

## CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

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**Title:** BOARD ORGANISATION – COMMITTEES;  
ADVISORY GROUPS; ETC

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### **Purpose**

To seek the Board's views on the mechanisms and structures it might use, in addition to full board meetings, to achieve its aims.

### **Recommendations**

That Members *agree* in the first instance:

- That two formal committees of the Board are set up to cover operational matters: audit and finance;
- That a temporary staff recruitment committee is set up as required for senior staff recruitment;
- That the planning committee (required by statute) to determine planning applications which have been called in should be a committee of the whole Board. A smaller working group should have delegated responsibility to make decisions on which applications are called in.
- That detailed proposals for these committees, including membership, are brought forward to the next board meeting for approval.

That Members *consider* longer term arrangements, so that further discussion can take place in June, and a further board paper for decision can be brought forward to a September meeting.

Suggestions are:

- That all members have specified responsibilities, so that they can act as a focal point of expertise and experience on issues;
  - That networks building on the Cairngorms Partnership forums and peer groups are used as a source of advice, as well as bringing different interests together for discussion and resolution of differences. Such groups would have on them the Member(s) with relevant responsibilities, to provide the link to the Board.
  - That working groups, mainly operating at staff level, but possibly involving a Member as and when appropriate, are used to take forward specific projects where these require a high degree of co-operation.
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## BOARD ORGANISATION – COMMITTEES; ADVISORY GROUPS; ETC

### Introduction

1. The challenge for the Board is to find ways of operating that enable it to deliver its aims effectively and efficiently. This implies finding mechanisms that:
  - allow Members to be well informed on all issues, both in terms of technical expertise and in terms of range of opinion;
  - allow this intelligence to be fed into the work carried forward by staff and the decisions made by the Board;
  - ensure that good use is made of everyone's time and expertise, with minimal bureaucracy.
2. The role of the board is to set the strategic direction of the CNPA, and the framework within which staff will take work forward (not necessarily on their own, but generally working in partnership with staff in other organisations). To that end, the board will meet formally (in public) to make major decisions on policy and expenditure. Given this "overseeing" remit, and the limited time input by Members of 3 days per month, it will be important to ensure that working arrangements are such that:
  - staff have a clear framework within which to work, and do not feel they have to seek approval of Members for day to day or week to week business;
  - Members do not feel they need to get too closely involved in detailed matters.
3. Nevertheless, the Board is collectively responsible for the activities and the performance of the CNPA, and needs to be content that it is sufficiently aware of current issues and how they are being handled to be able to trust staff to "get on with it", and equally, that they (Members) will not be taken unawares when issues are raised with them by the public.
4. Added to this, there is a wide range of expertise and experience among board members which our working arrangements should be able to take advantage of.
5. Finally, it will be essential to create opportunities for the whole board to engage collectively in full discussion on particularly important issues.
6. The following arrangements are therefore suggested:
  - Board meetings to decide major issues of policy and expenditure;
  - A limited number of committees of the Board, initially to deal largely with operational matters;
  - Each Member to have defined responsibilities, either area based or sectorally based, so that they can act as a spokesperson, sounding board for staff, and representative of the Board at meetings;
  - A range of advisory groups (based on current peer groups but probably with modification) with the relevant Members sitting on these as link between the group and the board;
  - Some working groups, largely operating at officer level, bringing partners together to find solutions to particular issues.

## Discussion

7. Formal meetings of the full board are required for decisions on significant matters of policy, strategy and operation. Such decisions can be delegated to smaller groups constituted as Committees of the board. Meetings of 25 Members are relatively large, and make full and in-depth discussion of issues difficult and time consuming (although it is important to recognise the importance of regular opportunities for the board to meet and discuss as a group). There may therefore be scope for making use of committees, comprising smaller groupings of board members. However, Committees are equally resource-intensive, requiring considerable input of staff time to organise and prepare papers, as well as Members' time in preparation and travelling.

## Committees

8. It is therefore proposed that as the CNPA's work programme evolves, Members keep in mind the option of setting up Committees as appropriate, but that this should be done with caution. In the first instance, **it is proposed** that only two permanent Committees are established – an audit committee and a finance committee – and a temporary recruitment committee as required (autumn 2003 in the first instance).
9. **Audit Committee:** In common with all public bodies like the CNPA, an internal audit committee is required by Scottish Ministers (as set out in the framework document governing our relationship with Ministers, namely the Management Statement). The committee's function is to provide a check on the adequacy of the internal control systems in the organisation. Control systems are not just about accounts – they extend to the whole range of systems that exist to ensure that the organisation operates efficiently, has taken adequate steps to assess risk and eliminate fraud, and can in all ways properly account for its use of public funds. It will oversee the appointment and work programme of an internal auditor, as well as providing the Board's working link with the external auditor (Audit Scotland). This Committee plays an essential role in helping to ensure that the Board can be comfortable with taking responsibility for the use of public funds. It is anticipated that this committee should be around 5 members, meeting approximately quarterly.
10. **Finance Committee:** Use of funds is inevitably an important element of the CNPA's effectiveness. Preparation of a budget; monitoring progress against the budget throughout the year; and in particular overseeing the programme of projects (which can be complex, given that projects often involve contributions from a number of different sources) are matters on which Board Members will wish to be kept involved. It is anticipated that this committee should be around 5 members, meeting approximately quarterly.
11. Both these committees are proposed not to substitute for the work of staff, but in recognition that audit and finance are important areas of work, in which errors of judgement can have significant consequences. It is also all too easy for errors to be made as a result of being too close to the operational detail. A "challenge" function by Members, by means of a small committee in each case, is therefore only sensible in ensuring that the Board can have confidence in the operation of the organisation for which it is collectively responsible.

12. **Recruitment Committee:** It is recommended that recruitment of senior staff (Chief Executive and members of the senior management team) should be undertaken by members, assisted by a recruitment consultant as appropriate. In recruiting the Chief Executive, the interview panel should include a senior member of the Scottish Executive. It will be for the board to decide on the timing of the recruitment of these posts. However it is suggested that the Head of Planning should in any event be recruited before the end of the calendar year as current arrangements are not guaranteed beyond this point. Other posts in the senior management team should be recruited once a clearer picture emerges of what is needed in terms of structure and people, following the Board's discussion about future priorities and working arrangements.
13. A recruitment committee should include the Convener and Deputy Convener, and a number of other Members experienced in interviewing. Around 6 Members (maximum) is suggested.
14. **Planning:** There is a statutory requirement for the Board to have in place a planning committee (Designation Order, paragraph 7(18)) for "the purposes of exercising the planning functions conferred on it by this Order". There is also a requirement that such a committee shall have on it a majority of Members who are directly elected to the Board or are local councillors.
15. There are two main elements to the planning function exercised by the board which require input from Members:
  - the decision to call-in a planning application; and
  - the determination of any called-in application.
16. The applications called-in will, by definition, be those of significance to the Park, and will tend to be those which are difficult and controversial. It would therefore seem only sensible, at least initially, for the whole Board to make such determinations. It is **therefore suggested** that the Planning Committee be a committee of the whole Board. The corollary is that meetings of the whole board, meeting as the planning committee, will need to be scheduled relatively frequently – say once per month – to ensure that planning decisions are not unduly delayed. It would be open to the Board to cancel such meetings in the event they were not needed.
17. The decisions to call in a planning application have to be made on a short timescale – within three weeks of the application being notified by the local authority to the Board. Such decisions therefore cannot await monthly board meetings. The planning manager will assess planning applications and make recommendations on call-in, but given the high degree of local public interest in such decisions, it is essential that Members have endorsed (or otherwise) a decision to call-in. **It is proposed, therefore,** that the Board delegate the decisions on call-in to a small group of Members (the "call-in" group), who will "meet" and make decisions electronically as advice is brought forward by the Planning manager. Such decisions are likely to be needed each week (even if they are all no call-ins). It is suggested that such a group is chaired by the Convener, and includes the deputy convener, and three other Members.
18. **Other Committees:** In the longer term, committees might be needed for oversee particularly important and complex tasks, namely the preparation of the National Park

Plan and the Local Plan(s), but this is not proposed for the moment; Members will wish to take more time to consider.

### **Other Mechanisms**

19. The Board will want to ensure that it is a “listening” organisation. Delivering the aims and purpose of the Park (which eventually will be encapsulated in the National Park Plan) will depend on effective communication with the users and residents of the Park, as well as good technical and scientific information where appropriate. In other words, good sources of opinion and advice will be needed.
20. It is suggested that two mechanisms (and there may be others) can be used to this end:
  - each Member should have agreed responsibilities, on which he/she would be the Board’s spokesperson and first point of contact on particular issues; would be the liaison member for interest groups and organisations in the area who sought a representative from the Board; would be a sounding board for staff in guiding their work. They would not have delegated responsibility or making major decision on policy or operations.
  - Peer groups/forums on particular issues, similar to those established under the Cairngorms Partnership, and with wide membership, should exist to advise the Board, and help to deliver the National Park Plan. They would also act as a means of bringing together partners to discuss and resolve differences. It is suggested that such groups should have a board member(s) with the relevant responsibilities on the group, acting as the link with the board.
21. The initial briefings in May will give Members the opportunity to consider the role of the peer groups and forums. Informal discussion sessions in the June meetings will allow consideration of whether these proposals are the way forward, and if so, what the detailed description of member responsibilities, and the number/nature and remit of peer groups/forums might be.

### **Working Groups**

22. In order to take forward particular pieces of work which require close working with partners, it is likely that members of staff will engage in a number of working groups, largely with staff from other organisations. One example would be the Rangers group. We might similarly need a group to consider signage. There is already a working group of development control officers working planning arrangements. It may be from time to time that involvement of a Member would be useful in meeting of these groups, but these would be different in kind from the peer groups and forums.

### **Board Meetings**

23. The full board will need to meet regularly to consider called-in planning cases. On those days the opportunity should be taken to ensure that the board has the opportunity to discuss important issues (even if not matters which require a decision), and take briefings on issues. This will help ensure the board remains a coherent and collective grouping, able to speak with one voice. Such meetings will take place throughout the

Park, and will take the opportunity to get out and about, as well as (in the evenings) host informal sessions to which the public can come and speak to board members.

24. If Members are given individual areas of responsibility, Board meetings could be used as a forum for Members to report back, from time to time, on developments in their particular areas of interest.

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**23<sup>rd</sup> May 2003**

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