

**MINUTES of MEETING of the  
FINANCE COMMITTEE of**

**THE CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
held at Mar Lodge, Braemar  
on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2008**

**Present:**

Eleanor Mackintosh (Chair)      Mary McCafferty  
David Green                              David Fallows  
Bruce Luffman

**In Attendance:**

David Cameron, Head of Corporate Services  
Alistair Highet, Finance Manager  
Hamish Trench, Head of Heritage and Land Management

**Apologies:**

Jane Hope, Chief Executive

**Welcome and Apologies**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies as set out above.

**Minutes of Meeting of 16 May 2008**

2. The minutes of the meeting of 16 May 2008 were approved without amendment.

**Matters Arising**

3. In regard to point 16 of the minute of 16 May, David Cameron confirmed that an officer group had been established and had begun working on appraisal of options for the longer term sustainability of both the Land Based Business training and Cairngorms Awareness and pride projects. Further updates would be brought to the Committee in due course.

4. On point 24, with regard to seeking transfer of grant support for Ranger services, David Cameron confirmed he had entered into correspondence with SNH on the proposed transfer and also had liaised with Scottish Government. David highlighted that there was a current issue with the proposed transfer, in that he understood that sums which should have been transferred to the Authority had been retained within the total ranger grant to be allocated to local authorities. At this point in time, SNH understood that this position could still be corrected.
5. David Green highlighted the benefits of work on the Deeside Management Plan that he had become aware of.
6. Members noted that they saw little on the outcomes of projects which they had considered initially as questions of budget allocation. David Cameron pointed out that, under current terms of references of the Board's Committees, the role of considering the value for money of activities and the match of project outcomes against project intentions fell to the Audit Committee. David confirmed that the Audit Committee had recently been directing more internal audit activity into reviews of project outcomes. Members remarked that this did leave some lack of completion in the work undertaken by the Finance Committee, which considered only decisions around resourcing and project inputs, rather than wider value for money considerations.

### **2007/08 Final Accounts (Paper 1)**

7. Alistair Hight presented the final draft of the accounts for 2007/08.
8. Alistair highlighted that the accounts reflected a total gain or surplus for the year of £23,472 on total income of £5.388 million. The surplus was therefore equivalent to around 0.4% of income.
9. Alistair reported that the accounts had been approved by the Audit Committee at its meeting of 25 July, and had also now been signed off by the external auditor. The accounts process had therefore been closed around 1 month earlier for 2007/08 than in the previous year.
10. **Members noted the accounts and their approval 1 month earlier than in the previous year.**
11. Members welcomed the report and thanked Alistair and the finance team for their work in closing the accounts and managing the budget over the course of the year. Members also expressed their thanks to all

staff who had managed budgets over the course of the year for their contribution to an overall result which was very close to target.

### **2008/09 First Quarter Review (Paper 2)**

12. Alistair Hight presented this paper, which set out a summary review of the Authority's budget activity for the current year to the end of June 2008.
13. Alistair highlighted that the position showed a £156,000 surplus at 30 June against a budgeted £146,000 – the £10,000 variance representing 1.0% of income.
14. The current outturn projection stood at a deficit of £19,000, although usual budget management processes would seek to bring that deficit back to target by the end of the year.
15. Members thanked Alistair for the report, and noted in particular that the pattern of expenditure on the Authority's £1.6 million Operational Plan budget was much closer to budget at the end of the first quarter than in previous years. Alistair reported that he had been working closely with programme managers in order to determine more accurate budget profiles, and seek wherever possible to bring expenditure profiles forward in the year in order to reduce year-end backlogs.

### **Community Heritage Project Expenditure Justification (Paper 3)**

16. Hamish Trench introduced this project expenditure justification which had been circulated to members for approval. The paper set out details of a community heritage project which Hamish expected to commence in the 2009/10 financial year, subject to approval being given. The intent of the paper at this time was to provide an opportunity for Finance Committee members to comment prior to a paper being presented to the full Board.
17. Hamish explained that he had been exploring a range of potential partnership options on developing cultural heritage matters within the Park, and considering how the Authority could best add value to the project activities. The idea behind the proposal was to provide a staff resource to support community to do work which had been targeted by those communities, and also to provide a source of "seed corn" funding to assist project start up.
18. A total of £47k was being sought from the Authority over 3 years, with bids also being made to the Heritage Lottery Fund and LEADER.

19. In discussion, member's comments that the level of salary proposed appeared relatively high, while the budgeted recruitment costs also seemed high. Hamish and David Cameron indicated that the Authority's job evaluation system would be used to confirm salary level, while every effort would be made to keep recruitment costs to a minimum.
20. Members also noted there may be a presentational risk around proposing a new activity to the Board while the Strategic Review was still underway. Hamish noted this point for further consideration in developing the paper to the Board, while also noting that the Board had frequently commented on its wish to do more in the areas of cultural heritage.
21. Members welcomed the idea of seed corn funding and noted that it would be beneficial to increase this budgeted amount if at all possible. There was some concern that the huge potential scale of cultural heritage work simply could not be accommodated by a single community support officer, to the extent that this posed the question of whether the project should be greater in scale in order to provide 2 or 3 people, or not be run at all. There was a significant risk that a number of communities would be disappointed if the necessary prioritisation of projects left them unsupported.
22. Hamish agreed that this was a risk and that there certainly would be a need to prioritise projects to be supported, and an equal need for the Support Officer to manage community expectations. Hamish reported that he believed that exactly this type of support had been requested by communities.
23. **Members agreed the proposal.**

#### **Date of Next Meeting**

24. 31 October 2008.