

Agenda Item 9
Report RPC 21/13

Report to	Resources & Performance Committee
Date	17 September 2013
By	Director of Corporate Services
Title of Report	A framework for project management, review and evaluation
Purpose of Report	To propose a governance framework for how projects are managed and evaluated

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1) note progress on developing a governance framework for projects and agree the next steps**
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose an approach to the governance of projects across the organisation, with particular reference to evaluation and review to enable continuous improvement. It sets out the reasons for the proposed approach and some initial next steps, to be implemented as quickly as possible.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Strategic Management Team (SMT) requested that an overall approach to developing, managing and monitoring projects is developed for all types of project undertaken by, or involving, South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) staff. Post project evaluation and sharing of learning from projects to continually inform and improve those that come after was identified as a key need. At its last meeting, the Resources and Performance Committee approved changes to the performance framework which proposed an annual update on projects.
- 2.2 The Peer Review team recommended improvements to performance reporting, suggesting that; “the planned review of the performance management system needs to address the current shortcomings and early consideration needs to be given to producing a system that can be used by the South Downs Partnership and to allow SMT and Members to rigorously monitor delivery against the National Park Management Plan and Business Plan”. This review supports that process by making it easier to ensure consistent monitoring, evaluation of and reporting on projects.
- 2.3 The current proposed restructure (which also has some of its basis in the peer review) is intended to support better project co-ordination across the organisation as the SDNPA move into delivery phase on the Partnership Management Plan (PMP).
- 2.4 The key principles underpinning the approach adopted are:
 - keep it simple and proportionate;
 - based on the user perspective (in this case project leads);
 - allow for co-ordination and better oversight of the delivery framework for the Partnership Management Plan.
- 2.5 The main purpose of the review is to recommend ways to achieve:

- better co-ordination of projects across the organisation;
- a consistent approach to developing, managing, monitoring and evaluating projects, whatever their size;
- develop mechanisms for sharing experience and information - avoidance of duplication and getting the most from initiatives;
- a consistent approach to reporting the outcomes of projects to Members and the wider public; and
- giving people the tools to do the job in the way the SDNPA would like it done.

3. Project Governance

- 3.1 A series of interviews with staff responsible for delivering projects identified a number of areas for improvement around the governance and management of projects. The requirements that project managers need to adhere to need to be clearly and consistently communicated. Alongside this, guidance and templates will be needed to support a consistent approach.
- 3.2 It is acknowledged that the process for providing an overview of what projects there are and how they contribute to the PMP objectives is a key area for improvement. A **flexible** and **proportionate** approach is needed to accommodate different types of project.
- 3.3 New software systems have been purchased which will be used to support project approval and monitor project deliverables at high level. The Grants and Evidence database will be used to capture project initiation and approval and the Aspireview performance management system will be used to monitor progress on projects and to capture evaluation information. The diagram at **Appendix I** sets out in simple terms how the approach will work and the documentation and systems used to support it.

4. Proposed approach to Project Evaluation

- 4.1 Responses from interviews indicate that project evaluation is perceived as a generally weak area across the organisation. In part this may be due to that fact that as a young organisation we have not had many completed projects to review until now. The process should not be cumbersome, and documentation should not be too onerous to complete. Above all the approach should be proportionate to the size of the project. The process adopted needs to be clearly defined and consistently applied. In response to these concerns, evaluation will be built into the beginning of projects, so that requirements are clear from the start. A standard way of capturing information will be developed.
- 4.2 Evaluation should ideally cover two areas, the management of the project itself and separately the outcomes. It was suggested that it is also important to carry out some form of evaluation for projects that are not approved or are not successful as there will be useful learning from them as well. A range of suggestions for carrying out evaluations were suggested and a mixed approach will be adopted dependent on the type of project.
- 4.3 The approach to innovation is important. If staff are encouraged to use innovative approaches they need to be sure that things that don't work will be used for learning as part of a "no blame" culture, to do otherwise would undermine that aspiration.
- 4.4 The option to evaluate and review projects part way through should be considered, to ensure they are on track, to pick up any succession issues after the project and importantly, to decide if a project should be abandoned or restructured.
- 4.5 Learning from the evaluation requirements of big funding providers should help inform the approach taken by the SDNPA. Where external evaluation is required by funders SDNPA will only require summary for its evaluation along with a case study. The external evaluation report will be made available to those who want it.
- 4.6 There was general agreement that there should be central oversight and collection of evaluation information, alongside general information about what projects are underway. A central repository for all project documentation was also considered helpful. The potential for support to facilitate evaluation exercises, either supported by SDNPA staff or potentially

externally (as with the production of the State of the National Park Report) will be considered where it is appropriate to the size and type of project.

- 4.7 In addition to carrying out evaluation exercises following projects, there is also need for clear and easy to use methods for sharing knowledge and learning. A number of mechanisms were suggested.
- 4.8 A specific resource on the intranet to support project leads will contain templates and guidance and up to date information about what projects are underway and where to find evaluation documentation. Where appropriate workshops could be used to share learning about a specific project or similar types of project, this would provide an opportunity for face-to-face learning and knowledge sharing.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 Steps will be taken to develop as much of this work as possible prior to the implementation of the new staff structure. The revised structure contains proposals for a dedicated project team which would provide much of the co-ordination suggested and may be responsible for implementing these recommendations. The next steps will be to:
 - 5.1.1 Ensure “back-office systems” allow the process for project initiation and approval through to monitoring and the evaluation phase appear seamless to the user.
 - 5.1.2 Establish a central repository for all project information and documentation.
 - 5.1.3 Establish a mechanism to review and improve project methodologies as required following project evaluation.
 - 5.1.4 Carry out further research to see if it would be possible to develop a standard set of SMART indicators which could be used for evaluation exercises.
 - 5.1.5 Agree an approach to the production of case studies about projects with the Communications Team.
 - 5.1.6 Produce new procedures, guidance and templates to support the revised process and communicate these clearly to staff involved in projects.
 - 5.1.7 Produce a project monitoring report for Resources and Performance Committee in February 2014.

6. Resources

- 6.1 The systems required to manage and monitor projects have already been, or are in the process of being, implemented. The main resource required to implement the next steps is staff time. Currently this work is being co-ordinated by the Performance and Business Planning Manager and this will continue to be the case until such time as any new structure is implemented. In addition, some time will be required from other staff across the organisation, particularly those in the External Funding and Evidence and Performance Teams, specifically to support the development of systems referred to in paragraph 5.1.1. However it is anticipated that this can be contained within existing job roles.

7. Risk management

- 7.1 The risks associated with this approach can be split into the risks of the approach itself and the risks of not doing anything to address the issues outlined in this report.
- 7.2 In terms of the project itself the risks are: the approach is not used by staff. Part of the mitigation for this has been the approach of carrying out interviews to gain insight from those currently involved in projects as to the issues and concerns. These have been incorporated into the process. Further mitigation will be provided by communicating clearly what is required and a strong commitment from managers to make it understood that the process is important and must be followed.
- 7.3 A further risk is that there may be some interruption during the implementation of the revised structure for the organisation as there will inevitably be a transition period where work and responsibilities are handed over to the new staff in post. They may have their own ideas about how the process should be implemented. The mitigation for this is approval for this approach being endorsed by senior managers and Members and as much work being carried out as

possible prior to the implementation of the new project governance arrangements.

7.4 One of the risks of not implementing the recommendations is that the SDNPA continues with an inconsistent approach, which is widely considered inadequate. This may lead to the organisation making mistakes because of failure to learn.

7.5 One of the major risks, which is touched on by the peer review is that the SDNPA is not able to demonstrate achievement of PMP objectives in a rigorous way.

7.6 The mitigation for all of these is to implement a revised governance framework for projects across the organisation as recommended in this report.

8. Human Rights, Equalities, Health and Safety

8.1 Support for users of the Aspireview system and the Grants and Evidence database who have particular needs will be evaluated and any reasonable adjustments made. This will need to be done on a case by case basis as need arises.

9. Sustainability

9.1 The recommendations in this report support the fourth sustainability principle - promoting good governance by putting in place mechanisms that contribute to the better governance of the organisation and also support the capacity of the SDNPA and partners to deliver the outcomes of the PMP.

10. External Consultees

10.1 None.

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Appendix I - Proposed Project Governance Process

SDNPA Consultees Chief Executive Officer, Director of Corporate Services, Director of Planning, Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Director of Operations, Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Monitoring Officer & Legal Services, Performance Management Group, External Funding Manager, External Funding Co-ordinator.

Background Documents Report to Resources and Performance Committee RPC15/13 20 June 2013
http://www.southdowns.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/345912/Agenda-item-8.pdf#

Proposed Project Governance Process

