

**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**DRAFT Minutes of the Staff Consultative Forum**

**held at Morlich House, 17 The Square, Grantown  
on Thursday 28 June 2007 at 2.00pm**

**Present**

David Cameron (Chair)  
Eric Baird  
Sara Krawczynska  
Quentin McLaren

Anne MacLean  
Gavin Miles  
Fiona Munro  
Fran Scott

**In Attendance**

None

**Apologies**

None

**Welcome and Apologies**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He said that as Fiona Munro had to leave early to attend another meeting, he would not take the items in order of Agenda.

**Minutes of Previous Meetings**

2. Minutes of the previous meeting of 16 March 2007 were agreed.

**Matters arising not covered on Agenda**

Minutes of 16 March 2007 – actions arising

3. *Monitoring mechanism for cleaners in place (para 26 14.08.06)*  
*Issue guidelines re general housekeeping (para 28 14.08.06)*  
These items are on the agenda for today's meeting under Cleaning Update.
4. *Issue update note on Gateway Scheme (para 11 06.11.06)*  
The HR Manager issued an update note to staff mid-April.
5. *Piggy back on discounted hotel rates (para 24 06.11.06)*  
The Chair said that this remained outstanding.
6. *Alert Line Managers to Craigdon quote for boots*  
The HR Manager said in the event Craigdon would only give a quote for a one-off purchase of boots, and that they would not agree to an ongoing discount. This was therefore not going to be of benefit as initially indicated.

7. *Consider article in Housing Magazine on auditing customer care (para 62 06.11.06)*  
The HR Manager said that this was not a high priority as it was not entirely appropriate just now. She therefore asked if it could be put “on hold”, which was agreed.
8. *Submit paper to S&R Committee re PRP element of pay award (para 20 21.02.07)*  
Overtaken by events.
9. *Implement Salary Sacrifice Schemes (para 23 21.02.07)*  
These schemes were now in place – i.e. Cyclescheme and Childcare Vouchers.
10. *Rephrase sentences under Consultation and Appeal Hearing (para 28 21.02.07)*  
This had now been done.
11. *Include a paper on Terms of Redundancy in future SCF meeting (para 31 21.02.07)*  
The Chair felt that today’s agenda was extensive, and therefore this item remained outstanding.
12. *Progress report for Higher/Further Education (para 37 21.02.07)*  
The HR manager reported that procedures were now in place for the support of Higher/Further Education (detailed in the revised Staff Handbook).
13. *Ensure Board Members have new or updated policies (para 39 21.02.07)*  
The due date for this has been extended to Sept in view of forthcoming changes.
14. *Members to read draft Staff Handbook and submit comments to HR Manager by 31 March (para 22 16.03.07)*  
The revised Staff Handbook was issued to staff this month.
15. *Make changes to homeworking policy and implement (para 30 16.03.07)*  
The Chair explained that the homeworking policy, in its present form, had been included in the Staff Handbook to allow things to progress meanwhile.
16. *Report back on Smoke Alarm and Fire Evacuation procedure review (para 34 16.03.07)*  
The Chair reported that he had received feedback on the fire evacuation drill and that no changes to procedures were required.
17. *Coordinate appointment of replacement staff representative (para 40 16.03.07)*  
The Chair confirmed that a Head of Group would not be filling this space, and that therefore the HR Manager would go ahead and seek a member of staff.

### **Pay Remit Process 2008/09**

18. An update note was tabled beforehand, which gave an overview of the Pay Remit guidance. In short, we are covered by the 2007/08 guidance (determined by our settlement date of 1 April 2008), with our submission for 2008/09 due by 31 Dec 2007. The Chair referred to para 6 of this note, saying that he had heard back from the sponsor team who said it would be possible to delay our pay remit submission until after receipt of the 2008/09 guidance, but as expected this would mean the pay

award would be late (at least Sept 2008). The Chair also pointed out that there was no way of knowing whether the 2008/09 guidance would be better or worse.

19. The Pay Unit had suggested submitting a formal pay remit for part of the year (April to July) and a second formal remit for the rest of the period. The Chair said he would not recommend this as two full pay remit processes would be too drawn out and time consuming.
20. The HM Treasury guidance was an average pay award of below 3.5% combined (Cost of Living and PRP). However, the Chair said we had yet to hear what the Scottish Executive's (SE) own version of the guidance was, with this due to be issued soon. The Chair had been invited to a briefing meeting on Tuesday 3 July in Edinburgh.
21. Gavin Miles said that the Union's advice would be to go for the best deal, but accepted it was not possible at this stage to know what was the best deal! He felt that we should go for one settlement only, as to do otherwise would be too upsetting for staff.
22. Quentin McLaren asked if a two year deal was on the cards. The Chair pointed out that this would be dependent on the SE's guidance. We don't know the resource funds from 1 April onwards yet, and therefore the next settlement may be for one year; it can only be multi-year if the funds are available.
23. After discussion, it was agreed that it would be best to follow the timetable of submitting pay remit by 31 December 2007, and getting settlement by 1 April 2008. The group will reconvene later in the year to discuss whether multi-year remit or not, once an indication of the resource funds for 2008/09 have been received. **Meanwhile, any update pay remit information will be e-mailed to group members as and when available.**

#### **On the Ground**

24. The Chair referred to the On the Ground update at the recent staff meeting and Jane's subsequent detailed notes that she circulated. He said there would also be an update available on Monday (2 July) when the Management Team meeting notes were completed.
25. The Chair explained that there is to be a single front end delivery service to customers, which will be called SEARS (Scottish Environment & Rural Services), with the project board made up of Chief Executives from Forestry Commission, SEPA, SNH and SE. This project board will appoint a design team made up of senior officers from their organisations. The design will focus on joint services to customers – namely grant delivery, provision of advice, regulation and enforcement.
26. Whilst National Parks were seen as a model for this joint working, the focus was Scotland-wide. It is expected that a proposal will be developed by end of Sept 2007, and agreement of delivery plans by June 2008.
27. Fiona Munro said the only queries she'd had were from external people – e.g. were we going to be disbanded/join up with another organisation?

## IT System

28. Fiona Munro, on behalf of staff, raised concerns regarding the “crashing” of the IT system and the increasing frequency when this has either totally crashed, or there is no e-mail or internet connection. Whilst they recognise that a long-term solution of joint working with SNH is being investigated, staff want to know what the short-term contingencies are. They are also concerned that as SNH don't do Microsoft just now, how can it be beneficial for CNPA to join up with them.
29. The Chair confirmed that as a follow-on from the On the Ground initiative, there is a joint project for Information & Communications Technology (ICT) services currently being explored with SNH. The next meeting with SNH is scheduled for Thursday 5 July (subsequently changed to Monday 9 July). There will be a technical evaluation of our infrastructure to see if it is possible to integrate our servers / networks. A specialist from SEPA will attend this meeting, to look at our current Microsoft network, giving their input as to both the joint project and our IT glitches.
30. Fiona Munro asked if the speed of our data transfer between HQ and Ballater could be looked at. Gavin Miles confirmed that no e-mails got through to Ballater when GIS was in use, with the demand for this usage increasing rapidly (particularly in the last six weeks).
31. The Chair explained that the constraint at present was the bandwidth, a dedicated “pipe” between HQ and Ballater. Integration with SNH would mean we were no longer reliant on the “pipe”, with it just being used as a back-up, and consequently improve the capacity and speed. Further future benefits would be video conferencing and desk top to desk top facility.
32. Quentin McLaren said that staff confidence regarding IT was very low, with the system seeming to be slower and slower. Being without internet access for a week had been particularly disruptive to his job and therefore very frustrating. The Chair said that the Web access should be reconnected by the beginning of next week.
33. The Chair acknowledged staff concerns, and said it was hoped that the SNH joint project would be completed by end of September this year, which would provide a bigger support mechanism.
34. **It was agreed that regular IT updates would be circulated to keep staff informed of progress.**

## Company Mobile Phones

35. Fiona Munro introduced this item, saying that staff had requested the availability of more mobile phones from a customer service and a Health & Safety point of view. It was also felt that there should be a mobile phone in each pool car. Fiona said that the current no. of three phones was not suitable for 50 staff, and that some staff did not want to give out personal mobile nos. She also pointed out that Ballater had one phone in each pool car.

36. The HR Manager said that the policy was that the three phones in HQ were for Health & Safety for lone working, available to someone travelling alone if they would feel more comfortable with a phone. If a phone was wanted for general work use then a business case had to be submitted which would then be considered. Phones would not just be issued to anyone on request. Staff could claim for the use of their own phone within the £5 incidental allowance available on the expenses form for non-receipted expenditure incurred.
37. **The Chair said he was content to get one mobile phone for each pool car and some spare ones. He agreed to check the most cost effective way to do this.**

#### **TOIL for Away-Days**

38. Sara Krawczynska introduced this item, saying that some staff had expressed concern at having to use their own time during an “away-day”, without being reimbursed by means of TOIL. They also asked for clarity on the following points:
- What is the purpose of an away-day?
  - Is there an expected balance of work/team building activity?
  - Should they take place only within office hours if that is all that can be claimed?
  - If there is an evening or overnight element is this optional if TOIL is not available?
  - If additional childcare costs are incurred, will they be reimbursed (especially if only 7½ hours can be claimed)?
39. The HR Manager said that away-days were designed to meet development needs of the group at that time, and that there should be a strong element of the whole group involved in the planning stages. There was no policy as to content, but as guidance the programme could include getting to know each other / fun / CNPA work / National Park / partners / team building / delivery by group / strategic direction of group / service delivery / achieving excellence, etc. The HR Manager said she was available to assist with guidance and planning of an away-day.
40. The HR Manager confirmed that an overnight stay was not compulsory. If this was a problem with some of the group, then the away-day should be held during working hours. This should be part of the discussions beforehand and agreed by the whole group. If childcare costs are incurred they can be reimbursed, but only if provided by a “registered” carer.
41. Fiona Munro said that in the case of the away-day to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs, one day was not feasible. She also said that in the event, the day’s content was heavy, with three National Parks being involved, and that they were working until 7.00pm. Group members felt it was more of an information sharing day rather than an away-day, with no fun included at all. The HR Manager said that this highlighted why the whole group should be involved in the planning stages, so that an unwanted programme was not inflicted on staff.

42. Eric Baird said it was important for away-days to be evaluated afterwards. Anne MacLean said if this was done anonymously then staff may be more inclined to express their views.
43. The HR Manager said that there had been a shift in general to away-days. Initially there was a greater need for team building, and therefore inclined towards activities. Whilst this was still considered, it was not a matter of course. Quentin McLaren agreed that groups were at different levels and therefore had different needs.
44. The Chair acknowledged the points raised by staff representatives, and empathised to an extent. However, in the guidance given employer representatives had tried to be clear and consistent with regard to TOIL etc. He said that they could not change the application of rules and that there were clearly lessons to be learned. It was important that groups speak together re wishes/wants and that everyone should want to take part.
45. **It was agreed that employer representatives would reinforce how away-days should be planned, and what can or cannot be claimed re TOIL, childcare expenses, etc.**

#### Special Leave

46. Fiona Munro introduced this item, saying that Adam Streeter-Smith had asked if the SCF would consider adopting SNH's special leave provision of three month's unpaid leave available once a member of staff has five years' service.
47. The HR Manager said that the CNPA had a Work/Life Balance Policy (full details in Staff Handbook), under which staff could apply for an unpaid career break. She also pointed out that there were elements of our policy that were better than SNH's. The CNPA was a much smaller organisation re managing career breaks – e.g. ensuring work covered in absence. It was open to all to apply for a career break, but the organisation could refuse, whereas in SNH's case the three month's unpaid leave was a basic entitlement. To date, all three career break requests had been supported.
48. **It was agreed that the CNPA's Work/Life Balance Policy and procedure was very flexible and that it should be left as it is.**
49. At this point Fiona Munro left the meeting.

#### Equality Schemes

50. The HR Manager introduced this information paper, saying it was a statutory requirement to put in place an Action Plan for implementation of disability, gender and race equality schemes. The draft Disability Equality Scheme was published on 4 Dec 2006 (revised version to be published shortly); the draft Gender Equality Scheme will be published in early July 2007; and the draft Race Equality Scheme will be published in October 2007.
51. Once in operation, the Equality Schemes will have to be reported on annually.

52. The HR Manager pointed out that a strand of the Gender Equality Scheme includes ensuring that we have an equal pay audit carried out to ensure that there is “no” gender-linked inequality of pay (note: typo in information paper – “no” missed out!). As we are a newish organisation, and our Job Evaluation was carried out per job and not gender, we have no historic problems re gender pay issues.

#### **Accommodation and Cleaning Services Update**

53. The Chair introduced the update paper which was provided by Andy Rinning, and acknowledged the ongoing concerns raised by the staff representatives. He was able to tell the Forum members that an early resolution was in sight, but that he was not in a position to go into details due to the stage of the negotiations.
54. Sara Krawczynska asked if the cleaning at Morlich House was included in the negotiations. The Chair said that this was not the case.
55. **The Chair assured staff representatives that he would inform them as soon as a decision had been made on how to move forward**, and that he would then also be in a position to issue guidelines to staff re general housekeeping.

#### **Health & Safety Update**

56. The Chair introduced the information paper – an update on Health & Safety - and asked if there were any questions or issues arising.
57. Quentin McLaren asked if the disabled ramp outside the Boardroom was complete, as there was no safety rail along the edge. **The Chair said he would check this with Andy Rinning, but thought it still had to be done.**
58. Anne MacLean wanted it noted that she was pleased to see that the Convenor now pointed out the fire exits and gathering point before each meeting.

#### **Training & Development Update**

59. The HR Manager introduced this information paper. In addition to the update, she reported that she was currently organising management training for those staff below Head of Group. A tender was out just now, which it was hoped would be awarded soon. There will be a selection of staff to assess preferred bidder. The Chair said a number of “participants” will be asked to review the proposals and feed in comments. It was hoped to roll out this training by September.

#### **Planning Team Staffing Levels**

60. Gavin Miles raised the issue of a shortage of planning staff, on behalf of staff at Ballater, who wanted it raised formally at SCF as they didn’t appear to be getting a response from their Line Manager despite raising it a few times over a long period of time. He reported that it was affecting team morale and respect for their Line Manager.

61. The Chair said that employer representatives had a meeting with the planning team set up for Monday 2 July at Ballater to brainstorm solutions. He said there was a national issue of a shortage of planners and that there would be no quick solution, with it needing some creativity to resolve the issue.
62. Gavin Miles confirmed that the full breadth of the service was affected: Local Plan being acute as no replacement in place for his secondment, and Development Control and Enforcement due to size of workload. Staff were already beyond their limit and could not work any harder. Gavin pointed out that the issues had been highlighted for over a year and it was therefore no surprise to the team that it was now a “hot” topic.
63. Anne MacLean said that the planning team were “running to stand still”, and that we would look toothless and get a bad reputation if we don’t have the resources to carry out enforcement.
64. Eric Baird asked if the fact that planning was based at Ballater and not HQ was responsible for the apparent lack of response to staff concerns. Management Team hear what Head of Group says, not what the staff say. Could it be that vibes are not being picked up as Ballater separate from HQ?
65. The Chair acknowledged it was one conduit for this information that wasn’t available, and that one had to make a conscious decision to go to Ballater. He would reflect on this personally, and make a point of going to Ballater regularly – say, four times a year.
66. Gavin Miles said that part of the problem was that the Line Manager was spending a large proportion of his time on the Pylon issue, and was therefore pressed for time meaning that general planning was being neglected, creating a problem for the planning team. Planning work is statutory and not discretionary.
67. The Chair thanked everyone for such a useful discussion, saying that Monday would be the start of a resolution.

#### **Staff Meetings**

68. The Chair introduced this item, saying that one of things highlighted in the Staff Survey was the need to address and improve internal communications, with the staff meeting being a key element. However, it was noted that there had been a falling away of numbers recently at staff meetings, and the Chair asked staff representatives if there were other preferred ways to improve internal communications.
69. Quentin McLaren felt that the current format for staff meetings was an improvement, with Jane Hope giving an overview of the bigger picture and the round up from group representatives quicker and more focussed. He didn’t know why numbers were falling.
70. Eric Baird observed that the staff meetings seemed to be like an “in-house” magazine with the staff being given the opportunity to respond. He asked if there could be a fun



element to them, perhaps a way to make them more enjoyable. It was noted that the speakers we used to have at meetings were popular, but that this had now stopped.

71. Anne MacLean felt it was important and valuable to continue to hear what other groups were doing.
72. Quentin McLaren suggested asking the staff why attendance was down. **Staff representatives agreed to do this, and to find out opinion on internal communications as a whole.**
73. **The Chair said the format of staff meetings seemed to be broadly right, but the issue would be brought up at the next SCF meeting.**

#### **Any Other Business**

74. The Chair, following on from the replacement of staff representative action point (para 17), asked whether Gavin Miles should stay on as the Ballater representative now that he was seconded to Strategic Policy & Planning Officer. After discussion, it was agreed that Gavin would continue to represent Ballater as he was based there most of the time, and seeking someone else from Ballater would probably mean another Band 2 representative. It was therefore agreed that the HR Manager would focus on a member of staff outwith Band 2 when she sought a replacement.
75. Eric Baird said he was heartened by the issues raised through the SCF, telling the staff representatives he saw it as them seeking quality in their workplace to enable good delivery, and that it was very constructive.

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

76. The next meeting of the Staff Consultative Forum will be held on Thursday 4 October 2007 at 11.00am in the Boardroom, Grantown-on-Spey.

**Summary of Actions Arising**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible</b>	<b>Due Date</b>
14/08/06	Monitoring mechanism for cleaners in place	DC	Sept 06
14/08/06	Issue guidelines re general housekeeping	DC,FS	Sept 06
06/11/06	Piggy back on discounted hotel rates (e.g. SNH)	DC	
06/11/06	Consider article in Housing Magazine on auditing customer care	DC,FS	On hold
21/02/07	Include a paper on Terms of Redundancy in future SCF meeting	DC	
21/02/07	Ensure Board Members have new or updated policies	FS	Sept 07
16/03/07	Coordinate appointment of replacement staff representative.	FS	May 07
Para 37	Investigate most cost effective method re getting more mobile phones	DC	
Para 45	Issue guidance re away days	FS	
Para 55	Inform staff representatives of outcome of negotiations regarding cleaning services	DC	
Para 57	Check with A Rinning re completion of ramp	DC	
Para 72	Find out why attendance at staff meetings down	Staff reps	

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