

# National Park Authority Board Meeting

Agenda Item 10



## Chief Executive Officer's Report

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### *Paper for Noting*

#### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 This report reflects on the many activities and achievements within the National Park Authority ("NPA") during the third quarter for 2013/14.
- 1.2 It also provides an overview of the performance of the key business functions reported since the last Board Meeting in December 2013.

#### 2. Consideration

##### 2.1 Recent Highlights

- 1.1.1 Our relations with Scottish Government continue to be very constructive. Transport Minister, Keith Brown announced £750,000 of funding towards a new cycle path from Strathyre to Kingshouse. The funding has been allocated to Sustrans who will work with LLTTNPA and Forestry Commission Scotland to construct the new 3.5km cyclepath. The NPA will also provide match funding for the new path between the two villages, this will provide traffic free route between both communities.
- 2.1.2 Richard Lochhead officially opened the exhibition of entries to the first Scenic Routes initiative design completion recently at The Lighthouse, Scotland's National Centre for Architecture, Design and the City. The winning projects in a competition to design viewing platforms in a pilot project on 3 different sites are about to be start being built on site and it is expected that Mr Lochhead will officially open these on site in the early summer.
- 2.1.3 A number of working groups are now underway which focus on the delivery of 2020 Biodiversity Action Plan. ENFOR executives recently attended a strategy workshop held in Edinburgh to help guide the direction and priorities for the implementation of the plan.
- 2.1.4 Our relations with key partners continue to be very constructive with some very productive engagements held over the winter period with Stirling Council, SportScotland, Forestry Commission Scotland, West Dunbartonshire Council and Police Scotland.

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- 2.1.5 Both Scottish National Parks were represented at the recent Environment Link Parliamentary event hosted by Scottish Environment Link at Holyrood, which was well attended by MSPs and senior civil servants.
- 2.1.6 At the end of January all UK National Park Chief Executives attended an away day, held in Peak District, to focus on commercialisation opportunities for the wider National Parks family. A diverse range of opinions were drawn from across all parks and working groups for specific areas have been set up to report in May/June.
- 2.1.7 Operational Delivery – During the last quarter, there has been a wealth of project delivery happened across the Conservation, Visitor Experience/Management and Rural Development teams, which is outlined in detail in the update papers.

### 2.2 Business Performance

- 2.2.1 The financial performance for the ten months ended 31 January 2014 is summarised in the attached table (Appendix 1), which presents a surplus of £467k after 10 months of the financial year.
- 2.2.2 The full year forecast position remains the same as was presented at the Q2 budget review. The forecast for the year remains as a minor overspend of £5k. As we approach the financial year end the Authority is pro-actively reviewing and confirming the full year spend in each area of the business in order to achieve a balanced out-turn for the financial year.
- 2.2.3 The annual operational planning process is almost complete with each team identifying their key priorities for 2014/15, aligning with the 2012-17 Corporate Plan and the National Park Partnership Plan. The budget for 2014/15 has been approved by the Executive and Strategy Group and is presented for Board Approval in Agenda Item 7.

### 2.3 Communication and Stakeholder Engagement

- 2.3.1 We are continuing to develop the communications performance indicators we report on. These new targets better reflect the focus of the communications and media functions in order to achieve our Corporate Plan Outcome of: *“Informed and engaged stakeholders: communities, visitors, strategic partners, staff and Scottish Government”*.

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- 2.3.2 The following tables summarise levels of activity, engagement and coverage generated by our communications and media functions in Quarter 3. The National Park continued to generate media coverage across the full range of local, national, specialist, online and broadcast media.
- 2.3.3 In Q3 2013/14, the National Park was mentioned in a total of 268 media articles. Only 1 of these were 'negative' in the form of an article in the Stirling Observer from an individual who was frustrated with the length of time it was taking to place a memorial at Rowardennan. In the article he blamed the National Park for the delay.
- 2.3.4 In October, the National Park launched a recruitment drive to attract more volunteer rangers resulting in local, regional and radio coverage.
- 2.3.5 Highlights from the Great Scottish Swim were broadcast on Channel 4 featuring stunning aerial footage of Loch Lomond.
- 2.3.6 The Lonely Planet Guide named Scotland as one of the top three countries in the world to visit in 2014 with specific reference to Loch Lomond & The Trossachs and the Cairngorms National Parks. There was extensive coverage in both national and broadcast media.  
In November, the National Park welcomed back Sir David Attenborough who was filming a new series for Sky. Filming took place on Loch Lomond.
- 2.3.7 The winners of the first Scotland's Scenic Routes project were announced. Preliminary work resulted in a double page opinion piece by Bill Jamieson in the Scotsman and subsequent coverage in local and specialist architectural publications.
- 2.3.8 Improvement works at Loch Lubnaig officially completed in November with BBC Out of Doors visiting the site to interview Gordon Watson.
- 2.3.9 The National Park planning department was highly commended at the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning for their Supplementary Planning Guidance on Sustainable Design. All local media covered the event.
- 2.3.10 The National Park Community Grants were announced in December with £20K awarded to different projects across 16 communities. The announcement led to coverage in both local and community media.
- 2.3.11 Filming started for a new Channel 5 documentary set in Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park. The four-part series will track wildlife over the

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changing seasons. Filming will last for a year with the programme due to broadcast early 2015.

<b>% of our media coverage that is positive/neutral/negative.</b>	<b>Target (Annual 2013-14)</b>	<b>Latest Quarter (Q3 2013)</b>
% of our media coverage that is positive/neutral	90%	99.9%

<b>Level of media coverage we receive (national, local, specialist, broadcast or online coverage).</b>	<b>Target (Annual 2013-14)</b>	<b>Latest Quarter (Q3 2013)</b>	<b>YTD</b>
National press	140	19	90
Local press	550	171	590
Broadcast ( <i>*new KPI measure</i> )	20*	5	12
Specialist	35	2	43
Online	250	74	261

- 2.3.12 By the end of Q3 our website had 266,103 unique visitors, taking us to 85% of our annual target (at just 75% of the way through the year).
- 2.3.13 In Q3 alone, unique visitors were up 16% year-on-year – with 67% of visits coming from new visitors, versus 33% for returning visitors to our site.
- 2.3.14 The main content users continue to access are our visitor focused information (what to do etc.), and using our site as the gateway to our e-planning service.
- 2.3.15 It is interesting to note the ways that users are accessing our existing website, and how that has changed over the past year. In Q3 2012-13, 83% of visits to our website came via desktop computers, 9% from mobile devices and 8% from tablets. The equivalent figures for Q3 2013-14 are 70% from desktops (-5% year-on-year), whilst 15% of visits to our site came from mobiles (+90% year-on-year), and a further 15% (also +90% year-on-year) via tablets.

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### 2.4 Freedom of Information (FOI)

23 Freedom of Information requests have been received to the end of December 2013.

The average response time for Freedom of Information requests is 17.65 days.

<b>Category of Requester (all requests)</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14 (to end of Q3)</b>
Councillor/MSP	4	3
Journalist	2	5
Member of Public	20	9
Community Council/other community organisation	1	0
Other	12	6

### 2.5 Environmental Information (EIR) Requests

22 Environmental Information Requests have been received and responded to by the end of December 2013.

There were two information requests where information was only partially released;

- The requester sought copies of the Authority's legal advice relating to the closure of Duncan Mills Memorial Slipway. There is an exception to the general duty to provide information which specifically relates to legal advice, and the Scottish Information Commissioner has upheld this exception on a number of occasions. This decision was contested by the requester; however the original decision was upheld on review.
- The related to the withholding of 3<sup>rd</sup> party personal data from release. The requester did not contest this decision. It is standard practice to withhold this sort of data from release.

The average response time for Environmental Information requests is 20.43 days.

<b>Category of Requester (all requests)</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14 (to end of Q3)</b>
Councillor/MSP	1	
Journalist		
Member of Public	20	18
Community Council/other community organisation		
Other	5	4

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### 2.6 Complaints

32 Complaints have been received to the end of December 2013. 26 of these complaints related to the cull of goats on the East side of Loch Lomond by RSPB and SNH.

The average response time for complaints is 13.71 days.

<b>Category of Complainant (all requests)</b>	<b>2012/13</b>	<b>2013/14 (to end of Q3)</b>
Councillor/MSP		
Journalist		
Member of Public	31	31
Community Council/other community organisation	1	
Other	3	1

### 2.6 People

2.6.1 There has been a decrease in unplanned staff turnover in the third quarter of 2013/14 with 2 members of staff leaving compared to 5 in the second quarter. Despite this overall increase in turnover over the previous quarters we are still on track to maintain staff turnover at less than 10% for 2013/14.

2.6.2 Sickness absence, both short and long term, increased in the third quarter of 2013/14 giving us an average of 4.56 days per person. Due to known long term illness this increase is likely to continue into the final quarter, however, managers will continue to provide the necessary support in order to facilitate a return to work.

2.6.3 Following undertaking the staff engagement survey in September 2013 all teams are now reviewing their own results and are formulating action plans which target progress in the areas that they wish to see improvements.

There are eight engagement factors; leadership, my manager, my team, my company, personal growth, wellbeing, fair deal and giving something back.

The Leadership team (Executive and Heads of Service) have taken responsibility for the production and implementation of an action plan to make improvements in the areas of "Leadership" and "Fair Deal" and Managers have done the same for the category of "My Manager". Progress against plans will be monitored by the Executive/Heads of Service.



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Organisations who participate in this survey can opt to apply for "star status". I am delighted to advise that we have been credited in the "Ones to Watch" category which is classed as 'good'. A recent survey of all staff proposed that we aim for a 1 star accreditation in 2015 which is a challenging target and, if achieved, would demonstrate a significant increase in staff engagement from when we started this process in September 2013.

Cairngorms NPA participated in this national survey for the third time in 2013 and the intention is that we will share results with each other.

### 2.7 Efficiency Target

2.7.1 As part of the drive to reduce costs and deliver a lean and efficient public service, the Scottish Government imposes an annual operational efficiency savings target. It has been confirmed by Scottish Government that the target for 2013/14 is 3%.

2.7.2 The original board approved budget for 2013/14 included annual efficiency savings estimated at £179.5k, or 2.8% of Grant in Aid income. This compares to £200.5k of annual savings achieved in 2012/13. At the end of Q3 the revised forecast savings for the year are estimated at £81.8k, or 1.3% of our Grant in Aid income. This is an improvement from the Q2 Budget Review which set a target for the year of £38.5k, or 0.6% of Grant in Aid. We have so far made improvements to our efficiency savings through effective management of our legal contract services and through effective vacant post management reducing our staff costs.

As we already operate a lean service in the organisation, understandably it becomes more challenging to continue to generate year on year operational efficiency savings whilst maintaining/improving service delivery. We have traditionally monitored and reported our efficiency savings through identifying specific financial savings. As part of the annual operational planning process teams are targeting additional efficiency measures to ensure that we deliver on our SG target.

### 2.8 Payment Performance

2.8.1 The percentage of agreed invoices paid within the government's target of 10 days from date of receipt was 99% in the period April to January 2014.

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### 3. Recommendation

3.1 Members are invited to **note** the contents of this report.

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