

The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park – a chief executive out of control

Description

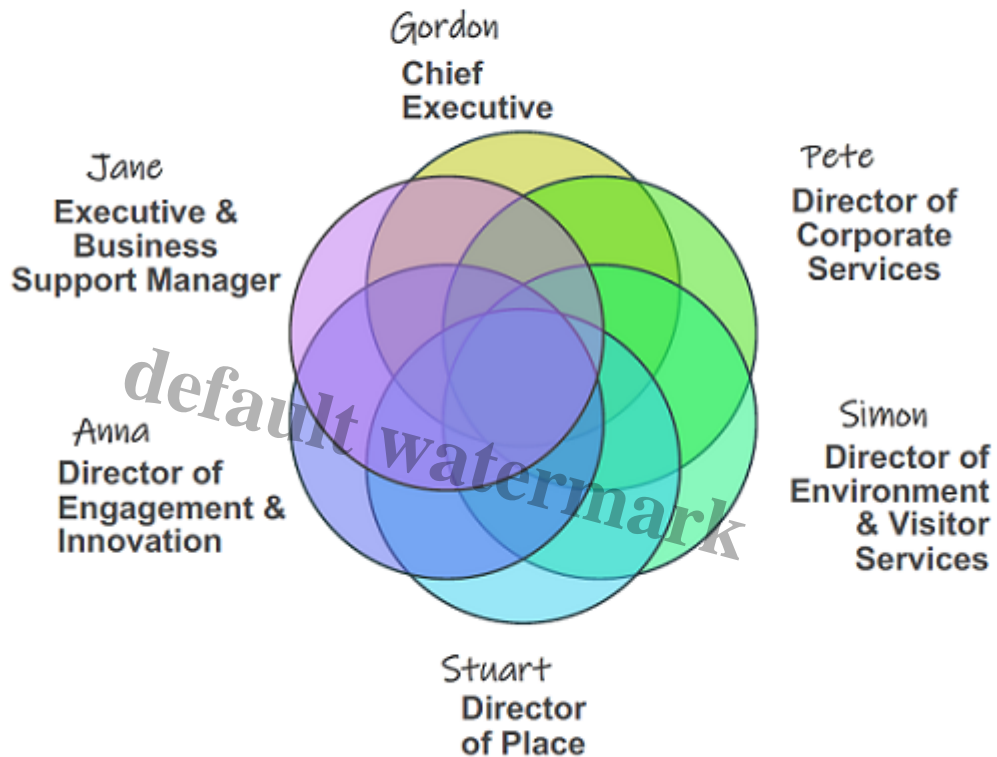
After being awarded an extra Â£3m by the Scottish Government for 2021-22, the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority decided at their meeting on 15th March to delay deciding how to spend Â£965,000 of this until their June meeting ([see here](#)). One Board Member did ask Pete Wightman, the Director of Corporate Services, about whether the money might be used to address staffing gaps but was given an evasive reply.

Just two weeks later, the Chief Executive, Gordon Watson sent out an –operating model– to –delivery partners– setting out a revised staffing structure for the National Park Authority. This created a significant number of new management posts. It is scarcely conceivable that either Mr Watson or his senior management team decided all of this in the two weeks after the Board Meeting. Rather, it appears Mr Watson must have been working on it for some time but chose NOT to take his plan to the Board for a decision. The contrast with the Cairngorms National Park Authority, where there is a Board staffing sub-committee, and the Main Board meeting openly discusses and makes decisions about staffing matters is stark.



Our Operating Model

Executive team responsibilities



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March 2022

It's all Gordon, Pete and Jane, Anne Simon and Stuart – as if these people were as well known to public as Nicola and Boris. But this is how chumocracy works, the only people who matter are those the know.

That the LLTNPA Board had no part in the decision was confirmed by an email from Gordon Watson that accompanied the slides:

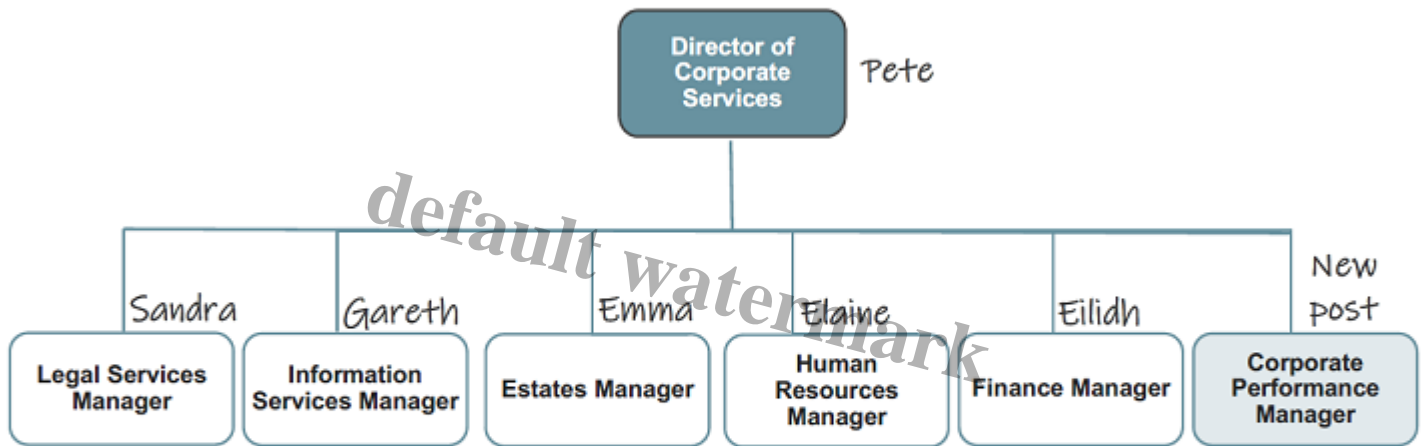
As one of our delivery partners and key stakeholders, I wanted to let you know about some changes that I have recently made to the operating model and team responsibilities across the National Park Authority. Across our directorates I have reviewed the remit of some of the Executive Team to focus on our refreshed outcomes, as outlined in our 2021/22.

The – speaks for itself, though further down the email Mr Watson starts using – when referring to all the new management posts that are being created (the – presumably referring to the Senior Management Team) .

Within the directorates we are also filling some existing vacancies and bringing in some new roles – which we will shortly be recruiting for.

There was no provision that I could see for these new management roles in the budget agreed by the Board in March so in effect Mr Watson has pre-empted any decision the LLTNPA might make on how to spend the additional Â£965k at their June Board Meeting. This is a public authority where the Chief Executive appears to manage the Board, rather than vice versa.

Corporate Services



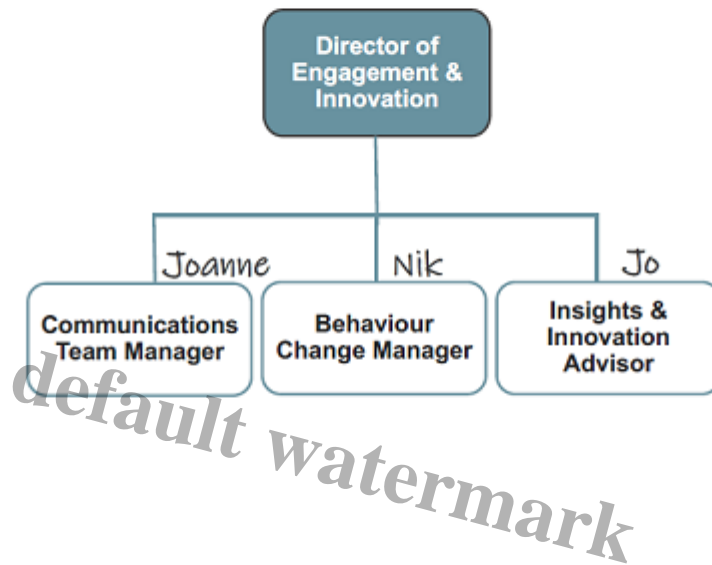
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For a small organisation with 130 permanent staff, the LLTNPA has an inordinate number of managers. When pressed by the Board Member about the potential for new staff, Pete Wightman did refer to the need of some additional staff in his team. He mentioned ‘‘estates’’, presumably to mop up the disasters that have resulted from the LLTNPA’s commercialisation agenda ([see here](#)), and ‘‘procurement’’, presumably to speed up the implementation of the Automated Number Plate Recognition tender that has taken four years. But Mr Wightman made no mention of any ‘‘Corporate Performance Manager’’. Why not?

Well, the task of this role is to ‘‘to take in the responsibilities of overseeing the running of our Board and Committees and all aspects of our corporate and annual operating planning work, project administration, information requests and complaints handling’’. This is work that up until now appears to have been Mr Wightman’s responsibility. Perhaps he should explain what this will free him up to do?

Engagement and Innovation



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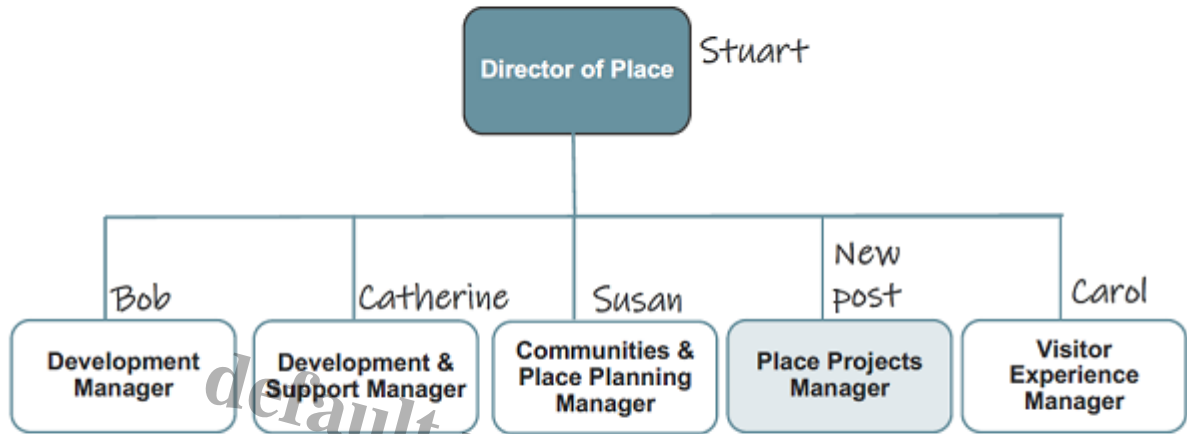
March 2021

By comparison to the other teams, the former “Communications Team” is slimline. There are no new managers and an Advisor who presumably manages no-one.

Public sector corporate speak, however, is alive and well, with “insights” replacing what was formerly known as research. More worrying is that Nik Turner, who was recruited as Litter Prevention Manager ([see here](#)), and had, to her credit, been trying to develop “infrastructure” has transmogrified into a “Behaviour Change Manager”. Good luck with that! The LLTNPA is blind to the fact that the way to influence behaviour is to put infrastructure in place that encourages/facilitates people to do the right thing, to enjoy the National Park without doing damage or causing inconvenience to others.



Place



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Last but far from least, Stuart Mearns, formerly Director of Rural Development and Planning is to become Director of Place. I am sure that will delight those responsible for corporate speak at St Andrew's House. It would also delight me if Mr Mearns now starts to pay attention to the quality of places like Lochgoilhead ([see here](#)). Perhaps the new Places Project Manager could start in Cowal, arguably the most degraded and neglected part of the National Park?

Further insights (a correct use of that term) are provided by Mr Watson's description of this role:

I [no mention of the Board] am looking to create a new Place Projects Team, led by a new Place Projects Manager role. This team will report to Stuart Mearns, whose expanded remit is reflected in his job title as our Director of Place. The Place Projects team will continue [how can it continue if its new?] to link to our Estates and Visitor Services teams to ensure projects are delivering needs in those areas [and what needs are these?]. The Place Projects Manager role that we'll be recruiting for will also help with partner projects with other public bodies such as Forestry and Land Scotland and our local authority partners. With the Community Partnership being wound down from the end of March [again the decision about this appears to have been taken by Mr Watson, not the Board], our community support staff led by Susan Brooks (Communities & Place Planning Manager) will be giving more support on community projects and capacity building, whilst also working with a revamped Countryside Trust, who will be working with us on nature, travel and climate projects while engaging with

communities [more on the [revamped](#) Community Trust in due course but its primary purpose appears to be a sort of money laundering vehicle, one that channels and allocates funds that could not be received by the LLTNPA directly].

What needs to happen?

None of these new management jobs appear to have been advertised as yet. The LLTNPA Board needs to step in, halt the whole process until there is a proper discussion in public about how the extra resources allocated by the Scottish Government should be spent and then make the decision itself. It would do well to follow the example of the CNPA, create a Staffing sub-committee and revise its Standing Orders so that all decisions about staff posts and whether or not to fill vacancies are taken by that Committee or the main Board.

If this [re-structure](#) is allowed to go ahead, 26 out of 130 permanent staff employed by the LLTNPA, will be Managers, that is one in every five. This is a top heavy management structure, with senior managers out of control and abusing their power to appoint more managers below them. These management ratios won't change much even if Gordon Watson has used some of the £965k to create more new frontline posts and not bothered to tell the Park's partners about this.

Frontline posts also need to be included in new Board decision making processes. There are two administrative jobs being advertised at present ([see here](#)), support assistants who *will be responsible for managing our camping booking system, assisting with virtual Board and Committee meetings as well as providing consistent and up to date information, advice and responding to enquiries for both internal and external customers*. The administrative costs of the camping byelaws, which the LLTNPA ceased to report on openly long ago, grow by the year. This is not wise use of public money and the Board should be taking a critical look at what has been happening.

Unfortunately, nothing is likely to change so long as the LLTNPA Board allow their Chief Executive, Gordon Watson, so much power or until politicians start calling for radical reform of the National Park Authority.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Governance
2. LLTNPA
3. Scottish Government
4. visitor management

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