

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Friday 15 May 2015

Present: Members:
J Nutley (Chairman), P Harper, P Vogel, D Webber

Officers:
Kevin Bishop (Chief Executive (National Park Officer))
Alison Kohler (Director of Conservation and Communities)
Donna Healy (Head of Business Support)
Stephen Belli (Head of Planning)
Neil White (Head of Organisational Development)
Christopher Walledge (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)

Apologies: J McInnes, D Lloyd (Deputy Chairman), P Sanders, M Retallick

The Chairman welcomed and Geri Daly and Andrew Shaw of Grant Thornton.

389 Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2015 were signed as a correct record.

390 Declarations of Interest

None

391 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

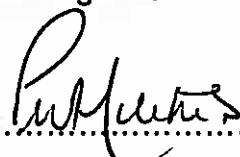
None

392 Public Participation

None

393 Audit Plan for DNPA – Year ended 31 March 2015

Geri Daly presented the Audit plan for the year ended 31 March 2015. She explained the developments relevant to the Authority – financial reporting, corporate governance, pensions etc. The plan also sets out the further work to be undertaken – with regard to areas of risk, she advised that Revenue was not considered to be high risk as the majority of income for the Authority was in the form of National Park Grant. The main focus of work to be undertaken during 2015/16 would be on the management of over-ride controls, operating expenditure and employee costs. With regard to Value for

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Money, an overall assessment would be included in the final audit report which would be presented to this Committee in September 2015. With regard to the recommendation to review and identify payroll variances in a timely manner, a new robust process has been put in place, with effect from the April 2015 pay run. All that remains to be undertaken are the checks for January to March 2015; these will be made as soon as possible. The annual fee of £11,807 has been confirmed and has remained unaltered from 2014/15.

In response to Member queries, she advised that the audit of the Devon Pension Fund was anticipated for mid-July; no issues were anticipated. In addition, Andrew Shaw, new Audit Manager, confirmed that every effort would be made to ensure timely delivery; the draft reporting dates had been agreed with the Head of Business Support prior to the meeting.

394 Financial Outturn 2014/15 (Provisional)

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/15/005). She advised that, due to further changes in accruals, the surplus now stands at £210,184. There have been some overspends, primarily related to premises maintenance at Parke and Princetown, together with the purchase of additional stock for resale at the visitor centres.

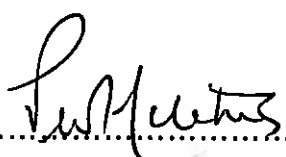
Operational and efficiency savings, together with additional income, which the Authority is very successful in obtaining, totals some £305,811.

Transactions relating to the £3.9m Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Project *Moor than meets the Eye*, for which the Authority is the lead accountable body, are accounted for separately and are not included in the Authority's Statement of Accounts.

With regard to Capital expenditure, this included the replacement of three lease vehicles, two of which have been delivered; the budget for the third vehicle will be carried forward into reserves as it is anticipated that the vehicle will be delivered in early May 2015. In addition, a new Committee Room microphone system was installed in-year.

At the time of setting the budget for 2015/16 in February 2015, the approval of a detailed Medium Term Financial Plan was not possible due to future uncertainties regarding National Part Grant (NPG) settlements and as the NPG for 2015/16 had not been confirmed by Defra. This was only confirmed on 31 March 2015. The Authority has also been warned that there could be an in-year cut to NPG and the Authority may have to utilise a proportion of its reserves if significant reductions in NPG are made. Members will be kept informed.

A Member requested that the income generated through the '£ for the Park' scheme be reported separately. He also congratulated staff for the sustained culture of robust financial management.

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Another Member suggested that, with regard to the car park charges at Princetown, it would be useful to provide a breakdown of income, to include a record of payments made to West Devon Borough Council. He also felt that it was important for the public to know that the Authority is not the 'enforcer' with regard to the charges. The Head of Business Support advised that, through the transparency agreement, the car parking account is likely to be placed on the Authority's website.

She added that it would take the Authority 4 – 5 years to recoup the money invested in the scheme. A breakdown will be provided at the next Audit and Governance Committee meeting.

The 2014/15 Statement of Accounts will be presented to the Authority for review and will be available for public inspection during July 2015.

RESOLVED: Members:

- (i) noted the content of the report;
- (ii) recommended to the Authority that the 2014/15 revenue surplus of £210,184 is transferred to Reserves;
- (iii) recommended to the Authority that grants and contributions received with specific conditions or restrictions and monies set aside for contractual commitments are transferred into earmarked reserves.

395 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/15/006).

The Head of Business Support advised Members that the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is prepared each year and must accompany the annual Statement of Accounts. It is the culmination of a year-long review process of systems and internal controls.

RESOLVED: Members:

- (i) noted the content of the report;
- (ii) recommended the 2014/15 Annual Governance Statement to Authority for approval

396 Performance Monitoring Report for 2014/15

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/15/007). He advised that his report was the first one to record performance across the Authority and provide an overall picture of the state of the National Park. Areas of good performance were highlighted, and included:

- S3 – 20 scheduled ancient monuments were removed from the "at risk" register;
- S9 – a significant amount of training has been provided to farmers;
- S11 – the Authority has exceeded its targets for the reduction of CO₂ emissions;

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- E10 - £ for the Park's target has been exceeded by almost double, earning the Authority £4,396 against a target of £2,500;
- P1 – determination of minor and householder applications have exceeded national targets;
- P3 – volunteer days organised or supported by the Authority totalled 2,573 against a target of 2,500
- P9 – the new indicator relating to our communication work and social media has recorded some promising results; this is an area that will continue to grow.

Sickness absence, however, remains a concern and is a high risk to the Authority's performance. Steps are being taken to improve sickness levels. Members commented that the Authority has a small number of staff and therefore sickness absence figures could easily be skewed. This, in their opinion, should be highlighted. The Head of Organisational Development advised that the Authority had, in February 2015, provided mental health awareness training for staff and managers. Last year saw a reduction in absences related to mental health. The focus over the next 12 months will focus on the organisation as a whole, its culture and people and their developing needs.

It was disappointing to note the continuing problem with litter. The subject has been well publicised recently, with Sophie Pearce and her Producer from BBC Radio Devon organising a litter pick at Newbridge which was well attended; Mr Vogel had represented Authority Members.

The Chief Executive (National Park Officer) raised the issue of Member attendance at Audit and Governance Committee, S14 – proposals elsewhere on the agenda would, hopefully, address this.

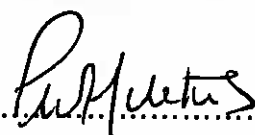
- RESOLVED:** Members:
- (i) noted the content of the report;
 - (ii) analysed the 2014/15 performance and suggested actions to improve and maintain good performance or to address under performance;
 - (iii) recommended the proposed targets for 2015/16 be approved.

397 Business Plan Monitoring Report for 2014/15

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/AG/15/008).

Members were reminded that the Business Plan was structured around three themes: Sustain, Enjoy, Prosper. These themes are shared with the Management Plan. Progress against key actions has been very positive. Most actions have either been implemented or work has been substantially completed.

One exception relates to plans to commence work on a Minerals and Waste Local Plan. These have been amended in order to focus on the completion of the

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Ashburton Masterplan and the work needed to assess the vision submitted by Friends of Ashburton Railway Station to reconstruct a railway line between Ashburton and Buckfastleigh. A revised Local Plan will now be produced in 2015.16 and will cover all land uses.

Members commended staff, whose numbers are greatly reduced, for their efforts in delivering a vast output.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report,

398 Risk Management and the Draft 2015/16 Strategic Risk Register

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/15/009).

The risk management strategy for the Authority has four main components:

- Risk management policy – approved by Audit and Governance Committee in May 2014
- Roles and responsibilities of officers and Members
- Strategic Risk Register
- Embedded risk management within services

With regard to the Strategic Risk Register, this has been reviewed and updated by Leadership Team and the 2015/16 draft is presented to Members to approve. The register will be monitored and reviewed on a quarterly basis.

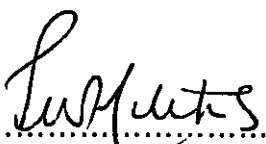
RESOLVED: Members approved the 2015/16 draft Strategic Risk Register.

399 Draft Calendar of Meetings

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services stated that the Authority clearly has a programme of business; the current issue is whether there should be fewer Authority and Audit & Governance (A&G) meetings. He advised that the calendar before Members proposes that there be eight Authority meetings and that the A&G meetings reduce to three, on the first Friday of a month, after Development Management Committee, to fit the monthly schedule. A slightly larger membership of A&G Committee is also proposed to ensure that meetings are quorate.

In addition, it is hoped that there would be less double-handling of reports going to A&G Committee, thence onto full Authority. Leadership Team is conscious of the amount of paperwork produced for A&G and is working hard to reduce this.


Members commented that it needed to be understood that Members should commit to a long day at Parke if required. Devon County Council and the District/Borough Councils all record the first Friday of each month as committed to DNPA work so it should not be necessary for Authority Members to leave early.

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Members were in agreement that the proposed calendar should go before full Authority for discussion and approval and requested that information be sent to Members prior to the annual meeting.

RESOLVED: Members endorsed the proposed calendar of meetings and recommended its approval.

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