

**DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE**

**Friday 3 February 2023**

**Present:** Members  
S Morgan (Chair), A Cooper, W Dracup, G Hill, M Renders,  
P Smerdon, P Woods, J McInnes, J Nutley,

Officers  
K Bishop, R Drysdale, A Stirland, N White

**Apologies:** P Vogel, P Harper, P Sanders

**589 Minutes of the meeting held on Friday 4 November 2022**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2022 were proposed by Mr McInnes, seconded by Mr Cooper and AGREED as a correct record.

**590 Declarations of Interest**

Mr Dracup declared a personal interest in Farming in Protected Landscapes.

**591 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

None.

**592 Public Participation**

None.

**593 Key Financial Systems Review 2022/23 – Ken Johnson, Devon Audit Partnership**

Overall, the report awarded DNPA a substantial assurance in 5 out of the 8 areas assessed, with reasonable assurance in the other 3 areas. Managers are aware and actions will be taken where necessary, although it is clear that the processes are effective and future recommendations have been made in line with the Head of Business Support's suggestions and actions already put in place to address the issues.

It was advised that a Reasonable Assurance rating was not uncommon when a third party carried out a review and did not mean that our processes were not robust.

A question was raised as to when the improvements and changes that will be made, due to the findings of this review, will be rechecked and it was advised that this would happen in the next review which will be in a year's time.

Members agreed that the results were extremely positive and wanted to thank the staff involved.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the content of the report.

**594 Financial Management 1 April to 31 December 2022 and Forecast of Financial Outturn 2022/23**

It was reported that at the end of Month 9, a deficit of £112,744 was forecast for year end due to recent court case costs, additional legal costs for planning appeals, settlement of the pay award, as well as a chimney repair at Princetown Visitor Centre. This varies by 2.80% against the budget, however this deficit could well change as interest rates are likely to change which would increase our income from treasury deposits and also, the Authority is particularly good at making in year savings.

It was advised that the Authority will need to make a call on reserves.

Once again, Members thanked the Officer for the work done.

In response to a question regarding the new Planning IT platform which is being implemented, it was confirmed that the costs were contained with the report. There have been issues with the roll out of this programme but it is in hand.

It was agreed that the forecast deficit was indeed due to external pressures, these were unforeseeable / unavoidable and could have been more. It was also advised that although reserves are currently healthy, they are not infinite.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the content of the report.

**595 Business Plan Monitoring**

The report was summarised by the Head of Organisational Development and key actions, progress and issues were highlighted. It was noted that seven key actions will not be completed as planned due to staff turnover, the impact of staff absence and unplanned work, often requiring urgent action and limited financial resources.

We are currently replacing a new planning application IT system and Steve Crosby, Head of IT advised that there have been some delays with the project caused by long-lead items being received, which is not unusual, however we have communicated our concerns to IDOX, who have now made significant steps to resolve the issues and we hope to have 90% implemented by end February. The Planning Team has therefore been under additional pressure with continuous demands from IT to support the implementation.

In response to a question about the type of system being implemented, it was confirmed that it is an “off the shelf” standard product. Mr Crosby advised that IDOX will be our partner going forward and that maintaining a positive ongoing relationship is important, despite current issues. It was acknowledged that major IT projects are often more difficult than expected.

It was recognised that the Authority continues to work through a very financially challenging period and Members wanted to congratulate all staff for their achievements.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) made Members aware that the planning IT system we are currently replacing is the key interface with the public and is therefore high profile with high risk. He reiterated that the system is still not working as promised and completion is significantly overdue.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the content of the report.

#### **596 Performance Indicators 2022/23**

The report was summarised by The Head of Organisational Development. It was advised that the report has been colour-coded to indicate whether the targets have been achieved. It was reported that long and short-term staff sickness absence have had an impact on performance in this quarter. It was pointed out that sickness absence has spiked due to coughs, colds and flu this winter.

It was recognised by Members that there is clearly a relationship between the reports heard today, the performance indicators and the sickness absence data, creating pressure on staff which is compounded by the under-resourcing from the government. The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) advised that staff turnover is also high.

It is hoped that more money will be forthcoming from Defra, however we have heard nothing about next year, so we are presuming it will again be flat cash.

Members also noted that Member attendance at meetings of the Authority was down in Q3 to 71%. There was no specific reason, however a combination of sickness, including COVID and some long-term absence, coupled with more than the usual amount of meetings in a short period of time, as well as some meeting clashes has led to the reduced attendance.

Volunteering figures should upturn in Q4 as we include all our project-based days in Q4.

It was observed how difficult it must be to maintain standards under the current difficult circumstances. Members expressly asked that their thanks is given to staff, for progress on the business plan, performance generally and the excellent report from our internal auditors, be recorded.

**RESOLVED:** Members noted the content of the report.