

## How debate is silenced in the LLTNPA

### Description

After the two candidates for convener of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Board had made their speeches last Monday, Cllr Fergus Wood asked if he could put a question to the candidates. The answer from convener Linda McKay and Governance Manager Amanda Aitkman was NO. Cllr Fergus then gave a resigned shrug of his shoulders. I could sense his frustration.

Candidates for election always try and present themselves in the best light and written statements and speeches rarely reveal much. Having listened to both candidates and read their statements I could not tell what they really stood for and I suspect Cllr Woods didn't either. He wanted to know something, was right to ask and if he and other members had been allowed to do so, the way they voted might have changed. That is surely what democracy should be about. It is not a coincidence that it was Fergus Woods, an elected councillor, asked this question. It will have been based on his own experience of being selected as a candidate for his party in his ward: he will have been subject to questioning and subsequently may well have been subject to questioning by the general public at election hustings. So why couldn't Board Members question the candidates for National Park convener?

It turns out there is no reason why he should not have been allowed to ask a question. Since the meeting, I have had a look at the Board Standing Orders which have a section on election of convener and this says NOTHING about whether Board Members could ask questions of candidates or not (see above). Therefore at the very least what Linda McKay as convener should have done is stated that asking questions of candidates was not covered in Standing Orders and asked the meeting what they wanted to do. She didn't and in effect closed off any opportunity to scrutinise candidates claims. This was wrong.

Unfortunately no Board Member challenged Linda McKay on this. I suspect this is illustrative of her time as convener, the current Board is simply not used to challenging what their convener and other Government nominees say. This was well demonstrated by the Owen McKee case ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)). The LLTNPA Board badly needs an injection of democracy and to become far more transparent about how they operate. Current Board Members should not leave this to their new Convener to decide when he takes up post on 1st March, they should demand it of him and staff.

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**Election and Removal of Convener and Depute Convener**

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6. In accordance with schedule 1, paragraph 11, of the Act, the Board elects the Convener and Depute Convener from the Members. Election of the next Convener and Depute Convener shall take place at the last Board meeting before the expiry of the term of office of the current Convener and/or Depute Convener, as long as this date is not within 6 weeks from the commencement of the appointment of five or more new Board Members in which case, the current Convener and/or Depute Convener, as the case may be, will continue in

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office until the next Board meeting at which time the election will be held. The Proper Officer shall conduct the process of election as follows:

- a) The Proper Officer will seek nominations for Convener and/or Depute Convener from Members. Nominations may be made in writing to the Proper Officer up to three weeks in advance of the Board meeting. Any Member may propose another NPA Member as Convener or Depute Convener and another Member must second the nomination for it to be valid.
- b) Each candidate who has a valid nomination will be asked to submit a summary not exceeding 300 words to the Proper Officer for onward circulation to the Board at least two weeks in advance of the Board meeting outlining their plans for the role if elected. Each candidate who has a valid nomination will also be asked if they wish to make a short statement (maximum of 5 minutes duration) to the Board meeting.
- c) Members who are absent from the Board meeting on the grounds of extenuating circumstances may be considered for election in their absence, provided they have indicated to the chair of the meeting their consent to being nominated and based on a majority vote by those Members present at the meeting in favour of their being considered.
- d) When the posts of Convener and Depute-Convener are to be filled at the same meeting, the Convener will be elected first. Any person elected as Convener shall be ineligible for election as Depute Convener.
- e) In the event of more than one candidate standing, election will be a secret ballot, as follows:
  - Only Members who are present and have heard all presentations from prospective candidates may vote;
  - Members must not cast more than one vote on each round of voting;
  - To be elected, a candidate must gain an absolute majority of the votes cast by those Members present and voting;
  - Where more than one round of voting is required, in each round the candidate with the lowest number of votes will be excluded. Where there is an equality of votes among those candidates who have least votes, the candidate to be excluded will be determined by lot;
  - Where there are only two candidates remaining and there is an equality of votes between them, the Convener or Depute Convener, as the case may be, will be determined by lot.

## Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

## Tags

1. Governance
2. LLTNPA

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## Author

nickkempe