



Virtual Meetings

Agenda Item 7

National Park Authority Board Meeting

13th September 2021

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1. Purpose

- 1.1. To outline our proposed approach in relation to virtual attendance at meetings for Board Members and members of the public, taking in to account legal, technical and environmental considerations following the expiration of the relevant parts of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020 on 30 September 2021

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. That the Board:

- a) Note the research undertaken in relation to virtual attendance at meetings of the National Park Authority Board and Committees
- b) Note the approach proposed in relation to virtual attendance at meetings for Board Members and members of the public from 1 October 2021

3. Contribution to National Park Partnership Plan and/or Our 5-year Plan

- 3.1. The efficient functioning of our Board and Committees ensures good governance which underpins all Outcomes and Priorities of the National Park Partnership Plan and Our 5-year Plan 2018-23.

4. Background and Context

- 4.1. The Board and Committees of the National Park Authority have been meeting virtually via *LifeSize* since the start of the pandemic. Whilst we have been meeting

virtually we have maintained transparency to the public by livestreaming our meetings online. We have averaged 11 viewers at our Board meetings, 17.5 viewers at our Planning and Access Committee meetings, and 1 viewer at our Audit & Risk Committee meetings.

4.2. Meeting virtually has had a number of benefits, including:

- Enabling continued good governance and public health safety during the pandemic restrictions
- Reaching members of the public through livestreaming who may not have been able to attend in-person meetings due to their location, time constraints, or physical abilities
- Reducing travel-related financial costs and carbon emissions
- Supporting flexibility for Board members' other responsibilities and personal life

4.3. However, there have also been drawbacks to meeting virtually, for example:

- More challenging to maintain relationships between Board members, and between Board members and staff
- Reduced ability for Board members to connect with the National Park as a place
- Lower accessibility for members of the public who don't have access to the livestream

4.4. On 30th September 2021, the temporary legislation that has supported us to have virtual meetings expires. Alongside the general lifting of pandemic restrictions in Scotland, we have considered in detail how we intend to conduct meetings in future, including how to ensure the public can access these meetings.

5. Planned way forward for Board and Committee meetings

5.1. From 1st October 2021, we plan return to having a physical meeting location, most often being our Carrochan office in Balloch, for all statutory bodies of the National Park Authority (Board, Planning & Access Committee, Local Review Body, Audit and Risk Committee) from 1 October 2021.

5.2. We will determine on a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the respective chairs whether to hold meetings of the Chairs & Executive Group and the Futures Group virtually or in-person.

5.3. In line with Standing Order 25¹, Board members may attend meetings in person or alternatively by participation by video and/or audio link.

¹ Standing Order 25 (SO25) states that "...Participation by Members at Board meetings may be either by attendance at the meeting in person or alternatively by participation by video and/or audio link. Members participating in the Board meeting by video and/or audio link will be deemed to be present and attending and constitute part of the Board for the purpose of the meeting..."

- 5.4. We also plan that the meetings for all our statutory bodies will also be accessible to the public via a video and/or audio livestream.
- 5.5. Following discussions with governance professionals at public bodies across Scotland, our proposed approach is consistent with the thinking of the sector.

6. Considerations and Next Steps

- 6.1. Based on discussions with the Chairs & Executive Group, as well as informal discussions with individual Board Members, we expect that many Board members will be keen to get back to meeting in person. Therefore, it is likely that meetings over the next 3-6 months are likely to be largely attended in-person.
- 6.2. However, where members do choose to dial in, we will effectively be in a 'hybrid' meeting scenario, where some Board or Committee members are present, and others are dialling-in. This a scenario we encountered from time-to-time before the pandemic, but it was rare. Therefore, we will be ensuring we keep the process under continual review, including whether it is working effectively, whether any Chair or Board Member training is required to assist with it, or whether any Standing Order changes would be helpful.
- 6.3. It is also important that Board members note that we are currently reviewing our technical requirements to support hybrid meetings, and the livestreaming of them. We expect to invest in new meeting room technology to support this. However, it is possible that this will not be in place until sometime in 2022, depending on progress on procurement and the state of the supply chain. This is further reason that members may wish to attend the upcoming round of meetings in person.

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