

MINUTES of MEETING of the
FINANCE COMMITTEE of

THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
held at Community Hall, Boat of Garten
on 22 February 2008

Present:

Eleanor Mackintosh
David Green
Bruce Luffman

Mary McCafferty
David Fallows

In Attendance:

Jane Hope, Chief Executive
David Cameron, Head of Corporate Services
Denby Pettitt, Finance Manager
Hamish Trench, Head of Heritage and Land Management

Apologies:

None

Welcome

1. The Chairperson welcomed all present to the meeting. There were no apologies.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

2. The minutes of the previous meeting of 18 January 2008 were approved without amendment.

Matters Arising

3. The Chair noted that the action arising from the previous meeting, regarding consideration of a further paper on staffing, was covered by an item on the current agenda.
4. Members requested that the Head of Corporate Services draw the principles agreed by the Committee on staffing at its last meeting to Anne MacLean's attention as the Chair of the Staffing and Recruitment Committee.

Ratification of Previously Approved Expenditure Proposals (Paper 1)

5. Members questioned whether the Green Farms project had received any funding support from other partners, or whether the Authority was the only contributor. Officers responded that the project was receiving in-kind support (time input) from others. The tight timescale for delivery of this activity was noted.
6. Members discussed the DMO funding agreed for Royal Deeside and questioned whether this represented parity of treatment with other DMOs. Officers indicated that funding levels for all supported activities were based on need and requests made by partners, rather than seeking to establish exact parity in funding levels between applicants. This was equally the case for the Authority's support of DMOs.
7. **Members approved the paper as a formal note of decisions taken.**

2008/11 Budget Update: Staff Monitoring and Efficiency Savings (Paper 2)

8. David Cameron introduced this paper, which sought to progress the Committee's previous discussions on amendments to the method of monitoring and controlling the Authority's expenditure on staffing. The paper set out a proposal that the guideline figure for staff salaries should be set at 53% of total cash income, based on an analysis of the current staffing provision and future need that could be anticipated at this time from existing Board approvals to activities.
9. David also highlighted that the paper set out, and sought members approval to, the efficiency delivery plan for 2008/09, through which the Authority would seek to meet the Scottish Government's 2% efficiency saving target, equating to £90,000.
10. In discussion, members highlighted their concerns that there would be an opportunity to avoid the staffing control guideline by routing expenditure on staff through consultancy budgets rather than payroll costs. David Cameron assured members that this would equally be picked up by members through finance monitoring of other Core expenditure budgets, including that for consultancies.
11. Members also expressed some concern that in establishing a guideline, there would be some temptation to spend at this level. Officers assured members that the Management Team would continue to have regard to overall budget priorities, including seeking to maintain the maximum level of investment through the Operational Plan that was possible.
12. **Members agreed the proposal for implementing revised monitoring controls on staff expenditure.**
13. In considering the proposed efficiency savings plans, members highlighted concerns that many of these reductions could have consequences for the effectiveness of the organisation, or the capacity to deliver some of its objectives. David Cameron agreed

that there were potential risks involved in implementing each of the proposed efficiencies. The areas and level of reduction proposed, had been selected to minimise these risks, but they did remain. Risks had been highlighted in the proposal to be submitted to Scottish Government.

14. **Members agreed the proposed efficiency delivery plan, and thanked officers for their work in developing this.**
15. **Members agreed that budget monitoring reports should enable delivery of these efficiencies to be monitored through the course of the year.**

Outturn for Ten Months to January 2008 (Paper 3)

16. Denby Pettitt introduced this paper, which set out the standard budget monitoring information for Committee's consideration. In keeping with the pattern of expenditure in previous years, the operational plan expenditure remained significantly behind budget at the end of January. Denby assured officers that work was ongoing to seek to pull expenditure back on track by the end of the year and maximise use of resources. Plans were also in place to address any late slippage.
17. **Members noted the report.**

Any Other Business

18. The Chair stated that there were 3 items of other business for consideration.

Rothiemurchus Funding Agreement

19. The Chair expressed disappointment that this had once again come through as an item of other business, which meant that the papers had not had the opportunity of circulation to all Board members.
20. Members discussed the merits of approving a funding agreement in advance of the Operational Plan being considered by the Board. In discussion with officers, members accepted that there were special circumstances for approving expenditure in advance of the operational plan in this case. Members welcomed officers' vision to move this agreement toward a national standard format.
21. Members approved the expenditure proposal.

Financial Consequences of Planning Investigation Work

22. The Chair highlighted a decision at a recent planning committee to pay for a further investigation into an aspect of a planning application. The issue here was one of the future consequences should this establish a precedent. In this case, members also identified an issue that there was no policy in place to require certain aspects of an

application to be sufficiently tested in the marketplace for a reasonable period prior to an application being made, hence the Authority had little option other than to pay for investigation work if the application was to be resolved in as timely a fashion as possible. Members accepted that this was not necessarily a case for Finance Committee, although there were potential financial consequences if planning policy was not revisited.

Thanks to Denby Pettitt

23. The Chair thanked Denby for all his work over the past years, as this would be his last Committee meeting prior to leaving the Authority. Members joined the thanks and wished Denby well for the future.

Date of Next Meeting

24. The next meeting of the Finance Committee was scheduled to take place at 9am on 16 May 2008, Clova Hall, Glen Clova.
25. Members noted there was also likely to be a brief meeting prior to the Board on 20 March to consider the Corporate and Operational Plans.