

Terms of Reference for Standards and Audit Committee Review of the Set-up of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)

Purpose

The SDNPA is now a well-established authority with effective governance and operational stability. In common with good practice, now is an appropriate time for an internal Standards and Audit Committee assessment of any lessons that can be learnt from the establishment of the SDNPA including its HQ accommodation strategy.

The aim will be to:

- a) Present a short note to Defra of any key lessons to be learnt from the set-up of the SDNPA to assist them in the future establishment of any similar bodies;
- b) Advise the NPA on any lessons to be learnt for the SDNPA arising from the set-up, including the HQ accommodation strategy;
- c) Make recommendations to the SDNPA in relation to any changes that might be necessary to the SDNPA's framework of governance and accountability.

Governance

A one-off exercise by the SDNPA Standards and Audit Committee, carried out by internal audit and managed by a steering group accountable to the Committee consisting of the Chair of Standards and Audit, an independent member of the Committee, another SDNPA Member, the Director of Corporate Services and another member of staff.

Method

The work will be undertaken by internal audit, guided by the steering group and under the day to day oversight of Hélène Rossiter. It will be carried out primarily through a review of the key documents and informal discussions. There will be no formal evidence or hearings.

Timescale

These terms of reference will be considered by the meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee on 13 September and the exercise will be launched by a meeting of the steering group in early October. The draft report will be presented to the 11 December meeting of the Standards and Audit Committee. Any necessary additional work will be undertaken in early 2013 and the Committee's conclusions will be presented to the 19 February 2013 NPA alongside an action plan for any proposed changes in the SDNPA's policies or procedures.

Scope

The review should focus on the strategic issues and any lessons to be learnt for the future. It should be guided by the following work plan:

- a) A description of the context within which the set-up took place. This should include the context in which the set-up took place, the resources available to the set-up team, the operating model and the high expectations of the National Park, taking into consideration Defra expectations and requirements;
- b) An examination of the publicly announced timetable leading to full operation on 1 April 2011;
- c) An examination of the basis of the transfer of the South Downs Joint Committee on 1 April 2011;
- d) An assessment of the first year of operation from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 including consideration of the balance of temporary versus contract staff in providing services;
- e) An examination of the Authority's HQ accommodation strategy and associated decision-making and implementation.

Conclusions

In the light of all of the above:

- What lessons, if any, can be learnt by:
 - a) Defra;
 - b) SDNPA?
- What changes, if any, should be made to the current HQ accommodation strategy?
- What changes, if any, should be made to the current governance of the SDNPA?