

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

Friday 6 November 2015

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

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)
Christopher Walledge (Head of Legal and Democratic Services)
Andrew Watson (Head of Recreation, Access and Estates)
Orlando Rutter (Senior Learning and Outreach Officer) - Part
Robert Steemson (Head Ranger) - Part

Apologies: J Kidner
K Bishop (Chief Executive (National Park Officer))

The Chairman welcomed Tim Stapleton, Independent Person, and Andrew Shaw of Grant Thornton.

400 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2015

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2015 were signed as a correct record.

401 Election of Deputy Chairman

Mrs Cathie Pannell was duly nominated, seconded and elected.

402 Declarations of Interest

None

403 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

None

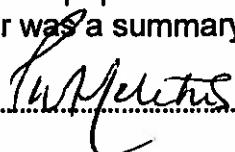
404 Public Participation

None

405 Annual Audit Letter for DNPA – Year ended 31 March 2015

Mr Shaw from Grant Thornton reported to Members that the Annual Audit Letter was the last paper to be issued in respect of the 2014/15 financial year. Effectively, the letter was a summary of the work undertaken within the year and confirmed that

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in September 2015 an unqualified opinion on the Authority's Financial Statements and an unqualified Value for Money conclusion was given.

In response to Member queries, he advised that with regard to the arrangements for the Authority's pension fund, Grant Thornton is reliant upon the assurances received from Devon County Council – no issues have been raised. The Head of Business Support confirmed that the next triannual review was due during this financial year, 2015/16. She added that the fund had performed well during the past three years and that current indications were that there would not be any need to increase employer contribution rates.

406 Performance Management Framework

Members received the report of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) (NPA/AG/15/010).

The Head of Organisational Development advised Members that the report outlined the proposed changes to the Performance Management Framework during 2015/16. The Framework will consist of the Business Plan monitor, Service Dashboards, Performance Indicators (PIs) and Budget monitoring.

The intention behind these changes is to provide Members with an overview of how the Authority is performing across all of our services and enable Members to scrutinise the activity of the Authority.

One Member commented that 'Outcomes' should be the main focus. Officers should measure the effect that actions are having and be very clear in their reporting.

An Organisational Development Strategy is to be drawn up; this will include information on the work that the Authority does; how it is recorded and the outcomes of that work.

Mr Sanders proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Mr Harper.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

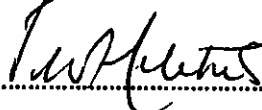
407 Business Plan Monitoring 2015/16

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/15/011).

The report provides an overview of the progress to date. Business Plan monitoring will assist with project management and ensure that the Business Plan is visible throughout the year. It will be considered quarterly by the Leadership Team and at Audit and Governance Committee meetings. This will enable any necessary changes to priorities to be made in-year.

One Member expressed concern that 31% of the key actions are considered to be either at risk or unlikely to happen. He stated that this begged the question of whether too much is being asked of officers; is the workload agenda too large and was the figure of 31% a reflection of the strain that officers are currently under.

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Members added that they would like to see the Authority's Leadership Team taking a proactive approach. Members would prefer to see that a key action had been deferred for 12 months rather than reported as failing.

The Head of Organisational Development advised that the monitoring tool was already proving to be useful as Leadership Team has identified where projects may be falling behind and, in discussion with the relevant managers, was taking action to address.

With regard to the quarterly monitoring sheets, Members requested that those key actions unlikely to happen, i.e., shaded red, be listed all together in order that an instant picture could be seen.

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

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

Action: Quarterly monitoring sheets to be presented in colour order i.e., Red, Amber, Green.

408 Service Dashboards

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/15/012).

The Head of Organisational Development confirmed that officers are developing a series of 'dashboards' for our key services with the first five being presented today. The dashboards are intended to provide information (including performance data) on the service provided as well as identifying key achievements and pressure points.

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

Access and Recreation

Large scale events on the moor – should there be a charge to cover officer time? The Head of Recreation, Access and Estates advised that this has been considered in the past and will be looked at again. Members agreed that event organisers should be made aware of the amount of officer time involved in dealing with events upon the moor. Another Member highlighted that officers always notify commoners of any events taking place; this is extremely helpful and he would like this to continue.

Public Rights of Way (PROW) work – issues seem to be building up. The Head of Recreation, Access and Estates reported that, particularly through the summer months in Quarter 2, there were daily reports from the public regarding overgrown footpaths etc. Rangers have to try to deal with this work during the peak visitor season. He added that it is anticipated that the amount of work on PROW that can be undertaken will reduce, due to the pressure on resources.

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The Director of Conservation and Communities reminded Members that we are in the first year of the PROW Review implementation plan. There may be implications of this new way of working and suggested that Members discuss progress with the PROW Review at the next Park Management Working Panel following discussion at Leadership Team. A full report will be presented to Audit and Governance Committee in February 2016.

One Member stated that the figures provided within the Dashboard were a little difficult to interpret; he asked that an explanation and conclusion be provided once a full year's data had been gathered.

Communications

A Member commented that work was needed with regard to subscribers to e-news. It was also noted that website visits were starting to decline. The Head of Communications, Economy and Fundraising advised that the current format was unhelpful and a new style of presentation was being worked on.

Members agreed that external communications were much more effective than in the past. An example of this was a recent media campaign regarding the overnight parking of motorhomes on the moor. This had proved highly successful.

Members congratulated the Communications team, and other staff, on the recent success of the National Parks Conference.

Education and Outreach

In response to Member queries, the Senior Outreach and Learning Officer advised that annual trend data was available. For example, the 2012 Olympics took its toll on education trips. The new national curriculum, where history focuses on the Bronze and Iron Ages, has meant that there has been a fall of school trips to undertake river sampling. He confirmed that his interest in in the impact on and outcomes for a child's life; e.g., has an educational event achieved the learning need? Have any special needs been catered for?

With regard to education, a Member added that there was a large amount of education and training delivered through the Hill Farm Project, with almost all events and activities fully subscribed.

Visitor Services

The Head of Business Support confirmed that the figures from West Devon Borough Council regarding car parking at Princetown had now been received.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to be provided with the baseline (sales per visitor) at the next committee meeting. The Head of Communications, Economy and Fundraising advised that the best year for sales was 2006/07 when sales totalled £156k. The least successful year was 2012/13 when the total was only £84k. She was pleased to report that, so far this year, sales have totalled £126k – this with a greatly reduced staff and support infrastructure.

Rangers

In response to Member queries the Head Ranger suggested that the number of people spoken to over the weekends dropped during Quarter 2 due to weather variances.

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A Member requested that information regarding the weekly updates to the Ten Tors website be added to the Dashboard.

The Head of Organisational Development thanked Members for their questions and suggestions regarding data, trends, explanations etc.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

409 Financial Management 1 April to 30 September 2015 and Forecast Financial Outturn 2015/16

Members received the report of the Head of Business Support (NPA/AG/15/013). This was the first budget report of this financial year. The budget for 2015/16 was set at £3,588,586, funded by National Park Grant (NPG), fees and charges and appropriated Reserves from the financial year 2014/15 relating to projects to be completed during 2015/16. This resulted in a net budget increase to £3,869,598. Based on current projections up to the end of September 2015, a surplus of £35,587 is predicted.

The Head of Business Support listed the main variations and highlighted the additional Grant income levered in and increased revenue from sales, fees and charges.

The Head of Business Support gave a mid-term review of Treasury Management Stewardship and reminded Members that, as reported in July 2015, Barclays plc suffered a ratings downgrade by one of the three credit rating agencies, the reasons for it and the fact that it meant a breach in compliance with the Treasury Management Strategy Counterparty list. A report will be taken to Authority in December 2015 recommending an amendment to Treasury Management regulations which would allow Barclays to be retained on the Counterparty list.

£2.695million reserve balances were brought forward from 2014/15. The current forecast outturn stands at £1.97million. The budget building process for 2016/17 is currently underway; however, the National Park Grant (NPG) allocation is still currently unknown. Should the cut in NPG be significant, the Authority may have to use a proportion of reserves over the life of the next Medium Term Financial Plan, either to support revised spending, pay redundancies, or a combination of both.

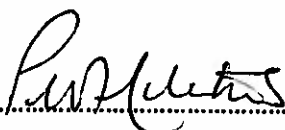
In response to a Member query, the Head of Business Support advised that it was unlikely that the Authority would be advised of NPG prior to the next Authority meeting. If possible, Members would be advised verbally.

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

410 2015/16 Strategic Risk Register

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/15/014).

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He advised Members that the Register had been updated. In addition, it also now included, at S5, the Superfast Broadband Project

A Member stressed the need to continually review the Strategic Risk Register, paying particular attention to S3 – *“Managing officer workload and potential stress arising out of reduction in Government funding and consequent reduction in staffing”*.

Mr Harper proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Mrs Pannell.

RESOLVED: Members:

- (i) Approved the updated Strategic Risk Register for 2015/16; and
- (ii) Approved the proposal to report the Strategic Risk Register to the Audit and Governance Committee in May and November each year.

411 Member Attendance

Members received the report of the Head of Organisational Development (NPA/AG/15/015). The overall target for Member attendance in 2015/15 is 85%; as at the end of October 2015 the actual attendance stands at 75%. Members were asked to consider whether the target set was too high, taking into consideration the number of meetings they are required to attend in undertaking their individual roles.

The Chairman advised Members that these issues needed serious consideration; many officer hours are utilised in preparing the reports that go before each Committee meeting.

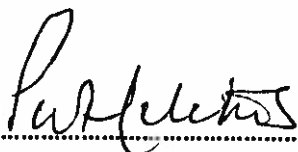
The Head of Legal and Democratic Services reported that a new pattern of meetings was being trialled from the 2015 Annual Meeting with Audit and Governance Committee taking place after Development Management. Having considered the statistics from three other National Park Authorities, average attendance was, at its lowest 72%, and at its highest 86%. Therefore, in his opinion, a target of 85% average attendance is very ambitious.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the average attendance report is not adjusted to take account of planned absence (e.g. holiday) or sickness absence (other than where 'leave of absence' is agreed).

RESOLVED: Members noted the content of the report.

The Head of Organisational Development advised Members that, at the Audit and Governance Committee meeting held in November 2014, Mr John Goulding, partner at Grant Thornton, offered some training for Members. This offer still stands and Members were invited to advise either the Head of Business Support or the Head of Organisation Development should they wish to take up the offer.

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