

## **Unconfirmed minutes – to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Committee**

### **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

#### **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 6 JUNE 2019**

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

Present: Ken Bodfish (Chair), Tim Burr, Jo Carr, 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), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also attended by: Kathleen Downes (Internal Auditor), Adam Brown (Research and Evidence Officer), Ruth James (Communications and Engagement Manager), Mark Rose (External Funding Co-ordinator).

#### **OPENING REMARKS**

234. The Chair opened the meeting.

235. 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 furthers 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**

236. Apologies were received from Sebastian Anstruther, Chris Dowling, Janet Duncton, Daniel Humphries, Helen Jackson and Margaret Paren.

237. The Chair informed the Committee that the Committee was not quorate and that Standing Orders stated that at the discretion of the Chair the meeting could go ahead but would not make any resolutions and where resolutions were required they would be referred to the NPA or next meeting of the Committee.

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

238. Tim Burr declared a Public Service Interest in Agenda Item 14 as a Parish Member awaiting the result of West Sussex Parish's appointment process.

#### **239. ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 25 APRIL 2019**

240. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 29 April 2019 were agreed as a correct record and will be ratified at the next meeting of the Committee.

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

241. There were none

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

242. There were none

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### **ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

243. There were no Public Speakers.

### **AUDIT**

### **ITEM 7: ANNUAL AUDIT FEE LETTER 2019/20**

244. The Principal Accountant introduced report PR17/19, on behalf of the External Auditor Grant Thornton, and reminded members of the report content.

245. Members commented that:

- The scope of work to be carried out was satisfactory.
- The document refers to the Authority as a Council and should be raised with the External Auditor.

246. The consensus view of the members was that the 2019/20 fee letter was acceptable.

### **ITEM 8: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2018/19: PROVISIONAL OUTTURN**

247. The Principal Accountant introduced report PR18/19 and reminded members of the report content.

248. Members commented that:

- It would be useful for the Committee to have a table of the key posts in place and any vacancies.
- They would like a future annual HR report to include looking at sickness levels.
- Helpful for the reports to contain a glossary of the terminology.
- They would like to see a future report to be brought to the committee detailing the level of investment returns of other National Park Authorities compared to SDNPA.
- They would like to see the returns of investment at least hitting the level of inflation.
- The Authority had always agreed that the reserves should be significantly large enough to defend any challenges to its planning decisions.

249. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The under-spend within the Planning Directorate was due to cost savings and income generation, and not related to staff vacancies.
- Each quarterly budget report could contain information on the staffing position.
- The Authority had always decided to keep a lean staffing model and currently had 130 FTE staff posts. In the recent staff survey there was an extremely high reported level of staff satisfaction.
- The additional £24,000 costs to the eastern area team accommodation was due to the conversion of the Stanmer Depot by BHCC taking longer than expected.
- Staff were working on addressing the inconsistent provisions between the Financial Procedures and the Committee Terms of Reference.

250. The consensus view of members was that the recommendations within the report were acceptable to be reported to the NPA for approval.

### **ITEM 9: INTERNAL AUDIT – ANNUAL REPORT AND OPINION FOR 2018/19**

251. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR19/19 and reminded members of its content.

252. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The survey to assess the effectiveness of the internal audit function was sent to P&R Committee Members and had a 50% return rate.

253. The consensus view of the members was that the Internal Audit Annual Report and Opinion

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for 2018/19 was acceptable.

### **ITEM 10: ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND UPDATED LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

254. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/19 and stated that subject to timescales it would be reported to either the next available NPA or P&R committee for approval.
255. Members commented that:
- Any changes to the Local Code of Corporate Governance should be highlighted within the report.
  - The report should contain reference to the 7 Nolan Principles of Public Life.
256. The consensus view of the members was that the Annual Governance Statement and Updated Local Code of Corporate Governance to be brought back to either the next NPA or meeting of the committee, depending on the timescale.

### **ITEM 11: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

257. The Head of Governance introduced the report PR21/19 and reminded members of the report content.
258. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Authority's risk levels were as well mitigated as they could be at the current time but any political implications that might arise were unknown at the current point in time.
  - The outcomes of the Glover review were expected to be reported in the Autumn.
259. The consensus view of the members was that the Corporate Risk Register was acceptable at June 2019.

### **ITEM 12: APPROACH TO MONITORING THE PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN OUTCOMES**

260. The Performance and Projects Manager Introduced Report PR22/19 and reminded Members of the Report content. The Research and Evidence Officer helped answer questions.
261. The Chief Executive, on behalf of the Chair of the Partnership Management Plan Task and Finish Group (PMP T&FG), who had given apologies to the meeting, informed the Committee that as the T&FG had not agreed the approach and had asked for further information, she felt that it was appropriate that the T&FG should be allowed to consider the way forward at its next meeting. The T&FG Chair felt that SDNPA should demonstrate ambition and best practice in target setting for the next 5 years and that SMART targets along with explicit spatial priorities should be developed over the course of the coming year.
262. Members commented that:
- The overall concept of setting targets for measuring the PMP for 2019-2024 should not be completely disregarded just because it not would not work for some of the priority programmes. Benefit could be gained from setting targets in some areas and it would produce useful information.
  - People could become obsessed with the numbers and forget what was actually trying to be achieved. Data was only useful if it actually tells you something.
  - The data collection and analysis required to set targets for of all the Outcomes and Priority Programmes would be a huge amount of work, and therefore would need to have a very clear purpose.
  - Even if data was unavailable to set targets, we still need to monitor the direction of travel with the priority programmes.

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263. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- For many issues high level data was not available.
  - Trying to set targets with partners who were set Government targets could become very complex and difficult.
  - Further investigation of the feasibility of target setting with partners over the next year could proceed without extending the timetable for publication of the management plan.
264. The consensus view of the members was that the T&FG should consider the approach to monitoring the Partnership Management Plan Outcomes at its next meeting.

### **ITEM 13: ENTRY SIGNAGE**

265. The Communications and Engagement Manager introduced report PR23/19 and gave a presentation. The Head of Business Services assisted in answering questions.
266. Members commented that:
- The project had been a success
  - Their congratulations were passed to all members of staff that had been involved in the project and for overcoming the difficulties that had been faced throughout the project. The delays had allowed a number of templates and models to be designed that could be used for future signage.
  - Given the resistance to the signs in the early days, Members were now very proud to see the signs in place and see and hear how welcomed they have been by communities and residents across the whole of the National Park.
  - Thought should now be given about whether it was now a good time to redesign the National Park Logo taking account the shared identity.
  - Would it be possible to add the National Park identity to the back of existing parish signage?
  - The use of car stickers maybe another good way to share the shared identity.
267. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Placing signs on the back of an existing signs may alter the passive safety of the sign in question and would be unlikely to receive approval from Highways Authorities.
  - A maintenance plan was currently being put together which will include vegetation management.
  - A project for a Phase 2 of the entry signs would be reported to a future NPA along with the positive discussions from the Committee and the pictures of the currently installed signage.
  - A proposal called the 'Communities of the South Downs' would be reported to a future NPA and would include a package of measures to support Parishes in bettering their links to the National Park and improving their public space through signage and other means.
268. The consensus view of the members was that the entry signage was positive and should be extended to different locations within the SDNP.

### **ITEM 14: PARISH ENGAGEMENT**

269. The Communications and Engagement Manager introduced report PR24/19 and reminded members of the report content.
270. Members commented that:
- Parish Councils were still sometimes unaware of what work the SDNPA were involved in their area. On occasions information circulated to Parish Clerks was not then forwarded to Parish Members or residents and it maybe helpful if information could also

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be circulated to resident associations as well as Parish Councils.

- Information should also be communicated to communities outside of the National Park boundary.
- It may be helpful to ask Parish Councils to have a standing item on their agendas to receive the e-newsletter. Parishes could also be asked to nominate a South Downs National Park rep who would then communicate the SDNP messages to their Parish.
- Speakers should be aimed at the Annual Parish Meetings rather than the Annual General Meeting, as these are much better attended.
- Members were a key vehicle for the communicating the South Downs National Park messages and key messages should be communicated to them so they could be passed on.

271. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- This paper dealt only with the communications with formal parish councils and meetings and that there was a wide range of work going on with communities in and around the National Park – which was set out in the Communications & Engagement Strategy.
- Any approach taken has to be manageable as there were 176 Parish/Town Councils within the SDNP and the goal was to put in place measures that would not only be effective, but could be maintained so as not to raise and then dash expectations
- It was reiterated that the paper sets out a number of ways in which we could better communicate with our parish meetings including:
- Creation of a pool of possible speakers centred around the Parish Members that could deliver a presentation (updated annually). The presentation will contain all the key stories so that everybody has the same messages to present.
- A list of parish publications would be compiled and a monthly piece about the National Park would be sent to each parish publication.
- It was confirmed that further discussion would happen once all six parish Members were in place.

272. The consensus view of the members was that the proposed engagement methods were acceptable.

### **ITEM 15: ACCESS IMPROVEMENT AT YOUTH HOSTEL ASSOCIATION TRULEIGH HILL**

273. The External Funding Co-ordinator introduced report PR25/19 and was joined by Simon Ainley, the Head of Capital Fundraising at the YHA. Mark and Simon jointly gave a presentation.

274. Members commented that:

- It would be helpful if a timeline could be presented showing the different stages of the development.
- Fundraising could potentially be assisted by the South Downs Trust.
- To avoid potential reputational risks and if the SDNPA was committing funds from the strategic fund then the project should also meet the expectations of SDNPA.
- The lease from WSCC could be an issue
- There should be more emphasis on local procurement
- Lessons needed to be learnt from the South Downs Youth Hostel where the originally well-designed wildlife gardens were not maintained.

275. In response to questions officers and Simon Ainley from the YHA clarified that:

- The Truleigh Hill Youth Hostel was on 100 year lease from West Sussex County Council. Although West Sussex County Council had previously advised YHA that they had no resources to commit to the improvement works. Members suggested that

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maybe West Sussex County Council could consider transferring the freehold of the building to the YHA as this would make it easier for the YHA to apply for grant funding.

- The project was costing £400,000 of which the YHA had committed £270,000 leaving a shortfall of £130,000. The figure of what was invested by the YHA was agreed by the YHA board through examining the business case for each location.
- There was always lessons to be learn from other developments and as part of the project the ongoing sustainability would be looked at.
- The YHA would like to do more with regards locally sourced foods but did have a responsibility to take into account issues such as allergens. The YHA as an organisation are looking at this issue.
- The Chief Executive of both the YHA and SDNPA meet regularly and as part of that discussion they had been looking at other potential opportunity sites close to the South Downs Way

276. The consensus view of the members was that the release of the £70,000 from the Strategic Fund for access improvements at YHA Truleigh Hill was acceptable to be reported to NPA for approval.

### **CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 1.15pm