

DARTMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Friday 2 February 2018

Present: Members:
K Ball (Chairman), A Cooper, G Gribble, S Hill, PW Hitchins, J
McInnes, M Retallick, P Sanders, D Webber, P Woods.

Officers:

Kevin Bishop (Chief Executive (National Park Officer))
Donna Healy (Head of Business Support)
Neil White (Head of Organisational Development)

Apologies: C Pannell

465 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2017

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2017 were signed as a correct record.

466 Declarations of Interest

None

467 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

The scheduled date for the next meeting of Audit and Governance Committee has been changed to 10am on Friday 25 May 2018.

468 Public Participation

None.

469 Internal Audit Report – Key Financial Systems Review 2017/18

The Chairman welcomed Dominic and Claire, from Devon Audit Partnership, to the meeting.

Members received the report presented by Dominic Measures and Claire Moore, Devon Audit Partnership.

The review of the financial systems in operation throughout the Authority was undertaken during October and November 2017.

Overall the audit was all to a high standard of assurance. It showed that the system and controls in place adequately mitigate exposure to the risks identified. The systems of control are being adhered to and substantial

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reliance can be placed upon the procedures in place. Mr Measures confirmed this is much to the credit of the staff who work within the Finance Department at the Authority.

Mr Measures referred to Appendix A of the Internal Audit report and highlighted the key observations and action plan for each area.

Only minor recommendations aimed at further enhancing already sound procedures have been made.

The current procedures in relation to the 'Bleep' stock control system at Princetown Visitor Centre are to be streamlined for more efficiency and unnecessary duplication with Accounting Ledger.

Two verbal quotations are sought for purchases of between £1,000 and £2,500 in accordance with the Authority's procurement procedures and a simple record of the suppliers that have quoted should be maintained on the request for order.

The Members congratulated the Head of Business Support and asked her to pass on the congratulations to her staff on an excellent report.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

470 Financial Management 1 April to 31 December 2017 and Forecast of Financial Outturn 2017/18

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/18/001) covering the period 1 April to 31 December 2017, quarters 1 to 3.

The Head of Business Support advised that, based on current projections a budget surplus of £93,000 is predicted. Members' attention was drawn to the main variations set out in section 3.1 of the report and detailed analysis at appendices 1 and 2.

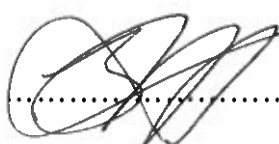
There is a larger variance in salaries due to in year vacancy savings.

There is an overspend on premises due to increased external building repair costs and decoration at Princetown Visitor Centre and Parke that can be met from the revenue underspend.

The Authority set aside a project Fund balance of £103,944 for this financial year. The remaining balance to date is £12,294. Full utilisation of the fund is anticipated by year-end but some balances may be carried forward as they span more than one financial year.

The net surplus of £62,520 for the Moor Otters project will be carried forward to 2018 budget to fund the three schemes for Junior Rangers, eradication of invasive species and Public Rights of Way erosion works.

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Members' attention was drawn to the summary position of reserves set out in section 5 of the report and detailed analysis at appendices 3 and 4.

Leadership Team has identified a number of projects that are being bid for in the 2018/19 Budget that could be brought forward to utilise the current forecast budget surplus; this would alleviate pressure on next year's spending plans and budget.

In response to a Member's question about the use of agency staff the Head of Business Support and Head of Organisational Development confirmed agency staff, with relevant qualifications and training, are sometimes required at short notice to support effective service delivery.

Members again commended the Head of Business Support and her team for their hard work.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

471 Business Plan Monitoring 2017/18 (April – December 2017)

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/18/002).

The Business Plan 2017/18 identifies 33 (plus 10 more than meets the eye) key actions against six agreed priorities informing Members of the Authority's performance at Quarter 3. Progress is tracked and shown on the Business Plan monitoring spreadsheet at Appendix 1 of the report.

At quarter 3 only 3 key actions are now unlikely to be completed by year end. The Head of Organisational Development drew Members' attention to page 35 of the report summarising the reasons for this.

Members were informed that of the remaining 40 key actions, 29 are on target and 11 are delayed or behind schedule.

Members attention was drawn to two major bids submitted last quarter; one to Defra's Facilitation Fund on behalf of the Hill Farm Project for £80,000 which has been successful and the second was a joint South West Peatlands bid to Defra's Capital Grant Scheme for the Restoration of Peatland in England with a decision now expected in February 2018.

Members were also made aware of two bids to Historic England for the Adopt a Monument Scheme and for surveys of the Upper Erme valuing £15,000.

A Member expressed concern about the deferment of key action no.14 Dartmoor Food Initiative. The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) assured Members that this action will be carried forward to next year and has only been deferred because of officers' time being used to bid for external funding.

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A Member queried the reference to Code Powers relating to the delivery of broadband which the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) will clarify and report back on.

Members agreed the new layout of the report and traffic light system works well.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

472 Performance Indicators Monitoring 2017/18

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/18/003).

The report set out the Authority's performance at Quarter 3 for 2017/18 against 40 indicators. The Head of Organisational Development indicated that the format on the appendices to his report could have been clearer and the highlighted columns should be the Target column and Quarter 3.

Members had asked for further analysis of sickness absence to be undertaken at the last Audit and Governance Committee. Staff sickness absence at Quarter 3 was 8 days per employee against a target of 7 days. Short-term absences reduced to 3.74 days per employee against a target of 4 days.

Long-term absences have a significant impact on overall performance and further analysis showed that 54% of absences this year have been due to five long-term absences in excess of 20 days (261 days lost).

Members were advised that the causes of all five long-term absences were not work-related. One case resulted in 106 days being lost which, if excluded from the figures, would mean overall days lost per employee would be 6.28.

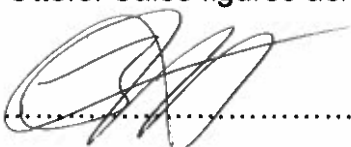
To support employee wellbeing a training event for nutrition and dietary advice is planned in February and taking good care of your back is planned for later in the year. These events will be open to Members to attend if not oversubscribed.

Members agreed the report was very useful and should include benchmark data against other National Parks that is regularly kept up to date.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) commented that the analysis shows an organisation performing well under pressure.

It was commented that Members regular attendance at Authority meetings could be improved as the percentage during quarter 3 was 82% against a target of 85%.

The Head of Organisational Development advised Members that visitor numbers continue to exceed targets, significantly boosted by the presence of Moor Otters. Sales figures across all three centres have all seen an excellent

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increase demonstrating the impact of an improved retail offer and the quality of service provided by the Information Advisers.

The performance indicator relating to public rights of way (E2) does not provide the full picture. There is evidence of good progress demonstrated within the Access and Recreation Service dashboard. Members commented that the results are a tribute to staff dealing with public rights of way given the weather conditions and effects of erosion.

Bill Hitchins, Chairman, Dartmoor National Park Authority, informed Members that he and Richard Drysdale, Visitor Services Manager, attended the Tourism Excellence Awards in Torquay on Thursday 1 February and collected the 'Outstanding Contribution to Tourism' award on behalf of protected landscapes in the South West. Members congratulated all staff involved.

A Member suggested it would be nice if different teams of staff came to join Members for lunch as a way of staff and Members getting to know each other better. The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) agreed to consider that idea and reminded Members of Team Dartmoor Day on 13 June 2018, where all staff, Members and volunteers are invited to attend a training day together.

Mr Hitchins agreed to send an email to all staff to express Members' gratitude for the work that all staff are doing.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

473 Audit & Governance Committee – Terms of Reference

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/18/004).

The Audit and Governance (A&G) Committee was established in 2006 as a sub-committee of the Authority, to provide independent and high-level resource to support good governance and strong public financial management. The Head of Business Support highlighted to Members the key areas set out in 1.3 of the report.

At a Member training event held in December, facilitated by the Head of Business Support and the Head of Internal Audit, Members were provided with a 'toolkit' document. Members that were unable to attend were reminded to obtain copies from the Head of Business Support.

At this event various issues were discussed including Terms of Reference. The Head of Business Support informed Members that the existing Terms of Reference are shown in the report at Appendix 1 and the revised at Appendix 2 which has been drafted in consultation with the current Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee, the Chief Executive, S151 Officer, the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Internal Audit.

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Members discussed the Terms of Reference at the meeting and the Head of Business Support asked for any further comments to be sent by email before the end of February. A formal report will be presented to Authority in April to be approved at the Annual Meeting in June.

Members congratulated The Head of Business Support on the Member training.

Members questioned whether safeguarding should be included in the terms of reference and this was agreed to be taken into consideration.

RESOLVED: Members NOTED the content of the report.

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