

# DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

## AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Friday 1 November 2019

**Present:** Members  
A Cooper (Chairman), P Harper, G Hill, J McInnes, J Nutley, R Parkinson,  
P Sanders, P Vogel, D Webber, P Woods

Officers  
K Bishop, D Healy, N White.

In attendance: Mike Galt (Independent Person), Nigel Tigwell (Independent person)

**Apologies:** C Pannell, G Gribble, K Ball

**507 Minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2019**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2019 were signed as a correct record.

**508 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**509 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

None.

**510 Public Participation**

None.

**511 Financial Management 1 April to 30 September 2019 and Forecast Financial Outturn 2019/20**

Members received the report Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/19/010).

Members were informed that the budget, approved in March this year, was funded from the National Park Grant (the last year of the four year settlement period), fees and charges, external grants and partnership income and the Authority's own reserve balances. £31k was brought forward from work programmes and associated income from 2018/19.

Based on the current work programmes, the forecast surplus is £121,092 at year end. The surplus is dependent upon an increase in parking income against budget of £25k, and income from a major planning application fee of £72k. It is predicted that there will be a shortfall in pre-application fees and reduced sales due to the closure of Postbridge Visitor Centre.

The salary budget is currently showing a surplus of around £13.5K but there is recruitment in progress. Redundancy costs from the recent business review have been absorbed.

The Head of Business Support highlighted three significant projects:

Postbridge Visitor Centre Interpretation Project – this has been part funded by the Heritage Fund grant and the Authority's own reserves. Part 1 was complete before the centre closed, and Part 2 (funded from Authority resources) will be implemented once the Postbridge Visitor Centre extension is complete in May 2020.

Postbridge Visitor Centre Extension Project - revenue costs incurred to enable a bid to be submitted are just under £128k and have been met from the Authority's reserve balances. The build has now commenced; the approved project cost of £480k, is 100% funded by external grant and cannot go over budget.

Moor Otters II is underway and funded from reserves.

The Head of Business Support informed Members that Treasury Management Performance is reported on, as set out in the Treasury Management Code of Practice. The surplus cash balances are deposited into a treasury deposit account to generate income; due to the continuing low levels of surplus cash and the low interest rates, the returns continue to be quite small, generating £18k this year.

Section 4 of the report was highlighted to Members regarding the details of the capital programme to meet the requirements of the Prudential Code. As the Authority has no plans to borrow, the other prudential indicators do not apply.

Section 5 of the report summarises the forecast movement in reserves for the year, in comparison to last year. Balances are reducing, as per the approved plans, but this can change for many reasons as the financial year progresses and as officers build the new Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). It will be looked at closely while planning the MTFP and once the Authority is notified by Defra about next year's National Park Grant, which is likely to only be a one year settlement. £50k has been set aside for the climate change emergency declaration and £120k for the Moor Otters II project since the budget was approved in March.

Members commented that the reduced income from pre-application advice was due to the service not being well advertised and, therefore, the public are not aware that the pre-application advice service is available again. The Head of Development Management will be advised about this.

Members raised concerns regarding the climate change emergency and the monitoring carried out by the Authority. The Chief Executive reassured Members that emissions have been monitored by the Authority since 2010 and good progress has been made. A Member suggested that reports brought to Authority should have a sustainability section along with equality etc.

A Member queried the £20,000 used for the Pathways Project at Pizwell, and suggested the money could be spent elsewhere. The Director of Conservation and Communities informed Members that certain parts of the path were not passable by bikes and horses, so it was vital to improve the 40-50m section. The improvements

to the path were part of a *Moor than meets the eye* project and supports the Glover Report which states that paths should be available to everyone. The Chief Executive reminded Members that projects such as this support the second purpose of the National Park.

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

## **512 Business Plan Monitoring 2019/20**

Members received the report from the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/19/011). He informed Members that the report outlines the Authority's performance, at quarter two, in delivering the 20 key actions in the current Business Plan.

The one action not likely to be completed in this business year relates to the new Environmental Land Management System, which is reliant on a formal contract offer from Defra which officers are still waiting for.

Leadership team has introduced a new key action relating to the Climate and Ecological Emergency which is explained in 2.4 of the report.

The good progress in the last six months is down to the collective efforts of staff, Members and volunteers who continue to deliver for Dartmoor.

Members raised concerns regarding new housing, stating that despite public protests to new housing, the Authority needs to be seen to support housing for Dartmoor residents to prevent an imbalance in the demography.

A Member stated that the Authority should be leading with the climate change action plan and show the public that it is proactive. The Chief Executive stated that Officers are aware of the importance of climate change and it is being taken into consideration in addition to their other work.

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

## **513 Performance Indicators 2019/20**

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/19/012). He stated to Members that the report sets out the indicator targets agreed for 2019/20 at the mid-point of this business year. The highlights of the year include welcoming signs of improvements with regard to sickness absence levels. There have been changes within the Planning team, and while some targets have not been met, performance is improving along with an excellent appeals record this year. He thanked the planning team for their hard work.

A Member queried why there has not been any great improvement in the website hits and social media output, despite a large team in Communications. The Members were informed that due to GDPR, there was a large reduction in subscribers due to having to unsubscribe people. The Chief Executive advised that the Head of Communications and Fundraising would be asked to attend the next Audit and Governance Committee meeting, to be held on 7 February 2020, in order to report of plans to raise the profile of the Authority.

In response to a Member query, the Head of Organisational Development advised that the content of the Annual Review letter for 2019 from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman was very similar to that of 2018 and previous years.

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

#### **514 2019/20 Strategic Risk Register**

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/19/013). He advised that as part of the risk management strategy it is important that Members review the Strategic Risk Register. It is also reviewed regularly by the Authority's Leadership Team.

With regard to risk S5 – Superfast Broadband Project – Members were advised that as the project has now been completed it was proposed that the risk be deleted.

Risk F1 – The Chief Executive advised that communication recently received from Defra advised that they were not in a position to determine National Park Grant (NPG) “until Brexit has been resolved”. There is a risk that the Authority will not receive notification of NPG until the end of the financial year; it is highly unlikely to be advised until 2020. If NPG was not received until the end of Quarter one of the 2020/2021 financial year, the Authority would be in a position to deal with the delay but Reserves would be reduced. An assumption of a 1.7% increase in grant has been made; however, this would not be an increase in real terms. Members agreed that the Planned Residual Risk should remain unchanged but that Member concern be recorded within the minutes.

With regard to Risk S4 – Workforce planning and resilience, with a Planned Residual Risk of 20, a Member asked that this be noted and monitored carefully as this risk is so very important regarding the running of the Authority.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) informed Members that Defra officials had notified Chief Executives that Defra did not yet have a timetable for determination of National Park Grant for 2020/21 and anticipated a significant delay. They had requested information on the potential implications should there be a significant delay. This information has been provided and financial modelling undertaken. Members were advised to note this risk at this stage rather than amend the Strategic Risk Register. Officers will continue to stress the importance of a budget settlement being confirmed in the next few weeks so the Authority's revenue budget for 2019/20 and the Medium Term Financial Plan can be based on a degree of certainty. Members will be kept fully informed of any developments.

In the absence of any direction, guidance or confirmation of NPG for 2020/21 officers are assuming a 1.7% increase in NPG for 2020/21 and the next two years of the MTFP. It is hoped that this is a conservative estimate given the proposals in the Landscapes Review and the fact that Defra received a 3.3% increase in its Department Budget for 2020/21. A 1.7% increase would, in real terms, be a further cut in NPG given the assumption of a 2% pay award.

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

**515 Moor than meets the eye (MTMTE) Landscape Partnership Scheme**

Members received the report of the *Moor than meets the eye (MTMTE)* Scheme Manager (NPA/AG/19/014).

The Director of Conservation and Communities introduced James Sharpe, *Moor than meets the eye* Scheme Manager. He advised Members that the Scheme was on track to deliver on all projects, with necessary evidence collected and in place. Spending has been well controlled.

Over 90% of the National Heritage Lottery Funding has been claimed; around 10% (£145,000) is retained and will be paid once satisfactory evidence had been provided proving that the projects have completed.

The Scheme has proved so successful that there is a great desire, both within local communities and partner organisations alike, to maintain the momentum which has been created. Proposals are in the process of being drawn up for future partnership working; this includes a Parishes 2 project.

With regard to the Wrey Valley Trail project, the MTMTE Scheme Manager stated that he had a high level of confidence that the project will be completed imminently; two pieces of the trail are yet to be completed.

The Chairman recorded his and Member congratulations to all involved with the *Moor than meets the eye* Landscape Partnership Scheme. A Member added that all initial scepticism around the Scheme had disappeared; there was now a clear indication of what has been achieved.

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