

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 10.30am

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Doug Jones, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch and Henry Potter.

Other SDNPA Members: Ian Phillips (Authority Chair)

SDNPA Officers: Trevor Beattie (Chief Executive Officer), Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Governance Officer).

Also Attended by: Liz Gent (Project Management Lead), Tanya Hibberd (Performance and Research Lead), Vicky Patterson (Human Resources Manager) and Mark Winton (Chief Internal Auditor).

OPENING REMARKS

- 42. The Chair opened the meeting
- 43. 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.
- 44. The Chair informed the Committee that the Eastbourne Member, Amanda Morris, had resigned her position on the SDNPA.

ITEM 1: ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR

- 45. The Chair informed the Committee that nominations for the positions of Deputy Chair closed 5 working days before the meeting. Baroness Jones of Whitchurch was the only nomination.
- 46. **RESOLVED:** Baroness Jones of Whitchurch was duly elected as Deputy Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee until the Authority AGM in 2022, or the end of her term of appointment whichever was soonest.

ITEM 2: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 47. Apologies were received from Morris Findley, Tom Fourcade, Lawrence Leather, Michael Lunn, Carole Nicholson, Martin Osborne, Isabel Thurston and Stephen Whale.

ITEM 3: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 48. Angus Dunn declared a prejudicial interest in Item 19 and withdrew from the meeting for this item.

ITEM 4: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 15TH JULY 2021

- 49. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 15th July 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ITEM 5: MATTERS ARISING

- 50. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management updated the Committee on the

following:

- The review of the Whole Estate Plan process was now completed. The full review and report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee.
- Work with the ‘Nature Recovery’ campaign was ongoing. Back office functions were being developed ahead of the ‘call for sites’ launch, which would provide farmers and landowners with the opportunity to put forward projects.
- All the positions on the South Downs Partnership had been filled and the next meeting would happen by the end of 2021.

51. The Committee commented that:

- When considering Nature Recovery careful consideration needed to be given to the balance between Purpose 1 (Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage) and Purpose 2 (Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of national parks by the public) for example if road verges were allowed to grow freely (to support wildlife diversity)(this could inhibit public access by making narrow roads difficult or dangerous to use.
- The Authority needed to be active and alert to the emerging markets and metrics around nature recovery.
- The next round of Parish workshops would be devoted to the ‘Nature Recovery’ topic.

52. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The aim of the ‘Nature Recovery’ campaign was to enable more land to be managed for nature, which included land that was being put forward for nitrate credits.

ITEM 6: URGENT MATTERS

53. There were none.

ITEM 7: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

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

ITEM 8: NEED FOR PART II EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

ITEM 9: QUARTER I CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

56. The Director of Countryside Policy and Management introduced report (PR21/22-08) and reminded members of the report content. The Performance and Research Lead and Project Management Lead helped answer questions.

57. The Committee commented that:

- Congratulations went to the Farming in Protected Landscapes Team (FiPL) which was an example of good practice in efficient project launch and management.
- The character of the Seven Sisters Country Park had already positively changed positively since SDNPA had become the new owners and suggestion was made for QR code installation to provide walkers with more information, similar to the “meet the farmer” QR codes.
- It was important that the Performance and Projects Reports not only showed whether projects were on time and in budget but also showed the impact they were having and overall progress towards the outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan.

58. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Officers continued to work closely with projects in Eastbourne and provided reassurance to Members that the recent Member changes were not a reflection on the strong working relationship with the Council.
- A meeting had recently taken place with the new Regional Director of the Environment Agency with a discussion on the topic of shingle clearing at the mouth of the Cuckmere Estuary. The Environment Agency had 2 key priorities within the SDNP, one being the Cuckmere and the other the Adur and Arun river catchments. The Environment Agency had a budget to clear the shingle, which would be undertaken under their own timescale.
- Meetings with relevant Project Managers had taken place to discuss why some projects had remained amber. A large number of the issues were linked to Covid-19 with many projects also relying on input from partners who had themselves been affected by Covid-19. Reference was also made to the fact that Quarter 1 closed in June and many of the reported delays were now beginning to pick up.
- A new Research and Evidence Officer had been appointed and was due to start work in November 2021.
- The introduction of a pre application fee charging schedule, had a red RAG status and was significantly behind due to competing priorities within the Planning Team but Officers confirmed that this was still a priority and would be targeted and dealt with quickly.
- The legacy for the Heathlands Reunited project was in 2 parts with the management of the sites falling into the Nature Recovery campaign and through the outreach community and engagement work funded by East Hampshire District Council and Whitehill Town Council Section 106 developer contributions. The S106 money was available in perpetuity but the contract with SDNPA wasn't. The outreach work to date had been successful.
- Further up to date information would be presented to the NPA on the Seven Sisters Project. The transfer of ownership took place on 30th July 2021 and much of quarter 1 had been taken up with the legal work around the transfer of ownership. Since transfer a full team of staff had been employed, more than 6000 people had been engaged with, Phase 1 contracts had been allocated and although there were a few slight delays to get hold of supplies it was anticipated the building works would be completed on time. More recently work on the cottages, toilets and raised floor in the visitor centre had also begun as well as a new contract signed for cycle hire.
- The South Downs Enterprise Partnership would be referred to as 'Our South Downs' and launched early 2022. The initial sign up would be free to businesses and they would then be able to unlock different levels of support for subscription.

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

- 1) Note the content of the Performance Report.

ITEM 10: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22: MONTH 4

60. The Section 151 Officer introduced report PR21/22-09 and reminded members of the report contents.

61. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
1. Note the 2021/22 revenue forecast position as at month 4 of a net £80,000 below budget variance.
 2. Note the 2021/22 capital forecast position as at month 4 of a zero budget variance.
 3. Note the reserves position as at month 4.
 4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 4.

ITEM 11: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

62. The Head of Governance & Support Services introduced report PR21/22-10 and reminded members of the report content including that discussions were currently taking place to assess whether there were any further actions the Committee could take, within its remit, to consider the risk register and further develop the Committee's understanding of the management of risks faced by the Authority. .
63. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- SDNPA had chosen the approach to outsource many of the services needed for the Authority to function, such as IT, and although there were still many benefits to this, one of the negatives was that there were single points of potential failure. The organisation had an extremely good and well-tested disaster recovery plan, which had been used in the past and had proved to be robust.
 - Vacancies within the Planning team were not due to low salaries as SDNPA planning salaries were competitive within the public sector. The Authority was often good at attracting new employees but not so good at retaining trained staff as employees often left for promotion or to move to the private sector. The Authority was also very good 'at growing our own', with particular mention made of one skilled planner who had started their career with SDNPA on reception.
 - Officers were in regular contact with officials at Defra. Having been delayed several times, the latest indication was that the Government response to the Landscape Review would be published at the earliest in late Autumn 2021. SDNPA had not waited for the Government response to the Glover Review as the issues identified, such as Nature Recovery, were urgent and much work was already underway. Through both the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Authority every opportunity was taken to promote the work of SDNPA to Senior Government Officials.
64. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Note the Corporate Risk Register as at September 2021

65. The Committee adjourned for a 10 minute comfort break.

ITEM 12: EXTERNAL AUDIT – AUDIT RESULTS REPORT 2020/21

66. The Chief Financial Officer introduced Report PR21/22-17 on behalf of the External Auditor, from Grant Thornton, who was unable to be present at the Committee.
67. The Committee commented that:
- They were concerned that there was not a representative from the External Auditors present at the Committee to be able to answer the Committee's questions.
68. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The Chief Executive expressed his similar concern about the absence of the External Auditors, and the consequent impact of the discussion.
 - The Audit Results report presented was not a draft report and although it referred to

outstanding queries, if the resolution of these resulted in no further changes, the report would come back as was presented to the Committee.

- A final audit opinion would be issued by the External Auditor once the Authority had approved the Audit Results report and the associated Statement of Accounts, and the final queries were concluded.

69. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to receive and consider the findings as set out in the 2020/21 Audit Results Report.

ITEM 13: AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2020/21 AND LETTER OF REPRESENTATION

70. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR21/22-18 and reminded members of the report content.

71. The Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2021 required that local authorities publish their statement of accounts and supporting documents (together with any certificate or opinion of the local auditor) for the 2020/21 financial year by 30th September 2021, but as there were outstanding audit queries the Committee could elect to defer approval of the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts to the Full Authority meeting on the 21st October 2021 by which time the outstanding queries should be resolved, provided that the Authority published a notice on its website to explain why it had not yet published the statement of accounts.

72. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- Pension Liabilities were calculated by professional actuaries, whose experience and professional competency is assured through a comprehensive procurement process undertaken by the Pensions Administrator (WSCC), with reliance consequently placed upon their professional judgement and assessment. However, the Chief Finance Officer reviews actuarial judgements and can challenge these where they appear to be out of line with national or local factors, for example, assumptions concerning annual pay uplifts.
- The increase in the value of creditors on the balance sheet was a timing issue and was linked to payments owing at the year-end in relation to the delegated planning arrangements with the District Councils.

73. A revision to amalgamate recommendations 2 & 3 was proposed, seconded and approved. The revised recommendation read '*subject to the completion of the outstanding external audit work and final audit opinion, the Committee recommends the NPA to approve the Statement of Accounts 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 2 and the Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3*'.

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

- 1) Note the Commentary on the Statement of Accounts set out in Appendix 1.
- 2) Subject to the completion of the outstanding external audit work and final audit opinion, the Committee recommended the NPA to approve the Statement of Accounts 2020/21 as set out in Appendix 2 and the Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3.

ITEM 14: ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT AND UPDATED LOCAL CODE OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

75. The Head of Governance & Support Services introduced report PR21/22-11 and reminded members of the report content.

76. The Committee commented that:

- It was thanks to the work and inventiveness of the Governance Team that Covid-19 had not adversely affected the Governance operations of the Authority.

- The actions identified for 2021/22 should be reported back to the Committee in due course in order that the Committee could be assured that they were completed.

77. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The Annual Governance Statement refers to the work of the internal Governance of the Authority rather than the internal workings of other functions, such as the HR team. Although Covid-19 did have an impact, there were no significant Governance issues during 2020/21 with meetings switching to becoming virtual when the Government temporarily removed the legal requirement for local authorities to hold public meetings in person during the coronavirus pandemic.

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

- 1) Approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2020-21 to accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts; and
- 2) Note the updated Local Code of Corporate Governance

ITEM 15: ANNUAL HUMAN RESOURCES AND HEALTH & SAFETY REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2020-21

79. The Human Resources manager introduced report PR21/22-12 and reminded members of the report content. Within the introduction, it was highlighted that there was an error within the sickness data analysis, within Appendix 2, and it should read that there were 7 individuals affected, with Covid -19, as opposed to 5 individuals reported.

80. The Committee commented that:

- It would be helpful for a future report to show the Equality and Diversity and Inclusivity characteristics of the current workforce.
- Their thanks went to all managers and staff for all their work in managing their teams during a challenging year.
- The 2021/22 report should include progress against the key priorities for the HR team as identified in the report.

81. In response to questions officers clarified that:

- The new blended working arrangements were a cross organisational priority and would see staff coming into the office for approximately 50% of their working week, with it being made clear in staff diaries where and when they were working. Training for Managers on managing remote teams was being organised and a significant amount of time had been spent reviewing policies and work practices.
- The best applicant with the desired skill set for the job was always the one appointed. The equal opportunities monitoring data showed that the Authority was not attracting applications from a diverse pool of candidates and an action plan was being drawn up to address this.
- A new tracking system was being put in place for lone working within the area teams. The device would have an alarm and Rangers would need to report into a call centre ensuring a reliable way to monitor staff safety. There were other procedures in place for staff not given the tracking alarm.

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

- 1) Note the content of the Human Resources and Health & Safety Report and highlight any areas requiring further clarification or action.

ITEM 16: INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT

83. The Chief Internal Auditor introduced report PR21/22-13 and reminded Members of the

report content.

84. The Committee commented that:

- It felt reassured that the 2022/23 Annual Investment Strategy would contain some parameters for investment with BHCC, including a summary of triggers and circumstances which would result in a review by the SI51 Officer as to the appropriateness of the proportion of investments held with BHCC compared to externally.

85. In response to questions, officers clarified that:

- The audit opinion of partial assurance was provided in respect of the New ICT contract arrangements as patches were not rolled out quickly enough.
- The Internal Auditors were working closely with the ICT Strategy Manager and were aware that progress was being made on 3 of the ICT actions and a further report being presented to the Senior Management Team. The Internal Auditors would follow up on the new ICT Contract Arrangements audit a year later.
- The most up to date information was provided in the report at the time of writing.

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

- 1) Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2021/22).
- 2) The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management

ITEM 17: SDNPA PROCUREMENT – STRATEGY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

87. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-14 and reminded members of the report content.

88. The committee commented that:

- Could Members help to narrow down the environmental issues that contractors would need to abide by?

89. In response to question, officers clarified that:

- The Sustainability Policy had to be robust and not simply just ask companies to provide an environmental statement. Companies should be asked to provide actual deliverables which were proportionate to the contract cost and therefore not place unrealistic expectations.
- The Procurement Officer was currently on Maternity Leave and Officers were therefore unsure the process of developing a Sustainable Procurement Policy over the next 24-months could be speeded up. The Committee urged development at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Public liability insurance would be tailored to the type of contract being procured. For example, when the contract was to provide advice Professional Indemnity Insurance was more important than Public Liability Insurance.
- It was hoped that the Green Paper on 'Transforming Public Procurement;' would provide advice on adding social value to be added into tenders.

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

- 1) Approve the SDNPA Procurement Strategy 2021-2026
- 2) Note that, through the Procurement Strategy, the SDNPA will take a proportionate view of risk in procurement, to strike a balance between mitigation and accessibility for small and medium sized enterprises, and in doing this, Officers will normally adopt the approach detailed in paragraphs 4.5 and 4.7 to relevant contracts.

ITEM 18: FINANCIAL SERVICES CONTRACT 2022 ONWARDS

91. The Chief Financial Officer left the meeting.
92. The Head of Business Services introduced Report PR21/22-15 and reminded members of the report content.
93. The Committee commented that:
- It welcomed the review of the Financial Services Contract and accepted that there were advantages to the current outsourced system. In regards to the S151 Officer the Committee could see how contracting this function out in the early days of the Authority was the right decision but as the Authority evolved and the financial systems became more complex the S151 Officer was more than a supporting role and it welcomed the opportunity for the review.
94. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to provide corporate financial services to SDNPA for a period of 3 years (and up to 5 years with extensions) from April 2022.
 - 2) Approve delegation of authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015
 - 3) Subject to a successful retendering of the Financial Services Contract, endorse the undertaking of a detailed and fully costed option appraisal for delivering financial services, to include an in-house model, the results of which are to be presented to the Committee for consideration during the first half of the initial contract period.

ITEM 19: INSURANCE SERVICES CONTRACT 2022 ONWARDS

95. Angus Dunn withdrew from the meeting for Item 19.
96. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-16 and reminded members of the report content.
97. The Committee commented that:
- The collaboration with other National Parks was fully supported and a significant achievement.
98. In response to questions, Officers clarified that:
- Some of the other National Parks who had not signed up to the consortium were keen to join but had taken up the option to extend their current arrangements. Those that had expressed they would like to join up next time, could align their current provision with the time scales of the consortium of National Park Authorities.
 - Scottish National Parks' insurances were funded by the Scottish Government.
99. **RESOLVED: The Committee resolved to:**
1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to provide insurance services to SDNPA for a period of 3 years (and up to 5 years with extensions) from April 2022.
 2. Approve delegation of authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 13.27

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING 25 NOVEMBER 2021

Held at the Memorial Hall, South Downs Centre, Midhurst at 10.30am

Present: Annie Brown, Tim Burr, Angus Dunn, Melanie Hunt (Chair), Doug Jones, Baroness Jones of Whitchurch, Michael Lunn, Isabel Thurston and Stephen Whale.

Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Members of the Committee: Tom Fourcade and Carole Nicholson

Co-opted Members of the Committee: Morris Findley and Lawrence Leather

Other SDNPA Members: Ian Phillips and Barbara Holyome

SDNPA Officers: Andrew Lee (Director of Countryside Policy & Management), Tim Slaney (Director of Planning), Louise Read (Monitoring Officer), Nigel Manvell (Chief Finance Officer), Alan Brough (Head of Business Services), Robin Parr (Head of Governance) and Catherine Sydenham (Committee Officer).

Also Attended by: Anne Rehill (Performance and Project Manager), Nick Heasman (Countryside and Policy Manager – Central Downs), Mark Alden (Enterprise Development Lead), Tanya Hibberd (Claire Kerr (Countryside and Policy Manager – Eastern Downs), Jeremy Burgess (Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Water) and Mark Winton (Chief Internal Auditor).

OPENING REMARKS

I00. The Chair opened the meeting

I01. 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.

I02. Within the opening remarks the Chair:

- Drew attention to the risk grid tabled and members were advised that in future the impacts of the risk column would be left blank for each member of the Committee to draw their own conclusions and reflections. This should act as a prompt to ensure that all members are considering risk to the work of the Authority and checking that management responses have taken account of these.
- Welcomed Peter Diplock to the Committee.

ITEM 1: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

I03. Apologies were received from Peter Diplock, Henry Potter and Martin Osborne.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

I04. Stephen Whale declared a prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 15, as a Director of South Downs Commercial Operations Limited and was not present for this item.

ITEM 3: MINUTES OF PREVIOUS POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH SEPTEMBER 2021

I05. The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 30TH September 2021 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

ITEM 4: MATTERS ARISING

106. The following updates were given to the Committee:

- The Chair updated the Committee in regards to minutes 76 & 80 that the actions in both the Annual Governance Statement and the Human Resources and the Health and Safety report would now be reported quarterly as part of the Performance and Projects Report to the Committee.
- The Head of Governance and Support Services updated the Committee that the discussions which were referred to in minute 62 had now taken place.
- The Director of Countryside and Policy management referred to minute 50 and updated the Committee that the next meeting of the South Downs Partnership (SDP) had taken place recently and focussed on Communications & Engagement, along with how the SDP might respond to the forthcoming Defra consultation on Protected Landscapes.

ITEM 5: URGENT MATTERS

107. There were none

ITEM 6: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

108. There were no Members of the public who had requested to speak.

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

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

110. Barbara Holyome joined the meeting.

ITEM 8: PARTNERSHIP MANAGEMENT PLAN DELIVERY – HEALTH AND WELLBEING

111. The Performance and Projects Manager introduced report PR21/22-19 and reminded members of the report contents.

112. Angus Dunn joined the meeting.

113. The Committee commented that:

- There was support that the Authority’s focus would be shifted towards creating information and supporting the development of activities that social prescribers could refer people to. Additionally, Officers would work to ensure that community action and support efforts should also focus on engaging with diverse groups and minority communities and not just developing stereotypical activities of walking and cycling routes.
- It was supported that SDNPA was part of the National Academy of Social Prescribing and that opportunities should be kept open for future partnership working should the emerging legislation be approved .
- It was hoped that the work in Adur and Worthing to allow nature into public open spaces could be rolled out into other Local Authority areas.
- More engagement with the student population within the SDNP was needed, particularly to engage with those people with mental health issues, and a suggestion of establishing more links with the universities.
- As well as providing access, the creation of health and wellbeing hubs could also be used as information hubs for other purposes such as the climate emergency.
- Transport was critical and there needed to be a bolder vision for how community groups would gain access to the SDNP where transport was a barrier.
- It would be helpful to see a list of organisations that SDNPA could be partnering with along with a map to show the geographical spread.

114. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Work streams would be prioritised as part of the Corporate Plan process to those that were likely to have the most impact and this included activities that could make the most difference. An impact framework would be created.
 - Health and Wellbeing was a difficult area to measure overall. Measurement of direct engagement was possible and the visitor survey could provide statistics on the diversity of people using the National Park.
 - Public Transport was not always the most effective method of transport for people accessing social prescribing and SDNPA was involved in conversations and bids to try and find new ways of enabling people to access prescribed activities.
115. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
1. Note progress on delivering the Health and Well Being Strategy
 2. Note the implications for the “Transforming Lives” section of the emerging 2022-2025 refresh of the Corporate Plan
 3. Support the direction of travel for future work

ITEM 9: WHOLE ESTATE PLANS (WEP) UPDATE

116. The Enterprise Development Lead and Countryside and Policy Manager (Central Downs) introduced report PR21/22-20 and reminded members of the report content.
117. The Committee commented that:
- The Land use Consultants (LUC) review was an example of transparent learning.
 - The recent visits to estates have been interesting and helpful to tie together the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) Outcomes and Priorities as well as aiding Members’ understanding. The new additional WEP analysis of delivery towards the PMP outcomes was an important step forward within the WEP process.
 - Within the emerging Whole Estate Plan guidance it stated that ‘*The WEP’s are seen as a Memorandum of Understanding with the agreed Action Plan which shapes the future working relationship between the SDNPA and the Estate*’, question was raised as to whether this is something that estates would feel comfortable signing up to?
 - Most of the SDNP landscape was managed by people other than SDNPA and WEPs prompted an effective dialogue between the SDNPA and the estates themselves, in addition to providing a powerful tool with mutual benefits to both. WEPs were a powerful communication tool delivering both the Statutory Purposes and the Duty, as well as bridging together countryside and planning.
 - There had to be a real benefit for an estate or farm to put their private business into the public domain. The partnership relationship between landlord and tenant was complex and should have shared success outcomes.
 - The LUC assessment did not include any information on monitoring PMP Outcomes 2 &3 and a question was raised as to whether it would be helpful for WEPs to contain a biodiversity action plan?
 - In order to help the SDNPA decide which estates to progress there should be clear criteria in order that decisions can be made of where SDNPA efforts should be focussed.
 - It may be helpful to add a section of the possible benefits of undertaking a WEP to the guidance along with some positive quotes from estates who already had endorsed WEPs.

118. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- Progress on the Firlie Whole Estate Plan has been paused whilst the estate’s new Manager ensured that there was alignment between the strategic direction being created and the WEP itself.
 - The management of WEPs was moved from the Planning Directorate to the Countryside and Policy Directorate to ensure that there was no ambiguity and to facilitate conversations on land management, including Nature Recovery and Climate Change, and not just that land use. The move had also ensured that emphasis was placed on PMP outcomes and not only planning outcomes.
 - The inconsistency of planning language throughout the emerging revised whole estate plan guidance would be addressed so that it was consistent, with a suggestion of using the words from Local Plan Policy SD25 of ‘*positive regard*’.
 - A couple of the estates with endorsed WEPs had put forward sites for Nature Recovery as part of the Nature Recovery call for sites campaign.
 - The WEP team were looking not only for protection of species on the estate but also enhancements, which would be added to the guidance.
 - The main aim was to have good quality endorsed WEPs. The WEP team received lots of enquiries and reasons why progress halted was different for every estate as no two estates were the same. Some of the reasons given for delay included economic costs and estate succession planning. When agreeing with estates that they were ready to begin the WEP process Officers were mindful of SDNPA capacity to also deliver with a maximum number of reserved site visit dates each year.
 - A few of the endorsed estates had been championing the benefits of having an endorsed WEP. Through the WEP process opportunities such as payments for ecosystem services and areas for Nature Recovery could be identified.
 - The annual action plan review meeting with the estate was about maintaining the relationship with the estate and not being an inspector.
 - Micro WEPs were aimed primarily at farms and small estates where there was not a great complexity, but allowed them to stop and think and future proof their business. Those with larger and more complex estates would not be allowed to take this route. Further discussions would take place on whether ‘Micro WEPs’ and ‘WEP Lites’ should be an option.
 - The Planning team were trialling calling in all applications from estates where there were endorsed WEPs.
119. The Committee were advised that it was not within the Committee’s Terms of Reference to agree the revised WEP Guidance. Officers had delegated powers to agree the revised guidance and confirmed that they would take on board comments raised at the Committee.
120. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to:
- 1) Note the outcomes from the recently completed Whole Estate Plan Evaluation conducted by LUC (Land Use Consultants) and the progress made to implement the new Whole Estate Plan process
 - 2) Endorse the emerging revised Whole Estate Plan Guidance detailed at section 4 and Appendix I.
 - 3) Consider and note the performance of the Whole Estate Programme, and the current Whole Estate Plan pipeline.
121. Ian Phillips left the meeting

ITEM 10: Q2 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND PROJECT PERFORMANCE REPORT

122. The Performance and Research Lead introduced report PR21/22-21 and gave the following update:
- From Quarter 3 the performance report would be presented around outcomes.
 - The following updates were given for the priority areas with an amber RAG status:
 - The Ambassadors Schools programme had an amber status due to Covid-19 but it was hoped that the programme would resume in Quarter 3.
 - The learning from the Whole Estate Plan review had now been considered and this action would be Green for Quarter 3.
 - Funding sources were still being investigated for the work with parishes but the work stream was not prioritised.
 - The newly appointed Research and Evidence Officer had now started and the set up of thematic research networks along with the monitoring of the SDNPA and partner delivery against PMP outcomes would be back on track in Quarter 3.
 - Work to secure long term accommodation for area offices was currently on hold whilst blended working across the Authority became embedded.
 - An update was given on the Red RAG status that the introduction of a pre application fee charging schedule had been deprioritised to allow other work streams to take priority but there was now progress on this action.
123. The Committee commented that:
- Blended working arrangements and the ability for Members to join non-decision making meetings was helpful to busy workloads.
 - It would be helpful if HR trend data could be reported on a quarterly basis in order that the committee can compare the same quarter to the previous year to identify any material differences in the data.
124. In response to questions Officers clarified that:
- The Seven Sisters contract was fixed price as far as possible and at the current point in time there was no pressure on costs due to rising inflation, but Officers were aware that this may come in the future. Officers were having regular discussions with the contractors.
 - Inflation on other projects would inevitably come as many of these were service driven and wage inflation/NI increases would be likely to increase project costs.
 - The Exceat Bridge was subject to an ongoing planning permission on which the SDNPA had high expectations.
 - The Environmental Agency had a budget for shingle clearing and would be facilitating the management of the River Cuckmere from source to sea.
 - There had been challenges in getting all parties to sign the Memorandum of Understanding at Lullington Heath, but this was now completed and work would be beginning.
 - The project to deliver paperless meetings was started pre-Covid-19, but put on hold during the pandemic. A new way of delivering this was being explored and a phased roll out would begin from March 2022.
125. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the content of the Performance Report and highlighted areas requiring further clarification or action.
126. The committee adjourned for a 5 minute comfort break.
127. Stephen Whale left the meeting

ITEM 11: STANMER PARK RESTORATION PROJECT- END OF PROJECT REPORT

128. The Countryside and Policy Manager (Eastern Downs) introduced report PR21/22-22, highlighting that the project was led by Brighton and Hove City Council and played a short video to showcase the project successes and the elements funded by SDNPA.
129. The Committee commented that:
- Their congratulations were given on the success of the project.
130. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the completion of the SDNPA funded elements of the Stanmer Park “Parks for People” Restoration Project.

ITEM 12: CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

131. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced report PR21/22-23 and highlighted that there had been one significant update to the risk register with regard to Risk 3 (Finance and Budgets) since it was last presented to the Committee. It was also highlighted that the Committee Chair and Deputies had met with the Independent (CIPFA) Co-opted Members to consider the risk register in detail and to give a higher profile to risk management in Committee. In future, invitations to such meetings would be extended to all members of the Committee.
132. A summary of the recent meeting with Committee Chair and Deputies and Co-opted Members, was given by the Deputy Chair, Tim Burr and Co-opted Member, Carole Nicholson to the Committee. It was highlighted that the 2 major risks facing the Authority were Risk 2 (Finance and Budgets) and Risk 25 (Government Response to the Landscape Review). It was reported that discussion was also focussed on Risk 1 (Health and Safety). It was also highlighted that it was important that the Committee considered the risk register before it considered the other governance items on the agenda.
133. The Committee commented that:
- The Authority must not spread itself too thinly as all budgets across all sectors were fully stretched.
134. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- Pre Application charging had slipped down the list of priorities as although it would bring in further revenue to the Authority the income that would be achieved was relatively small in comparison to the focus of Planning Performance Agreements.
 - Operational Management Team level Managers had all been involved in an exercise to look carefully at their areas of work and how this related to priorities. The process of realigning time and budget along with clearing the decks of other activities had been presented to the Senior Management Team, and would be presented to members at the upcoming budget workshop.
135. **RESOLVED:** The Committee resolved to note the Corporate Risk Register as at November 2021.
136. The Monitoring Officer withdrew from the meeting.

ITEM 13: LEGAL SERVICES AND MONITORING OFFICER CONTRACTS – 2022 ONWARDS

137. The Head of Business Services introduced report PR21/22-24 and reminded Members of the report content.
138. The Chair advised the Committee that a member of the Committee was invited to join the panel to evaluate the tenders received and any member of the Committee that wished to do so to let the Chair know, if not the Chair would join the panel.
139. **RESOLVED: The Committee resolved to:**
1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor or contractors to provide Legal Services and Monitoring Officer Services to SDNPA for a period of 3 years (and up to 5 with extensions) from 27 June 2022
 2. Approve delegation of Authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015
140. The Monitoring Officer returned to the meeting.

ITEM 14: WALLANDS SUDS IN SCHOOLS CONTRACT 2021-2022

141. The Landscape and Biodiversity Lead – Water introduced report PR21/22-25 reminded members of the report content and explained the SuDs in Schools project.
142. **RESOLVED: The Committee resolved to:**
1. Approve the commencement of a procurement process leading to the appointment of a contractor to deliver the Wallands SuDS in Schools project from February 2022.
 2. Approve delegation of authority to the Chief Executive to award contracts for the above, following a competitive process carried out under the terms of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

ITEM 15: DRAFT OPERATING AGREEMENT BETWEEN SDNPA AND SOUTH DOWNS COMMERCIAL OPERATIONS LIMITED

143. Tim Slaney withdrew from the meeting for the duration of Item 15.
144. The Head of Governance and Support Services introduced report PR21/22-26 and reminded members of the report content.
145. In response to questions officers clarified that:
- The main risk that the Authority was taking on behalf of the trading company was public liability. The Authority was protecting itself because all employees were employed by the SDNPA and received the same Health and Safety training as well as being subject to completing the same risk assessments as those that did not work at the Seven Sisters Country Park.
 - Consideration of whether SDNPA should indemnify the company directors for all liabilities that they incur in respect of their delivery of the Landscape Management Plan would be re-examined before being presented to the NPA, as the Company directors had also raised a query about this provision.
 - The timetable outlined in Appendix 2 of the report was indicative and the Business Plan would be agreed annually by P&R and NPA.
 - The wording in the ‘Permitted Activities at the Site’, specifically related to applying for the Rural Payments Agency and similar grants was deliberate as it reflected the nature of the licence that would be issued to the Company to operate at the Seven Sisters Country Park.
 - South Downs Commercial Operations Limited currently had 4 Directors who were

appointed by the NPA: Vanessa Rowlands, Stephen Whale, William Meyer and Tim Slaney. The Board of Directors also had the ability to appoint 2 independent directors themselves.

146. **RESOLVED:** The Committee Resolved to:

1. Note progress with the development of the Operating Agreement between SDNPA and South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (“the Company”);
2. Endorse, subject to any comments made by the committee the current draft of the Operating agreement, noting that work is ongoing to prepare the final version for approval by the NPA.
3. Endorse the principle of delegating matters related to the operation of the Operating Agreement to the Chief Executive as set out as paragraph 3.5 below.

ITEM 16: BUDGET MONITORING REPORT 2021/22: MONTH 6

147. The Chief Finance Officer introduced report PR21/22-27 and reminded Members of the report contents.

148. Officers further commented that the Senior Management Team had more up to date information than was presented in the report and the current prediction was that there would be a larger underspend than that predicted in the presented report. The Authority was facing a time of rising core costs and flat cash settlements from Defra so any underspend would be used to prepare for future years.

149. The Committee commented that:

- It was right for the Authority to be prudent in terms of costs and unknown expenditure.

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

1. Note the 2021/22 revenue forecast position as at month 6 of a net (£22,000) below budget variance.
2. Note the 2021/22 capital forecast position as at month 6 of a zero budget variance subject to approval by the NPA of the capital variation set out in section 3.10 and Appendix 2.
3. Note the reserves position as at month 6.
4. Note the Treasury Management overview and position as at month 6.

ITEM 17: INTERNAL AUDIT - PROGRESS REPORT

151. The Internal Auditor introduced report PR21/22-28, reminded Members of the report contents and updated the Committee that the high priority action on Patch Management had now been implemented.

152. The Committee made the following comments:

- It was pertinent that a new report format and information had been developed for the Budget Monitoring Report.

153. In response to questions Officers clarified that:

- Capital works at the Seven Sisters’ Countryside Park were forecasted to complete on time during the 3rd week of March 2022, however it would take very little to delay this into the next financial year.
- SDNPA has a leaver process in place in that the HR team notify the appropriate people when a member of staff leaves the Authority. A systems check was then undertaken quarterly to provide an existence check. Further information would be circulated to

the Committee on the overdue action of 'Accounts Payable/ Creditors'.

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

1. Progress against the Internal Audit Strategy and Annual Plan (2021/22).
2. The implementation of audit actions previously agreed by management.

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 13.31

