

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 27 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 10am

Present: Sebastian Anstruther, Ken Bodfish (Chair), Tim Burr, Janet Duncton, Philip Ede, Daniel Humphreys, Helen Jackson, Russell Oppenheimer and Pete West

Independent Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Anne Rehill (Performance and Projects Manager), Steven Bedford (Principal Accountant), Kathleen Downes (Internal Auditor), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Mike Hughes (Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager), Chris Fairbrother (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead-Chalk), Vicky Patterson (HR Manager) and Jon Wayte (Safety Officer).

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

43. The Chair opened the meeting
44. The Chair welcomed all those present and stated that:
  - The meeting was being webcast by the Authority and would be available for subsequent on-line viewing. Anyone entering the meeting was considered to have given consent to be filmed or recorded, and for the possible use of images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purpose
  - SDNPA Members had a primary responsibility for ensuring that the Authority furthered the National Park Purposes and Duty. Members regarded themselves first and foremost as Members of the Authority, and would act in the best interests of the National Park as a whole, rather than as representatives of their appointing body or any interest groups.

#### **ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

45. Apologies were received from Jo Carr, Norman Dingemans, Chris Dowling, Mark Dunn and Margaret Paren.

#### **ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

46. Carole Nicholson declared a Public Service Interest in Agenda Item 15 as Chair of the Sussex Wildlife Trust.
47. Sebastian Anstruther declared a Personal Interest in Agenda Item 11 as Chair of Arun and Rother Rivers Trust.

#### **ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 19 JULY 2018**

48. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 19 July 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING**

49. Members asked for further guidance on declarations of interests with regards to grants allocated within their local area. The guidance would be circulated to all Members.

#### **ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS**

50. There were none.

## ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

51. There were no public speakers.

## ITEM 7: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

52. A motion was proposed and seconded that the Committee would not move into part II to discuss Agenda Item 15 and that the report set out at Agenda Item 15 and the sections of the appendices that did not relate to the financial affairs of the Authority or potential partnerships would be made public.
53. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee will not move into Part II for Agenda Item 15.

## AUDIT

### ITEM 8: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT FOR MONTH 4 2018/19

54. The Principal Accountant introduced report PR36/18 and reminded members of the report contents.
55. The Committee commented that:
- It was good to see the Authority raising money but it would be helpful to have more information regarding how the income had been raised and the criteria then used to allocate the money.
56. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The £50,000 income target to fund activities for the Trust was unconnected to the South Downs Trust and was a target set for the Authority. There was a budget variance due to the decision having been made on which SDNPA activities to support.
  - Much of the income generated had come from the Planning consultancy work and Members would be able to discuss whether £50,000 was the correct figure within the Budget workshops.
  - Variances within the Planning budgets were also due to more applications having been received and the 20% increase in fees.
  - The signage project was taking longer than expected and installation was expected October to December 2018. A report with regards to the lessons learnt would be brought to a future P&R committee.
57. Janet Duncton joined the meeting
58. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Noted the 2018/19 revenue forecast position as at month 4, 2018/19
  - 2) Noted the 2018/19 capital forecast position as at month 4, 2018/19
  - 3) Noted the current Treasury Management overview and position as at month 4, 2018/19.

### ITEM 9: INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT

59. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR37/18 and reminded members of the report contents.
60. The Committee commented that:
- It would be helpful to have an additional column on the list of Audit recommendations not yet implemented table to show what the revised due date was.
  - Members would like to input into the project management review.
61. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- A review of project management processes was taking place. The review was mainly connected to the release of capital from the Strategic Fund. The review was behind schedule due to other priority work. A report of where the review had got to and how it would be progressed would be brought to a future committee.

62. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted
- 1) Progress against the Internal Audit Annual Plan (2018/19) and
  - 2) Progress in implementing the agreed audit actions.

## **PERFORMANCE AND PROCEDURES**

### **ITEM 10: ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2017/18**

63. The HR Manager and Safety Officer introduced report PR38/18 and reminded members of the report content.
64. The Committee commented that:
- In future the Annual Report should contain an appendix with a statistical annual summary
  - Members should be informed on joining the Authority that Simply Health is a benefit in kind.
  - It would be helpful for members to see the outcomes of the internal Health and Wellbeing staff group.
  - Risk can be by association e.g. reputational risk
65. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The internal Health and Safety Committee, which was well represented across all directorates, looked at the statistics and any analyses and trends that appear in the data. SDNPA saw a low rate of incidents overall (as compared with similar size organisations) though some types of incident were more prevalent than at other NPAs, such as driver/vehicle related incidents.
  - Incidents also covered those from the Volunteer Ranger Service and any actions arising were discussed at the Volunteer Ranger Service Committee.
  - All staff that drive Land Rovers off road have had off road driver training.
  - Health and Safety procedures had recently been audited and a report of the findings would be presented to a future P&R Committee.
  - There was a 40% uptake of staff using the Simply Health scheme.
  - SDNPA didn't currently own any property other than the South Downs Centre and while liable for all staff and volunteers in most circumstances, when they were on land owned by other organisations/individuals then the respective landowner may share some liability.
  - The work on finding a good standard of accommodation for all area offices was progressing well. New accommodation had been sought for the Eastern and Western area teams.
66. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee
- 1) Noted the reported and continuing improvement in the overall safety management of SDNPA, and
  - 2) Endorsed the proposals for further priorities and actions

### **ITEM 11: PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 1 2018/19**

67. The Major Planning Projects and Performance Manager introduced the planning performance for quarter 1 in report PR39/18 and gave a presentation
68. The Committee commented that:
- Once a year it would like to see a detailed report of planning performance of all host authorities and of the Authority's own planning team.

69. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The bulk of the Planning Applications received fell into the 'other category' as they were applications such as householder, change of use, listed buildings, etc.
  - The extension of time was a valuable tool available to all Local Planning Authorities in England but had to be used carefully.
  - The Chief Executive met the Chief Executive of Host Authorities on average once a quarter and discussed planning performance at these meetings. The Leader of each Council also joined these meetings approximately once a year.
70. The Performance and Projects introduced the project performance for Quarter 1 in report PR39/18.
71. The Committee commented that:
- The Red project on the sediment and mitigation on the River Rother PHD had been submitted and would be available shortly to SDNPA.
  - It was difficult to follow the report and gain an understanding of what the deliverables were, what was trying to be achieved by who and when.
  - It would be helpful to have a succinct summary of the implications of failure of a red project.
  - It would like a member workshop or future committee report on the work happening with Green Infrastructure Framework.
72. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Heritage at Risk case study would be circulated to Members of the Committee.
  - The catch-up plans for the Heathlands Reunited project would enable the project to be back on track by the end of the next work season.
  - The delay with regards to the Centurion Way completion was due to Purpose 1 and Purpose 2 of the SDNPA being in direct conflict with each other. SDNPA was trying to ensure that no routes went near to the tunnels disturbing the roosting bats which would cause Natural England to raise an objection in the planning process. The construction phase wouldn't start for at least another year and the capital also still needed to be sought from grant funds.
  - The priorities of the visitor giving programme and continuing to work with the South Downs Trust to encourage a culture philanthropy were in the Corporate Plan for 2018-19 and were therefore currently measured against it. In future these would not be reported to committee as the South Downs Trust was a separate entity and would not be measured against future corporate plans.
  - The member survey had already been completed earlier in 2018 and a workshop had been held with members on the outcomes.
  - The Rampion project was a year behind schedule due to the collapse of Carillion and bad weather.
73. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee:
- 1) Received the Quarter 1 performance report
  - 2) Did not wish to make any recommendations to Officers on the report

## ITEM 12: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

74. The Head of Governance introduced report PR40/18 and reminded members of the report content.
75. The Committee commented that:
- There was an overlap between risk 21 (delivery and reputation) and risk 13 (partner expectations) and then a duplication of wording with risk 2 (finance and budgets).
  - That there were a number of identified risks facing the Authority and the Authority needed to maintain awareness across all the risks.

76. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Health and Safety risk was reported to committee due to a specific Health and Safety Audit recommendation.
  - It was important to have a finance and budget risk on the risk register as a separate risk.
  - The pensions fund risk had been added to the risk register due to member request and it would be useful to leave on the register to track the risk for the time being.
  - The SDNPA grant was currently protected and was index linked. The risks around grant reduction and scenario planning would be discussed within the Member budget workshop sessions.
  - Planning income was monitored on the planning directorate risk register.
77. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee noted the Corporate Risk Register as at September 2018.
78. Philip Ede left the meeting

## STRATEGY

### ITEM 13: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE

79. The Director for Countryside Policy and Management gave the Committee a verbal update on the work of the Task and Finish Group and made the following points:
- A successful Partnership Management Plan workshop had been held on 25 September. Attendees included current members of the South Downs Partnership but also new potential members not currently on the South Downs Partnership. The workshop had been extremely successful.
  - Attendees prioritised a long list of programme areas and suggested potential projects.
  - Information about the Partnership Management Plan would be fed in to the Parishes workshops being held in November to engage communities in the Management Plan.
  - The new Partnership Management Plan for 2019 to 2024 would be a web based interactive document rather than a static PDF document.
  - A further workshop would be held on 24 January 2019.
80. The Committee commented that:
- The workshop had been extremely constructive and thanks were expressed to the Director of Countryside & Policy Management, the Performance and Project Manager, Strategy leads and the Officers involved.
  - All members were invited to the Task and Finish Group.
  - A Communication and Engagement Strategy was currently being produced by the Communications team and would be reported to a future Committee.
81. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Projects happened both inside and outside the SDNPA boundary.

## GRANTS AND PROJECTS

### ITEM 14: PROJECT EVALUATION – BIG CHALK

82. The Performance and Project Manager and the Landscape and Biodiversity Lead - Chalk introduced report PR41/18 and reminded members of the report content.
83. Currently only £10k of £150k allocated budget for the Big Chalk project had been spent. The £140k had been returned to the strategic fund and unallocated for future years.
84. The Committee commented that:
- There had been a change in attitude of people in recent years. Positive change in removing nitrate in water was beginning although it would take many years to be

completely removed. People now felt that they could make a difference.

85. **RESOLVED:** That the committee:

- 1) Received the evaluation
- 2) Did not wish to make any recommendation to officers as a result of the learning from the evaluation
- 3) Agreed that the learning from the evaluation be added to the improvement plan.

#### **ITEM 15: ENTERPRISE AND INVESTMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

86. The Chief Executive introduced report PR41/18 and explained to Members that there were 3 levels of conditionality with regards to the acquisition of Seven Sisters Country Park. Firstly the SDNPA need to be the preferred bidder, secondly there needed to be a strong business case and thirdly SDNPA Members needed to agree. There would be a NPA workshop on the 16 October for all Members

87. The Committee commented that:

- The Expression of Interest submission submitted to East Sussex County Council understated what the SDNPA could offer and did not make mention of the Partnership Management Plan.
- Was this an opportunist or a strategic opportunity? Was the SDNPA considering the acquisition of the Seven Sisters County Park because it is available and would it consider a different country park in a different part of the SDNP?
- How would the Governance arrangements work around the management of the Country Park?
- SDNPA should not be a reactive organisation and since its establishment it had grown in maturity within its operations and was ready to take the next steps in owning and managing an asset. This would allow the SDNPA to showcase best practice.
- It would like to see detailed analysis of the inherent financial risks connected with the SDNPA acquiring the Seven Sisters Country Park.

88. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- East Sussex County Council were aware that at stage this no decision had been taken by the Authority
- If the SDNPA does agree to acquire Seven Sisters County Park it would not exhaust its borrowing capacity. All funds used would be from borrowing and not from the core SDNPA funds.
- Scenarios of the budget implications would be included within the budget workshops and in order for the SDNPA to consider acquiring Seven Sisters Country Park the budget analysis would need to see a return.

89. It was proposed and seconded to amend the recommendation from noting the ongoing work to endorsing the ongoing work of the Enterprise Task and Finish Group. Members discussed whether this was the appropriate wording and took a vote. The amendment was carried.

90. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee endorsed the on-going work of the Enterprise and Investment Task and Finish Group.

#### **CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 1pm.