How senior staff in the LLTNPA control board members â?? they pick them!

Description

Recently, while researching my post on the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA) local member elections (see here), I came across this revealing post on Linked In (see here):

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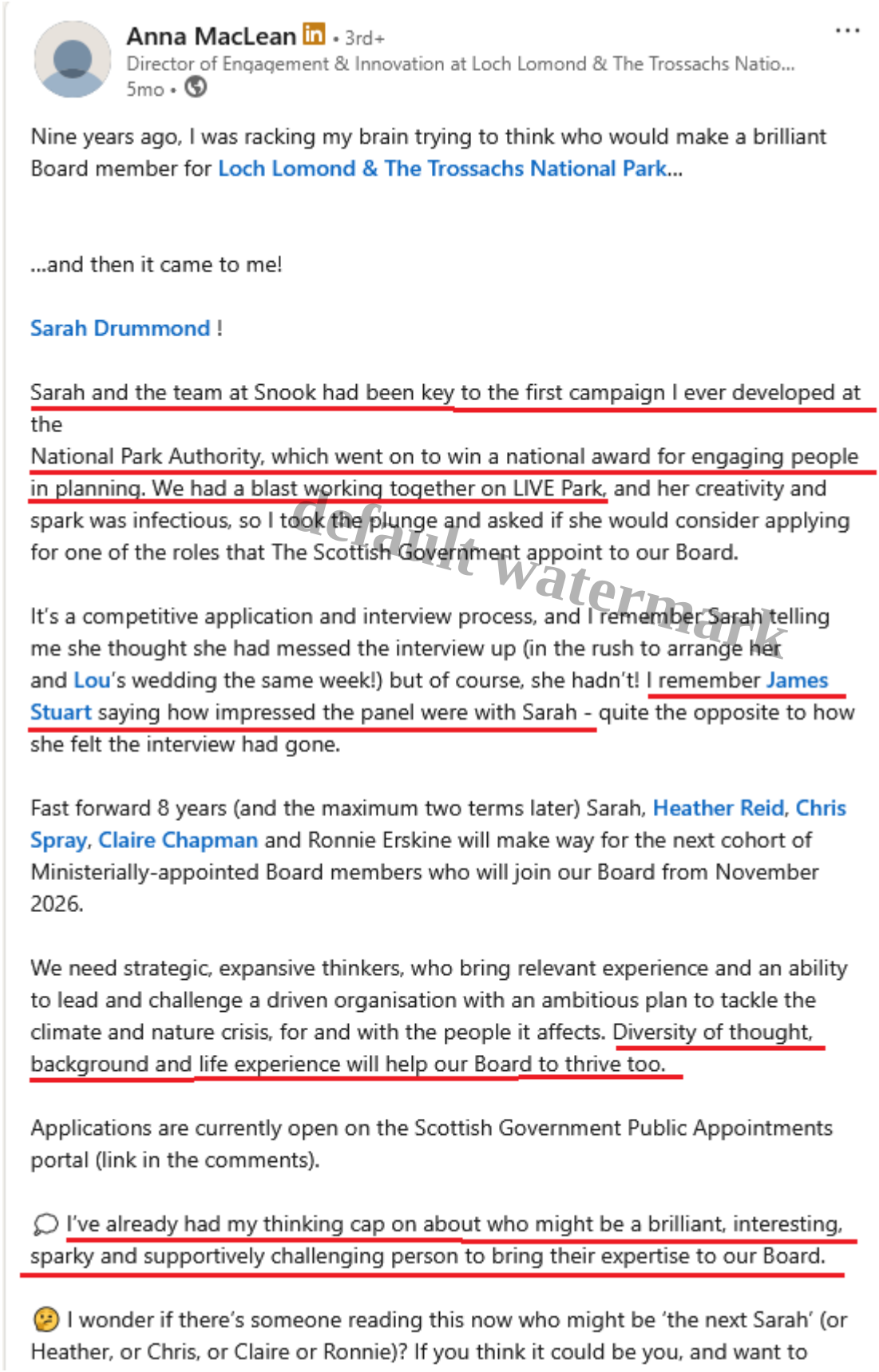

Anna MacLean • 3rd+
Director of Engagement & Innovation at Loch Lomond & The Trossachs Natio...
5mo •

Nine years ago, I was racking my brain trying to think who would make a brilliant Board member for Loch Lomond & The Trossachs National Park...

...and then it came to me!

Sarah Drummond !

Sarah and the team at Snook had been key to the first campaign I ever developed at the
National Park Authority, which went on to win a national award for engaging people in planning. We had a blast working together on LIVE Park, and her creativity and spark was infectious, so I took the plunge and asked if she would consider applying for one of the roles that The Scottish Government appoint to our Board.

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It's a competitive application and interview process, and I remember Sarah telling me she thought she had messed the interview up (in the rush to arrange her and Lou's wedding the same week!) but of course, she hadn't! I remember James Stuart saying how impressed the panel were with Sarah - quite the opposite to how she felt the interview had gone.

Fast forward 8 years (and the maximum two terms later) Sarah, Heather Reid, Chris Spray, Claire Chapman and Ronnie Erskine will make way for the next cohort of Ministerially-appointed Board members who will join our Board from November 2026.

We need strategic, expansive thinkers, who bring relevant experience and an ability to lead and challenge a driven organisation with an ambitious plan to tackle the climate and nature crisis, for and with the people it affects. Diversity of thought, background and life experience will help our Board to thrive too.

Applications are currently open on the Scottish Government Public Appointments portal (link in the comments).

💭 I've already had my thinking cap on about who might be a brilliant, interesting, sparky and supportively challenging person to bring their expertise to our Board.

🤔 I wonder if there's someone reading this now who might be 'the next Sarah' (or Heather, or Chris, or Claire or Ronnie)? If you think it could be you, and want to

Having been writing for a number of years about how staff at the LLTNPA control board members (see here for example), I should have guessed that they involve themselves in who gets appointed.

It is also revealing is that Anna Maclean states that James Stuart, then Convener of the LLTNPA, fed back to staff about how Sarah Drummond performed at interview. That should have been none of staffâ??s business. One wonders whether Mr Stuart or other members of the interview panel also sounded out staff about candidates beforehand giving them further influence about who gets appointed?

â??Succession planningâ??, in which the leadership of an organisation chooses who will succeed them, is now commonplace. The Scottish Governmentâ??s Public Appointments system, however, is ostensibly supposed to promote equality and diversity on Non-Departmental Public Boards like the LLTNPA. Staff encouraging people who share their world view to apply to the board undermines that but from what Anna MacLean says â?? â??Iâ??ve already had my thinking cap onâ?• â?? is still clearly going on

The dangers of staff â??pickingâ?? who they enjoy working with is well illustrated by the appointment of Sarah Drummond. Dr Drummond, as Anna Maclean states in her post, designed the consultation on the Main Issues Report underpinning the LLTNPAâ??s Local Development Plan (LDP). That consultation won the Overall Award at the Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning in 2015 for its innovative approach. The LLTNPA then secured another award in 2016 for the LDP itself (see here). The engagement on the Main Issues report and LDP resulted in just three objections to the proposal to allocate the Riverside Site at Balloch for Visitor Experience in 2016 (see here). Eight years later over 150,000 people had objected to the Flamingo Land planning application for that same site. With Sarah Drummond on the LLTNPA board, there was very little chance of it or senior staff like Anna MacLean ever reflecting on what was, judging by the numbers, the least effective planning consultation in Scottish history.

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Unlike other senior staff, Ms MacLean has engaged with me in the fairly recent past and I have liked her for that but her post is an indication of the bubble the leadership at the LLTNPA inhabit. Neither she nor any of the board members linked into her post, which is still up five months later, can apparently can see anything wrong in officials encouraging people they like to join the board .

Anna Macleanâ??s statement that â??Diversity of thought, background and life experience will help our board to thrive tooâ?? is highly ironic given what has happened to Sid Perrie, the local member for Balloch. Sid, as regular readers will know, is neurodiverse and has now been suspended from the LLTNPA for six months (see here) for sending six strongly worded emails challenging the Flamingo Land planning process. One wonders how far Sarah Drummondâ??s involvement in the planning process which paved the way for the Flamingo Land planning application explains the lack of support from other board members for Sid?

One lesson is that when board members and staff get too close and are one â??teamâ??, as James Stuart liked to put it, the potential to hold officials to account publicly greatly reduces. Anna MacLean was right to say that the LLTNPA needs a different type of board member (see here), but she and other staff are not the people who will make that happen.

Senior staff have also indirectly been trying to influence who stands in the local elected member elections. They do this, as was recently reported (see here), by telling people who are considering whether to stand that their role is to represent the interests of the LLTNPA rather than the interests of local people who elected them. That puts many people off standing and is designed to prevent any more board members like Sid Perrie who were prepared to challenge what they do. Whether senior

staff try to influence the elections directly, by encouraging certain people to stand, is a moot point but the evidence of Anna MacLeanâ??s post â?? as Director responsible for communication she is only the messenger â?? suggests they would have no scruples in doing so.

Category

1. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. flamingo land
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