LINK banner. WRT his frustration at the lack of progress in raising landscape up the political agenda, LINK trustees had noted that landscape challenges are Europe-wide at least, that the LINK subgroup was considering a framework to give the issues wider political meaning and more effectively tap into the European Landscape Convention. The Board also noted current landscape dialogue happening outwith LINK's Landscape Subgroup so as to engage JMT and other non-members. WRT LINK protocols, and the continuing engagement of JMT in LINK deer work, it was agreed to see how JMT's board decided in the summer before implementing LINK's rule.

Action: Board to review in August

3.2.4 Strategic liaisons

- (i) Ministers - Dates for meetings with Cab Sec Roseanna Cunningham and Brexit Minister Mike Russell were awaited and a meeting in May was anticipated with Cab Sec Fergus Ewing following the December dialogue with him.
- (ii) SNH – A meeting over funding for nature was planned for late March. As this would not allow opportunity to cover other items on which LINK had requested dialogue with CEO Francesca Osowska (e.g. public goods for public money, future of protected areas), it was agreed to pursue a further opportunity to meet SNH's Chair and CEO.

Action: Jen and Craig to liaise ahead of the March funding meeting

- (iii) SEPA – Liaison would take account of issues flagged by LINK's Groups and would include the upcoming REFIT of the water-related directives.

Action: Craig to liaise with Scott Mathieson, Alice to coordinate LINK meeting

- (iv) Liaison with FCS – This happened via the Woodland Subgroup

3.2.5 EEB

Besides constructive engagement between LINK and EEB over the November conference and positive commitments made there by Cab Sec Roseanna Cunningham, EEB contact was providing other 'ins' for LINK including access to EEB working groups on Circular Economy, Legal, among other. LINK members were being encouraged to communicate globally-relevant aspects of their work via EEB's newsletter 'Meta' which reached thousands of NGOs, officials and politicians across Europe.

3.2.6 Funding

Reviewing the circulated update, trustees noted the potentially hopeful situation around Trust funding alongside unknowns around LINK's public sector funding for the year ahead.

3.2.7 Staffing

In addition to the circulated update, the meeting noted that the funding situation (above) affected contract extensions which might be offered to fixed term post holders.

3.3 REPORTS BACK

None flagged.

4. OPERATIONS

4.1 Update on LINK's Brexit engagement

Daphne spoke to the paper circulated and key current issues: joint frameworks; and solutions to the governance gap created by loss of the ECJ and EU functions. The meeting noted: a listing of where joint frameworks are needed will be developed; Governance Group aimed to support a supranational body but with strong caveats on its ownership and design and its interaction with Scottish institutions; importance of LINK's having a position as SG was publishing its thinking and inviting views in March; LINK hoped to influence GUK/ELUK letters to Gove and countries' Cab Secs to present the single body as one of various options that the Joint Ministerial Committee should consider; LINK was ensuring clearest comms with Ian Jardine and David Miller on all of these issues; legal advice on how the single body would work was to be commissioned; scenarios assessments would need to take into account issues such as the Single Market. The meeting discussed the extreme political sensitivities surrounding powers within the UK, agreeing that Governance Group was applying appropriate caution in respect of the various relationships at stake, the importance of articulating the independent ENGO voice, and the nuancing of the advocacy proposals. Daphne confirmed that the Group was picking its way extremely carefully and that the challenge to date was in nurturing relationships but not about whether SG's funding for LINK would become an issue. The meeting thanked Daphne for her excellent work.

4.2 Shaping Congress 2018

The meeting considered the circulated paper on purpose of Congress and appropriate timing. Main conclusions were: Congress still serves an important purpose for members to meet and network, to see how LINK works, and its spread and scope. An overnight format is not priority, single-day format will serve these purposes. Topic is key, speaker(s) need to attract and justify members' attendance. Linking Congress to existing events such as networking or training, or using it for blue sky discussion, or focussing it round a lecture were all appropriate. Among options for the 2018 event were linking environment to arts and culture. Volunteers to the 2018 Congress steering group were Helen Senn, Clare Symonds, Beryl Leatherland, and Ian Findlay was proposed. The steering group would consult with Joyce McMillan and keep the Board informed by email of progress.

Action: Alice to coordinate steering group discussion of theme, format, timing, speaker(s)

4.3 Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland

The meeting considered the paper from LINK's Legal Strategy Subgroup which reported on the prospectus for an Environmental Rights Centre, the Subgroup's plans from spring 2018 to establish the Centre as an independent Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation and to fundraise for its commencement. The Board noted the good progress being made. There were no questions.

5. FINANCIALS

5.1 LINK management accounts

Karen gave a brief tutorial for new trustees on the management accounts and LINK's overall approach in budgeting. Tim Ambrose explained LINK's current reserves policy and the importance of reserves to tide the organisation through difficult times; this included a wind-scenario and ability to pay creditors. LINK's savings were currently held in cash, which meant least risk, if little interest; the fixed bond option had had its day, as interest rates rose again. The annual

budget and 5-year projection were explained and the target for membership subscriptions to meet 55-60% of 'essential' costs (a subset of full costs) was noted. Trustees were reminded to take any questions to Karen and Tim.

5.2 Budget outturn at end December

As expected, LINK was forecasting a lower deficit than in the start of year budget.

LINK was dependent on three main streams of funding: membership; public sector; trusts and foundations. From the WGF award in 2017 LINK was taking just £10,000 in the current financial year.

The meeting agreed that possibility of a larger-than-anticipated, unrestricted EFF award, was surprising though very welcome. If secured, this would require LINK to develop an exit strategy for the end of the funded period which might include investing more in fundraising during the period. The meeting noted that soundings EFF had taken from the sector were highlighting the value of supporting ENGOs over the Brexit 'hump'; and that EFF may be less available to applications for support with other environmental projects. It was agreed that any EFF award to LINK would need to be considered in the context of LINK's total funding; the outcome should be known during February.

5.3 Draft budget for 2018-19

Two scenarios had been circulated, one with and one without the maximum possible EFF award. Without that figure, the projected budget was reasonable, would result in a deficit of normal level, included normal provision for discretionary project funding. In the scenario that EFF awarded the maximum level of funds, the projected budget allowed for a new 3-day policy advocacy post, a much larger discretionary fund on which groups and subgroups would be able to depend for significant support including for internships, and LINK should close the year in surplus.

Both budget scenarios assumed that continuing public sector support. The meeting noted that this was not yet confirmed for the coming year and though there had been no negative signals to LINK, the decision might not reach LINK before April. It was noted that members funded by SNH were being advised that SNH's grants programme was being replaced by a challenge funding arrangement.

Action: Review financial position in wake of EFF and public sector's decisions

5.4 Five-year financial projection

Two scenarios had been circulated, depending on possible EFF award for 3 years from 2018/19. Again, the assumption was of continuing public funding though at varying levels. In either scenario LINK would be a going concern in 2021/22. No questions were raised and the meeting agreed to revisit the projection in the light of fundraising outcomes; hopefully these would raise capacity and DPF to help the network through Brexit, as intended by EFF at least.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Year of Youth Various invitations to LINK for an SNH-Young Scot parliamentary reception, evening of 7 March, to celebrate the ways in which SNH and partners are encouraging and empowering young people to engage with nature.

Action: Interested trustees to contact LINK staff

6.2 Changes at Plantlife Davie Black was leaving Plantlife soon for a new post at Mountaineering Scotland and Plantlife was recruiting for a post straddling Davie's recent remit and aspects of Deborah Long's previous director role.

6.3 Changes at British Ecological Society BES was recruiting a full-time policy post based in Edinburgh. Meeting noted this should enhance their capacity to engage in LINK work areas.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 26 April, morning, LINK Perth office.