

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Friday 5 February 2016

Present: Members:
S Hill, P W Hitchins (Chairman), D Lloyd, J McInnes, C Pannell (Deputy
Chairman), D Webber, P Harper, M Retallick, J Kidner

Officers:
Alison Kohler (Director of Conservation and Communities)
Donna Healy (Head of Business Support)
Stephen Belli (Head of Planning)
Neil White (Head of Organisational Development)
Sam Hill (Head of Communications, Economy and Fundraising)
Robert Steemson (Head Ranger) – Part
Dan Janota (Senior Forward Planner) – Part
Lee Bray (Archaeologist) – Part
Keith McKay (Historic Buildings Officer) – Part
Norman Baldock (Senior Ecologist) – Part

Jane Quick – Devon Audit Office
Andrew Shaw – Grant Thornton

Apologies: Mr Sanders

412 Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2015 were signed as a correct record.

413 Declarations of Interest

None

414 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

The Chairman asked the Committee to mark the death of Tony Beard with a minute's silence. Mr Beard had been a good friend of the National Park.

415 Public Participation

None

416 Internal Audit Report – Key Financial Systems 2015/16 Final Report

Jane Quick from the Devon Audit Partnership presented the report to Members. The system and controls are all of a high standard and only minor recommendations have been suggested. Recommendations include that disposals

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of IT equipment should be signed off by someone other than the IT manager, which has now been put in place. In respect of advertising income received via Enjoy Dartmoor, the breakdown of sales should be obtained from the contractor in order to verify and reconcile all income due.

The Members congratulated the Officers on an excellent report.

RESOLVED: Members noted the report.

417 Service Level Agreement between Devon Audit Partnership & Dartmoor National Park Authority

Jane Quick, Devon Audit Partnership presented the report to Members.

It was confirmed to Members that 20 days of work would be satisfactory to cover the amount of work that needs to be completed, any fewer days would undermine the results.

RESOLVED: Members noted the report.

418 Audit Committee Update for Dartmoor National Park Authority for the year ended 31 March 2016

Andrew Shaw, Grant Thornton presented the report to Members. He stated that the 2015/16 interim Audit will commence on 15 February and this will also inform the 2016/17 Audit Plan to be developed, which will be presented to the next Audit and Governance Meeting.

RESOLVED: Members noted the report

419 Financial Management 1 April to 31 December 2015 and Forecast Financial Outturn 2015/16

The Head of Business Support presented the report to Members. Two corrections to the report were highlighted: Paragraph 2.2 should read"at the end of December (Month 9)..." and Paragraph 3.1 Table 4 should read "New contributions to reserves/carry forward - £85,170". The overall forecast indicates that the Authority is in a robust financial position going forward.

Members reiterated the success of the sponsorship for the National Parks conference. It was a great display of Members and Officers working well together, sourcing and implementing the sponsorship deals, which resulted in the £15,000 budget for the conference not being used.

Members noted that there were significant savings against the Voluntary Wardens budget. The Director of Conservation and Communities informed Members that the voluntary wardens had received adequate training and new equipment; the savings in the budget have been reallocated to support two dedicated 12 month Ranger Volunteer placements.

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It was suggested that in Table 2 of the report, "Website", should read "Website re-design".

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

420 2016/17 Draft Net Revenue Budget, Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Budget

The Head of Business Support presented the report to Members.

Defra has confirmed the level of National Park Grant for the next 4 years, which means that for the first time in 8 years, the Authority can plan ahead and provide the Authority with relative stability. It also enables a review and reallocation of reserve balances.

Members congratulated the Finance team on how well the finances have been managed. Members also noted how pleasing it was to have the Minister's and Secretary of States backing. They encouraged the officers to use this opportunity to investigate and diversify the Authority's income base, but noted that competition to access external funding will be a challenge especially as other local authorities are facing further cuts.

A Member stated that the Dartmoor Hill Farm Project is looking at alternative ways of funding the project. The Hill Farm Project Steering Group has suggested a Membership scheme, which may not meet the total budget requirement but will help to deliver the key aims of the Project.

Members recognised that a lot will be expected in return for a 4 year protected National Park Grant settlement.

The Chief Executive (NPO) informed Members that the planned extension to the National Park Visitor Centre Postbridge (as part of Moor than Meets the Eye landscape partnership), is currently on hold and discussions with the Duchy of Cornwall are ongoing. The funding received from the HLF may well be able to be allocated to a new project that has similar outcomes, but will need HLF approval.

Mr Harper proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Mr McInnes.

RESOLVED: Members:

- i) Reviewed the draft Net Revenue Budget.
- ii) Noted the report.

421 2016/17 Draft Business Plan

The Chief Executive (NPO) presented the report to Members. He highlighted the priorities; the vision for the Authority, the core values and how we will work. The Members were informed that the business plan will be sent to DEFRA for information after final approval by the Authority.

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Members discussed the level of volunteering days currently being achieved against the target of 3500 volunteer days in the business plan. Members suggested that to organise that level of volunteering a specific role of volunteer co-ordinator would have to be created. The Head of Organisational Development stated to Members that the Authority has successfully engaged with volunteers for many years and continues to do so with the Voluntary Wardens, support for volunteer groups and ad-hoc volunteers across services. However, we have identified a need for a clear plan and direction with volunteers. As part of the developing Organisation Development Strategy we have agreed an action plan to take forward in 2016/17.

The Director of Conservation and Communities explained to Members that an independent evaluation on the Naturally Healthy Project is being carried out with Plymouth University. A suggestion by a Member was that Public Health may be able to help, which will be investigated.

One Member asked how the Authority planned to achieve P6 - High Quality opportunities for young people to develop their careers/gain practical opportunities. The Head of Organisation Development informed Members that the Authority had employed 5 apprentices in the last 7 years and that determining a clear approach going forward is a key action in the Organisational Development strategy. We are also engaged in a project being led by North York Moors National Park Authority developing new employer led apprenticeships aligned with government priorities. The Head of Organisational Development added that the Senior Learning and Outreach Officer is also engaged with other countryside management organisations developing traineeships. These delivery mechanisms should provide options so we can support pathways to employment. The Director of Conservation and Communities informed Members that officers will keep abreast of opportunities through HLF funding to fund apprenticeships as a positive way to use funding.

RESOLVED: Members reviewed and noted the content of the business plan.

422 Business Plan Monitoring 2015/16 and Performance Indicators

The Head of Organisational Development presented the report to Members.

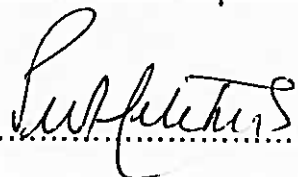
A Member said that whilst, on the face of it, the increased number of 'Will not complete' actions is concerning he was pleased that there was increased realism and accuracy in the reporting mechanisms and that the vast majority of actions were still on target or had already been completed.

Members were informed that Dartmoor NPA would be the first National Park to trial the 2 minute clean, similar to the Two Minute Beach Clean model.

Members were pleased to note the positive progress on the majority of the key actions.

The Head of Organisation Development presented the second half of the report regarding the Performance Indicators (PI's). He informed Members that the Leadership Team have reviewed the PI's and how and where the information is reported to avoid duplication.

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RESOLVED: Members noted the report

423 Service Dashboards

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/16/005).

The lead officers attended and Members were invited to raise any questions they may have.

Development Management/Enforcement

Members were pleased with the performance figures, especially taking into account the staff shortages experienced before Christmas. The Head of Planning informed the Members that the payable pre-application system had been reinstated. There should be a satisfaction survey every 2 years, to receive any feedback from applicants/agents, this was behind schedule but would be completed. The Head of Organisational Development stated that complaints are monitored and learnt from.

Forward Planning

The Senior Forward Planner informed Members that there is potential for a joint local plan with Plymouth City Council, South Hams District Council and West Devon Borough Council. The bid for funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government towards Neighbourhood planning and local plan work was unsuccessful. In response to Members questions, the Senior Forward Planner stated that the proposed changes to Government policy on affordable housing has had a dramatic negative affect on affordable housing.

Archaeology

The Members were pleased with the numbers of volunteers at events.

Listed Buildings

The Historic Buildings Officer (HBO) and Members agreed that the work at Higher Uppacott deserves publicity and it has taken a lot of the HBO's time.

It should be celebrated that 92% of Listed Building Consent applications have been approved between Q1 – Q3.

Ecology

Members raised questions in regards to the cuckoo project. The Senior Ecologist stated that the public participation had been excellent, so there is a good record of sightings and hearing cuckoos. Exeter University are now using the information for PhD Projects.

The southern damselfly numbers have doubled in the past 19 years.

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In response to a question from a Member about bee numbers and a potential ban on neonicotinoids, officers explained that meadow management will help all bee species, but the control of pesticide use is beyond the Authority's powers.

The Chief Executive (NPO) stated that the Minister had shown an interest in the cuckoo project.

Trees and Landscapes

In response to a Members question the Trees and Landscape Officer informed them that replanting in developments is on a case by case basis. In some cases there may be a suggestion/condition to offer money to the local community for tree planning, but there is no requirement to replace unprotected trees.

The Head of Organisation Development informed Members that the Service Dashboards will be reviewed frequently and welcomed any comments or feedback on them.

424 Review of Function and Delivery of Public Rights of Way Work

The Head Ranger presented the report to Members.

Members felt the communication with communities have lacked clarity. They felt Parish Councils need to have specific projects to focus on such as assist clearing pathways, mending fences, rebuilding bridges etc. The need for volunteers to be guided and for landowners to be involved was highlighted. It was suggested that a central record should be held with what needs completing and where it is, this would tie in with planned volunteer days. One Member suggested that a Parish Award for the best project supported by Parish Council Volunteers in the area, which could also tie in to the Edward Morshead Award. Members also express concern about the state of PROW signage across the National Park.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report and agreed that the following action points should be put in to place:

- Communications to the Parish Council and/or Parish Link identifying specific tasks that need doing. Respond positively to current offers and help and continue with pro-active communication.
- A parish award
- A 3 – 5 year rolling work plan for public rights of way so that works can be programmed

425 Fundraising Action Plan 2016/17

The Head of Communications, Economy and Fundraising presented the report. She informed Members that although the Authority is now in a more robust financial position, we still have to be mindful of the future and explore other income streams, with a view to develop and test different strategies. The three areas to test are: Individuals, Business and corporate and Income from assets.

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A new scheme called Donate for Dartmoor has been developed to take the place of £ for the Park. Donate for Dartmoor will focus on individual donations of time and/or money. If people would like to donate money, they will have the opportunity to choose a specific project they wish to support. The 3 areas would be Access, Nature projects and Heritage Archaeology. The launch of the scheme will be in the summer. A new bank account will be opened to receive donations.

Businesses/corporate donations will focus mainly on corporate volunteering days and have previously been a success.

Income from assets will mainly focus on the car parks we manage, there will be a review in to car park charging and an agreed plan will be put in to place by the end of 2016/17.

Members suggested that the fundraising ideas should be brought to a full Authority meeting for all the Members to have an input and to assess what we are trying to achieve with the money donated, and ensure the public understand where their money is being spent. Members also suggested that the Authority should capitalise on the logo, and look in to how we could incorporate gift aid/Dartmoor Trust.

RESOLVED: Members

- Noted the report
- Agreed to have a discussion on fundraising after an Authority Meeting.
- Agreed that Donate for Dartmoor should be the new 'brand' for voluntary donations and an authorised trading name for Dartmoor National Park Authority

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