For information

Draft Minutes of the Staff Consultative Forum

Held at Cairngorms National Park Authority

Hybrid

10 September 2025 at 02.00pm

In Attendance

Adam Streeter-Smith
Charlotte Milburn
Derek Ross (Board Member)
James Lee
Kate Christie (Chair)
Katherine August
Mariaan Pita
Mike Woolvin
Nasim Mehrabi
Pip Mackie

Apologies

David Cameron
Richard Hardy (Prospect)
Russell Jones (Board Member)

Item 1: Welcome and Apologies

1. Kate Christie (KC) welcomed everyone.

2. Apologies were received from the above.

Item 2: Minutes and Matters Arising

3. KC advised that it had been agreed with finance team that the Park Authority will now purchase any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) item for staff rather than

requiring staff to make the purchase themselves and then claiming it back via the travel and subsistence process. Health and Safety Committee have now increased the PPE limits for individual items, and these will be advised to staff. Policy to be updated detailing the above and to also include that if staff require PPE purchasing then this must be done through the organisation, and they should not rely on using their own equipment / clothing.

4. Matters arising and draft minutes were approved.

Item 3: Paper 1 - Electric Vehicle Leasing Benefit

5. Katherine August (KA) introduced the staff benefit paper and requested feedback, particularly on the following action points:
   a) **Action 1:** Consider whether implementation of the scheme could potentially be viable given the information detailed in this report. In particular, consider whether you are comfortable with a significant number of colleagues being excluded from participating in the scheme – approximately 3% of staff due to salary banding and 23% staff due to fixed term contract length and long lead in times.
   b) **Action 2:** Decide whether to include hybrid vehicles in the offer, or only fully electric vehicles.
   c) **Action 3:** A key concern raised by Senior Management Team (SMT) is whether the investment in staff time will be justified if take up numbers are as low as predicted. Staff Consultative Forum (SCF) is asked to share the details of this report with staff and invite them to express interest via their staff representatives. Expressions of interest are non-binding and can be made anonymously. The goal is to gain insight into potential take-up numbers to assess whether the scheme is worth pursuing.

6. The following points were raised:
   a) Staff in other organisations that have this option are also able to use these for work purposes. Therefore, the organisation can make a reduction in the amount of fleet vehicles required. KA advised that by comparing the figures of uptake from NatureScot to the number of staff in the Park Authority would be an approximate uptake of two people per year. This expected number would not be significant enough to enable a reduction in fleet vehicles.

b) It was advised that the cost savings were only beneficial to staff if they were leasing or buying a new vehicle. It would not benefit those staff who wished to buy second hand and get cost savings that way.
c) Support for the scheme but being put off by the lead in time of six to 12 months.
d) The likelihood of staff who were leasing a car not being able to afford to buy a vehicle and therefore were potentially more likely to be in the lower salary bands and possibly not eligible for the scheme.
e) The possibility of looking at other staff benefit options, such as medical benefits – due to the difficulty in finding NHS dentists and accessing healthcare. KA advised that staff benefits such as these could be classed as a 'benefit in kind', something the Park Authority had previously steered away from. There may still be savings, but it would be a taxable benefit. However, other options could be explored.
f) Some staff being potentially interested but not at the present time.
g) Other staff would not take up the scheme due to the requirements of living remotely and the restrictions that came with Electric Vehicles (EV).
h) Disappointment in SMT's position in seeking staff views on this via SCF. Given the significant opportunity for staff in future, and the morals / ethics of organisation and staff coupled with the transition to net zero, casually asking for feedback through SCF was not felt to be satisfactory. It was felt that it would be more appropriate for a different survey sent out to all staff, canvassing opinion on future uptake in three to five years. KC responded that this was still at the early stages and that it was entirely appropriate to come to SCF now at the early stage before investing more staff time in looking into this further – this is exactly what the SCF was for – to seek staff views prior to commencing something that may require significant resource input. The organisation was willing to revisit this in the future, as we do with many matters, but wished to establish now if there were enough initial interest to take the scheme forward. From the discussion, it would appear that at present, there was not enough interest, but it would remain a live issue.
i) General feeling that hybrid vehicles should not be included (due to the movement towards being a greener organisation).
j) A feeling that the organisation should apply the position of staff using the fleet EV's when making shorter journeys more robustly.
k) A staff rep flagged that interest free loans were available from the Energy Savings Trust to buy second hand EV 's. This may be an option to help those

wishing to purchase a vehicle on lower salaries, fixed term contracts or part time hours. Link provided:

l) 0% interest loan for second hand EVs up to £23,000: https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/grants-and-loans/used-electric-vehicle-loan/

m) It was also flagged that the Charging Place Scotland network was due to be privatised. Therefore, would charging personal EV's at work still be free. KA responded that there was a priority access for fleet vehicles to the charging points and therefore staff couldn't be guaranteed a spot.

7. KA to research the energy savings trust suggestion and will bring this back to SCF. KC will look into the viability of alternative benefits. Agree therefore that the scheme will not go ahead for now due to low interest and concerns, but this will be revisited in the future, and we will make recommendations on alternatives

Katherine August left the meeting.

Item 4: Paper 2 - Staff Awards

8. Pip Mackie introduced the proposal. It was recognised that a huge amount of positive work is happening across the Park Authority. However, some of this work (by its very nature) is more visible to staff and the wider public. The staff awards have been developed and are being proposed as a way to recognise staff who may normally go 'under the radar', as well as more visibly operating staff. It is proposed that the judging panel would be made of three members of staff (who would volunteer for that panel) to promote impartiality and so that the awards do not become a popularity contest. It is envisaged that the awards would be presented on the afternoon of the Christmas Party (during work hours). This paper is part of the consultation process and there are still details to be finalised, should the decision be made to the awards forward. Feedback on the proposal was requested.

9. The following points were raised:

a) There was strong feeling against the proposed awards relayed via the staff representatives, reasons for this included:

i. The risk around driving competition rather than cohesion.
ii. Awards being felt to be symbolic and not materially rewarding winners.
iii. The awards not being based on a transparent metric.
iv. The process being open to discrimination based on protected characteristics.
v. The process favouring able bodied staff and the proposed categories disfavouring those with neurodiversity, long term ill health or disability.
vi. Award schemes favouring neurotypical rather than neurodiverse people.
vii. Succeeding at work looking different to different people.
viii. Awards schemes generally favouring extroverted personality types.
ix. The potential for bias towards shiny, exciting and well promoted work.
x. The awards potentially becoming a popularity contest.
xi. The potential for staff to feel rejection sensitivity or marginalisation should they not win an award.
xii. The risk for line managers to no longer see recognition as part of their role.
xiii. No specific need for the awards having being identified, them just being seen as a 'nice to have'.
xiv. Awards being seen as 'exclusive' rather than 'inclusive'.
xv. The risk around self-selection of the judges, which may favour certain personality types.
xvi. The possibility for negative perception of staff should they wish to remove themselves from consideration.
xvii. The proposal favouring those longer serving members of staff or those whose projects have shorter timescales.
xviii. The awards going against the ethos of Insights Discovery by assuming that all staff wished to be recognised in this way.
xix. Not being culturally appropriate for the organisation.
xx. The awards being seen as contrived and inauthentic.
xxi. A strong feeling that staff would not be motivated by the introduction of this proposal.
xxii. It was felt that the awards would not drive forward change or improvement in terms of the organisational principles.

b) A suggestion that an equality impact assessment should be carried out on the proposal.
c) The Christmas party day not being an appropriate time or place for this event.

d) An alternative suggestion for a video-based recognition reel to be shown during an all staff away day.
e) The possibility of an external 'friend' of the Park Authority on judging panel to keep impartiality.
f) How would team responses be managed and the possibility of more team awards.
g) The nomination period being for a rolling year not just a set few weeks.
h) Three judges not being enough on the panel.
i) The light-hearted awards not being seen to be appropriate.
j) There being no award specifically covering great service to a partner / customer.
k) It was acknowledged the effort that had gone into writing the paper.
l) A suggestion that a bigger piece of work needed to be carried out on reward and recognition, highlighting all the positive benefits that working for the organisation already brings. KC – responded that this work was ongoing by the HR team.
m) The need to assess if the awards were going to do what they were intended to do eg motivate staff and if they didn't then to find out what does do this.
n) Past experiences of staff awards (at a different company) being negative. The intention was right, but execution was poor, leading to them feeling contrived. What worked better was ad hoc or unexpected praise from either the line manager or Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at a staff meeting. This carried more weight and was more appreciated.
o) If the proposal did go forward, the criteria for categories would be hard to score and assess due to not necessarily knowing what everyone's role involved.
p) Some staff feeling more comfortable with recognition at a team or directorate level rather than organisation wide.
q) Some positive feedback was received, with some staff liking the idea of being noticed due to being the 'silent unsung heroes' - but it would need to be done in the right way. Recognition does help with motivation in carrying out your role.
r) An opinion was expressed that if person doesn't want award, they don't have to collect it.
s) An expression that as an organisation the Park Authority pursue external awards to recognise staff, routinely going for the Nature of Scotland awards. Were there other external awards that could recognise different parts of the

organisation? There appeared to be an inherent bias towards the type of external awards that were being applied for.

t) On balance, if the proposal upsets people, then this has to be reflected upon.

Derek Ross left the meeting.

u) Recognition that any implementation would take up a lot of staff time.

v) It was highlighted that the Staff Services team meeting agenda always included an item for a shout out for thanks at each meeting. Could this be taken across the organisation or a post on Eolas recognising an individual or team?

w) KC summed up the discussion by expressing disappointment that something that had been proposed in the spirit of being fun and motivational had not been received as it had been intended and had clearly been misjudged. The awards were never intended to be divisive and were to be an opportunity to recognise those people who typically don't get recognition through them working 'behind the scenes'. The idea had come from a different organisation where their awards were seen as a very positive event. She recognised however that every organisation was different and had a different culture, and she acknowledged that just because this had worked elsewhere did not mean it would work well at the Park Authority. She said that organisationally we had been seeking to find ways to recognise and praise staff but she acknowledged that the feedback today indicated that the staff awards proposed were not the way to do this.

x) KC advised that the HR team are working on a Reward and Recognition policy but being a public sector organisation limits what can be done. The proposed awards was an attempt to work within these public sector constraints. Nevertheless, she acknowledged the strength of feeling on this matter and said that the feedback would be taken back to SMT for consideration.

y) A staff representative advised that the feedback received reflects the great work done on equality and inclusivity across the organisation. KC responded that she was hopeful that this paper would not undo all that good work.

z) A staff rep advised that they recognise the huge amount that the organisation already does for staff and this needs to be articulated to staff. Staff are extraordinarily lucky with being able to attend team away days, and the benefits we already offer etc. There is reward in working for the organisation but that may not always be acknowledged by staff.

10. To conclude, KC advised that this open and transparent conversation had been greatly appreciated and delivered exactly what the SCF was designed to do, in terms of being the mechanism to facilitate a sharing of a variety of staff views across what could sometimes be difficult proposals. She said that the amount and degree of feedback was welcomed, and she was glad that so many members of staff felt able to put their views forward, and this reflected recognition by staff of an organisation that was open to hearing a diversity of views. KC said that she would take this feedback to SMT and that the degree of upset would be reflected in that feedback, and an update would be brought back to staff in due course. Thanks were expressed to the staff reps for their engagement with the wider staff.

Item 5: Update – Pay Review

11. Kate Christie presented an update on the pay review and advised that the situation would continue to be monitored.

12. The following points were raised:
    a) Staff Pay Remit
        i. A staff representative requested that an update be provided to SCF towards end of financial year. KC advised that it would be aimed to be kept as a standing item.
        ii. A staff representative advised that the paper makes reference to our pay award of 2.3% as compared to inflation in March at 2.6% and being within the margins of 3% but pointed out that so far in 2025 this is the lowest figure for all monthly Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures. As of July, it is 3.8% having risen steadily since March. Consumer Price Index with Housing (CPIH) - which includes householder costs is actually 4.2% inflation. This put our pay award in a very different perspective as being inadequate and meaning we are actually getting a pay cut.
        iii. KC advised that our pay award was being closely monitored against levels of inflation, and that we were also keeping a watching eye on the wider position with where other public sector organisations and Scottish Government are pitching their pay awards. She said that this will remain a live conversation with SCF going forward.
    b) CEO Pay Remit

i. KC clarified that the CEO pay remit was not a matter for decision of, or consultation with staff. The decision to review the CEO pay band was made by the Board and upon developing a robust business case, was approved by Scottish Government (SG), within the context of an overarching SG review of public sector CEO pay in 2024, and the recommendation that came out of that review that CEO pay bands should be reviewed every five to seven years. It was noted that the Park Authority's CEO pay band had not been reviewed since the current CEO's appointment in 2013, some 12 years ago. The business case included an assessment of the staff and CEO pay awards over last five years which highlighted that cumulatively, the CEO pay increases had been significantly below the staff awards. The SG CEO Pay review recognised that public sector CEO basic pay awards had been very low in prior years and that it was now an appropriate time to increase the CEO Pay Framework pay bands for the three grades of public sector CEO. The Park Authority's CEO pay band was out with the increased band for his grade.

ii. A staff rep noted that grades F and G pay bands were recently uplifted and requested that all other salary bands need a similar exercise carrying out. KC advised that benchmarking had been done across all salary bands at the time of that uplift and it was identified through this benchmark that bands F and G had fallen well behind public sector comparators. Most Park Authority pay bands remain comparable, but recent national pay proposals indicate that bands E, F and G may start to fall behind again, depending on how SG, and therefore many other public sector organisations approach the current year pay award. We will keep an eye on this going forward.

iii. A staff rep queried as to the actual percentage of the pay uplift that was received by the CEO in 2024. KC advised that the CEO was at the top of the previous pay band and following the review of the 2024/25 pay band, is at the top of new pay band, the top of the new pay band being an uplift of 13.5% on the old pay band. Any future pay awards will be limited to cost of living only and not pay progression.

c) Board Members

i. KC advised that Members were to receive an £11 uplift, taking their daily rate to £256.57, and in April 2026 there would be an additional £12, meaning a day rate of £262.67. This was the maximum allowed within the parameters of the pay policy, though a two-year award had been agreed, to align with the remaining time of the staff multi-year award, although a three-year award was possible within the parameters of the Board Member Pay Policy.

Item 6: Health and Safety Committee Update

13. KC advised that the Health and Safety Committee had recently approved an increase in PPE purchase limits, and these would soon be published on Eolas.

14. There had also been a discussion regarding the breakdown of the escalation process in the lone work system. This had created a situation which had led to the scrutiny of the current systems and improvement points going forward.

Item 7: Leadership

15. KC advised that a new Board Member, Ian McLaren, starts on 22 September as the representative for Angus Council.

Item 8: Equalities

16. KC advised that there was to be a menopause cafe held on 01 October. This was an opportunity to have coffee, cake and a chat regardless of age or gender and the organisation were delighted to support this.

Item 9: AOB

17. KC advised that concerns had been received from a member of staff about some of the meeting rooms and the furniture provided (Avon and Nethy) where the default was to comfy furniture. It was advised that Avon now has a desk and upstanding chairs as well as comfy chairs and a low table. These would also be provided in Nethy. Meaning that staff now have the choice of which furniture to use.
18. New pods have been installed in Reception for quick conversations. It was advised that the office facilities were constantly being reviewed and a report had gone to SMT regarding the meeting rooms and how the spaces were being used.

19. A staff representative stated that this should be shared on Eolas as a 'you said, we did' story and a great example of the organisation listening to staff.

20. A staff representative expressed thanks to the Facilities team, who often were the unsung heroes. The work they do is brilliant and they are always quick to act on any suggestions that can be implemented.

21. A staff representative wished expenses to be clarified, as £5 did not seem enough to cover the costs of purchasing lunch when out the office. KC advised that she had checked the Travel and Subsistence Policy, and you can claim up to £30 for **receipted** expenses, and there is no time limit on this. It's only when you cannot provide a receipt, that your claim is limited to £5 for time away of more than five hours, but less than 10, and £10 for more than 10 hours away. Basically, this means that if you are working away from the office, say for example for four hours (10:00 – 14:00) and need to purchase lunch, you have up to £30 to spend, provided you can provide a receipt. If you can't provide the receipt, in this example, you cannot claim anything – but could claim £5 if you were away for five hours,

The meeting concluded at 15:35pm. Next meeting 3 December 2025.

Ref	Action	Responsible	Due Date
06.12.21 Para 19	Electric Car Salary Sacrifice Scheme Future updates to be brought back to SCF 27.06.22: Finance team looking into and any proposal will be brought to MT 07.11.22: Still progressing 25.01.23: Ongoing 20.03.23: Update: Support had been received from NatureScot who had recently launched a similar scheme. Any proposals would go to MT then be brought back to SCF 19.06.23: still progressing 19.02.24: Craig Lewis from the finance team will come to SMT to give an update. 12.06.24: Ongoing	KC	June 22

	16.09.24: Craig Lewis (finance team) to pull together a paper for SMT setting out proposals and options on EV. Should be at SMT in next month and should be at next SCF. **10.09.25: Paper presented at SCF and Katherine August to carry out more research. Staff to be surveyed to gauge future interest in EV scheme**		
19.02.24 **Para 21**	Internal Recruitment Policy Internal recruitment opportunities not being circulated to be raised with SEPA / NatureScot. 12.06.24: SEPA requested that the internal recruitment of posts was paused. NatureScot are keen for this to be reinstated, as are CNPA. 16.09.24: Discussions ongoing, and will be updated in due course. 11.06.25: Ongoing **10.09.25: Hasn't been progressed due to recruitment freeze and scrutiny from Scot Gov.**	KC	Jun 24
12.06.24 **Para 18**	**Credit Union** To consider how to take forward **16.09.24: Ongoing**	DC	Sept 24
11.06.25 **Para 26**	**PPE Purchase:** **10.09.25: Policy to be updated per para 3.**	KC	Dec 25
Ref	**Action**	**Responsible**	**Due Date**

06.12.21 **Para 19**	Electric Car Salary Sacrifice Scheme Future updates to be brought back to SCF 27.06.22: Finance team looking into and any proposal will be brought to MT 07.11.22: Still progressing 25.01.23: Ongoing 20.03.23: Update: Support had been received from NatureScot who had recently launched a similar scheme. Any proposals would go to MT then be brought back to SCF 19.06.23: still progressing 19.02.24: Craig Lewis from the finance team will come to SMT to give an update. 12.06.24: Ongoing 16.09.24: Craig Lewis (finance team) to pull together a paper for SMT setting out proposals and options on EV. Should be at SMT in next month and should be at next SCF. **10.09.25: Paper presented at SCF and Katherine August to carry out more research. Staff to be surveyed to gauge future interest in EV scheme**	KC	June 22
19.02.24 **Para 21**	Internal Recruitment Policy Internal recruitment opportunities not being circulated to be raised with SEPA / NatureScot. 12.06.24: SEPA requested that the internal recruitment of posts was paused. NatureScot are keen for this to be reinstated, as are CNPA. 16.09.24: Discussions ongoing, and will be updated in due course. 11.06.25: Ongoing	KC	Jun 24

	10.09.25: Hasn't been progressed due to recruitment freeze and scrutiny from Scot Gov.		
12.06.24 **Para 18**	**Credit Union** To consider how to take forward **16.09.24: Ongoing**	DC	Sept 24
11.06.25 **Para 26**	**PPE Purchase:** **10.09.25: Policy to be updated per para 3.**	KC	Dec 25