
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE BOARD MEETING **held in the Ballroom, Blair Castle, Blair Atholl** **on Friday 29 March 2019 at 10.00am**

PRESENT

Peter Argyle	Xander McDade (Convener)
Geva Blackett (Deputy Convener)	Willie McKenna
Carolyn Caddick	Ian McLaren
Deirdre Falconer	Dr Fiona McLean
Pippa Hadley	William Munro
Janet Hunter	Dr Gaener Rodger
John Latham	Derek Ross
Douglas McAdam	Judith Webb
Eleanor Mackintosh	

In Attendance:

Grant Moir, Chief Executive,
Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development,
David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services,
Pete Mayhew, Director of Conservation & Visitor Experience,
Pete Crane, Head of Visitor Services,
Gavin Miles, Head of Planning & Rural Development, Item 6 only
Francoise van Buuren, Head of Communications & Engagement,
Heather Trench, Sustainable Tourism Officer,
Alix Harkness, Clerk to the Board

Apologies: Anne Rae Macdonald John Kirk

Welcome and Introduction

1. Xander McDade the Convener, welcomed everyone to the meeting in Blair Atholl.
2. Apologies were noted for Anne Rae Macdonald and John Kirk.

CEO Report and Convener Update (Paper 1)

9. Grant Moir, Chief Executive introduced Paper 1 which highlights the main strategic work streams that are being directed by Management Team. The CEO explained that these are areas where significant staff resources are being directed to deliver National Park Partnership Plan priorities. He highlighted the following areas:
 - a) Forest Strategy and Nature Action Plan event was attended by 150 people. By the beginning of February 2019 242 people had been spoken with on this subject.
 - b) Cairngorms Nature celebration held at Holyrood in February, Board members are encouraged to attend at least one of the events as part of this year's Cairngorms Nature Weekend taking place 10-13 May.
 - c) 36 applications to the volunteering posts had been received, 12 people would undergo the training and it was the intention to take a second group of volunteers through training later this year.
 - d) Writers in Residence: classes in Aviemore were full and classes would be starting in Tomintoul shortly.
 - e) Strengthen Communities conference in May in Aviemore would involve the youth council people from Finland.
 - f) Office extension had been shortlisted as one of 19 developments by the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) for the 2019 design award – and would be decided on 30th May 2019.
 - g) At the recent Family friendly awards, the Authority was recognised as an impressive small organisation with an “Above and Beyond” award recognising the range of our policy development supporting flexible and family friendly working goes well beyond the levels of expected of an organisation our size.
10. The Convener thanked staff for all their work around the direct member elections and to the Head of Planning and Communities and his team for the work on the Local Development Plan Consultation. The Convener welcomed Deirdre Falconer to her first meeting on the Board.
11. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
 - a) Was any lobbying done to encourage Sustrans to fund tarmacking footpaths along the Deeside Way? The CEO advised that Sustrans funding was for short links and therefore an unlikely source of funding for the Deeside Way. Head of Visitor Services explained that the state of policy is for paths of 3 meters in width. He added that Sustrans would not fund the Seven Bridges path in Ballater because of the slopes.

- b) A Board Member reported that he had attended the launch of the forest strategy and nature action plan and was disappointed with the lack of land owners or estate workers in attendance.
- c) In relation to Kinveachy mountain bike trails, the CEO explained that the Authority's Conservation and Access teams were working with them and Mountain Biking Scotland to see what could be done.
- d) Clarification sought as to why there did not appear to be any budget for sustaining the Peatland Action project. The CEO explained that funding to date had been on an annual basis and they were confident more funding would be allocated over the course of the year from SNH.
- e) Judith Webb, member of the Cairngorms Nature Strategy Group encouraged members to attend one or more events at the Cairngorm Nature Big Weekend on 10th-13th May 2019 as Board support was vital. She invited members to provide her directly with any feedback after the event.

12. **The Board noted the Paper.**

13. **Actions:**

- i. **Board Members to attend at least one event during the Cairngorms Nature Big Weekend and to provide feedback direct to Judith Webb.**

2019-20 Budget and Operational Plan (Paper 2)

- 14. David Cameron, Director of Corporate Services introduced Paper 2 which sets out the Authority's financial position for the 2019/20 financial year. The paper presents the proposed financial allocations for 2019/20 for core income and expenditure, together with intended operational plan investment. The paper seeks Board endorsement of the budget and Operational Plan for 2019/20 as an appropriate deployment of resources to work towards delivery of the Authority's adopted Corporate Plan objectives.
- 15. The Convener highlighted Annex 2 of the paper which illustrates the leverage of external funds by the Authority and advised that a press release would be issued today on that.
- 16. The Board considered the detail of the paper and discussed the following points:
 - a) Director of Corporate Services agreed that the paper sought to communicate the crossovers of work being carried out across the different NPPP priorities, highlighting that budget headings were a necessary element of management accounts organisations. However, work in Land Management for example often had crossover into Community and Rural Development, while work on Access may often have beneficial impacts on economic development and

community development priorities. Hence investment in one area will have multiple benefits across a range of workstreams.

- b) With reference to table 1 on page 9, why did it appear that the office costs would be lower than last year? Director of Corporate Services advised that while it was a pressure point in budgeting, he explained that they look for 3% annual efficiency savings target in response to Government budget objectives. He explained that this is typically sought from office running costs, procurement of facilities, professional services in order to protect Operational Plan investment levels and that he is relatively confident that savings can be found there. He added that additional funding had been budgeted last year for the office opening earlier than it did and therefore comparisons were slightly skewed by this.
- c) Comment made that the Scottish Government allocation of £4.805m reflects well on the Authority and deserves being acknowledged.
- d) Could the rationale for using the average full time equivalent for staff costs and values be explained? The Director of Corporate Services advised that this approach is used to summarise the total value of the Operational Plan. He explained that the full time equivalent is used to calculate the total cost absorption value and apply this across each line of activity to give a sense of total value of investment in each line of Operational Plan activity while doing so in a relatively administratively light manner. While it would be possible to drill down to look at staff hours and further levels of detail, additional work would be required.
- e) With reference to paragraph 13 in the supporting information relating to the cover paper, could the percentage of staff costs versus the operation plan be built into the paper in the future? The Director of Corporate Services advised that it was already detailed in the paper at table 1, Core Budget Summary on page 9. He agreed to make it more explicit in the management accounts reports.
- f) Comment made that great cost savings had been made in refiling posts but warned of the danger especially in the planning department. Director of Corporate Services explained that 15-18 posts (Capercaillie Project and Tomintoul & Glenlivet Partnership) in the Authority were funded by external project funding sources and there would be a three-year domino effect at the end of those projects whereby the Authority would have to manage those staff in the organisation who are delivering projects carefully at the beginning of the transition phase of projects coming to an end and completing final reports. Vacancies would have to be used carefully in managing staff transitions. He provided reassurance that any vacancies in the Planning department would continue to be filled as required.
- g) Appreciation of the difficulties in providing permanent posts and having the balance to ensure vacancies arise when staff members return to the Authority.

Director of Corporate Services provided reassurance that the Management Team had the focus on delivery of Corporate Plan objectives front and centre to all deliberations where making decisions around vacancies, staffing and resource deployment.

- h) Members noted it was also important in delivering effective resource deployment that they also took steps to keep their costs down.

17. The Board:

- a) **Reviewed the proposed budget and resource allocations for 2019/20;**
- b) **Considered whether the proposed deployment of resources poses any perceived risks to the achievement of the Corporate Plan objectives by 2022 and agree any risks posed for subsequent action by the Chief Executive and Management Team;**
- c) **Endorsed the budget and operational plan proposals for 2019/20.**

18. Action Points arising:

- i. **Percentage of staff costs versus the Operation Plan to be made explicit in the management accounts.**

Standing Orders (Paper 3)

- 19. David Cameron Director of Corporate Services introduced the paper which presents a revision to the Authority's Standing Orders. Following recent discussions on governance arrangements with Board members, the opportunity has been taken to revise the Standing Orders last reviewed in 2014, based on both feedback from members and observations by the Director of Corporate Services as Proper Officer. The paper also presents a review of Audit and Risk, Staffing and Recruitment and Finance and Delivery Committees' Terms of Reference.
- 20. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following issues:
 - a) Secret ballots and how they should be retained for 48 hours. It was agreed that secret ballots be retained for 7 days. (A1)
 - b) The benefits of having a show of hands which demonstrates collective responsibility against doing a roll call that then moves away from corporate decision. It was agreed to move to a roll call for votes (A2).
 - c) Election process for the Convener role and suggestion made that it is moved to the end of a meeting as opposed to being taken at the beginning of the meeting, then if and when a new Convener is elected the current convener is not made to feel uncomfortable having to convene the remainder of the meeting.

- d) Suggestion made that in the election process for the Convener could be taken at a separate special meeting in advance of normal a Board meeting where business is discussed. This was agreed (A3).
- e) Question of clarity surrounding whether there was a time limit for the chairs of Board Committee's? The Director of Corporate Services confirmed that there was – 3 years. This length of time was considered long enough to give the Board Committee's continuity whilst allowing the chair to stand down soon if they wanted to.
- f) Suggestion made to amend the process in paragraph 4b of the standing orders to decree that written submissions from candidates are to be provided and circulated in advance of the meeting. Director of Corporate Services advised that he was happy to incorporate that suggestion.
- g) Suggestion made that paragraphs 10 and 25 of the draft standing orders are connected to ensure clarity that a member attending a meeting via video conferencing link would help towards making the meeting quorate however should a member make contributions via email this would not count towards quorum. Director of Corporate Services agreed to make this explicit (A4).
- h) With reference to drawing lots and tie break procedures suggestion made to make it clear the Proper Officer would toss the coin. Director of Corporate Services agreed.
- i) The Planning Committee Convener reminded members that the Planning Committee had a separate set of Standing Orders that were to be read in conjunction with the Board Standing Orders and asked why they had not been re-drafted? Director of Corporate Services explained that the Board Standing Orders would be finalised first then he would review the implications on the Planning Standing orders which would then be taken before the Planning Committee for review before being taken back to the Board for formal adoption.
- j) How would a member participating in a meeting via video conferencing then take part in a secret ballot? Director of Corporate Services advised that he had not thought about this but advised that there would have to be staff at the other CNPA office (where the member would be video conferencing from) to collect the secret ballot. The Convener advised that it would need to be restricted to member who were physically present at the meeting. Suggestion was made to revise the wording in paragraph 10 to reflect this. Director of Corporate Services agreed this and agreed he would make it explicit that video conferencing would not be available for members for the election of Board Convener and Board Deputy Convener (A5).
- k) Suggestion made that the Audit & Risk Committee remit in the Terms of Reference link back to Scottish Government guidance which states that the role of the Committee is to give assurance to the accountable officer. The Convener agreed to delegate any revisions to the Terms of Reference of the

Audit & Risk Committee to the Audit & Risk Committee so long as they were not substantive (A6).

- l) Suggestion made that another layer of detail with regards to the scheme of delegation would be useful (A7).
- m) Agreement that quorum for Planning Committee would be 13 members present (A8).
- n) Agreement that the amendments would be made in track changes for clarity.

21. The Board:

- a) **Reviewed the draft revised Standing Orders set out at Annex 1 to the paper;**
- b) **Reviewed the Committees' Terms of Reference set out at Annex 2 to the paper; and**
- c) **Subject to amendments numbered A1 to A8 in paragraph 20 above, agreed that the revised and finalised documents should be approved by the Convener, Deputy Convener and Chief Executive for endorsement and publication, to be effective from that publication date.**

22. Action:

- i. **Amendments as numbered A1 to A8 in paragraph 20 above to be made to the Board Standing Orders.**

Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-2022 Progress Report (Paper 4)

- 23. Francoise van Buuren, Head of Communications and Engagement introduced Paper 4 which presents the progress made against the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018 – 2022 during 2018/19 and sets out the priority areas of work for 2019/20. The strategy supports the delivery of the Corporate Plan and involves all Board and staff members in its delivery. It contains the strategic communications priorities, aims and outcomes for the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA).
- 24. The Convener reported that there had been a lot of social media presence and feedback on the local elections.
- 25. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:

- a) Directly Elected members were encouraged to submit blogs in their local areas just as the Board Convener does in the Strathspey & Badenoch Herald as the Cairngorms National Park is more than just the Strathspey area.
- b) Concern raised that 57% of Members of Parliament were unfavourable towards the awareness of the existence of the Cairngorms National Park. The CEO reported that 43% were favourable but 57% did not have an opinion either way.
- c) With reference to Annex I, the headline stating that the Authority's social media reach was slightly larger than Mongolia, how had that been measured? Head of Communications & Engagement advised that it was measured through google analytics, which provides information on the number of people reached and where they are located.
- d) Praise for displaying the statistics in picture form as it clearly shows that people are coming to the website for practical information.
- e) Having a Board buddy system was one of the priorities for 2019 and raised mixed concerns surrounding this, was this more for directly elected board members? Head of Communications & Engagement advised that this had yet to be agreed however that in order to raise the Authority's profile more regular contact with residents was needed. Agreed that a board discussion to agree approach on this, should be scheduled.
- f) Suggestion made that Board are sighted with what events are coming up and any issues and any lines to take if approached for comment. Head of Communications & Engagement advised that there is an issues briefing that is prepared by the Press Officer quarterly, anything out with this comes out as and when. Should Board members receive direct questions they should direct the enquirer to the Communications team. It was agreed to circulate the Board Forward Look to members.
- g) Suggestion made to increase business and land manager's engagement in our campaigns. Head of Communications & Engagement explained that the Make it Yours campaign was visitor facing businesses supporting our brand and had proved successful.
- h) Had any further work been undertaken to encourage non visitor facing businesses to relocate their businesses to the National Park? The CEO explained that HIE have an attractions group that covers part of the Highland and Moray local authority area parts of the National Park however the Authority do not have enough resource to be influential on that. Once the Local Development Plan is adopted, the Authority will have more of an idea of the number of sites zoned for economic development and the Board can think about how to best invite investment on those sites.
- i) A query surrounding website usage being 174,000 visits, what was that measured against? Head of Communications & Engagement explained that it is measured against other National Parks, despite the Cairngorms being in a more

remote location and having less residents the website performs well in comparison to them.

- j) Suggestion to use former board members to work as ambassadors for the National Park and attend Cairngorms Nature BIG weekend. The Convener agreed and advised that he planned to write to the candidates who lost on the elections about the other opportunities. Head of Communications & Engagement advised that the quarterly e-bulletin is sent out to former Board members.
- k) The need to better inform the general public as to the role of Cairngorms National Park Authority Board members. The Convener advised that he and another Board Member had done a video which was on the Authority's website. The CEO highlighted that he, the Head of Communications & Engagement and the Digital Campaigns Officer had been having discussions on creating short one minute videos and that the role of Board Members could be included in that.
- l) Discussion on how to promote the role of Board Members to other councillors. The CEO reminded members that they could use the quarterly CEO Report and the 6 monthly National Park Partnership Plan & Corporate Plan update papers as their crib sheets of things to talk about within their councils.
- m) Comment made that the Scottish Government On Board training day had been very useful and one of its key messages was around engaging with other public boards.

26. The Board noted the progress made against the CNPA Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018 – 2022 during 2018/19 and the proposed priority areas of work for 2019/20.

27. Actions:

- i. Board discussion on the Board Buddy system and how it could work to be scheduled.**
- ii. Board Forward Look to be circulated to Board Members.**

Cairngorms Tourism Action Plan: Annual Update (Paper 5)

28. Murray Ferguson, Director of Planning & Rural Development and Pete Crane, Head of Visitor Services, introduced Paper 6 which reviews the annual progress with delivery of the Cairngorms Tourism Action Plan and look forwards to priorities in the year ahead. Heather Trench, Sustainable Tourism Officer was available to answer any questions relating to the visitor surveys.

29. There was a pause for a two minute comfort break.
30. The Board considered the detail in the Paper and discussions took place around the following:
- a) Would the Scottish Government's proposed tourism tax impact on proposals to establish a Visitor Giving Scheme? Director of Rural Development and Planning explained that the main elements of the scheme were approved by the Board in June 2018. The Cairngorms Trust are now leading the initiative and a paper had been taken to the Finance & Delivery Committee to review the draft Memorandum of Understanding between the Trust and CNPA. Since that time there had been the government announcement on the introduction of the transient tourism levy but this would take a few years to be implemented. Director of Corporate Services added that the Cairngorms Trust are looking to take it forward with individual businesses but looking for voluntary donations made from visitors to the Trust to help support the work of the Cairngorms. He added that this was much more of a voluntary mutual benefit and partnership.
 - b) With reference to point k on page 6, was this a new visitor management plan that was planned? Head of Visitor Services explained that the need to develop a new visitor management plan was identified before the decision to restructure Forest Enterprise Scotland came about. He explained that they had intended to carry out the first public survey of this before Easter 2019 however this had slipped as a result of the name change to Forest and Land Scotland.
 - c) The Convener reported that he had received a response to his letter from Kate Forbes who had advised that the government are consulting on a transient visitor levy at present but that would not be implemented this year. A Board Member added that the Cabinet Secretary had made it clear that it would not be implemented in 2019-2020 or 2020-2021.
 - d) The need to initiate joint work with neighbouring regional destination VisitAberdeenshire. Suggestion made from Peter Argyle, VisitAberdeenshire Board Member that the Authority take a presentation to one of their meetings. Head of Visitor Services advised that by the next conference, data from the next visitor survey would be ready and would be good to share.
 - e) Where are the Local Information Centre's? Head of Visitor Services said they were Glenshee café, Balmoral, Braemar, Tomintoul, Grantown on Spey, the Heather Centre, Nethybridge, Kingussie, Laggan café and Laggan mountain-bike centre and at Blair Atholl. He explained that the Authority provide them with the information and training through the Make it Yours scheme and get them to meet with each other on an area by areas basis.

- f) How do visitors find the Local Information Centres? Head of Services advised that they are there to complement the VS Visitor Information Centres and are shown on all maps produced by the Authority.
- g) The growth of visitors since 2003 appears low and is challenging given there isn't anything to compare it against. Sustainable Tourism Officer advised that it could be compared to Scotland as a whole. She went on to explain that when they had applied for the European Charter this time round it showed slow steady growth with visitors staying longer and out of season. She added that STEAM data compare to other National Parks.
- h) Recognition of the wide range of tourism work going on.
- i) A Board Member raised the concern around the increase in second homes that are impacting on the lives of residents in the form of 'party houses', request made to see work being done on that. The CEO advised that some work on that was underway, looking at compiling stats on the number of holiday homes in National Park which is 22% in total which also includes those that are vacant. He added that amendments in the Planning Bill may have implications for example it may be that in the future if one wanted to change a house from permanent use to holiday home one may need permit.
- j) Having attended a recent Scottish Tourism Alliance Conference one of the topics of discussion was the European Charter and the enhancement of sustainability by promoting the environmental focussed tourism businesses to the visitors. Director of Planning & Rural Development referred to Annex 2 and explained that this issue had been discussed with the Cairngorms Business Partnership but that this was not seen as a significant competitive advantage for businesses at this time.
- k) Suggestion made to explore the digital and virtual side of things targeting overseas visitors and young people through use of goggles and 3D images. Director of Planning & Rural Development ran through some of the things that were underway including the Snow Roads having developed and app and the Badenoch Great Place project planning the same. Head of Visitor Services advised that nothing on the virtual reality front had been done yet. He explained that
 - l7 community paths leaflets would be being made for viewing on mobile phones this year and that the Authority were looking at doing work to make the interpretation of the Speyside Way available on mobile phones. Further suggestion made in building virtual landscapes to help patients such as those waiting on a cardiac operation where readings could be taken when they are calm; the virtual landscapes of the Cairngorms could be accessed via goggles and they could also receive information on how they might manage their conditions.
- l) Suggestion made to think strategically about raising the profile of the Park by tapping into BBC Winter Watch and Spring Watch.

- m) Suggestion made that more work could be done on the Snowroads app which tells the user the location of public toilets.

39. The Board agreed to the recommendations as set out in the paper.

40. Action Point Arising: None.

Cairngorm Mountain Update (Paper 6)

41. This item was taken in a closed session at the end of this meeting.

AOCB

42. There were no items of business.

43. Action Point Arising: None.

Date of Next Meeting

44. Next formal Board meeting to be held on 14 June 2019, Glenlivet Distillery.

45. The Public part of this meeting concluded at 12.50.