

MINUTES of MEETING of the FINANCE COMMITTEE of

THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

held at Beaton Craigie Room, Albert Halls, Ballater
on 8 November 2013

Present:

Eleanor Mackintosh
Gregor Rimell

Duncan Bryden
Kate Howie (Convenor)

In Attendance:

Grant Moir, Chief Executive
David Cameron, Corporate Services Director
Daniel Ralph, Finance Manager
Pete Crane, Head of Visitor Services

Apologies:

Angela Douglas

Minutes of Previous Meetings

1. Minutes of the meeting of 27 September 2013 were approved with no amendments.

Matters Arising

2. Pete confirmed that Nethy Bridge Community Centre own the hall, with regard to the question on this point at the previous meeting.
3. Pete Crane gave an update on the Laggan capital project. The timeline established between the Community Trust and their consultants confirmed that it is still possible to get a contract agreed and committed by March 2014. Pete commented that the timetable is very tight although with a reasonable chance of contract commitment within the required timeframe. Members noted that tender and building warrant processes are crucial to delivery.
4. On wider capital investment projects, members noted updates that:
 - a) Aviemore Community Park: permissions were in place and lease was due to be signed in the week following the meeting;
 - b) Tomintoul: project was ready to go regarding land permissions and tendering;
 - c) Nethy Bridge: project progressing satisfactorily;
 - d) Access: Speyside Way bridge had been built; other Speyside Way permissions being applied for as separate applications.

5. Officers present highlighted that staff time would be very stretched with slippage in workplans elsewhere expected as a result of the push to ensure delivery of the capital projects as far as possible.

Appointment of Committee Convenor

6. David Cameron highlighted that this meeting was the first since the revised membership of the Committee had been agreed by the Board in September. He therefore asked for nominations for the Convenor of the Committee.
7. Kate Howie was nominated by Committee members. There being only one nomination, David Cameron declared Kate Howie as appointed as Convenor.
8. Members discussed whether this appointment of Convenor needed ratification by the Board. David highlighted that the paper to the Board in September 2013 making changes to Committee membership had made clear that the Committee's would appoint their own Convenor and as this had been agreed by the Board there seemed no need for any further ratification. This had also been the Authority's practice over the previous 8 years. Members asked that David check this position against the standing orders.

Project Proposal: Visitor Survey (Paper 1)

9. Pete Crane presented this project proposal on the delivery of a Visitor Survey in 2014/15, costing up to £50,000. Pete highlighted as an element of the proposals that contractors appointed would also be tasked to consider how best to operate a visitor survey both in conduct of the forthcoming contract and into the future at a reduced total cost.
10. Grant reported that the business community were keen to see this piece of work happen. Despite a number of contacts with other organisations, there are no other partners willing to co-finance this work.
11. In discussion it was considered whether costs would go down if the survey was tendered and operated jointly with Loch Lomond and the Trossachs NPA (LLT). This was perceived to be a potential outcome, although these was also a recognition that the design of the survey was unlikely to be fully agreed between both organisations with differing points of interest and information collection opportunities.
12. Members agreed it was important that information gathered was comparable over years and consistent between surveys. There was increasing potential to do more with the information gathered as the available time series extended.
13. Members agreed that the information generated was very valuable, and the project proposed therefore represented good value even if the "headline" cost seemed high. If the survey could be designed to get costs down this would be very welcome, provided that the quality of information was maintained. Members recognised that the partnership with LLT may not go ahead.
14. **Members agreed the project proposal.**

Finance Monitoring: 6 Months to 30 September 2013 (Paper 2)

15. Daniel Ralph introduced this paper, presenting an update on the Authority's financial position half way through the financial year.
16. Daniel highlighted an increase in net expenditure against budget for the year at 30 September of £167,000, due to a shortfall in Operational Plan income contributions against budget expectations. This position related almost wholly to the situation with LEADER grant claims, which were still being held by Scottish Government pending the conclusion of project reviews and identification of whether project funding was to be met by LEADER European funds or from domestic sources. Officers confirmed that there remained no perceived risk of the funds not ultimately being released by Scottish Government. This issue was more one of cash flow timing.
17. Daniel highlighted that core expenditure on staff was running slightly below budget at the half year point while expenditure on other areas of core costs were above budget. The paper highlighted specific areas of activity which had notable variations from budget.
18. In discussion, officers confirmed that there were no underlying issues at present which posed a significant risk to the Authority being able to bring the financial position back to a break even by the year end.
19. **Members thanked Daniel for the paper and noted the report.**

CNPA Office Accommodation: Outline Business Case (Paper 3)

20. David Cameron presented the outline business case (OBC) prepared to support the consideration of the Authority's main office accommodation needs. The OBC represented an initial overview of the rationale for the accommodation review, and general cost estimates for main options.
21. In discussion, members noted that the work would progress from preparation of an OBC to a full business case (FBC) considering in full the options for the Authority's future accommodation needs. This FBC would most likely be prepared for consideration by the Board at its meeting in March 2014, given timetables to identify and evaluate options. In the meantime, only a small amount of resources would be committed in developing further feasibility and options appraisal information to support the development of the FBC.
22. Members noted the position with the review of the Authority's accommodation provision.

Any Other Competent Business

23. There were no other items of business considered.

Date of Next Meeting

24. Committee meeting 7 February 2014, Ballater.