

**MINUTES of MEETING of the
FINANCE COMMITTEE of**

THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

**held at Ballater
on 2 March 2012**

Present:

Eleanor Mackintosh (Chair)
David Green

Marcus Humphrey
Gregor Rimell

In Attendance:

Jane Hope, Chief Executive
David Cameron, Corporate Services Director
Bob Grant, Senior Outdoor Access Officer
Pete Crane, Senior Visitor Services Officer (until end of paper 1)
Sandra Middleton
Alistair Hight, Finance Manager

Apologies:

Mary McCafferty, Board member

Minutes of Previous Meetings

1. Minutes of the meeting of 28 October 2011 were approved noting two minor typing amendments required to page 2.

Matters Arising

2. Regarding point 7, funding for Blair Atholl visitor centre, David Cameron reported that additional funding totalling £210,000 had been secured from Scottish Government toward this project. The funding would be routed to the project via the Authority. Committee members welcomed this additional funding and ratified the allocation of this additional funding to the project.

Declarations of Interest

3. Marcus Humphry and David Cameron declared an interest as Directors of the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) in item 9, paper 5. As an officer advising the Committee members and with no decision making authority within the Committee, it was agreed that David Cameron could participate in the item while Marcus Humphry would not participate in those discussions.
4. Eleanor Mackintosh declared a non-direct interest in agenda items 5 and 7.

Improvements to A939 Lay By, Tomintoul (Paper 1)

5. Pete Crane presented this report to the Committee. The Authority had been successful in securing an additional £25,000 from Scottish Government from a bid to support delivery of the Tomintoul and Glenlivet master plan. The proposed activity is to upgrade and improve the gateway lay-by on the A939, installing information on the National Park, the Crown Estate and local visitor information.
6. In discussion, the Committee welcomed the success of another bid for additional funding from Scottish Government. Members had a discussion around the general benefits and risks of accelerating some work on the master plan as a result of early funds being made available, noting a risk in particular that some early work could compromise design of future activity. On balance, members agreed the project intervention selected was relatively low risk in terms of prejudicing future work.
7. **Members thanked Pete for pulling this project together at short notice and agree the expenditure proposal.**

Continuation of Support for the Dee, Spey and South Esk Catchment Management Plans (Paper 2)

8. David Cameron introduced this paper in the absence of the authors. The paper highlighted that multi-agency management groups were in place for all three of these catchment areas and had proven to be an excellent vehicle for collective delivery of National Park Plan (NPP) objectives. This paper now identified planned contributions toward joint delivery of these projects for the three years to 31 March 2015. The specific request put forward by officers at this time was for 2012/13 financial year funding only, recognising that the request was coming to the Committee in advance of the Corporate Plan being considered by the Board.
9. In discussion, members agreed the value of these projects in making multiple contributions to the NPP. Members particularly noted the value of project officers in taking the catchment management projects forward in tandem with a range of stakeholders.
10. Members agreed that some form of economic research to underpin the economic value of projects such as these to the National Park would provide very worthwhile information. Such research would also allow the Authority and partners to highlight the full story around the value of these projects to the National Park.
11. **Members agreed the CNPA contributions to each of these Catchment Management projects for 2012/13.**
12. **Recognising the value of the project officers and the interest in seeking to maintain continuity of these officers, members also approved the specific contributions for the following 2 years required to meet the project officer salaries and costs.**

Approval of Expenditure for a Tomintoul and Glenlivet Economic Development Officer (Paper 3)

13. Sandra Middleton introduced this paper, seeking a contribution of £15,000 each year for 3 years toward an Economic Development Officer supporting establishment of a Development Trust and delivery of a regeneration strategy and action plan.
14. In discussion, members welcomed the progress made on this project and recognised the work done by Sandra, Claire and others in pulling the project together and engaging with the communities.
15. Members noted the multi-partner aspects of funding and recognised the potential for future actions in delivering plans to be funded through LEADER should funds be available from that source. Members also recognised that to date the Crown Estate had offered an in-kind contribution toward the project. Committee members felt that it would be a very welcome statement of commitment to the planned development of these communities if the Crown Estate was able to also offer some cash contribution to these projects.
16. **Members thanked Sandra for the detailed paper and approved the funding proposal of £15,000 each year for 3 years, ending 31 March 2015.**

Three Access Projects (Paper 4)

17. Bob Grant introduced this paper, seeking ratification of funding allocation to the Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust (COAT) of £162,000 following a successful bid by the Authority to Scottish Government for additional funding to deliver a replacement bridge at Strathdon and two path projects. All of these projects would be delivered by COAT, and all projects has received necessary planning approvals to proceed. As with the Blair Atholl project, funding would be routed to the project via the Authority.
18. **Committee members again welcomed this additional funding and ratified the allocation of this additional funding to COAT.**
19. In wider discussion, members noted the considerable success of officers in securing almost £0.4 million of additional funding at short notice.
20. **Members agreed that Corporate Services officers should put in place systems that would continue to ensure the Authority had a bank of projects ready to respond to such funding opportunities.** Members requested that this system incorporate some opportunity for the Committee to look at and prioritise projects prior to bids going forward. The Chair made clear that this point was in no way a criticism of the very prompt action taken by officers to secure funding in this bidding round, more a reflection on how future process may operate.
21. The Chair noted that David Cameron had lodged an item of other business on COAT funding and asked whether David would like to bring this now while COAT was being discussed.
22. David highlighted that the Authority had continued to work closely with the Trust, and that he and Alistair were monitoring the cash flow of the Trust closely given ongoing pressure on it of a high value of project expenditure which could only be

claimed quarterly in arrears. David requested that the Committee consider delegation of approval to the Chief Executive and Director of Corporate Services of up to £65,000 payment to COAT in respect of the Authority's contribution to 2012 calendar year ESF projects and a further maximum of £65,000 in general 2012/13 funding to assist the Trust in its cash flow management. Any payments made would of course have to be subject to affordability within the Authority's own 2011/12 budgets if made before 31 March 2012.

23. Members noted that this practice was in line with previous years support to COAT, with the Finance Committee recognising the difficulty in cash flow management for small organisations where large value projects were being delivered while the majority of funding was paid quarterly in arrears. The Committee agreed this continued to be in line with the Authority's enabling ethos.

Review of 10 Months to 31 January 2012

24. Alistair Hight reported that overall, the Authority continued to be on track to deliver a financial outturn result close to break-even. Currently, there was an under-spend of £168,000 against Operational Plan budgets. However, Alistair expected that this situation would be brought back toward budget expectation over the remaining weeks of the financial year.
25. Alistair also reported that the 3% financial efficiency target for the year was expected to be exceeded.
26. Members thanked Alistair for his report and noted its content.

Review of Operational Plan Commitments

27. Alistair reported that contractual commitments established in the current financial year and running into future years accounted for £407,000 in 2012/13, some 21% of current Operational Plan budget levels. The guideline limit established by the Committee for forward commitment levels is 30%, equivalent to £585,000 and therefore commitments remained well below guideline at this point.
28. In discussion, members noted that with declining resources and increasing cost pressures, forward commitment levels became an increasingly important control feature of the Authority's financial management.
29. Members thanked Alistair for the update and noted the position.

Any Other Business

30. Year-end cash flow support for COAT was covered earlier in the meeting.
31. There were no other items of business for consideration.

Date of Next Meeting

32. Committee meeting 11 May, 9:00am.

Finance Committee: Outstanding Actions

| Action | Status |
|--|---------------|
| Research on economic value of Catchment Management Projects | Open |
| Seek potential cash contributions for Glenlivet and Tomintoul Development Project | Open |
| Year End Cash Flow Support for COAT delegated to Chief Executive and Corporate Services Director | Open |