

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Friday 2 November 2018

Present: Members

G Gribble, P Harper, S Hill, B Hitchins, C Pannell, M Retallick,
P Sanders, P Woods, R Parkinson

Officers

K Bishop, A Kohler, D Healy, S Hill, N White, M Allott

Apologies: K Ball, A Cooper, J McInnes, D Webber

486 Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2018

The Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2018 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

487 Declarations of Interest

None.

488 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

A Member expressed concern regarding the current state of the public toilet facilities and the possible misconception of this being the responsibility of the National Park Authority. The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) advised Members that this was the responsibility of the National Trust and that he understood that they had plans to address the issue.

Minute 478 – Reports from Devon Audit Partnership: the Authority's Internal Audit Service - the Chair advised that Mr Rob Hutchings has been invited to attend the next Audit and Governance Committee meeting, scheduled for 1 February 2019, to explain and provide an update regarding internal quality reviews.

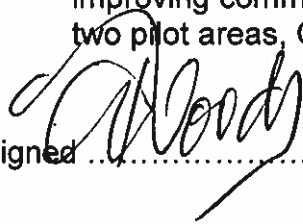
489 Public Participation

None.

490 Verbal Update – Communication Via Parish & Other Local Magazines

The Head of Communications and Fundraising advised that during their workshop 12 months ago, Members had asked Officers to consider ways of improving communications with local residents. Officers agreed to develop two pilot areas, Christow and Ilsington, to test the effectiveness of including

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DNPA updates into parish magazines. These pilots should be up and running in the near future. Some issues that have held up the process include the new GDPR regulations and the regular changes in newsletter editors. A Member commented and the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) confirmed that, due to the reduction in resources available to the Authority in recent years, it was no longer possible for Rangers and other officers to regularly attend parish council meetings. It was noted that Rangers are required to attend one Parish Council meeting a year and this was generally the annual general meeting. Some Members suggested that articles could be sent to parish clerks or Members for inclusion within the parish magazine; officers could use the parish clerk list with is held centrally.

491 Financial Management 1 April to 30 September 2018 and Forecast Financial Outturn 2018/19

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/17/012) which is for the first six months of the year.

At the current time, if programme spend continues in the same way a year-end surplus of £99,524 is likely, which represents a minus 2.34% variance against the budget. Section 2.3 of the report sets out the most significant items; the largest contributors to the surplus would be income including:

- £9,374 filming income
- Forecast increased income of £65k in respect of car parks and mobile vending licences
- Forecast increased planning fee income of £30k, set against a loss of circa £10k due to the suspension of the pre-app advice service
- Increased treasury deposit income of £8,000
- Extra external grant income of circa £11,000

Salary costs are currently forecast to be in surplus against budget which reflects the impact of vacancies due to normal staff turnover. Recruitment is ongoing for two posts: a Planning Officer and a Historic Buildings Officer.

Bids made to the Project Fund, and approved by Leadership Team are listed within the report at section 2.4. There is currently just over £50k remaining but it is anticipated that the fund will be fully allocated by year-end. Members noted that the fund is occasionally used to engage temporary staff in order to back-fill and add capacity to services, when needed.

The mid-year Treasury Management Strategy performance report required by the Code of Practice is set out in section 3. Interest rates have been at their lowest rates for 10 years; the impact of the restructuring of the banking system, the capitalisation requirement of the banks by government and the previous downgrading credit ratings has hampered the Authority's ability to make significant returns in recent years. A recent interest rate rise has, however, resulted in a doubling of last year's treasury income receipt.

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Section 4 of the report also provides details of new capital expenditure that was not included in the original budget. A Land Rover was procured by the Ranger Service to replace an end-of-lease vehicle; this was funded from earmarked reserves and Members received a report in May (NPA/18/017) requesting approval to pursue external funding for Postbridge Visitor Centre, the costs to date also being funded from earmarked reserves.

Members were advised that the earmarked reserves position for the current year, including detailed movements and forecast movements for the next two years are detailed in Appendices 3 and 4 and Section 5 of the report; reserves could be reduced by 31% by the end of 2020/21 if all events were to come to fruition. Reserve balances and allocations will be considered in more detail as the Authority moves through the new Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process.

The budget and the management of it is a dynamic process and variations are inevitable and acceptable as long as they are managed and sound budget management processes are well established and robust. The Head of Business Support advised that the current surplus was mainly as a result of favourable events and could help replenish earmarked reserves for the next MTFP. Members would be updated at month nine and as the new budget is set in early 2019.

In response to Member queries, the Head of Business Support advised that: the income from the newly introduced car parking charges has covered the capital costs of buying and installing machines and clear picture of total running and maintenance costs will be available at year end; and in respect of whether there is a minimum or maximum level of reserves that is required for the Authority, this is a matter for Members to decide, based on commitments, ring-fencing and risk management, which is done on an on-going basis and more formally when the budget is set at the start of each financial year.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

492 Business Plan Monitoring 2018/19

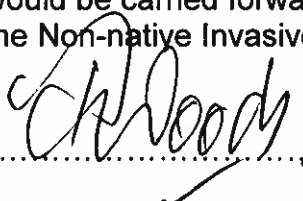
Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/18/013).

Members noted the Authority's performance for the first half of the year for each of the 28 key actions within the current Business Plan. Two actions have been identified as being unlikely to be completed in this business year:

- Non-native Invasives Project;
- Traditional Farm Buildings Grant Scheme

However, in response to a Member query, it was confirmed that these actions would be carried forward into the next financial year 2019/20. With regard to the Non-native Invasives Project, the Director of Conservation and

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Communities advised Members that the team has now drawn up a project which will be ready to implement in Spring 2019.

There are delays to the actions relating to Peatland Restoration and Natural Flood Risk Management – these highlight the nature of partnership working in that sometimes the Authority is not able to control the timeline which has been set. However, the overall picture is that through the collective efforts of 'Team Dartmoor' - staff, Members and volunteers – good progress has been made during the first six months of the year.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

493 Performance Indicators 2018/19

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/18/014).

Members were reminded that the full set of performance indicators are reported annually to Authority. This Committee focuses on the 25 (of 38) Performance Indicators that focus on how services are performing.

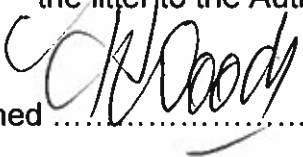
Levels of sickness absence within the Authority are higher than the target set. A strategic discussion between Leadership Team and Human Resources has recently taken place and work is ongoing to identify strategies to address and improve these figures. Member attendance at committee meetings fell during Quarter 2 and is currently below target. A report will be taken to the Authority meeting in December and Members will be asked for their approval to publish Member attendance figures.

Members were advised that good performance has been maintained within the Development Management team, despite some significant staff absences and vacancies. For the time-being, the provision of pre-application advice remains suspended.

With regard to complaints, Members' attention was drawn to the Annual Review letter 2018 from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, in which details of two complaints and enquiries are provided.

In response to Member queries regarding the levels of sickness absence, the Head of Organisational Development provided a more detailed breakdown of the overall figures. He also advised that the Authority does provide access to an employee assistance programme, including access to counselling, which staff can either self-refer or be referred to. Leadership Team is also looking into how early intervention can assist and is considering other ideas and interventions that could be employed.

A Member noted the fantastic work being undertaken by staff and volunteers in respect of litter collection; however, they also noted the cost of disposal of the litter to the Authority. The Director of Conservation and Communities

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advised that this issue had been raised previously with litter collection and disposal authorities with a view to them paying or contributing to the costs – especially the disposal costs. Members felt another approach should be made.

Members agreed that Member attendance is a concern and should remain on the agenda. However, it was acknowledged that there was the possibility that some under-reporting was happening; officers agreed that this would be looked into and emphasised that Members needed to take responsibility for reporting their attendance. With regard to attendance at Parish Council meetings, a Member suggested that a card specifying the expectations from Members could be provided. It was noted that Members already receive 'In Touch', 'Dartmoor Matters' and a weekly update from the Chief Executive (National Park Officer).

Members were provided with a verbal update regarding an ongoing complaint and the Authority's current position.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

494 Strategic Risk Register 2018/19

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/18/015).


The Strategic Risk Register forms part of the Authority's overall risk management strategy. It is important that Members regularly review the strategic risks for the Authority to raise issues for consideration and highlight areas of risk to be added or removed. The Authority's Leadership Team has recently reviewed the register and concluded that F4 - *Moor than meets the eye* Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme – be updated to recognise the risk of project officers on fixed-term contracts finding alternative employment before their contract with DNPA ends.

RESOLVED: Members APPROVED the current Strategic Risk Register for 2018/19, subject to the amendment to F4 as detailed above.

495 Moor than meets the eye (MTMTE) Landscape Partnership Scheme

Members received the report of the *Moor than meets the eye* Scheme Manager (NPA/AG/18/016).

The Director of Conservation and Communities reminded Members that the Scheme started in August 2014 and runs to August 2019. However, the Partnership and DNPA as lead partner, the Authority has until December 2019, to tie up loose ends, submit final claims and evidence, and complete the Scheme.

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The importance of the final year cannot be stressed enough. It will be crucial that a very close eye is kept on all of the projects to ensure that they deliver against their outcomes and spend their agreed budgets. The projects with the biggest risks to the Authority are those that contribute to the Common Fund because if they do not spend their original budgets the Fund may be short on monies to pay others. The Scheme Manager has undertaken full assessments with most of the project leads over the summer to ensure that he is happy about projected spend and delivery.

The projects that contribute to the Common Fund are not showing any major risks at the moment. Close monitoring of all projects that have significant forecast spend over the next 12 months will be needed. This is a key role for the Scheme Manager.



There is currently £969,000 left to spend; approximately £600,000 of that is already committed either as staff costs or tender/contracts that have already been advertised or let. There is a confirmed underspend of £73,000. Priorities for re-allocating this spend have been discussed with both the Project Board and the Heritage Lottery Fund. A short business case will be required to confirm the priorities as follows:

- Claiming against the overspend in the core costs of the staff team - HLF have been aware of this since the start of the scheme
- Increasing contracts for the staff team to ensure they are all fully employed until the end of December 2019 – this will reduce the risk of staff leaving early; it will also provide some resilience and ensure that we have a full and comprehensive evaluation, celebration and legacy for the scheme.
- small additional costs for the Whitehorse Hill Community Play.
- Claiming against underspend on Eco Skill

The HLF will withhold the final 10% of grant (£190,000). The current forecast is that this will kick in in Year 5, Quarter 3 (Mar to May 2019). The Authority has allocation in reserves to manage the cashflow.

Officers confirmed that there are a number of successful outcomes that have already been delivered by the scheme:

- Community Engagement and Volunteering through Parishscapes, Moor medieval and a number of other projects including the two digs at Holwell and North Hall Manor over the summer (over 200 days of volunteer help at Holwell alone). The HLF is using Parishscapes as a model for other Landscape Partnership Schemes across the country;
- Outreach and Education- the Royal Albert Memorial Museum (RAMM) exhibition last year - 40,000 visitors, many of them new audiences; Moor Meadows Conference – two days with a specialist audience on the

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Saturday and the public on the Sunday; the lantern festivals which have taken place each year attracts about 200 – 250 people;

- the dramatic change in the fabric of Higher Uppacott and projects such as the Fernworthy Reservoir path have seen similar physical improvements appreciated by the public;
- Moorland Birds project and Ancient Boundaries have started to bring benefits to the farming community; the latter is now oversubscribed;
- The Dartmoor Story being embedded into the interpretation branding for all key partners;
- Welcome to Widecombe – a model for other settlements on how to work with local businesses and the community


A legacy plan is being drawn up and will be put before Members, along with the full annual report, at the Authority meeting in January 2019.

A Member commended the team. As a member of the Stakeholders Group he has taken part in many of the events and added that he was looking forward to the legacy events.

The Head of Business Support confirmed that 'exception reporting' would be provided over the next 12 months. A Member requested that, with this in mind, future spreadsheets be reduced in size to report areas of concern, with an explanation column. A good example of this type of spreadsheet is Appendix 2 to report number NPA/AG/18/012, page 17.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report and the progress made to 31 August 2018.

Action: Scheme Manager to refine reporting spreadsheets to accompany next report to Authority meeting in January 2019.

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