

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Friday 27 July 2018

Present: S Barker, W Cann, A Cooper, P Harper, P Hitchins, M Jeffery, J McInnes, D Moyse, C Pannell, M Retallick, P Sanders, D Webber, P Woods

Apologies: K Ball, J Christophers, G Gribble, S Hill, N Oakley, M Simpson

The Chairman welcomed Anopa Gumbie, Assistant Manager, Grant Thornton, to the meeting.

3372 Minutes of the Authority Meetings held on 15 June 2018

The Minutes of the Annual Authority meeting held on 15 June 2018 were agreed and signed as a correct record.

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3373 Declarations of Interest

Mr Retallick declared an interest in the additional urgent paper "*Impact of extreme weather on Dartmoor*" being tabled at the meeting, due to his grazing of cattle on Dartmoor.

3374 Chairman's Report

The Chairman thanked those Members who had attended the Authority's National Park Forum, held on 11 July 2018. He advised that he had attended the Dartmoor Rescue Group 50th anniversary celebrations at County Hall. The Princetown Summer Fayre was a great success, with takings of around £1,000.

Julian Glover's visit to the National Park was a positive one and he left feeling that Dartmoor is "something special". The Deputy Chairman stated that Mr Glover was particularly impressed with the fact that the Authority engages and works with the farming community.

3375 Items requiring urgent attention

- (a) The Deputy Chairman advised Members that a letter had been sent from Dartmoor Commoners' Council to Natural England, requesting that derogation be offered to commoners within an HLS agreement to extend the grazing period into the winter following the prolonged period of hot, dry weather. The volume of silage, hay or grass cut has been severely depleted due to the current weather; an extended period for grazing cattle on the common would help the situation immensely. He requested that the Authority supports the Council in their request.

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The Head of Business Support advised Members that, should they agree to support this request, she would recommend that they agree to delegate authority to deal with this to the Director of Conservation and Communities and the Chief Executive (National Park Officer). It would not only be important to monitor the effects of any derogation in terms of erosion etc, but also to record any other positive/negative effects.

Members agreed that it would be important to monitor this action, should derogation be granted. The Deputy Chairman suggested that the Commons' Council could take on this responsibility. A Member commented that this could be an ideal opportunity for the Farming Futures model to be used.

RESOLVED: Members AGREED to support the request 'in principle', with appropriate safeguards and environmental monitoring; the Director of Conservation and Communities and the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) to send a letter of support and copy Members.

- (b) **Appointment of Independent Person** - The Head of Organisational Development reported that interviews had taken place for the appointment of a new Independent Person on 28 June 2018. Of the four applicants shortlisted, Catherine Shewan was selected as the most suitable candidate for the role.

RESOLVED: Members AGREED the appointment of Mrs Catherine Shewan as an Independent Person of the Authority, effective from 1 August 2018.

3376 Public Participation

None.

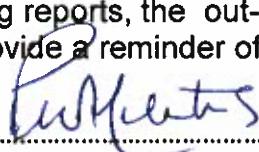
3377 Annual Statement of Accounts 2017/18

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/18/026).

The statement of accounts is a means to explain to stakeholders how the Authority has used public money to deliver services and achieve strategic objectives. It is also a technical document that sets out the Authority's financial transactions in the previous year; follows complex protocol and standards and explains the impact of statute (which is not relevant in private sector accounts). Its length and complexity does not facilitate easy understanding by non-specialists. For these reasons it is prepared by experts and is then subject to audit by the Authority's External Auditors.

There are no changes to the format or content of the accounts this year that need explanation. The Narrative Report is a key tool in telling the story - explaining the financial and non-financial outcomes and results for the year and provides some commentary on future direction. Members were advised that the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES), which shows the economic cost of providing services, is structured in the same way that the budgets are set, managed and reported to them during the year; this provides a clear link between budget monitoring reports, the out-turn report and these accounts. Sections 2 & 3 of the report provide a reminder of the Outturn position and the movement in reserves.

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Section 4 provides commentary and information about the "snapshot" accounting valuation of the pension scheme liability at 31 March - which is used to meet the statutory reporting requirements under which the Authority operates. This has a significant effect on the Authority's Balance Sheet i.e. it shows a negative position. This is due to the valuation of the Authority's Pension Fund Liability of £12.953m as at 31 March. However, Members are aware that this liability does not represent an immediate call on the Authority's reserves; it is a snap-shot valuation in time, based on assumptions and estimates that change over time. The true value of the Pension Fund deficit is assessed by the Actuary on a triennial basis, with contribution rates then set (by the Actuary) to recover the balance over the longer-term.

Members were reminded of their responsibilities, as set out within the report, and were reminded of the various sources of assurance received during the year (and today) that the accounts have been prepared correctly to enable them to approve the Statement of Accounts and authorise the signing of the Letter of Representation.

The unaudited accounts were placed on deposit for public inspection on 31 May 2018; no objections or representations were received. Grant Thornton's work is now substantially complete – the findings and the current position will be presented in the next agenda item. It is pleasing to note that once again there are no changes or adjustments required to the accounts. Team Dartmoor has once again worked hard to meet the early close deadline without compromising accuracy or quality.

A Member commented that it was important for Members to note paragraph 7.2 of the report which relates to Members returning their Declarations of Interest on time. Whilst it is appreciated that everyone has busy lives, public perception is key and it would have been good to have had a totally clean report this year.

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Mr Cooper.

RESOLVED: Members:

- (i) approved the 2017/18 Statement of Accounts;
- (ii) authorised the Chairman to sign and date the Statement of Responsibilities on behalf of the Authority;
- (iii) authorised the Chairman and Chief Executive (National Park Officer) to sign the Letter of Representation on behalf of the Authority; and
- (iv) re-approved the 2017/18 Annual Governance Statement approved by the Audit & Governance Committee on 25 May 2018

3378 The Audit Findings for Dartmoor National Park Authority – Year Ended 31 March 2018

Members received the Audit Findings Report for the year ending 31 March 2018, prepared by external auditors Grant Thornton. The Chairman invited Anopa Gumbie, Assistant Manager, Grant Thornton to present the report to Members.

Mr Gumbie advised Members that the report contains no significant issues which need to be reported to them. At the time of writing the report (13 July 2018) there were four outstanding items. A letter has now been received regarding the pension fund; no

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issues have been identified. Grant Thornton has determined that no financial adjustments, mis-statements or omissions have been identified and will issue an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts.

In respect of the Value for Money conclusion – an initial risk assessment was carried out in March 2018. No significant risks were identified and an unqualified opinion will be issued.

Independence and Ethics – Mr Gumbie advised that Grant Thornton has a duty to report any non-audit services which have been undertaken. With this in mind he advised that works had been carried out regarding governance at Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (Somerset County Council is the lead accountable body).

The Action Plan contains one single item – that of the timely receipt from Members of their declarations of interest. Fees have remained the same as those set for the previous year at £11,807.

He thanked the Head of Business Support, her team and other officers of the Authority for their assistance during the audit.

In response to Member queries, Mr Gumbie advised that, with regard to the work undertaken for Somerset County Council, there was no risk to the Authority. The Head of Business Support advised that with regard to the approach of Brexit, the Authority is not in receipt of any European funding; the only potential risk would be to the Postbridge project which is still 'work in progress', with clear exit points in the project plan.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

Members recorded their thanks to Mr Gumbie for attending the meeting and also their thanks to staff for their hard work.

3379 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) local action funding Greater Dartmoor Local Enterprise Action Fund (GD LEAF) 2015-2020

Members received the report of the Communities Officer (NPA/18/027). She reminded Members that this is a six year grant scheme, designed for small businesses to help them to grow. The GD LEAF programme continues to be one of the top performing in the country and is expected to be fully committed by September 2018. Members were pleased to note the creation of 98 full time equivalent jobs; these will be monitored over a five year period.

A Member commended the team from the DR Company which is responsible for programme delivery, stating that they were all extremely helpful in assisting with things such as application form filling etc. The Communities Officer advised that she would report those comments back to the team.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

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3380 Tree Preservation Orders and Section 211 Notifications (Works to Trees in Conservation Areas) Determined Under Delegated Powers

Members received the report of the Trees and Landscape Officer (NPA/18/028).

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

3381 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Governance Committee meeting held on Friday 25 May 2018

Members received and NOTED the contents of the draft minutes.

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