

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

**THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
held at Glen Clova Hotel, Glen Clova
on 16 May, 2008**

Present:

Eleanor Mackintosh
David Green

Mary McCafferty
David Fallows

In Attendance:

Jane Hope, Chief Executive
David Cameron, Head of Corporate Services
Pete Crane, Senior Visitor Services officer
Claire Ross, Education and Inclusion Manager

Apologies:

Bruce Luffman, Alistair Highet (Interim Finance Manager)

Welcome

1. The Chairperson welcomed all present to the meeting. Apologies were noted as above.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

2. The minutes of the previous meetings of 22 February and 20 March 2008 were approved without amendment.

Matters Arising

3. Members noted that following the meeting of 22 February, both the Chair and David Cameron had alerted the Chair of the Staffing and Recruitment Committee to the principles on staffing budgets and management agreed by the Finance Committee on 18 January. The action at paragraph 4 of the minutes of 22 February was therefore discharged.

4. The action from 20 March to provide a consolidated budget paper for 2008/09 had also been discharged, with a paper on the current agenda for review by the Committee.

Budget 2008/09 (Paper 1)

5. David Cameron introduced this paper, which set out a consolidated core and operational plan budget for 2008/09 for endorsement by the Committee. The paper also presented a first update on progress with the efficiency savings targets for 2008/09.
6. The Chair highlighted that she expected close control would be required over budget monitoring and management for the year, given the general perception of firmer expenditure proposals being developed at the early stages of the year as compared with previous years. This increased the risk of an over-spend in the year when combined with the level of over-programming that continued to be built into the initial Operational Plan.
7. In discussion, members highlighted a concern that the level of resources that may be needed to support the strategic review of National Parks may add pressure to the budget. There were no additional or new resources to support this process and the Committee may have to consider switching funds between budgets should resources be required to support the process, with lower expenditure priorities having to slip.
8. Members questioned whether the planned efficiency savings on software and office running costs could be realised. David responded that he was relatively confident on the software saving as this related to a reduction in the costs of GIS software which, while not confirmed in writing, he had a strong expectation of realising. The other reductions in office running costs related in the main to accommodation rentals, which had been secured through moving out of Morlich House in Grantown.
9. **Members endorsed the 2008/09 budget figures for Core and Operational plan activities, and noted progress toward achieving the target efficiency savings.**
10. Members welcomed the clarity of the paper.

Approval of Expenditure to 2010: Land Based Business Training Project and Cairngorms Awareness and Pride Project (Paper 2)

11. Claire Ross introduced this paper, which sought the Committee's approval to commitment of expenditure on the Land Based Business

Training Project (LBBTP) and Cairngorms Awareness and Pride (CAP) projects between April 2008 and December 2010. This paper followed up a previous paper to the Board in August 2007, at which the Board had given in principle support to the project subject to Finance Committee confirmation of affordability and satisfactory levels of funding support.

12. Claire highlighted that the paper confirmed the levels of funding support now secured.
13. Members welcomed the funding secured for the project, and thanked Claire and Kate for their work on this.
14. Members' discussions focussed on the longer-term sustainability of the activity, with members recognising that it would be increasingly difficult for the Authority to successfully bid for continuation funding for the same general activity despite the ongoing success of the project. Discussions highlighted that the project activities may have to be split up, with perhaps new partners taking the lead for different elements of project activity. This may allow new organisations to put in new bids for slightly refocused delivery along the same general themes as LBBTP and CAP had found success with.
15. **Members approved expenditure, as detailed in paragraph 8 of the paper, for the LBBTP and Cap projects.**
16. Members requested that an officer group be established to develop and appraise options for longer term sustainability of these projects, and Claire and David agreed to take this forward.

Ratification of Transfer of Grant Aid Function for Ranger Services in the National Park (Paper 3)

17. Pete Crane introduced this paper, which sought detailed approval for the transfer of the grant-aid function for ranger services in the National Park from SNH to the Authority. This paper followed previous approval in principle by the Board that the Authority should take on the discretionary ranger grant function from SNH, subject to any proposal not reducing the overall public support for ranger services and subject to detailed approval by the Finance Committee.
18. Pete highlighted that agreement had been reached with SNH to transfer a sum of £120,000 to the National Park Authority for this purpose, which covered the total of £116,650 current levels of grant aid from SNH to ranger services within the National Park and also provided a sum to cover an element of administration costs.

19. Members welcomed the process being brought to a conclusion after a long period and thanked Pete for all his work on this subject.
20. In discussion, members questioned whether it may be possible to ring-fence this budget allocation within CNPA's income. David Cameron highlighted that this was unlikely within the Scottish Government's budget process, which only included a single budget line for total grant to each national park authority. However, this paper now established the 2008/09 benchmark grant level, which the Board and Finance Committee could have regard to when setting future budget allocations.
21. Members asked whether the funds to support administration would be adequate to cover costs. Pete responded that this was unlikely to be the case in the initial stages, but completion of some other projects over the course of 2008/09 was likely to give some staff resource capacity to take the work on. In the medium term, as staff became accustomed to the activity, the resource allocation amounted to about 0.1 of a full time equivalent post, which seemed a reasonable time allocation for the activity.
22. David Cameron highlighted that the Authority should seek to establish the budget transfer as a 2008/09 baseline adjustment, in order that the Authority would receive any inflationary grant increases due for 2009/10 on this amount.
23. **Members approved the transfer of the grant aid function for ranger services in the Cairngorms National Park from SNH to the Authority.**
24. Members requested that David Cameron write to SNH and Scottish Government to confirm this position, and also requested David to seek the 2009/10 inflation uplift if possible.

Ratification of Previously Approved Expenditure Proposals (Paper 4)

25. **Members approved the paper as a formal note of previous expenditure decisions taken under the Committee's scheme of delegation.**
26. David Cameron noted that one activity, the support for the River Dee Catchment Management Plan, should strictly have been brought to a full meeting of the Committee as a result of the cumulative level of expenditure on the activity over three years now exceeding the £25,000 limit for approval by the Chair with the support of the Chief Executive and Head of Corporate Services. Unfortunately, this had now been identified on time on this occasion, but any future expenditure proposed

on this project would be brought to the Committee for prior approval. Members accepted this position.

2007/08 Budget: First Draft Outturn (Paper 5)

27. David Cameron introduced the paper, highlighting a current forecast of a small surplus for 2007/08 of £34,000 (0.7% of income).
28. **Members welcomed this first indication that maximum use had been made of 2007/08 resources available.**
29. Members noted further updates would be issued when available.

Any Other Business

CNPA Corporate Website Expenditure Justification

30. Members considered the expenditure justification for the Authority's website, covering the website hosting, maintenance, content management and redevelopment service over the next 3 years. This proposal followed a competitive tender exercise undertaken by staff.
31. Members discussed the delicate balance between the costs of the activity and functionality made available. This balance was particularly difficult in the current funding environment, where the Finance Committee had agreed a reduction in website management cost as part of the efficiency savings plan for 2008/09. Members recognised that, while at first sight costs may appear high, the tender process had realised the target efficiency saving.
32. David Cameron highlighted that the intention was for training available under the contract to allow staff to be more active in site development and content management, with a view to allowing more to be done with the site within a contained cost-base.
33. Members noted that in due course they may wish more functionality from the website, and accepted that if this was the case then budget allocations would have to be reviewed.
34. Members noted that the best vehicle for considering the functionality which may be required in the future from the website may be through a communications and media strategy where the role of the website may be viewed in the context of the Authority's various other communication mechanisms.
35. **Members approved the proposed expenditure.**

Date of Next Meeting

36. The next meeting of the Finance Committee was scheduled to take place at 9am on 8 August 2008, Albert Hall, Ballater.

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