

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 4 February 2022

Present: A Cooper, W Dracup, G Gribble, P Harper, G Hill, S Morgan, D Moyse, J Nutley, N Oakley, C Pannell, L Samuel, P Sanders, P Smerdon, P Vogel, P Woods, D Thomas J McInnes

Officers: K Bishop, Chief Executive (National Park Officer)
R Drysdale, Director of Conservation and Communities
N White, Head of Organisational Development
A Stirland, Head of Business Support
J Sharpe, Strategic Planning and Projects Manager

Apologies: M Renders

3381 Declarations of Interest

S Morgan, J Nutley and P Vogel declared an interest in Item 7 and will leave the room for this discussion. See also the note under section 3393.

3382 Minutes of the Authority meeting held on Friday 7 January 2022

None.

3383 Chair's Report

The Chair reported the following:

- Attended the Team Devon video conference, which includes representatives from Devon County Council and the District/Borough Councils. All will be joining forces with regards to housing strategy. She was given the opportunity to report on the work undertaken by DNPA officers;
- Attended the National Parks England video conference with the Chief Executive (National Park Officer). The main discussion related to initial views on the Government's Response to the Landscapes Review which was published on 15 January 2022;
- A proposed new business has been received from National Parks Partnerships Limited and this will be considered at the March meeting of the Authority
- A video conference was held between Members and Officers from the English National Parks and Defra officials the focus was on the Government's Response to the Landscapes Review.

The Deputy Chair reported that he had attended an All Parliamentary Group meeting 'Right Tree Right Place'. He advised that England's planting targets are faltering; by 2040 the least amount of timber will be planted since the war, 83% of timber is currently imported.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) reminded Members that the National Park Forum is due to take place on Thursday 17 February 2022.

3384 Items requiring urgent attention

None.

3385 Public Participation

None.

3386 Auditor's Annual Report for Dartmoor National Park Authority 2020-21

The Chair welcomed Mr G Mills of Grant Thornton to the meeting (via Teams). He stated that the report was the first to be presented under the new Code of Practice issued by the National Audit Office. The Value for Money review was very positive with reporting made under three themes – Financial Sustainability, Governance and Improving Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. Under the new code of practice requirements, no significant weaknesses in the Authority's arrangements were identified.

Mr Mills introduced his colleague Mr M Bartlett who continued the presentation (via Teams). Mr Bartlett advised that an unqualified opinion of the financial statements was issued on 1 November 2021. However, the audit certificate could not be issued at the same time as Grant Thornton was awaiting a letter of assurance regarding the Authority's pension scheme.

In developing its financial plans for 2021-22 to 2023-24 the Authority applied several key assumptions including salary inflation, non-wages inflation and flat cash National Park Grant per annum. Whilst these assumptions may seem optimistic in hindsight they are mitigated through the use of reserves. The Authority produces a balanced budget every year; however, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) shows budget gaps in 2022-23 and 2023-24. Grant Thornton has made recommendations the Authority should identify in advance a range of saving options and scheme and report in the MTFP but noted the management comments about the Authority's strong history in reviewing areas of savings when setting the budget and finding in year savings.

With regard to governance, Grant Thornton recommended that the Audit and Governance Committee undertakes a self-assessment effectiveness review on an annual basis. Grant Thornton accepted the Authority's response that it would review and consider undertaking.

The Code of Conduct, covering policies, procedures and controls, together with the Risk Management Policy Statement, require updating as job titles are incorrect. With regard to the Strategic Risk Register, it is recommended that individual risks are allocated to named senior officers. Grant Thornton noted that management would undertake this recommendation.

There are no issues with regard to budgetary control.

The Authority takes a proactive approach towards partnership working; this work has continued throughout the pandemic. No significant weaknesses have been identified with regard to the impact of Covid 19; the Authority has coped well.

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In response to Member comments and queries; Mr Mills recorded the following:

- Noted that the Local Access Forum is not part of the Authority's internal governance framework – it is a separate statutory requirement; the report would be amended to reflect this;
- Value for Money – Auditors consider overall arrangements within a government organisation; this goes beyond finance;
- Terminology within the report – agreed to take Member comments re negativity of phraseology to the National Audit Office;
- Strategic Risk Register – agreed recommendation to change that risks should be allocated to senior posts, not named officers
- With regard to publicity regarding the report, Mr Mills advised that he would be happy to provide any wording needed in respect of any explanation.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report and thanked Mr Mills and Mr Bartlett for attending the meeting.

Mr Harper requested that an ACTION be noted regarding the recommended self-assessment of Audit and Governance Committee. This was agreed

3387 Internal Audit Report of Dartmoor National Park Authority Key Financial Systems Review 2021-2022

The Chair welcomed Mr D Measures, of Devon Audit Partnership to the meeting (via Teams). He advised Members that the annual review was undertaken remotely, in the Autumn of 2021. He added that credit was due to all staff, not least the new Head of Business Support who joined the Authority part way through the review; the Devon Audit Partnership has been able to give a substantial opinion. A minor issue which was identified within the HR department has been addressed and this reflects the continued hard work of Authority staff.

A Member commented positively on the language used within the report, which made it easily understandable for Members and public alike.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

3388 Body Worn Cameras

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/22/004). The report set out the Authority's proposal to pilot the use of Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) by key staff (the Ranger Team). He emphasised that the primary reason for their introduction would be to support the health, safety and wellbeing of staff. Rangers engage, inform and educate people on a daily basis and in the vast majority of situations, members of the public understand and appreciate the information and advice given. However, Rangers have experienced increased verbal and, at times, attempted physical abuse.

Procedures and measures that are currently in place to support and protect Rangers could be seen in Section 2 of the report. BWCs would equip the Ranger team with an additional tool to be used within risk-based guidelines which would be kept under review.

Evidence and feedback from other organisations who already use BWCs indicate that BWCs can alter confrontational and aggressive behaviour leading to fewer incidents. For example, the Lake District National Park Rangers describe them as the *most useful piece of kit at their disposal* and they have noticed a positive change in public behaviour (NB the Rangers who use BWCs in the Lake District National Park are those who patrol the Lakes).

The Head of Organisational Development stressed the importance of ensuring that the introduction and operation of BWCs is compliant with relevant legislation. Officers have worked with partner organisations including Devon County Council and Teignbridge District Council to develop specific policy and guidance based on best practice, see Appendix 1 of the report. A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been undertaken and the relevant Privacy Notice updated. It is proposed that these would be published on a specific page of the Authority's website. Appropriate training for relevant officers would be provided before the introduction of the BWCs. The cameras would be piloted over a trial period of two years, with their use being closely monitored; a formal review would be undertaken after 18 months. A secondary aim of the trial period would be to assess the usefulness of BWCs in providing evidence to support legal action. A separate Enforcement Policy to support byelaw enforcement will be drafted and presented to Members for discussion and agreement at a future meeting of the Authority.

In response to Member queries, the Head of Organisational Development advised the following:

- The Body Worn Cameras (BWCs) would be worn by Rangers when patrolling/engaging with the public; they would not normally be worn while Rangers were undertaking physical work e.g. strimming;
- Clear guidance and training will be provided to all users. Rangers from the Lake District National Park Authority have kindly offered to assist with training.
- Rangers have been consulted;
- Footage would be automatically deleted after 30 days, unless it was flagged to be retained for potential use as evidence. Footage is only accessible by the Authority's Data Protection Officer and Ranger Team Manager.

A Member commented that society has changed; there is a distinct lack of respect towards others and the Authority needs to be able to look after its staff. The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) reaffirmed the Authority's primary reason for proposing the use of BWCs was to safeguard staff. If a member of staff was abused then the Authority would consider legal action and footage from BWCs could assist in this process. He reiterated that the aim was not to change the role of our Rangers – they are there to help people look after and enjoy the National Park.

Mrs Oakley proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Mr Harper.

- RESOLVED:** Members:
- (i) approved the introduction of body worn cameras for use by Authority staff (focused on the Ranger Team) for a trial period of time; and
 - (ii) approved the policy and guidance detailed in Appendix 1 and noted that a further policy of Enforcement would be brought to a future meeting of the Authority for discussion and approval.

3389 Community Protection Notices

Members received the report of the Ranger Team Manager (NPA/22/005).

The Director of Conservation and Communities presented the report and recorded the Ranger Team Manager's apologies due to sickness.

Through the Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative, established in October 2019, constituent authorities and Devon and Cornwall Police have suggested that the Authority's Rangers could support their powers to issue Community Protection Notices (CPNs). These are used to maintain local communities quality of life and would be issued to repeated, persistent offenders. Rangers would assist through the gathering of information and evidence, i.e., their roles will not change. There would be no direct costs to the Authority, other than officer time. Appropriate training would be given, the priority being the protection of the National Park.

In response to Member queries, the Director of Conservation and Communities advised:

- Evidence gathered from the use of body worn cameras could be used;
- CPNs can be used where there is consistent impact on local communities e.g., cars driving on to moorland, anti-social behaviour etc;
- The Dartmoor Rural Crime Initiative definitely works; the Ranger Team Manager works closely with Devon and Cornwall Police Officers;
- He agreed that it is important to let the public know why this is being done; information/explanation needs to be provided to the media to ensure understanding.

The Director of Conservation and Communities advised that the Authority's Rangers are there to advise and inform. The issues requiring CPNs and enforcement are in the minority.

Mrs Pannell proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Mr Gribble.

RESOLVED: Members agreed that Authority staff will work in partnership with the relevant authorities to support the Community Protection Notice process as already operated across the National Park.

3390 Financial Management 1 April to 31 December 2021 and Forecast of Financial Outturn 2021/22

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/22/006).

Mrs Pannell left the meeting.

The Head of Business Support reported that based on the current projections the forecast if for potential in year savings of £24,959 at year end (overspend £2,138 at month 5) – See Appendix 1. It is intended to use this surplus to help balance the 2022/23 Budget as it is anticipated that the Authority will not receive any increase in core funding from Defra next year. The Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan will be presented to Members on 4 March 2022.

A full variance analysis of both income and expenditure can be found at appendix 2 and further details of the most significant variations and movements by individual cost centre are set out in section 2.4 of the report.

The majority of variations and changes since month 5 are detailed as follows:

- Staff turnover results in vacancy savings. Now with a clearer outturn the savings have reduced since month 5 reported position of £30,932 to £10,591.
- Travel and transport saving have increased by just over £3,000 since from the last reported outturn position to £11,572. This is not a surprise due to the continued implications of the Covid pandemic restrictions.
- Staff training budget has also been affected by the Covid restrictions.
- Operating costs savings are due to the reductions in stationary with staff embracing technology (reduced printing) since blended working arrangement required for Covid restrictions.
- Repairs costs for the Ballroom at Princetown visitor centre included in the last outturn have now been deferred until a survey has been completed, which is due to happen in the new year
- Visitor Management car parking shortfall will be offset by the Mobile vending licences income being more than budgeted, circa £9,000, which equated to 34% above the budget.
- The authority has received several additional grants and contributions. Since the last outturn report we have received a contribution from British Mountaineering Council for carpark improvements at Bonehill Rocks.
- The Authority are to purchase the carbon toolkit to enable modelling of carbon sequestration on NPA land.
- Access and recreation underspend is due to the Peakhill agreement, which is unlike to complete this year. The ground works are underway, but this will be covered under FIPL.
- The nature recovery project – habitat ground truthing, has been deferred until 2022/23
- There are some schedules works that are not completed due to capacity and priorities and works being met under other elsewhere. For example, 'Miles without Stiles' or volunteers.
- Visitor centres sales income is expected to have a surplus of £3,000, but this has been offset with unplanned maintenance for a water leak at Haytor, which cost £2,000.
- The new Planning system was due to be taken from reserves, but with efficient in year savings the call on reserve will not be required
- Planning income is expected to be 10% less than budgeted, with an underspend of circa £20,000

With regard to Moor Otters II, costs incurred to date are £98,954 and income received is £108,545 (since 2019). As the project was delayed due to COVID 19 the resulting income is considered a positive outcome.

Section 2.6 of the report set out the bids that have been funded from the Project Fund to date. This is an unallocated post of money that allows officers to bid for

money in year, to enable new unplanned projects to start, to add capacity to teams if required and meet unforeseen expenditure and pressures

Section 3 of the report formally sets out details of the capital programme to meet the requirements of the Prudential Code; the table at 3.1 shows the total anticipated spend per project, how the projects are funded and timing of any income streams. The planned replacement vehicle for the Conservation Works Team has been deferred until 2022/23. Several vehicles are being reviewed, together with the potential to purchase/lease electric vehicles, which will aid meeting carbon neutrality by 2025.

Appendix 3 shows a detailed breakdown of individual reserve balances, how and when those balances are to be used up. Appendix 4 is the risk based analysis of our reserve balances.

The forecast outturn in year savings of £24,959 represents a -0.61% variance against the (revised) budget. This has been due to staff vacancies, service delivery capacity, additional unbudgeted revenue, and implications of Covid restrictions. The efficiencies will be used to cover the additional planning inspectorate fees, which are still to be confirmed, and to bring forward the installation of vehicle electrical charging points at Parke. Any funds remaining will be used to help balance the 2022/23 revenue budget, which is currently being built, and to meet some of the costs to sustain key posts.

In response to Member queries, the Head of Business Support advised as follows:

- Peek Hill Agreement – relates to the walking and cycling route from Princetown to Burrator – the route is open but is not subject to a legal access agreement.
- Team A – the name of a group which is the recipient of a grant;

A Member commented that the Moor Otters 2 project had made little profit; however, it had raised the awareness of a great number of people which had made the project very worthwhile. Benefits should not always be measured in monetary terms.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

Mrs Pannell returned to the meeting.

3391 Business Plan Monitoring 2121/22 (April 2021 – December 2021)

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/22/007).

The report sets out the Authority's performance to the end of Q3 in delivering the **27** key actions identified in the current Business Plan. He advised that a summary of progress was provided in the table at section 2.3 of the report with full details provided against each action at Appendix 1. Two key actions will not be completed is provided in this business year, namely:

- the production of a species reintroduction strategy; and
- the implementation of the Recreation Strategy

Increased turnover in 2021 – including the departure of two members of the Leadership Team – has had an impact. However, this has also been positive with new people, ideas and skillsets enhancing *Team Dartmoor*.

The Leadership Team are closely monitoring workloads across the Authority; while there are pressure points, the Authority's staff are as committed as ever and continue to deliver for Dartmoor.

Mr Sanders commented that the results so far have been exceptionally good, in spite of the difficulties faced, staff have kept the Authority going. He asked for this to be noted within the Minutes and fed back to all staff. He proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Mr Smerdon.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

Mr Thomas left the meeting.

3392 Performance Indicators 2021/22

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/22/008). The report sets out how the Authority has performed against the indicator targets agreed for 2021/22 at quarter 3 of this business year. Appendix 1 to the report provides the full set of performance indicators; Members were reminded that for some of the indicators the data is only reported annually. The report also provides more detail relating to staff sickness absence, Member attendance at Authority meetings and visitor numbers.

The Head of Organisational Development advised Members that 'Team Dartmoor' – staff, Members, and volunteers – have continued to demonstrate dedication, flexibility, and adaptability to meet the challenge of working differently and in doing so remaining positive and supporting each other.

Members commented that the indicators relating to the natural environment could improve; although no trend identified, Members noted the lower Member attendance at committee meetings during quarter 2.

A Member suggested that a visual report of the performance indicators would be beneficial. The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) advised that a copy of the 2020/21 Annual Report would be re-circulated to Members.

RESOLVED: Members:

- (i) noted the content of the report; and
- (ii) analysed the performance indicators for 2021/22 to date

3393 Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme – A report on the first six months of the programme – July to December 2021

Members received the report of the Strategic Planning and Projects Manager (NPA/22/009).

Funding for the programme is provided by Defra and administered by the Authority. Launched in July 2021, staff were immediately busy with enquiries and applications –

currently over 100 enquiries and 35 applications since the end of December. A Local Assessment Panel is in place and is working well. The programme is set for three years and is front loaded in Year 1. A re-profiling of the budget was proposed to Defra – moving year 1 money into years 2 and 3. We are awaiting formal confirmation that this has been accepted and clarity on the financial allocation for years 2 and 3.

All of the year 1 funding had been allocated; projects are live and need to complete and claim their funding grant in this financial year. Defra has confirmed that projects can be run in stages; therefore, officers are in contact with applicants to ascertain whether their projects will complete this year or whether they will continue into the new financial year.

There are four themes for projects – climate, nature, people and place, with an emphasis on nature. There is a good range of applicants, including some from charitable trusts.

Working with the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project has been exceptionally valuable. The skills and experience of the farmers who sit on the assessment panel have proved beneficial too.

At this point, Mrs Oakley, Mr Dracup and Mr Harper claimed a personal interest in this item, having benefitted from the project.

In response to Member comments / queries, the Strategic Planning and Projects manager responded as follows:

- As a landowner, the Authority could apply under the FiPL programme for its own projects or as a lead applicant;
- Officers are currently working on a web page for the website, together with an article for the Enjoy Dartmoor publication;
- Officers have limited ability to influence applicant behaviour. All applicants are highly self motivated to complete this year due to their own workloads, seasonal issues etc. However, the availability of contractors can always have a negative impact on timelines.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) advised that while the Authority could indeed apply to the programme, officers had taken the conscious decision not to, rather to encourage the farmers of Dartmoor to apply.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

3394 Tree Preservation Orders, Section 211 Notifications (Works to Trees in Conservation Areas) and Hedgerow Removal Notices Determined Under Delegated Powers

Members received the report of the Trees and Landscape Officer (NPA/22/010).

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

The Part I business completed, Mr McInnes proposed that the Committee move to Part II, business to be undertaken in the absence of press and public, which was seconded by Mr Harper.

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3395 Remuneration of Statutory Posts – Monitoring Officer

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer).

Following discussion the recommendations were proposed by Mr Harper and seconded by Mr Sanders.

RESOLVED: Members AGREED the recommendations.

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