

**NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

**AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE**

**Friday 21 February 2014**

**Present:**

Members:

P Harper (Chairman), B Hitchins, D Lloyd, J Nutley, P Sanders,  
J Shears, N Way

Officers:

Lorna Brown (Director of Communications & Business Support)  
Stephen Belli (Director of Planning)  
Christopher Walledge (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)  
Donna Healy (Head of Resources)  
James Aven (Planning Team Manager)  
Rob Steemson (Head Ranger) - part  
Orlando Rutter (Senior Learning & Outreach Officer) - part  
Anne Parsons (Devon Audit Partnership)

R Woodall - observing

**Apologies:**

P Vogel, J McInnes, M Retallick,

**329 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2013**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2013 were signed as a correct record with the amendment of a spelling mistake on page 7.

**330 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**331 Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

None.

**332 Public Participation**

None.

**333 Internal Audit Report – Key Financial Systems 2013-2014**

Members received the report of Devon Audit Partnership presented by Anne Parsons

Anne reported to Members that the key financial systems audited are of a high standard. The systems and controls in place adequately mitigate exposure to the risks identified. The systems are being adhered to and substantial reliance can be placed upon the procedures in place. It was noted that in a small team a degree of overlap in responsibilities was inevitable and full segregation of duties is not realistic, however this

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was not a matter of concern. Only minor recommendations have been made to further enhance already sound procedures.

Members congratulated the Finance team on their hard work and high standard achieved. It was also acknowledged that the audit cost was well below the agreed budget.

**334 2014/15 Internal Audit Plan**

Members received the report of the Head of Resources (NPA/AG/14/031) who confirmed to Members the audit plan for 2013/14 financial year allowed for 25 days, 6 days of which were not utilised therefore making the cost lower than budget.

The audit plan for 2014/15 allows for up to 19 days of internal audit support. As part of the audit service Devon Audit Partnership will be available to provide assistance and advice to, and be a central contact point for the Head of Resources.

The cost of Internal Audit provision for 2014/15 will be £4,750, a slight increase due to an increase in the Devon Audit Partnership's hourly rate (the first price increase since 2011/12). By way of comparison, in 2011/12 there were 40 internal Audit days costing the Authority £9,500.

Mr Shears joined the meeting.

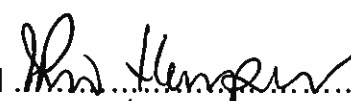
**RESOLVED:** Members approved the 2014/15 Internal Audit Plan presented by Devon Audit Partnership.

**335 Financial Management 1 April to 31 December 2013 and Forecast of Financial Outturn 2013/14**

Members received the report of the Head of Resources (NPA/AG/14/032) who advised Members that current projections based on figures at end of June indicate a predicted surplus of £21,627 (£12,390 at month 6) representing a -0.48% variance against the budget.

The main variation and movements since month 6 were highlighted as follows:

- RDPE transition funding for the Hill Farm project resulting in a 100% saving in salaries and supplies and services
- Overspends in relation to the BAP, Holne Leat repairs and Fernworthy Survey works had been met by additional external funding
- Other grant funded projects, including White Horse Hill and Farming Futures would be carried forward into 2014/15
- The underspend reported here in the Public rights of Way budget would in fact be less, as further work has now been commissioned and will be completed by 31 March

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- Sales, fees and charges – and improvement in sales income at the Visitor Centres and increased planning, filming and FEP fees
- The project fund will also be underspent as two schemes have been delayed until 2014/15 (car park resurfacing and public path improvements) and a request for funding toward the purchase of Fingle Woods by the Woodland Trust has been deferred.

At year end the Authority will be formally requested to approve the transfer of grant income, relating to specific projects, into earmarked reserves to enable the Authority to meet the terms and conditions attached to them. The underspend in the project fund will also mean that the original budget requirement to make a transfer of £138,777 from reserves, may no longer be required.

Members questioned the £5,500 underspend in the training budget. It was confirmed that all training requests from staff have been approved.

Members asked for clarification on the Planning overspend for enforcement costs. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services informed Members that this was mainly due to external legal costs in connection with Marley Head and Swete Sigford.

The underspend in Public Rights of Way was mainly due to capacity and weather preventing work being done, but would now be less as further work has been commissioned.

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

**336 Conservation & Communities Performance Report – Quarter 3 (October – December 2013)**

Members received the report of the Director of Conservation & Communities (NPA/AG/14/033).

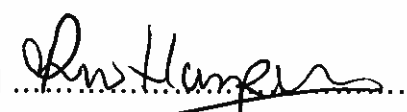
In the absence of the Director of Conservation and Communities, the Senior Learning and Outreach Officer confirmed that the Moor than meets the Eye bid has now been submitted.

Members were informed that the Historic Environment Character Assessment has been completed and the report has been used as supporting evidence for the Landscape Partnership bid.

A conservation plan has been agreed for Higher Uppacott and some essential works have been undertaken.

The Senior Learning and Outreach Officer thanked Members for their support in relation to the Outreach vehicle which has been valued and has added to its success.

Volunteers numbers improved in quarter three after an earlier dip but it is felt that limits on officer capacity may mean that volunteer numbers cannot continue to grow.

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White Horse Hill has sparked a great deal of public interest. An exhibition is planned in Plymouth in September 2014, and 258,000 viewers had watched a recent BBC programme.

The Head Ranger spoke to the remainder of the report and said that in recent weeks large planning applications have taken up significant officer time, which has hampered the progress of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

The maintenance of The Authority's woodland estate continues, but the Public Rights of Way and Open land target has not been met due to weather and capacity.

A Member raised concerns regarding overnight camping, erosion caused by parking and Ranger capacity to deal with it. The Head of Legal & Democratic Services confirmed that work is currently being undertaken on an internal protocol to ensure a consistent approach to unauthorised camping and encampments.

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

**337 Planning Directorate Performance Report – Quarter 3 (October - December 2013)**

Members received the report of the Director of Planning (NPA/AG/14/034).

The Planning Team Manager reported that the number of planning applications and prior notifications for Quarter 3 were slightly down from the previous quarter. No major applications had been determined during the quarter. The determination of minor applications has improved on the previous quarter and is now exceeding target. A marked improvement in determination of other (householder) applications has also been achieved as a reflection of having a full complement of three Planning Officers. The Authority had approved 88% of all applications received.

The recruitment process is underway following the resignation of a Planning Officer during this quarter. The time taken to replace is likely to have an impact on maintaining the improvements shown.

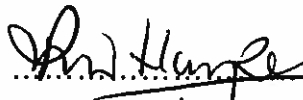
The number of resolved Enforcement cases has increased. However, the number of live cases remains consistent, around 150.

A programme of monitoring occupancy conditions for agricultural dwellings, ancillary accommodation and holiday units has commenced. An 88% response rate was reported for the first batch of enquiry forms, resulting in 3 new enforcement investigations. No complaints have been received about the process.

Demand for preliminary enquiries remains high but are being dealt with within the target 28 days.

A Member enquired whether this new area of work had put more pressure on the Enforcement team. The Planning Team Manager confirmed that so far it has been manageable but as it progresses it will certainly involve more work.

With regard to Forward Planning, the Director of Planning reported that the Chagford Masterplan is to be brought to Authority in April, and the Ashburton Masterplan in May or

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June dependant on the outcome of the current consultation exercise on the draft plan. The Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document has progressed to consultation stage and will be brought to Authority in April.

The final bid for the Rural Community Broadband Fund was submitted in October. Further action is being undertaken, exploring other emerging funding and technological opportunities to address the needs of the community across the whole of the National Park.

The Director of Communications and Business Support confirmed that the Communications Team will be promoting the benefits of the Walkhampton undergrounding scheme and will maximise press coverage in liaison with Western Power Distribution.

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

**338 Charging for Pre-application Advice**

Members received the report of the Director of Planning (NPA/AG/14/035).

The Director of Planning reported that charging for pre-application advice was last considered at Authority in January 2011 (NPA/11/009) when it was resolved not to introduce charges for planning advice. Members were asked to reconsider this taking into account that it is a discretionary charge and is limited to 'cost recovery' for the cost of delivering the pre application advice service.

Neighbouring Authorities Mid Devon District Council, West Devon Borough Council and South Hams District Council all currently charge for pre application advice. With regards to other National Parks, charges have been introduced since 2011 in South Downs, North York Moors, Broads, Peak District, and Northumberland National Park Authorities.

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) noted the content of the report and
- (ii) agreed that a detailed report be brought to the August 2014 meeting of the Committee setting out how charges for pre-application advice could be calculated and applied
- (iii) officers of constituent authorities to be asked for advice on the introduction of charges and the risks associated.

**339 Performance Monitoring Framework**

Members received the report of the Director of Communications and Business Support (NPA/AG/14/036).

The Director of Communications and Business Support presented Members with a proposal to change the framework for the future reporting of performance monitoring. It was confirmed the role of and remit of the Audit and Governance Committee is to monitor the performance of the Authority in delivering actions, priorities and targets in the Business Plan.

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It is proposed that Members will in future receive the following:

**Quarterly meetings** - two key reports from Planning and from Conservation & Communities setting out progress against the Business Plan; and a financial monitoring report (excluding August as too early in the financial year).

**Six monthly** – Communications & Visitor Services report and an Enforcement report.

**Annual** – Performance report (including commentary on delivering the actions in the Business Plan as well as achievement against the PIs), Complaints and Compliments report and HR annual report.

In debate it was agreed that measure S12– no. of working days lost due to sickness per FTE should be modified to report a) no of days lost and b) no of days lost excluding long term sickness.

A discussion took place around measure S17: % of appeals allowed against DNPA decision to refuse consent. The Director of Planning stated that a breakdown of the headline measure can be included in the Development Management Committee reports.

It was also agreed that it would be timely to review the implications of the sequence of meetings and the finance reporting cycle. Proposed dates will be circulated to all Members, and efforts will be made to avoid a February meeting falling during half term.


In addition to the routine and exception reporting, the Committee's other main role is that of scrutiny and challenge. Two areas were put forward for consideration, Public Rights of Way - service level agreement and the Communications agenda.

Three Members, (Mr Hitchins, Mr Sanders and Mr Shears), agreed to be appointed as the review panel to assist officers in a review of maintaining Public Rights of Way.

**RESOLVED:** Members:

- (i) noted the content of the report
- (ii) approved the performance indicators at Appendix 3 of the report for future reporting
- (iii) approved the annual performance reporting programme to Audit & Governance Committee at Appendix 4 of the report; and
- (iv) approved and appointed 3 Members to the Review panel for PROW.

Owing to the impending retirement of Lorna Brown the Director of Communications and Business Support in March, the Chairman thanked her for all her hard work and time given to supporting the Audit and Governance Committee.

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