
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR DECISION

Title: CNPA BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE

Prepared by: Jane Hope, Chief Executive
Don McKee, Head of Planning

Purpose

To review the scheduling and format of Board meetings.

Recommendations

That the Board adopt revised arrangements from the New Year as proposed, and agree that these are reviewed from time to time to ensure they are fit for purpose.

Executive Summary

It is proposed that Board and Planning Committees should continue to take place on Fridays, rotating around venues within the Park, and accompanied by an open-evening on the previous evening to allow local communities to engage directly and informally with Board Members. It is also proposed that the total time allocated to Board meetings and planning meetings remains unchanged, but that meetings are re-scheduled to make more efficient use of time and resources. Under the proposed new schedule, the Board would continue to meet every other Friday to consider planning call-in decisions. Board meetings would be held once every two months; discussion sessions once every two months, and planning determination meetings every month.

CNPA BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE FOR DECISION

Background

1. The CNPA has existed for 3 years now. The needs of the Board in terms of briefing, discussion, making decisions etc have evolved over that time, as have our formats for Board meetings (formal and informal). As things constantly move on, it is appropriate for us to think about whether or not we are running and servicing Board meetings in the right way to meet the Board's and the public's needs.
2. The function of Board meetings is to:
 - a) enable Board Members to collectively deliver their role of setting the strategic direction of the organisation; monitor delivery; and make decisions on key issues and its statutory functions;
 - b) enable the public to see the decision making processes of the CNPA (by putting papers in the public domain, and holding meetings in public, at different venues around the Park).

How do Meetings Operate?

3. Principally through staff preparing papers, for discussion and/or decision by the Board. Supporting this:
 - a) A forward look of issues/Board papers is kept by the staff, and circulated to Members each month. From this, the agenda for monthly Board meetings is put together, and agreed with the Convener.
 - b) Papers and meetings are in the public domain (and advertised a week ahead, as well as the schedule for the year being agreed and publicised in advance).
 - c) The minutes record the decisions, and any additional actions of significance, which are picked up in subsequent meetings through "matters arising" from the minutes; a running list of actions is kept by the Board secretariat.

What types of papers are brought?

4. To date, these have been as follows:

For Decision:

- a) Decisions on strategic direction/priority setting for allocation of resources (e.g. Approval of corporate plan; future of specific major projects).
- b) Decision on key policies (e.g. a stance to take on an important consultation such as sale of HIE estate; response to Scottish Water on Q&S III).
- c) Organisation and governance of the Board (e.g. membership of committees; delegation of authority to other groupings or to staff);
- d) Approval of interim stages of policy/project development and agreement to next steps, providing a clear basis (and delegated authority) for staff to continue to take forward and spend money. (e.g. Point of Entry Markers; Development of LBBT project)

For discussion

- a) Early soundings on Members' views on an issue/general policy area. Can be a useful step in developing new policy. (e.g. CNPA role in Cultural Heritage, a precursor to bringing a subsequent paper for decision)

For Information

- a) Updates on progress (e.g. delivery of operational plan; report on Corporate Plan themes).

Analysis

5. A number of principles have guided our approach to Board meetings in the last 3 years – these are articulated below:
 - a) Openness and transparency: the processes and decisions of the CNPA need to be open to public view, and the organisation should be open to input from the public.
 - b) Adequate time for dealing with business: our scheduling of meetings needs to ensure that there is sufficient time to deal with a range of matters – ranging from essential matters for decision (such as planning applications), as well as discussion of strategic issues, and oversight of certain operational areas (finance, audit, and staffing).
 - c) Efficient use of resources: arrangements must make best use of Members' and staff time and travel costs.
 - d) Statutory requirements: arrangements must take account of the need of the Planning Committee to meet every 14 days to consider call-in decisions.
 - e) Information: Board meetings are an opportunity to keep Members informed of progress with various workstreams; it is also an opportunity to put this information in the public domain (although not the only means of achieving this wider profile, and other tools are used as appropriate).
6. These principles should continue to apply.
7. While the planning committee remains a committee of the whole Board – an arrangement which the Board shows no wish to change following informal discussion in January 2005, and which has worked well to date - the Board will continue to meet every 2 weeks in order to consider call-in decisions. It follows that to make efficient use of time and travel, we should concentrate as much Board business on these days as possible.
8. The current arrangements do this, but there are some changes which might better suit our circumstances 3 years into the life of the organisation. The following is therefore proposed:
 - a) The total amount of time allocated to Board meetings (2 hours/month), Planning Committees (1.5 hours/m for call-in, and 3 hr/m for determinations) remains largely unchanged, but is rescheduled;
 - b) A planning committee is held every fortnight to deal with call-in decisions;

- c) Determinations are dealt with by the planning committee once a month. This means the planning committee would last all day on these occasions, and would consider around 8 cases, taking a break for lunch;
- d) A Board meeting is held once every 2 months (following call-in decisions), lasting the full day with a break for lunch;
- e) A Board discussion session is held once every 2 months (following call-in decisions). Allocating almost a full day will provide a better opportunity for the Board to engage more fully in seminars and workshops on strategic policy issues; and visits out and about. Board Members are invited to suggest issues for discussion.
- f) Committee meetings (of Finance, Audit and Staffing & Recruitment) will continue to be held on the same Fridays as Board/Planning meetings, but after the main meetings, rather than the start of the day. The current 9am start rules out a number of members from participating, and so there will be no presumption that this is the start time unless participating members all decide this is acceptable.

9. The schedule of Board meetings would therefore be as follows, on a two-monthly cycle:

| Month 1 | | Month 2 | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Week 1 | Week 3 | Week 1 | Week 3 |
| 10.30-11.15 P.Cttee - Call-in | 10.30-11.15 P.Cttee - Call-in | 10.30-11.15 P.Cttee - Call-in | 10.30-11.15 P.Cttee - Call-in |
| 11.15- 3.30 P.Cttee – Determinations (12.30-1.30 Break for lunch) | 11.15 – 3.30 Board (12.30-1.30 Break for lunch) | 11.15- 3.30 P.Cttee – Determinations (12.30-1.30 Break for lunch) | 11.15 -3.30 Discussion session (12.30–1.30 Break for Lunch) |

Issues/Discussion

- 10. This revised schedule has several advantages. It provides more scope to manage Board meeting agendas appropriately, with time allocated for discussion separated from items which are clearly for decision or for information. There will also be some resource savings in staff time associated with formal Board meetings being once every two months. However, it is envisaged that open evenings will continue to be held monthly – it is relatively unimportant whether these are before a Board or before a Planning Committee, but it is important that there continues to be a regular opportunity for communities in the Park to engage directly and informally with Board Members and staff.
- 11. On the planning side, there are similarly some savings in staff resources. Servicing two-weekly determination meetings creates a number of inefficiencies which can be dealt with by a move to monthly meetings. Our analysis is that move to monthly determination meetings would be associated with the following changes/benefits:

- a) Increased time between committees would increase the opportunity for planners to handle the early stages of application assessment more efficiently (coordinating consultation responses, requesting necessary additional information at an earlier stage);
 - b) This would also allow for more organised and definite advance monthly scheduling of papers for meetings - this would facilitate clearer and tighter deadlines for receipt of consultation responses and an opportunity to provide greater advance notice of scheduling to applicants, objectors, community councils, etc,
 - c) Deadlines for report completion and issue to members could be Thursday of the previous week, not the Monday of the meeting week;
12. These changes are not necessarily dependent on a move to monthly determination meetings; however, such a move certainly makes these benefits much easier to deliver, largely through less staff time being diverted to fortnightly meetings.
13. Monthly meetings equates with the practice in most local councils. Now that the CNPA has dealt with the backlog of planning applications, and the call in rate has levelled out (down to 12% in Jan-Mar 2006, compared with 17% for Oct-Dec 2005), a move to monthly determinations is possible without significantly affecting the time taken to deal with applications – all other things being equal, 2 weeks should be the maximum increase in time and against this has to be set the gains that flow from making more staff time available to process cases.
14. Providing for cases to be considered at a meeting held in the right area of the Park has always been difficult, and would continue to be so under the proposed new arrangements. Making sure that an application is taken at a meeting on the right” side of the hill” can at the moment mean a delay of 2 weeks; under the new arrangements this could in theory be 4 weeks, i.e. an increase of two weeks.
15. It is a fine judgement; on balance my recommendation would be that having dealt with our previous backlog which made anything other than fortnightly meetings unrealistic, we should now try monthly determination meetings and monitor their effectiveness and impact on determination times. The savings in resources look as if they should balance possible delays which should in any event be no more than 2 weeks.

Implications

Financial Implications

16. Considered above – there should be some efficiencies in terms of staff time. The proposed arrangements, like current arrangements, seek to make best use of Members’ time and travel.

Presentational Implications

17. Dealt with above – there may be some perception that the CNPA are putting less time into their Board and Planning meetings. In reality, this is not the case, as the total time input is unchanged. There may be some concern that there will be delays in dealing with planning cases. In theory this should be no more than 2 weeks, and may be counterbalanced by the benefits of less staff time being diverted by meetings.

Implications for Stakeholders

18. None immediately obvious.

Next Steps

19. We propose that new arrangements should be introduced in January. Our annual schedule of Board and Planning meetings is published in November each year, for the period January-December. Changing this part way through the year runs the risk of some people not knowing, and turning up to a non-existent meeting (although this risk is small). Further, we already have informal discussion sessions programmed in (notably on the National Park Plan, as well as other matters), using the “spare” afternoons after planning meetings. It is probably more convenient for everyone to leave these arrangements in place rather than unpick them now.

Jane Hope
Don McKee
19 June 2006

janehope@cairngorms.co.uk
donmckee@cairngorms.co.uk