

## **Minutes of the LINK Board meeting held 15 August 2019, at the Woodland Trust office in Perth.**

**Present:** Charles Dundas (Chair), Paul Walton, Tim Ambrose (Treasurer) Craig Macadam (Vice-Chair), Clare Symonds (via video link), Sam Gardner, Beryl Leatherland, Deborah Long (CO), Alice Walsh (DO).

**1. Apologies:** Lucy Graham, Helen Senn.

### **2. Minutes, Matters and Reports.**

2.1. Minutes of the April 2019 meeting Paper A (for approval). These were approved subject correction of the Species Survival Committee to Species Survival Commission. Proposed by CM, seconded by SG.

#### 2.2 Actions and Matters Arising Paper B – To note

Most actions were completed or would be discussed during the meeting. Clarifications were:

Funding Subgroup met, DPF criteria were clarified, for review in January 2020. FSG has 4 trustees, that was plenty. Other trustees were always welcome to join meetings if they wished.

LINK 10 year vision: proposed wording was shared with members via the June bulletin.

Environment Thought space: Clare had added some ideas to the invitation list.

Shadow Environment Audit Committee. Not progressed, is on the back burner until the new AM in post.

Mapping of key tools - ongoing.

Members support of FFSN: no action though there were no problems with membership support, and there was support from members through Species Champions promotion of the Pledge.

Shared space for Board papers: Huddle's business model had changed and was now too expensive. Clare and Sam had problems accessing papers for today on Sharepoint. With Karen's help we would try Sharepoint again for the October Board meeting. On the Master policies spreadsheet, Karen will let trustees know when they are up.

Trustee appraisal. Charles had not pursued, partly as it would duplicate Graeme Reekie's work.

Calum Langdale's contract is extended to March 2020.

SEPA meeting ahead on 19 September.

### **3. Operations Paper C.**

#### 3.1 Staffing and board updates – to note

Vhairi Tollan, currently a researcher for the Green Party, has accepted the Advocacy Manager job, start date 9 September. Lloyd was working one day a week in the interim and would help with her induction. Calum Langdale was working one day extra per week to cover social media and other general Advocacy tasks. We are looking for ways to keep Calum on after March 2020.

Marine funding is being sought for the period beyond October. Esther has agreed to work 4 days per week from November, which will be covered by underspend from the current John Ellerman Foundation funding.

### 3.2 Horizon scanning and Strategic plan development.

The paper circulated summarised Deborah's meetings with members, general points from those discussions on strengths and ways of working together. There are some areas on which we could do more, eg alliance building and strategic partnerships. Trustee comments covered:

FFSN has built a collective purpose to speak with one voice which is helpful for cut through. We need to establish that as a way of working beyond Brexit, and build it into forward strategy.

There are important environmental issues that are relatively neglected by our sector, eg aquaculture. We cannot do everything, though can improve identification of gaps. Strategically we need to look at the environmental need, then consider what members are doing (or not), opportunities for traction and what LINK can do about it.

Deborah sought feedback on what she had developed on the vision, from input at the Network meeting. Was it pitched right and would it help us to move forward?

Charles thought the pitch was good and generally going in the right direction.

Beryl would be happier if member bodies managed to engage their members more and we had more evidence of public support.

Sam thought the vision should be an achievement, and one of the things we would need is to have built greater levels of public support. Broadly the statement was going in the right direction, is suitably ambitious. It is of value if we hold ourselves to it on a constant basis, looking at how we are building our programme of work to get us towards it, that gives it all meaning.

Clare thought it not quite ambitious enough. Doughnut economics talks of enhancing, not just restoring. A strapline would be useful (coming up later in the discussion on branding).

**Action: the next step is to get staff input, then Board input at the away day on 24<sup>th</sup> October.**

### 3.3. Update on the Environmental Rights Centre.

Mary Church joined by phone to give an update on plans now that JRCT funding was awarded; £40k per year for 3 years from October 2019. The Year 1 budget includes 10k from the LINK DPF, and a £10k donation from Juliette Gordon. There are savings on the budget of £70k on office costs and line management. The Legal Strategy Subgroup are confident about moving forward with recruitment of staff within 6 months (from July 2019), to have the shadow Board in place taking an active role by 6 to 9 months, pursuing the development strategy and having the SCIO set up by the end of Year 1.

The Subgroup have already identified supportive individuals who are keen to be involved as trustees or as members of the advisory group. Mary has rechecked their interest. Most are interested in the more flexible, ad hoc role of the Advisory group. There is a smaller group of potential trustees, with gaps to be filled – in terms of organisational development, finance and fundraising, and to have ethnic and social diversity within the Board from the start. There is work to be done on the process of trustee selection. Ian Cowan has been drafting the constitution, to be checked by LINK's lawyer, ready by the time of SCIO set up. Deborah will give Mary the details of the lawyer. Mary was drafting the job descriptions to be advertised in September. The plan is for 2 part time staff, rather than 1 FT post, for organisational resilience, and mutual support. RSBP has offered to host, though Mary would prefer a more central location in terms of line management. FoES will not charge for Mary's time managing the posts. In the longer term it was important the Centre be independent of member body hosting.

When the Board considered the DPF bid in April there was some concern that budget figures were low, and over optimistic. The total project expenditure including in kind support from time of the

shadow trustees and members of the subgroup and LINK admin support, is 106k. Most of the income will be spent on salaries. Some funding will be spent on external expertise to help think through structures and governance before the staff and trustees are appointed. One post will have fundraising prominent in the job description. It would be better not to rely too much on in-kind support. It was agreed that a Chair's letter to members setting out the situation as it stands, the importance of it for members' interests, would be useful to generate further support. That should be sent soon, to give members time to plan ahead. Mary agreed it would be very helpful to have an injection of support at this stage, mindful of the work that has been done, and avoiding revisiting all of that. There was discussion of the JRCT's expectations with respect to the reach of the Centre, which had been covered well in the meeting with its CEO, and JRCT was quite satisfied. It was noted that FoES and PD have a broader reach than most member bodies into communities and individuals that most need what it will offer. Deborah was keen to protect the work that has been done so far and to help in developing a sustainable strategy, in boosting the Legal Subgroup to get the right people involved, targetting the right trustees, and developing a communications strategy.

**Action: Deborah and Mary to liaise on next steps and on the letter to members.**

#### 3.4 Board effectiveness and Trustee appraisal.

Graham Reekies' paper summarised his findings on the Board's effectiveness, which 7 trustees had completed and most staff, so it was quite a rounded assessment. Thoughts were invited.

Sam noted comments on the extent to which the board holds itself accountable for the collective impact of network activity, and in turn charges Groups with seeing the activity through. The Board is very enabling. He asked if the Board was doing all that was possible to ensure the greatest impact, and asked to what extent the Board wished to take a strategic view, eg providing additional resource or allocating more staff time to particular areas.

Craig had expected this to flow from the 2016 formation of priority groups. In his view it has not happened for Wildlife within the Land group. The twice yearly meetings did not prioritise. Charles agreed, noting they are useful for information exchange and integration between the many subgroups.

On Board accountability Clare thought more communication was needed between meetings to understand all that was happening across the breadth of the work. Sam clarified that it was more oversight rather than familiarity with the detail of the work, that the Board needed.

Paul thought it was about coherence – it was difficult to plan ahead in the Wildlife Subgroup - and that LINK having a strategic plan that the activity fits into will be helpful. The Board's job will be to look at what is coming through and how it fits into that.

Deborah noted that the staff team has a good idea what is going on, and this must be central.

Craig suggested that work area leaders should be trained on the plan, which will help reduce silo thinking.

The Board's interface with the Groups needs to improve, a more formal relationship established between Board and work area leads in the next Strategic Plan. Board meetings could be less about operations and review. Themed Board meetings would give a sense of purpose. The October meeting would focus on Board input to the Strategic Plan. Deborah would meet Graeme Reekie in September. He will shortly finish stakeholder interviews and will help Deborah prepare for the October Board meeting. The Plan will come to the 12 December Network meeting, and be in place from March 2020.

**Action: Deborah to take forward.**

### 3.5 Advocacy update and FFSN campaign (Paper D)

Noted. The Survation survey would be underway shortly.

### 3.6 LINK Communications, branding, website, Congress.

Deborah showed on the screen how the new website would look. Trustees liked the new branding. Comments on the website included:

- ensure it is clear what is all on the front page when it appears on screens, that it changes to fit different devices, the size of the banner on the landing page.
- social wall. Ensure that it only picks up from our feed, rather than others' comments.
- search function will be improved.

All were generally very happy with it. The costs are within budget and the plan is to launch it in October.

Congress: is about successful communications, a training session in the afternoon followed by a panel of 4 speakers and a buffet supper.

### 3.7 Funding update

Tim noted there is no longer a jump between membership subscription bands in the new system.

## **4. Governance (Paper E).**

### 4.1 President search

There has been a lack of capacity in taking this forward. Beryl offered to help with reaching out to contact candidates. We are hoping to widen the pool of potential candidates. The Board had identified three areas in terms of contacts and profile: business, land and media. Deborah would send the spreadsheet around again for trustees to fill in within a week. Suggestions which had not excluded themselves already included Gordon Buchanan, James Curran, Cameron McNeish, Kathleen Jamie.

**Action: Deborah to share the list for trustees further input.**

### 4.2 Lobbying register for noting.

### 4.3 AGM preparation: trustees standing down: table

The succession plan was for Craig, Paul and one other trustee (either Helen or Clare depending on Sam's intentions) to stand down for re-election. The call for new trustees will go out next month. Sam was willing to continue as a trustee, wishing to continue to be involved with LINK in some way, and trustees wished to keep him onboard. Discussion covered the logistics of elected trustees and co-optees. (**Note:** LINK M&A allows for up to 9 elected trustees and up to 4 co-optees). It was agreed to co-opt Sam so freeing up a space for an elected member. Paul and Craig would stand for re-election. Clare may have to step down anyway due to capacity, if getting more involved with the Environmental Rights Centre.

The Skills Audit was last completed in January 2018. This guides who is encouraged to stand for election. All trustees would revisit this and advise of any changes to theirs within a week. There are no pure gaps. Some skills are covered through the staff team. The clearest gap was on HR.

**Action: Trustees to check and update skills audit.**

## **5. Financials (Paper F).**

Outturn to 31 June: Tim explained that the most significant unknown had been subscription income,

based on the new model. He was delighted to see the figure was £96k. The new system was working out well. Seven members had increases capped by 20%. Several members were challenged on their Scottish returns, and all was now agreed.

Website and rebrand costs were confirmed as within budget.

The rent at Dolphin House had increased, though remained cheap in comparison to other Edinburgh offices. Staff based in Edinburgh were working from home during the festival.

The DPF summary was briefly discussed. The Wildlife Crime allocation of £250 was agreed. It was noted that an application for NEN work would be likely for some of the £9k that remained this year.

The 5 year outlook was encouraging. Some figures were to be checked. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation grant ran from July to June rather than April to March.

Outlook ahead with income drop of 20% Several members are modelling a 20% cut in funding due to Brexit. Deborah and Karen had done this for LINK, seeking reassurance there was time to plan for it, which there is. It is a rough tool with many variables.

#### **6 AOB.**

There had been a meeting with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, very cordial, though unlikely they will re-join, due to finances.

#### **7. Meetings.**

Next Board meeting is 24 October, venue tbc. (Paul sends his apologies).