

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title:** CNPA ADVISORY GROUPS

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### **Purpose**

To review operation of working groups and advisory groups over the first year, and seek agreement to revised arrangements.

### **Recommendations**

- a) That the Board agree to the six advisory forums described below (paragraph 21);
- b) That staff bring forward proposals for membership and remit, and other arrangements for servicing the forums in keeping with the principles set out in paragraphs 23 and 24;
- c) That the working groups are wound down in their current form, and that staff liaise with individual CNPA Board members to draw on their expertise and experience as appropriate;
- d) That the Senior Management Team keep an overview of staff working arrangements to ensure they are sufficiently broadly based and engage with others to deliver well informed and balanced advice;
- e) That guidance on preparing Board papers is endorsed as a means of ensuring advice addresses all the relevant issues, including consultation (see checklist at Annex 1);
- f) That seminars and workshops are also used as a way of bringing large groups of people together to engage on particular topics.

### **Executive Summary**

The biggest challenge for the CNPA is to add value to the extensive work already being taken forward by a range of public bodies by ensuring a genuinely integrated and consultative approach to the complex policy issues facing the area. It is therefore proposed that a limited number of advisory forums are set up, with wide membership:

- Joined up Government /National Park Plan Forum
- Integrated Land Management Forum
- Visitor services, Tourism, and Information Forum
- Local Access Forum(s) (required under the Land reform legislation)
- Social and Economic Development Forum
  - The existing Housing Strategy implementation group as a sub group, reflecting the importance of housing issues in the CNP

These groups will have a wide membership, and will be advisory rather than project management groups. The work of the CNPA would also be supported by seminars on appropriate topics, to bring together a wide range of views on a particular issue.

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## CNPA ADVISORY GROUPS

### Introduction

1. Any discussion on working groups/advisory groups need to be set in the wider context of the Board's role, and the various mechanisms available to it for fulfilling that role.
2. The Board is ultimately responsible to Scottish Ministers (and hence to the Scottish Parliament) for the actions and the performance of the CNPA. That accountability is formally delivered each year through the annual report and accounts, which explains how the organisation has delivered its objectives as set out in the corporate plan and operational plan for that year.
3. That responsibility has to be exercised in a non-executive fashion – Members are only paid for three days input per month. Their role is therefore to:
  - a) set the strategic direction within which staff work; and
  - b) to monitor progress in delivering key objectives.

### Setting the Strategic Direction

4. Examples of setting the strategic direction include the following:
5. ***Tourism Strategy for the CNP:*** this was recently approved by the Board, and sets out the role of the CNPA as leading and coordinating a collective approach to tourism development across the whole Park area. That includes, for example, taking a lead in developing a tourism marketing strategy and action plan, applying for the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism, and developing ideas for delivering quality standards. Once the Board had agreed a paper setting out this approach, the job of staff is to work to deliver/implement that strategy. The various elements of it will appear in the operational plan, and can be monitored on a regular basis through reports on the progress with the operational plan (discussed further below).
6. ***Policy on Windfarms:*** A CNPA policy on windfarms within the Park, once agreed by the Board, provides the basis for future decisions on planning applications within the Park, and contributions to consultations on related issues.
7. ***Grant Scheme:*** once agreed in principle by the Board, the proposed Communities Small Grants scheme became the basis on which staff could make decisions on applications for financial assistance.
8. ***Communications Strategy:*** Once approved by the Board, this provided the framework for a whole range of activities, to the drafting of CNPA documents, and the way we go about raising the profile of the CNPA and the Park.
9. ***Corporate Plan:*** The Board agrees a corporate plan each year, for the next three years, setting out the high level aims and objectives for the organisation, and its funding needs. The operational plan, also approved by the Board, sets out more detail of the current year's work for delivering the corporate plan. The operational plan would include in it, for

example, the objectives of: developing a communications strategy, developing a grant scheme, developing interim policies on key planning issues, etc. (as set out above).

10. In each of these examples, the Board's role has been to approve proposals put to them as Board papers by staff, whose job is then to work within the framework set by the Board, and/or deliver the various elements of a strategy. It is then the role of the Board to monitor how effectively this is being done.

### **Monitoring Progress**

11. Once the corporate plan (and budget) and the operational plan are in place, there are three main ways in which the Board monitors progress:
12. **Expenditure:** The question "are we keeping to budget" is addressed each quarter by the finance committee, which takes quarterly reports on expenditure to date against budget, and expected outturn for the year. These papers are also copied, for information, to all Board Members.
13. **Activities/Outcomes:** The question "are we delivering what we said we would" is addressed in two ways.
  - a) papers to the Board from time to time once key decision points have been reached in a strand of work;
  - b) by quarterly reports to the Board on progress against the Operational Plan. This is not so much a question of expenditure, but about whether or not the key objectives specified in the operational plan have been delivered or are on track. For example, the Board would want to be reassured that we on track for having the first draft of the National Park Plan by March 2005, and if not, what the implications were and whether additional resources needed to be approved to ensure this as a priority (and by implication, agree that some other objective should slip).
14. **The Three "Es":** The question "are we operating as effectively, efficiently and economically as possible" is addressed by the quarterly meetings of the Audit Committee, who agree the programme of work by the internal and external auditors, and consider their reports throughout the year.
15. These are the main formal mechanisms through which the Board can reassure itself that the strategic direction of the CNPA, which they have agreed, is being followed by the work of staff.
16. In fulfilling its strategic role, it is essential that the Board is receiving good well-founded advice that reflects the full spectrum of opinion of stakeholders as well as being based on sound fact and evidence. Further, it is important that there are effective mechanisms in place for the CNPA to engage with stakeholders so that the communication is two-way – the organisation needs to know the views of others, but equally, needs to ensure that others are aware of what the CNPA is doing.
17. This paper recommends a number of advisory groups which will ensure the Board is in touch with outside stakeholders and views, and will be complementary to the

arrangements already described which allow the Board to make decisions on strategic direction, and to monitor progress.

### **First Year of Operation**

18. The Board considered two papers soon after its establishment (Paper 2: 27 June 2003, and paper 1: 10 September 2003), and as an initial measure, set up a number of time- limited working groups focused on specific tasks. This decision recognised the circumstances which the Board found itself in at the time. Having been established with only a very short preparatory period, there was very limited staffing capacity. As a result, it proved very difficult to deal with the inevitable pressures to start making decisions on a range of early actions. Working groups were therefore set up (paper 1: 10 September 2003) with the clear intention that these should be time limited, should focus on planning and delivery of particular actions and projects, with initial membership being of small number of board members, but widening out membership as required.
19. The Board now has a good opportunity to take stock of its first year, and review these working arrangements. This review takes account of informal discussions with Members, and reflects the following observations:
  - Many of the working groups have remained very small with membership limited to Board members and staff. In the absence of other more broadly based groups this is leading to the impression that the Board is not engaging properly with the outside world.
  - Staff capacity has increased over the past year. Nevertheless, capacity will always be limited, and servicing Groups takes up some of that capacity.
  - The use of ad-hoc meetings, as opposed to formal groups, has proved effective as a means of engaging with other stakeholders and generating well-informed advice for the Board (e.g. the one-off public meetings held to discuss response to CAP reform consultation);
  - Board members put in their full time allowance (3 days a month) simply on Board meetings and planning meetings. Working groups have proved a considerable additional time burden.
  - The advisory panels have not met to date (other than the panel on Joined Up Government)
  - Decisions on CNPA strategy and policy are ultimately for the Board itself, but in reaching those decisions the Board must be well informed and advised. Other groups, particularly those that have a broadly based membership, have a vital role to play in providing that information and advice.

### **Proposal**

20. The biggest challenge for the CNPA is ensuring a truly integrated approach to dealing with complex policy issues – complex because of the involvement of a number of different agencies in delivery, and because of the range of different interests and policies which are affected (e.g. strategies on tourism in the National Park cannot be looked at in isolation from information/interpretation, economic development, signage, recreation, landscape etc).

21. It is therefore proposed that five standing advisory forums (and one sub group) are established to ensure integration of policy issues. They also largely mirror the chapters in the National Park Plan, and will provide an essential sounding board as we develop the Park Plan:
- Joined up Government /National Park Plan
  - Integrated Land Management (“stewardship of natural resources”)
  - Visitor services, Tourism, and Information (“Understanding and enjoying the Park”)
  - Local Access Forum(s) (required under the Land Reform Legislation to advise the CNPA)
  - Social and Economic development (“Communities living and working in the Park”).
    - The existing Housing Strategy implementation group as a sub group, reflecting the importance of housing issues in the CNP.
22. These are in many ways equivalent to the 5 Advisory Panels proposed last year, but with the emphasis shifted towards ensuring adequate joining-up between policies and strategies that will eventually be articulated in the National Park Plan. These groups are not intended to draft the National Park Plan chapters, or to project-manage, but they would provide a useful sounding board and source of advice. In most cases (certainly the first three) they can be based on existing working groups or advisory panels, with membership widened as appropriate.
23. Two factors are crucial to the Groups’ success:
- Membership. It follows that these groups need to be broadly based, and their strength will come from bringing a range of different viewpoints round the table. They would have a very wide membership (about 25), with “paper/electronic” membership to widen membership beyond those for whom there is room round the table or who cannot attend meetings. The groups would be chaired by a Board member, with only one or two other members attending, to maximise room for external attendance.
  - How they are serviced. The Groups must be used as sounding boards, to inform the development and delivery of policy. They should be serviced by relevant CNPA staff, who would prepare agendas and papers to bring forward relevant issues for discussion, which would help inform the development of policy. There might be an element of reporting on work in progress in order to keep people informed, but only briefly, and not in order to manage projects or the work of staff.
24. We must recognise, in how we use these forums, that there are limits to the demands we can place on people’s time, particularly those who are self employed. Those attending would be eligible for mileage expenses (unless from a public agency, in which case the agency would be expected to cover travel costs). We might need to be more creative in finding meeting times that are acceptable to others (evenings, for example). We must ensure that meetings interesting; are no more frequent than is useful or necessary; that papers are short, readable and stimulate discussion; that agendas include relevant issues for discussion (and not just everything happening in the Park).

**Seminars**

25. In addition it is proposed that we make use of occasional seminars and workshops to bring together relatively large numbers of people to discuss particular issues. We have already used such ad-hoc gatherings to discuss CAP reform; and there is already a proposal for a seminar held twice a year to bring together estate/land owners to discuss issues of mutual interest.

**Working Groups**

26. The work of the working groups is narrowly focused on specific tasks. In most cases the work of these groups has now moved on, and can be dealt with through other means. Generally it is suggested that the work of these groups is simply taken on by the relevant staff, and that they should call on the relevant Board members informally for discussions where a steer is required.

Ranger Svcs	Wind up. Staff to seek guidance informally from Members as required.
Food Marketing	Work to become part of ILM Advisory forum
Housing Development	Wind up, but use Cairngorms Housing Strategy Group as a sounding board for new proposals on affordable housing.
Park for All	Wind up. Use other forums (Social & Economic Development Forum, and the Visitor Svcs, Tourism etc Forum, Access Forum, as sounding boards.
TDWG	Advisory role to pass to Visitor services, Tourism etc Advisory Forum (with suitable additions to membership).
Access	Replace in due course by Local Access Forum, planned for January 2005.
Integrated public transport	Not yet started – set up officers gp when Economic Development officer in place.
Gateways	Wind up now Phase 1 of project complete.
NP Plan	Already agreed by Board to wind up, and joint officer group to take over project management. Advisory forum on Joined Up Government to advise on strategic issues.
Local Plan	Wind up and replace by joint officer group for project management.
Agriculture-ILMWG	Advisory role to pass to ILM Forum, with widened membership.

**Other Groups**

27. It is important to view these proposals in context. There are many groupings in existence which provide useful vehicles for communication, a means to engaging with particular communities of interest.

28. The Association of Cairngorms Community Councils is an independent group (part funded by the CNPA), which provides an essential vehicle for the CNPA to engage with communities on issues that collectively affect communities (albeit not a substitute for engagement with individual communities on relevant issues). The Cairngorms Chamber of Commerce is now operating across the whole Park, and provides a collective voice for business interests with which the CNPA can engage. There are groups that oversee the management of particular projects (LEADER +, the moorland project, and the LBAP project).
  
29. In addition, there are many informal groupings, sometimes ad hoc, sometimes more permanent, which inform the work of staff at the CNPA. These tend to be more focused on the practicalities of delivery. For example: there is a standing group of Local authority and Scottish Executive representatives which regularly reviews the arrangements (as set out in a protocol) on call-in of planning applications. Similarly a group of local authority and NPA representatives is forming to ensure a joined up approach to delivering the access legislation duties across the five access authorities in and around the Park. There is an annual gathering for all the Park Ranger Services, generally hosted by the CNPA in November.

## CNPA BOARD PAPERS

### GUIDANCE ON PREPARATION (extract)

To ensure Board papers (and planning policy papers) deal with the right issues, the following checklist/template should be used:

- What exactly are we asking the Board to approve, and why?;
- How does this help deliver corporate plan?;
- Relationship between this strategy/policy (if for CNPA) and NP Plan
- Consequences/interactions with other policy areas of CNPA/CNP;
- Links with National policies (e.g. from Scottish Executive)
- Links with prior Board papers/approvals;
- Impact on other organisations, and communities;
- Consequences for other stakeholders;
- Input from others into preparation of paper (consultation), and extent to which advice reflects views of other stakeholders;
- Presentational implications
- Financial implications