

## **SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

### **POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING – 26 NOVEMBER 2020**

Held online using the Zoom Cloud Meetings Software at 1.30pm

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Chris Dowling, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt, Doug Jones, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Michael Lunn, Russell Oppenheimer, Martin Osborne, Henry Potter, Isabel Thurston, Richard Waring and Stephen Whale

Independent Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson

Ex-officio Members: Ian Phillips and Vanessa Rowlands

Other SDNPA Members: Barbara Holyome

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning) Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Jill Fisher (Deputy Section 151 Officer), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance), Richard Sandiford (Senior Governance Officer) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Chris Fairbrother (Landscape & Biodiversity Strategy Lead), Ruth James (Communication and Engagement Manager), Amanda Elms (Learning, Outreach & Volunteer Lead), Daniel Greenwood (Volunteer Development Officer), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead), Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Allison Thorpe (Access and Recreation Strategy Lead), Andy Conlan (Grant Thornton – Internal Auditor), Mark Winton (Internal Auditor), Vicky Patterson (Human Resources Manager), Debbie Hartman (Human Resources Manager), Bruno Averio (Apprentice Co-ordinator), Jon Wayte (PDNPA Safety Officer).

### **OPENING REMARKS**

119. The Chair opened the meeting welcomed all those present and stated that:

- Due to the current Coronavirus pandemic the South Downs Centre and Memorial Hall remained closed until further notice, hence this meeting of the South Downs National Park Authority's Policy and Resources Committee was held using the Zoom Cloud Meetings software.
- 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.

120. The Senior Governance Officer reminded Members of the protocol that would be followed during the meeting

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

121. Apologies were received from Helen Burton.

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

122. Doug Jones declared a public service interest in Item 11 as a trustee of Petersfield Museum.

123. Martin Osborne declared a public service interest in Items 13, 14 & 15 as a Councillor of Brighton and Hove City Council.

124. Annie Brown declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 11 as a farmer/landowner

at Truleigh Hill.

### **ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 2020**

125. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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

126. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management updated the Committee on the following:
- Minute 98 which referred to the development of an Authority 'App', the Director updated the Committee that the Communication and Engagement Strategy would be presented to the December NPA and would set out how and where the Authority used different channels to communicate.
  - Minute 104 which referred to updated financial information, the Director informed the Committee that the draft Quarter 2 Budget Monitoring report was circulated to all Members of the Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> November.
127. In response to a member question on whether endorsed WEPs are marked up to say that they have been endorsed, members were informed that it was for the estates themselves to decide how to 'badge' the endorsed WEP, however feedback would be given to the WEP team with the potential of using the shared identity. An Endorsed WEP does have material consideration within the planning system and the actions within the plan were followed up by SDNPA Officers each year.

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

128. The Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that there was one urgent update to an item of business. This related to appendix 3 of agenda item 13 (Audited Statement of Accounts) which comprised the Letter of Representation to be signed on behalf of the Authority. An updated version of Appendix 3 had been received setting out a revised version of the letter which contained additional references to the Covid 19 Pandemic that had been omitted from the published version. The Chair had considered this matter and had agreed that there were special circumstances that required the Committee to take this as an urgent update to an already published item of business, these circumstances being that it was not possible to defer consideration of this item to a future meeting as the statutory deadline for the signing of the letter was 30 November 2020. The replacement appendix 3 to agenda item 13 was published on the Authority's website and sent to all Members of the Committee on Tuesday 24 November 2020. The Chair had agreed that this would be taken as part of item 13.

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

129. There were no members of the public who had requested to speak.

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

130. Officers advised that there was no requirement to consider any item in private session.

### **ITEM 8: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN THEMATIC UPDATE: CLIMATE CHANGE COMMITMENTS AND ACTION PLAN**

131. The Landscape and Biodiversity Strategy Lead introduced report PR20/21-19, gave a presentation and reminded Members of the process that had been followed in the creation of the Climate Change Strategy and action plan.
132. The Chair explained to the Committee that due to the Covid 19 pandemic and changes to the way the Authority took decisions in the early part of the crisis the Climate Change Strategy had not been formally adopted and therefore the Committee were being asked to

endorse the work and recommend to the NPA for formal adoption.

133. The Committee commented that:

- The breadth and scope of the climate change work that had begun was impressive and to be commended.
- Clean Growth UK, which was a support network across the UK for businesses, could be a good partner for SDNPA.
- The forthcoming budget workshop in December could be used to review whether a new post should be considered for the co-ordination of the climate change work.
- Members should be counted as part of the resource for delivering the action plan.
- A number of partner Local Authorities had some excellent work happening and the Committee expressed their thanks to the Local Authority partners for the completion of the questionnaires.

134. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- There was an internal Officer 'Sustainability Group' which was looking at the best options for the NPA to improve its performance on a number of key issues such as purchasing, fuel and the creation of a carbon budget for the Authority. The Group was also developing a sustainability policy which would be brought back to members.
- The implications of Covid-19 have had a disproportionate impact on carbon metrics and partners would take into consideration that results would be skewed when working on baselines and trajectories. The pandemic had demonstrated different ways of working which involved less travel.
- The overlap between organisational culture and sustainability was something that could be explored further with the Member suggestion of officers looking at their own jobs and thinking of individual ways to reduce carbon consumption as well as making personal pledges. The Sustainability Group would be making a presentation at the next All Staff Member Event on the 15 December.
- It was recognised that there were lots of challenges ahead for businesses including Brexit but it was hoped that the shift to a low carbon economy would be seen as an opportunity.
- The Climate Change Reserve Fund could be used to fund projects such as the Community Energy Pathway and Officers would like to see other projects coming forwards.
- There was a newly established Local Planning Authority Climate Change Action Group which tried, as best as possible, to co-ordinate and identify opportunities for joint working across all the Local Authorities within the National Park.
- The Authority had recognised that the action plan needed to be resourced and this would result in better integration across the directorates.

135. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee resolved to:

- 1) Endorse the proposed climate change commitments, set out at para 1.1 ('a' to 'c') and the action plan set out at appendix 2 and recommend these to the NPA for formal adoption.
- 2) Note activity to date against the draft climate change commitments.

## ITEM 9: ENTRY SIGNAGE PHASE II: PROGRESS UPDATE

136. The Communication and Engagement Manager introduced report PR20/21-20 and reminded Members of the report content. Members were informed that the project was back on track following a delay from the impacts of Covid-19.

137. The Committee commented that:

- The signage also allows for a Purpose 1 benefit to be obtained because if members of the public were aware that they were in a National Park they were more likely to respect the environment.
- The signs were also an excellent example of public art and it was the right decision for the SDNP to be established and its identity in place before developing the signage project.
- Sometimes it was about the right type of signage to get members of the public to respect the information on the sign.

138. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The signs were designed for next to a carriage way rather than in a pedestrian location and therefore it would be difficult to include either brail or Makaton.
- The shared identity was on the new South Downs Way signage and was part of the 'Communities of the South Downs' project where communities were supported and advised on the development of signage for communities.
- Phase 2 of the signs had been split into 2 contracts 1 for the manufacture and 1 for the installation. Following a tendering exercise the manufacture and been awarded to Tara Signs in Lancing and the installation contract to A J Wells based in the Isle of Wight.

139. **RESOLVED:** That the Committee Resolved:

1. To note the progress on delivering the Entry Signage Phase II project

## ITEM 10: VOLUNTEERING UPDATE

140. The Learning, Outreach & Volunteer Lead and the Volunteer Development Officer gave a verbal update to the Committee.

141. Within the update to the Committee the following points were explained:

- All the volunteers and staff who had been involved with restarting volunteering following the pause caused by the Covid-19 pandemic were thanked.
- Volunteering can be categorised into 4 areas:
  - Volunteer Ranger Service (VRS). In 2018/19 there were over 300 volunteers contributing to 24,000 hours of work. Volunteer work was temporarily paused, due to Covid-19, on 17 March until October 2020. During the pause webinars were run to keep volunteers engaged and motivated which resulted in 20 hours of content and 225 live attendees. The VRS had a new Chair, Steve Brookman.
  - South Downs Volunteer Network (SDV). There were 100+ partners. As a result of the pandemic there had been a shift to meetings happening on zoom which had resulted in many more organisations, than would have physically, being able to attend and share information with each other. This would be continued for the future.
  - Micro Volunteering. This type of volunteering can happen anywhere at any time and was thought to be the future of volunteering.
  - South Downs Youth Action. Young people are hugely underrepresented making up only 4% of volunteers within the South Downs National Park. The Youth Ambassadors had given a youth voice to the Authority through attendance at Member Workshops, staff events and the Policy and Resources Committee.

142. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- There was a £13,000 Volunteer Training budget which was spent on upskilling the volunteers

- The number of volunteers able to complete volunteering was in direct proportion to the number of staff able to manage the volunteering activity. Micro-volunteering doesn't need the same level of staff input and therefore was a good way forward whilst also enabling the creation of stewards of the National Park.
- The South Downs Youth Action programme was for 16-24 year olds as this was the age bracket most underrepresented in volunteering. The 'I will' project with Clarion Housing was a year-long project to be launched in 2021 and would work with Neighbourhood Officers linking into young people from the age of 10 upwards.
- The Youth Ambassadors have presented to the South Downs Network and through partnership work with the South Downs Trust a temporary position of a Youth Action Officer would be appointed.
- Officers felt confident that there would be a lot of volunteers ready to go once volunteering could fully return. At present SDNPA did not have relationships with community pay back teams.
- There were extensive links with the formal education sector and Officer conversations had begun with organisations who were looking to offer residential volunteering opportunities.

## ITEM 11: QUARTER 2 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

143. The Performance and Research Lead and Project Management Lead introduced report PR20/21-21 and reminded members of the report content, making the following comments:
- The development of annual challenge fund had a red rag status because alternative sources of funds were still being explored.
  - The Petersfield Museum had been given a red rag status but since the publication of the report there had been an update from the Museum and the status would return to an amber.
  - The Tide Mills: A Living History project had a red rag status due to the impacts on Covid-19 and was seeking funding through an application with the Sustainable Communities Fund.
  - Currently there were over 50 projects in delivery and Officers were now working at maximum capacity. Members were advised that 'stress cracks' could become apparent in Quarter 3.
144. Consent for the transfer of ownership of the Seven Sisters Country Park had now been received from both Defra and Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government (MHCLG) and officers expressed their thanks to both departments for their support. Preparation for the conveyancing work had already begun and East Sussex County Council's legal team would now give the work their highest priority. It was expected that the Authority would take ownership of the Seven Sisters Country Park in 2021.
145. Members were advised that the Seven Sisters Project Board, which was attended by some Members, had detailed input into the project. The Business Plan would be brought back to a future NPA and Members were advised that the costs had increased from the previously approved business plan. The appointment of the Commercial Manager was also a good step in the Authority employing more commercially minded people.
146. The Chair advised members that the project management software Tableau was a good way of members finding out more about what projects were happening and their status.
147. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
1. Receive and note the Quarter 2 Corporate Performance and Project Performance report

148. The Committee adjourned for a 10-minute break

**ITEM 12: END OF PROJECT REVIEW – ACTIVE ACCESS FOR GROWTH (AAFG)**

149. The Access and Recreation Strategy Lead introduced report PR20/21-22 and reminded members of the report content.

150. The Committee commented that:

- Could there be opportunities, post Covid-19, for some of the big hospitals to deliver de-stress programmes for both patients and employees.
- Brighton and Hove City Council were introducing an electric bike scheme in the city and it would be interesting to know whether the introduction would see an increase in new audiences visiting the National Park.
- Adur and Worthing Councils had established a 'Going Local' Programme of work which had been successful in delivering social prescriptions and moving people away from GP surgeries.

151. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Social prescribing was often down to which sectors of the health service and which GP surgeries were able to offer it. SDNPA was working with the other Southern National Parks both bottom up and top down to deliver social prescribing.
- SDNPA was now in a different place to when the Active Access project was first set up and undertaken with a Health and Wellbeing Officer now in post and an outcome within the Partnership Management Plan.
- GPs do not get incentives for social prescribing in the same ways that they do for vaccinations and Officers recognised that there were better and easier ways of working to tap into the health sector.
- Funding for the project came from the Department for Transport.
- Future similar projects would be co-designed with the target audience so that the projects could be tailored to deliver exactly what was needed and what worked best for particular audiences.

152. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Receive the end of project review and note achievements, conclusions and recommendations of the Active Access for Growth project (AAFG)

153. Annie Brown left the meeting.

**ITEM 13: AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2019/20 AND LETTER OF REPRESENTATION**

154. The Deputy Section 151 Officer introduced report PR20/21-23 and reminded members of the report content.

155. A typographical error in the Appendices of published papers was identified and the 'Statement of Accounts 2019/20' was wrongly labelled on the document itself as Appendix 3 but referred to in the body of the report as Appendix 2. For clarity the correct reference for the 'Statement of Accounts 2019/20' should have been 'Agenda Item 13 Report PR20/21-23 Appendix 2'.

156. The Committee commented that:

- The dates identified within Appendix 2 on page 144, first paragraph, were not consistent with the Committee being asked to approve the accounts at the meeting.

157. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Due to Covid-19 the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations

2020 were passed to extend the deadline for Committee approval of the accounts from 31<sup>st</sup> July 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

- It was common practice for investments to take place in other Local Authorities and the different investment amounts identified within the reports (PR20/21-23) and PR(20/21-25) related to 2 different time periods. The following Treasury Management response was provided to the Committee:
  - *'In the early part of 2020, the SDNPA had a maturity of one of the Lloyds investment deals, and (BHCC Treasury Management) looked for other places to invest this money. As investment rates with Lloyds and Santander had tracked lower due to the change in Base Rate, BHCC looked at investing money with other Local Authorities as an alternative. There was a very large market in lending and borrowing between Local Authorities, and BHCC itself had a portfolio of around £40m lent to other LAs. The deal with Coventry City Council was a treasury fixed term deposit investment and was entered into as it represented a much higher yield in comparison to Lloyds and Santander at the time of undertaking the investment. The security of the investment was also higher with another LA as opposed to being with a bank, so the SDNP Authority was better off overall, with an improvement in both security and yield by undertaking the investment with Coventry. The authority received the principal and interest back at the end of the term of the investment. The authority were not investing in specific things linked to Coventry's capital programme, just a cash deposit'.*
- There had been an increase in the debtor amount for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts not because the Authority was holding onto monies for longer than necessary but because partners were slow to draw down on the funds. This would be reviewed further when the next round of CIL was considered.

158. Henry Potter and Chris Dowling left the meeting.

159. Following Member comments on the dates within the Statement of Accounts being inconsistent, the Committee agreed for the removal of the following paragraph from the 'Statement of Account 2019/20' on page 144 of the published papers

- *'The overall 2019/20 revenue position would be reported to the Authority in July 2020 as the Policy &Resources Committee had been temporarily suspended; the report can be found on the Authority's website, [www.southdowns.gov.uk](http://www.southdowns.gov.uk)'*

160. An amendment to recommendation 2 was proposed and seconded, to add the following words:

- *(erroneously identified as Appendix 3 in the published report) on the basis that the first paragraph of page 6 (page 144 of the agenda pack) of the Statement of Accounts be deleted.*

161. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note the Commentary on the Statement of Accounts set out in Appendix 1.
- 2) Approve the audited Statement of Accounts 2019/20 as set out in Appendix 2 (erroneously identified as Appendix 3 in the published report) on the basis that the first paragraph of page 6 (page 144 of the agenda pack) of the Statement of Accounts be deleted.
- 3) Approve the Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3.

#### **ITEM 14: AUDIT RESULTS REPORT 2019/20**

162. The External Auditor introduced report PR20/21-24, took the Committee through the Audit Findings Report for the South Downs National Park for the year ended 31 March 2020 and highlighted that an unqualified opinion had been issued.

163. The Head of Business Services expressed the Authority's thanks to both the BHCC finance team and External Auditors, Grant Thornton, for their work on the year-end and audit

work in the unusual working circumstances faced by Covid-19.

164. The Committee commented that:

- It was reassured to see that the issues identified within the 2018/19 audit in relation to section 106 and CIL had been addressed.

165. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The systems in place for managing S106 funds were robust and praise was expressed to the Planning team for their work.

166. **RESOLVED** The Committee resolved to:

1. Consider the findings as set out in the 2019/20 Audit Results Report.

#### **ITEM 15: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2020/21: MONTH 6**

167. The Deputy Section 151 Officer introduced report PR20/21-25 and reminded members of the report content.

168. Isabel Thurston left the meeting.

169. The Committee commented that:

- It sought reassurance that there was no conflict of interest in the Authority making the decision to invest its cash balances in Brighton and Hove City Council who undertake the Treasury Management function on behalf of the Authority.
- The potential conflict of interest should be explored further and information provided to the Committee.

170. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- It was common practice for National Parks and other Local Authorities to invest their cash balances in other Local Authorities.
- The SDNPA had a qualified accountant (Head of Business Services) who, on the Authority's behalf, independently reviewed the Treasury Management Strategy and the Annual Investment Strategy to ensure that oversight remained within the Authority. Treasury Management was a niche expertise and if the Authority were to undertake the Treasury Management function itself a different operating model would need to be used with the Section 151 Officer being employed directly by the Authority which would increase the Authority's operating costs.

171. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note the 2020/21 revenue forecast position as at month 6 of a net (£85,000) below budget variance.
2. Note the 2020/21 capital forecast position as at month 6 of a zero budget variance.
3. Note the reserves position as at month 6.
4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 6.

#### **ITEM 16: INTERNAL AUDIT – PROGRESS REPORT**

172. The Internal Auditor Introduced report PR20/21-26 and reminded members of the report content.

173. The Head of Business Services reported to the Committee that the Senior Management Team had agreed that future audit item should include looking at the potential risks brought on by staff working remotely and a heavier reliance on technology as well as the attempted fraud increase since lock down as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.



174. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note:

1. Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2020/21) and
2. The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.

**ITEM 17 & ITEM 18: ANNUAL HUMAN RESOURCES REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2019/20 & ANNUAL HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2019/20**

175. The Chair explained to the Committee that as much of the information in the Human Resources Report for the year 2019/20 and the Annual Health and Safety Report for the year 2019/ was duplicated the items would be taken together.

176. The Head of Human Resources introduced reports PR20/21-27 and PR20/21-28, reminded members of the reports contents and explained that the Covid-19 pandemic started at the end of the financial year and although referenced within the reports it would be expanded on for the following year.

177. The Committee commented that:

- It was pleased to see that the staff mental health was reflected in the Corporate Risk Register.

178. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- An enormous amount of work had been invested into staff mental health with mental health first aiders trained, counselling services available through Simply Health, dedicated intranet page and managers speaking to staff.
- A summary of the 2018 Staff Survey was available on the intranet and a full survey was repeated every 3 years. Although a key outcome was the delivery of bullying and harassment training through a programme of training (Ensuring Positive Workplace Culture) for managers and staff it was only identified as an issue within 5% of the survey responses but it was felt extremely important to address the issue.
- The Senior Management Team were very aware of the increased physical and mental pressures that staff were under and a further health and wellbeing survey would be issued to staff in February 2021. The survey would follow up on the survey conducted in August 2020.

179. **RESOLVED ITEM 17:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note the report

180. **RESOLVED ITEM 18:** The Committee resolved to:

1. Note the report
2. Commend the continuing improvements in the overall management of Occupational Safety and Health at South Downs National Park Authority.
3. Endorse the proposals for further priorities and actions.

**ITEM 19: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

181. The Head of Governance introduced report PR20/21-29 and reminded members of the report content.

182. The Committee commented that:

- Effort should be placed into relationship building with partners, particularly those severely impacted by Covid-19, to try and bring the 'Projects – External facing (Delivery and Reputation)' Risk down from a Red Rag rating to a yellow rating.

183. Members highlighted that the risk register was not portraying a 'rosy' picture and asked the Senior Management Team to explain what the mood of the staff was and how the

organisation was feeling with pressures faced such as Covid-19, Brexit and uncertainties of the spending review. In response to the question SMT responded

- The organisation was reaching peak delivery which did bring extra pressures on staff and SMT were very aware not to put any additional pressures on the 'system'. A health and wellbeing survey had been carried out with staff in August and highlighted the vast majority of staff were happy with the remote working and the organisation was working very effectively. Both SMT and OMT were constantly reviewing the situation and line managers were playing an essential role in checking in with staff.
- Staff morale was high prior to lock down but SMT were aware that lots of staff reserves had now been used. SMT had been very impressed with the innovative ways staff and teams had worked during the pandemic. Staff ambitions were still high, but workload was at peak capacity and staff needed to prioritise what was important. SMT were also aware that being a good manager in lock down was harder work than in normal times.
- Flexibility was needed in how teams communicated. SMT were aware that flexibility was needed on all sides. Keeping the offices open for a limited number of staff had also been useful in supporting staff. Staff priorities needed to be organised in such a way that they didn't cause additional stress. SMT were aware that if staff remained under additional pressure that the efficiency and productivity of the organisation would probably be maintained but innovation could be lost and ways to address this were being looked at.

184. **RESOLVED** The Committee resolved to:

- 1) Note the Corporate Risk Register as at November 2020.

The meeting concluded at: 5.28pm

**CHAIR**