



## For information

# Draft Minutes of the Staff Consultative Forum

**Held in Cairngorms National Park Authority**

**Hybrid**

**Wednesday 03 December at 02.00pm**

### **Present**

Adam Streeter-Smith

David Cameron (Chair)

James Lee

Kate Christie

Mariaan Pita

Nasim Mehrabi

Pip Mackie

### **Apologies**

Charlotte Milburn

Derek Ross (Board Member)

Mike Woolvin

Richard Hardy (Prospect)

Russell Jones (Board Member)

### **Item 1: Welcome and Apologies**

1. David Cameron (DC) welcomed everyone and advised that Richard Hardy is no longer the Park Authority Prospect contact, and a new person had been appointed. The new person would be contacted in due course for them to attend the Staff Consultative Forum (SCF).
2. Apologies were received from the above.



## **Item 2: Minutes and Matters Arising**

3. The draft minutes were approved.
4. A point was raised regarding the new Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) process whereby the member of staff was having to advise the admin team of the items to be purchased despite links being provided in the requisition form. Kate Christie (KC) responded this could be due to the implementation of the new finance system, whereby any PPE requests need to include the link to the item of PPE in the purchase request as well as the requisition form. It could be that this had been missed being done by the member of staff.
5. DC advised that both he and KC had been looking at the pay position. Approval had been given for them to contact the Scottish Government (SG) Remuneration Group (RG) to put forward a case seeking to revisit the approved pay position (the pay awards having previously been agreed for a three-year period from 2024/25 to 2026/27). This was in recognition that inflation has remained above 3% in the last few months and the commitment that the organisation would keep watch on inflationary movement during the agreed three-year pay award period. DC advised that a meeting with RG had been scheduled for 17 December and discussions were currently taking place with the Park Authority SG sponsor team and the SG pay policy team about the business case. The Park Authority are looking for consideration to apply a supplement to the existing pay position. It was hoped to be able to issue an update to staff update by 19 December regarding the direction of travel. However, if RG required longer to consider the request an update would be provided in the New Year.

## **Item 3: Papers 1: Flexitime Policy**

6. KC introduced the paper. KC advised that the policy had been reviewed following on from the recent line manager training, where it became apparent that there was confusion from staff regarding what was considered time off in lieu (TOIL) and what was flexi. Also, with the move to hybrid working and staff having the opportunity within the hybrid policy to be able to work their contractual hrs over a seven-day week according to their personal circumstances / needs (with line manager agreement) it was appropriate to look at this policy and see if TOIL was still relevant. It was clarified that time and half / double time for weekend working



was not being removed but needed to be for a clear business reason as to why the hours were being worked and have prior line manager agreement eg to attend an event etc and not just carrying out standard working eg working hours to suit your circumstances. It was clarified that some roles were expected to work evening / weekend hours and these did not qualify for incurring the additional time (these roles usually have a '1' after salary band, as they receive additional remuneration for this requirement). It was advised that a cap on hours that can be carried forward was required to meet our commitment to staff wellbeing and work life balance, as well as the Working Time Directive and it's important that staff manage their working time within that cap. It is recognised that there may be times when some staff may accrue more than policy position allows due to specific pressures or demands, and in these circumstances, staff are encouraged to speak to the HR team, together with their line managers as short term exceptions to the cap can, and have been agreed by HR. It was recognised that TOIL had less prescription on amount of time that could be carried forward and the time period. Therefore, the policy looked to increase the level of flexi staff can carry forward (17.5 hours) per flexi period. Feedback was requested.

7. The following points were raised:

- a) It being a grey area when working a seven-day flexi contract, whereby some staff if they had already worked 35 hours were then asked to undertake more work and log this as TOIL. KC advised that if staff were working their hours over seven days to meet personal circumstances this would not qualify for enhanced accrued time, as it is not to specifically fulfil a piece of work that could only take place on a Saturday / Sunday eg attend an event.
- b) The enhanced flexi carry forward figure of 17.5 hrs (pro rata) being quite low. It was clarified that staff could request to modify their hours eg compressed hours etc through a flexible working request (FWR), if the flexi ceiling limit were too high it could potentially start looking like a FWR. The organisation was already being accommodating by allowing staff to be flexible with their working hours.
- c) TOIL being an advantage as it could be carried for three months, the possibility of the flexi limit being higher and therefore could be carried for a longer period of time. It was advised that this could also stray into FWR territory with staff potentially then being able to take up to one day per week as flexi – this would be covered by a FWR.



- d) Some staff having no view on TOIL being removed, as they felt it was up to the staff member and line manager to plan ahead. They would know when they were going to work on a weekend and then take the flexi time during that following week. Staff could still carry forward a flexi balance (within the limits) to use at further date.
  - e) A request for training for line managers and staff on this including how to record information on flexi sheets. It was agreed this could be done at either drop-in sessions or a wider staff meeting.
  - f) It was confirmed that the information manager was looking at developing new time recording system. However, this would not be ready for the New Year.
  - g) Concern about the ability for staff to work early in the morning, as there were no set core hours and a request for the policy to make reference to the Right to Disconnect Charter for work life balance.
  - h) Overall staff were happy with flexi time as it was seen as a big benefit.
8. KC thanked everyone for the feedback and the revised policy was adopted. It was confirmed that the policy would be kept under review.

#### **Item 4: Paper 2: Sabbatical Policy**

9. Pip Mackie (PM) introduced the paper. PM advised that sabbaticals can be self-led or hosted by an organisation. It was confirmed that an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) would be carried out on the policy. Whilst sabbaticals can be overseas, it was important to note that they can also be UK based, including local to the area, including self-led learning. This means that sabbaticals are open to as wide a number of staff as possible.
10. The following points were raised:
- a) It was confirmed that accommodation costs can be claimed (as specified in para 40 of the policy).
  - b) It was advised that the policy was a staff benefit not an entitlement, therefore it may not be available to all staff all of the time and staff being able to take advantage of the policy would be dependent on personal circumstances.
  - c) Clarification to make clear that staff can take a sabbatical if the furtherance of development benefits them as an individual and therefore the organisation, but it does not have to be directly related to role that they carry out.



- d) It was advised that this was a new policy and was part of a wider range of enhancement and developments to support staff. It was unattainable to draw up policies that are equal for everyone, as staff are all in different jobs and have different personal circumstances. However, hopefully staff could find something in the suite of policies to support them.
- e) It was recognised that some jobs do take on natural networks which could be used to support sabbatical opportunities, but there were also charities and community networks looking to get support from qualified people, such as those working in Corporate Services. It was hoped that the policy would be as accessible to a wide grouping of staff as possible.

11. PM thanked everyone for the feedback and the policy was adopted.

### **Item 5: Paper 3: Overseas travel and work guidance**

12. PM introduced the paper and advised that overseas travel can be required for a number of reasons including conferences, training, rangers' camps, sabbaticals etc. This document seeks to provide guidance for all these. The guidance does not seek the justification of overseas travel, as this will have been covered in the initial training requisition / sabbatical application. It provides guidance on how the overseas travel should be managed. Feedback was requested.

13. The following points were raised:

- a) It was advised that any business-related costs for travel / accommodation / subsistence could be covered (under the travel and subsistence policy) for the member of staff. However, should they be joined by family member(s) any additional costs for the family member would not be paid by the organisation.
- b) It was confirmed that there was a requirement for staff to ensure that they had the relevant travel insurance in place as soon as possible and prior to commencing the trip.
- c) A request for the reference to Ireland be removed, as a global health insurance card (GHIC) and potential additional travel insurance may be required for visiting this country with it being outwith the UK. It was advised that the policy had been based on Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) guidance. It was presumed Ireland had been included due to being part of the Common Travel Agreement. However, if this gave clarity for staff then the reference would be removed.



14. PM thanked everyone for the feedback and the guidance was adopted.

### **Item 6: Health and safety update**

15. There were no matters raised.

### **Item 7: Leadership**

16. DC advised that Fiona McLean was due to finish her second term on the Board at the end of September 2026. Therefore, SG were looking to start the recruitment process for a new appointed member.
17. It was advised that Andy Ford, Director of Conservation, would be out of the organisation for several weeks and was expected back in the New Year. In the interim, alternate cover arrangements had been made and advised to the team.
18. DC advised that the Best Companies staff survey had now been completed, with the results due to be circulated in the New Year.

### **Item 8: Equalities**

19. KC advised that the Equality Advisory Panel were to hold a two-day in-person event, scheduled for March.
20. The next Internal Equality Advocacy Group meeting was due to take place next week.
21. Exciting news had been received that the Park Authority had won The Herald and S1 jobs Top Employer Award in the 'Best Diversity and Inclusion Dynamic in the Workplace' category. Thanks were expressed to all the staff reps for their involvement and continued comments on developing organisational policies. The staff reps recognised that KC had been the driving force behind leading on, and, achieving the award. The award was to be recognised at the next all staff meeting.



## Item 9: AOB

### Staff engagement

22. KC expressed thanks to the SCF staff reps for their input at the last meeting and the engaged conversation around the proposed staff awards. It was hoped that the reps were comfortable with the decision to not take the awards forward. This was highlighted as a good example of the consultative process. Following the meeting, a number of staff had expressed how disappointed they were that the staff awards were not happening. It could be that there was a tendency to focus on the negatives when proposals were brought to SCF. There was a request for suggestions on what we might do organisationally to get feedback from staff when they are happy with things.
23. The possibility of staff reps raising the papers at team meetings for discussion or for the Heads of Service to have as a standing item as part of their SMT update at team meetings. However, being cautious with putting more onto the Heads of Service to relay information. The ongoing work regarding the internal comms review was flagged, as this may help with disseminating information to staff.
24. The need to harness opportunities to keep the profile of the SCF raised and staff engaged, possibly including opportunities for work to be celebrated more.
25. The meeting concluded at 3:15pm.
26. Next meeting 02 March 2026.

Ref	Action	Responsible	Due Date
<b>19.02.24</b> <b>Para 21</b>	Internal Recruitment Policy Internal recruitment opportunities not being circulated to be raised with Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) / NatureScot.	KC	Jun 24



	<p>12.06.24: SEPA requested that the internal recruitment of posts was paused. NatureScot are keen for this to be reinstated, as are the Park Authority.</p> <p>16.09.24: Discussions ongoing and will be updated in due course.</p> <p>11.06.25: Ongoing</p> <p>10.09.25: Hasn't been progressed due to recruitment freeze and scrutiny from SG.</p> <p><b>03.12.25: Due to significant reduction in recruitment, no current appetite to resume internal recruitment pool (NatureScot / SEPA). Complete.</b></p> <p><b>Come back to March SCF meeting with info on public sector reform.</b></p>		
12.06.24	<b>Credit Union</b>		Sept 24
Para 18	To consider how to take forward	DC	
	<b>16.09.24: Ongoing</b>		
11.06.25	<b>PPE Purchase:</b>		Dec 25
Para 26	10.09.25: Policy to be updated per para 3.	KC	
	<b>03.12.25: Policy updated. Complete.</b>		
03.12.25	<b>Flexi Policy</b>		
Para 7f	Training sessions to be run on completion of flexi sheets.	PM	June 26
Para 7g	Policy to make reference to the Right to Disconnect Charter	KC	Mar 26
03.12.25	<b>Overseas Work and Travel Guidance</b>		
Para 12 c	Remove reference to Ireland. Policy to cover work and travel outwith the UK.	PM	Dec 26