

Report to **South Downs National Park Authority**  
Date **19 May 2022**  
By **Head of Governance & Support Services**  
Title of Report **Report of the Governance Task and Finish Group**  
Decision

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**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to**

- 1. Endorse the outcomes of the work of the Task and Finish Group set out at Section 3.**
  - 2. Agree that the Policy and Resources Committee shall normally meet four times each year and that additional meetings may be called by the Committee or its Chair as required for the efficient dispatch of its business.**
  - 3. Agree that the Planning Committee shall normally meet nine times each year and that additional meetings may be called by the Committee or its Chair as required for the efficient dispatch of its business**
  - 4. Agree the principle of proactively publishing information on each members attendance at formal meetings of the Authority and Committees on the Authority website**
  - 5. Note the proposed 2022/23 schedule of Meetings of the Authority, Policy and resources Committee and Planning Committee set out at Appendix I**
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**I. Introduction**

- I.1** The Governance Task and Finish Group which was set up in January 2022 comprises Ian Phillips, Vanessa Rowlands, Barbara Holyome, Tim Burr, Maggie Jones, Diana van Der Klugt, and William Meyer and was established with 2 core purposes. The first was to provide a member response to the Governance questions within the Landscape review consultation exercise. The outcomes of this element of the work were presented as part of the Paper on the Landscape review consultation considered by the NPA at its meeting on 24 March 2022
- I.2** The second element of its work was to consider the outcomes of the 2022 Member survey and make recommendations for change. The outcomes of this work are presented in this paper and the changes proposed by the Member Task and Finish Group take into account the financial and staffing context described below.
- I.3** The Member survey results were positive and reflected a well engaged, supported and committed membership. The survey did not, in itself, reveal areas where there is a pressing and widely held case for change, however the general thrust of Member comments that it revealed support the improvements developed by the Member TFG and outlined in this paper.

- 1.4 Whilst many of the changes do not require an NPA decision as they relate, in the most part, to administrative processes and practices and are designed to support the efficient operation of the organisation and its decision making structures, it is important that members understand the rationale for the changes and the context within which they are made.
- 1.5 This paper is presented in the context of the recently confirmed flat cash grant settlement and approved corporate plan which seeks to ensure resources are allocated to key priority areas to achieve the “most impact against the priorities of the PMP, the public affairs strategy and the government’s Glover response”.
- 1.6 Staff resources are currently under review in line with the outcome of the budget round and the staff available to deliver the priorities in the PMP and Corporate Plan will reduce during this financial year. This will include a reduction in officers available to directly support the governance structures of the organisation, as well as those required to produce material for consideration by members. As members noted during the budget workshops, it is therefore essential that changes are introduced to ensure that the requirements to service member events, committees, and meetings reflect the resources available.

## 2. Policy Context

- 2.1 Effective and efficient governance contributes to delivery of all PMP and Corporate Plan Priorities.
- 2.2 This paper specifically contributes to delivery of corporate plan priority 9 (new ways of working) and the agreed outcome of “**Streamline levels of service to Members and Partners to ensure that they are proportionate and reflect the resources available for their delivery**”. Against this outcome is the action to “**Complete a review of internal governance and propose recommendations for changes to structures and processes as appropriate**”. This paper describes the outcomes of that review, although the process of reviewing internal structures and control mechanisms is an ongoing activity.

## 3. Issues for consideration

- 3.1 The Task and Finish Group makes the following recommendations for change:  
Outcome 1
- 3.2 Reduce the number of NPA meetings held each year to the AGM plus three meetings. This reduces the current number of NPA meetings by 1 and is the minimum number of formal NPA meetings that must be held in a year (as prescribed by the SDNPA Establishment Order). The Standing Orders for Regulation of Authority Proceedings and Business (Standing Orders) only require four NPA meetings to be held annually but a practice has arisen whereby a fifth meeting of the Authority is routinely called each year. It is proposed to cease this practice and a proposed annual calendar is set out at Appendix 1 that takes this change into account.
- 3.3 Reducing the number of formal meetings will help reduce calls on officer and member time and reduce costs associated with the running of meetings. Officers have confirmed that key NPA Business can be accommodated within the reduced number of meetings. The main impact of this change will be fewer updates from the Authority Chair and Chief Executive but there are many other mechanisms for communication with Members including regular updates through the Chief Executive’s blog and the regular Member bulletin.
- 3.4 Standing Orders will continue to enable additional meetings to be called should they be required.  
Outcome 2
- 3.5 Proposal to reduce the number of Policy & Resources Committee meetings to 4 each year (reduction of 1). Standing Order 8.7 provides that, where not determined by the NPA, the number of meetings of a committee shall be determined by the committee or its Chair for the convenient and/or efficient dispatch of its business. The NPA has not traditionally determined the number of meetings of its committees and the practice has arisen whereby five meetings of the Policy and Resources Committee are called each year, although the fifth

meeting is often cancelled due to lack of business. It is recommended that the NPA agree that the Policy and Resources Committee shall normally meet four times each year and that additional meetings may be called by the Committee or its Chair as required for the efficient dispatch of its business

- 3.6 The proposed annual calendar that takes this change into account is set out at appendix I. The dates have been discussed with the Finance and Audit team to ensure they will align with the reporting requirements of the Committee.
- 3.7 A Policy & Resources Committee away day will be included in the meeting cycle (April/May each year) to enable the members of the Committee to meet informally to discuss its work and consider its annual review of effectiveness to form a part of the annual review to be presented at a formal meeting of the Committee through the Annual Governance Statement. This is in line with good practice recommended by the Authority's Auditors.
- 3.8 As with the reduction in NPA meeting, this will help ensure effective use of officer and member time and reduce costs associated with the running of meetings.

#### Outcome 3

- 3.9 Proposal to reduce the number of Planning Committee Meetings from 12 to 9 each year (reduction of 3). The committee cycle will continue to be monthly, however, the committee will not meet in the months of January, May and August. The proposed annual calendar set out at **Appendix I** takes this change into account. The proposed change and subsequent dates has emerged from discussions by the Planning Committee and have been considered the officer team to ensure they will not unduly affect the ability of the committee to deliver its workload. This change will be kept under review and the implications considered by the Planning Committee throughout the year.
- 3.10 Following analysis of the expected business and workload of the committee, it is considered feasible to reduce the number of meetings of the planning committee by 3.
- 3.11 It is therefore recommended that the NPA agree that the Planning Committee shall normally meet nine times each year and that additional meetings may be called by the Committee or its Chair as required for the efficient dispatch of its business.

#### Outcome 4

- 3.12 It is proposed to provide the following Member development activities during 2022/23 :
  - a. Subject to 3.12.2 (below) continued separation of workshops and formal meetings with workshops held on line (with face-to-face workshops being an exception). This will support Member attendance and reduce the overhead costs (including officer and Member time) related to such workshops
  - b. The inclusion of two pre NPA budget sessions ( face to face) to consider the development of the budget
  - c. Inclusion of 2 Member days per year (Member days are face to face sessions out in the Park)
  - d. Inclusion of up to 3 WEP site visits per year in the events schedule
  - e. Inclusion of 4 pre P&R workshops- open to all members. These sessions to take place on line on a day in advance of a meeting the P&R committee (in line with 3.12.1 above)
  - f. That additional training days be included in the programme on an ad hoc basis.

#### Outcome 5

- 3.13 That Members transition to receiving electronic payslips. This will reduce postage costs and save officer time as payslips will be sent directly from Brighton & Hove City Council, using the same system as for staff. Training and guidance will be made available to members to support this transition

### Outcome 6

- 3.14 It is clear from the Member survey that there is a vast variety of preference in relation to the transition to paperless meetings. In order to take advantage of the new technology available to us and drive a reduction in printing and postage costs the following is proposed:
- 3.15 Members are asked to indicate whether they would like to remain hard copy or go partially or fully electronic.
- 3.16 Officers will be asked the same question.
- 3.17 Any Members who go partially or fully electronic will be issued with a suitable tablet device if they do not already have a suitable device and will receive support in accessing and annotating reports. Members still receiving paper copies will not be issued a device, and will be asked to return any device previously issued so these can be recirculated to those not receiving papers, unless these are required to facilitate member engagement at virtual/on line sessions

### Outcome 7

- 3.18 That the following changes in relation to standing orders be worked up for presentation to the NPA in July:
  - a. Revision of the rules of debate (appendix 5 of Standing Orders). These rules set out the process to be followed by the NPA when undertaking its deliberations, however the currently these rules does not reflect the practice of the authority to operate a more informal basis for its deliberations and therefore these will be reviewed to better reflect current practice.

### Outcome 8

- 3.19 That the Governance Team and Policy & Resources Committee Chair and Deputies explore the possibility of holding one meeting of the Committee each year in an alternative venue to the Memorial Hall in the South Downs Centre (possibly Seven Sisters Country Park when suitable facilities are available). It is also proposed that at least one Member day per year will be based at the Eastern end of the National Park.

### Outcome 9

- 3.20 That the Governance Team in conjunction with Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs explore the times and days on which workshops are held to support Member attendance – especially where workshops are being held virtually

### Outcome 10

- 3.21 That additional training for Members be prepared on paperless meetings, and accessing the SDNPA intranet (*This training was delivered on April 28<sup>th</sup> 2022*)

### Outcome 11

- 3.22 That further work be undertaken and fully costed to consider the introduction of functionality for hybrid workshops and informal meetings – with further recommendations to be made in due course. This would enable a hybrid approach to Member workshops in particular that cannot currently be easily delivered and will support Members who have difficulty in attending face to face meetings, for whatever reason, to be able to better participate in the policy development and other informal work of the Authority. This will require investment in additional equipment in the Memorial Hall and other meeting rooms and additional training for staff and Members on the practicalities and etiquette of hybrid meetings. It should be noted that, unless there is a change in the law, the physical attendance of Members will continue to be required at formal meetings of the Authority and its committees so these will not operate on a hybrid basis.

## Outcome 12

- 3.23 That the Authority proactively publish information on each Member's attendance at formal meetings on the Authority's website and collate information on member attendance at informal events for discussion with members at their annual review with the Chair/Deputy Chair.
- 3.24 Information relating to Member attendance at formal meetings is already available in the public domain, through the published minutes of meetings therefore this proposal does not propose an increase in the information available, but rather bringing this information together in one place to aid transparency. It is common practice amongst Local Authorities to publish this information and this proposal brings SDNPA in line with other Authorities in the area.

### **4. Options & cost implications**

- 4.1 The purpose of this paper is to support efficiencies within the wider organisation and the reduction in staffing capacity within the Governance team directly.
- 4.2 Officers have reviewed the proposals and the possible impacts these may have on the members allowance scheme and are satisfied that the changes do not significantly impact on the calculations undertaken when setting the scheme of allowances. This will be further considered when the scheme is reviewed fully in 2024.

### **5. Next steps**

- 5.1 Subject to the recommendations being accepted by the NPA and Members' comments on the other proposals Officers will begin to implement the changes with immediate effect – with changes to meeting schedules etc. coming into effect from the AGM in July 2022.
- 5.2 A paper proposing changes to Standing Orders, including a review of the rules of debate, will be presented to the NPA In July 2022.

### **6. Other implications**

<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Review of governance arrangements is an ongoing activity. A paper on specific standing order changes will be presented to the NPA in July
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	The proposals support reductions in operational and staffing costs in line with the approved Corporate Plan.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The proposals are designed to drive efficiency within the organisation and therefore contribute to value for money
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	Corporate Plan outcome 9
Links to other projects or partner organisations	None directly
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	The use of remote meetings, where possible, supports a reduction in vehicle usage related to authority business.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	<b>None directly</b>

<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	The organisation's governance structures are designed to be inclusive and not a barrier to participate. The changes proposed support virtual and hybrid working for informal meetings which assist in removing barriers to participation
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	<b>None directly</b>
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	<b>None directly</b>
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	<b>None directly</b>
Are there any Data Protection implications?	The proposals do relate to the use of personal data. Personal data will be processed in line with the Data protection act and all relevant internal policies
Are there any Sustainability implications based on the 5 principles set out in the SDNPA Sustainability Strategy?	This work contributes to principle 4 – Promoting good governance

## **7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision**

- 7.1 Failure to maintain an effective and efficient governance Framework and Standing Orders could lead to decisions being challenged or delays in decision making and may result in resources being diverted from front line PMP/Corporate Plan delivery

### **ROBIN PARR**

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#### **South Downs National Park Authority**

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Appendices	1. 2022/23 meeting schedule
SDNPA Consultees	Chief Executive; Director of Countryside Policy and Management; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer;
External Consultees	none
Background Documents	Authority standing orders