

**South Downs National Park Authority**

**Annual Governance Statement 2021-22**

<b>Review Date</b>	Annual
<b>Responsibility</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Approved by</b>	Policy & Resources Committee

## **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY 2021/22**

### **1. Scope of Responsibility**

- 1.1 Through carrying out its general statutory duties and responsibilities in connection with the two national park purposes, the South Downs National Park Authority (the SDNPA) seeks to work for and with the local community to foster the social and economic wellbeing of communities within the National Park.
- 1.2 The SDNPA is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for and used economically, efficiently and effectively.
- 1.3 The SDNPA also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.4 In discharging this overall responsibility, the SDNPA is also responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of the Authority's functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.5 The SDNPA has approved and adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE guidance Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The Local Code of Corporate Governance sets out agreed criteria against which the effectiveness of the governance framework will be assessed. This statement explains how the Authority has complied with the Local Code and meets the requirements of Regulation 6(1) of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 for the Authority to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

### **2. The purpose of the governance framework**

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the SDNPA is directed and controlled. The frameworks also include the Authority's activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the SDNPA to monitor the achievement of its strategic priorities and to consider whether these priorities have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services. It is also a driver for the delivery of the Authority's outcomes and objectives, by contributing to the Authority's culture and empowering staff and members to act.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness.
- 2.3 The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's aims, objectives and policies, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.4 The governance framework which has evolved and been strengthened over many years, has been in place within the SDNPA for the year ended 31 March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and Statement of Accounts.

### **3. The Governance Framework**

- 3.1 The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the SDNPA's governance arrangements are summarised below.

### Vision and Leadership

- 3.2 The SDNPA's purposes, vision and intended outcomes for residents, visitors and other service users are identified in a range of policy documents set out in our Local Code of Corporate Governance. The overarching vision for the management of the South Downs was agreed in July 2012 and is included in the Partnership Management Plan (PMP), which was launched in 2014. The review of the PMP was completed in 2020 and an updated PMP published. The plan was originally developed with partners and delivery partnerships have been put in place to ensure the objectives are met. The Authority has also established a refreshed South Downs Partnership, with updated terms of reference, an independent Chair and representatives from across a wide range of key sectors, linked to the PMP in order to support delivery of the PMP and embed the PMP across those organisations and sectors operating within the national park.
- 3.3 The Policy and Resources Committee includes on its agenda a standing item to report on the delivery of the PMP ensuring that the four key PMP themes, Climate Change, Health & Wellbeing, Rural Economy and Nature Recovery have been kept under review, with each meeting of the Committee during 21/22 focussing on one of the themes. The Committee has also organised workshops, which have involved key partners, to ensure delivery against these themes is monitored and scrutinised.
- 3.4 The Local Plan sets out how the National Park Authority will manage development over the next 15 years. This is based on the statutory purposes and duty for national parks. The Local Plan builds on the framework of the South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan. The PMP sets out an overarching strategy for the management of the National Park and the Local Plan policies deliver many of the outcomes and policies set out in the PMP.
- 3.5 A review of the Local Plan has been initiated in line with the requirement to review the plan every 5 years. A revised Local Development Scheme has also been adopted. The local plan review will consider the impacts of changing national planning legislation as part of its remit.
- 3.6 The SDNPA's Corporate Plan sets out the high-level objectives and priorities for the organisation and sets out detailed proposals for the forthcoming financial year. The Corporate Plan also sets out our values. The Corporate Plan action plan has been reviewed during this period and updated by the NPA to ensure this aligns with the current budget position and organisational priorities setting out clearer priorities and targets to reflect the Authority's flat cash settlement and anticipated flat cash settlements for future years.

### Service Quality

- 3.7 Progress against the SDNPA's objectives, and the National Park Authority performance indicators is identified via quarterly and annual performance reporting to the Policy and Resources Committee and where appropriate, Planning Committee. The Performance Management Framework reflects the development of high-level objectives for the Partnership Management Plan. Performance is monitored by the Policy & Resources Committee with policies and strategies in place to ensure that the SDNPA makes best use of resources. The performance of the Sustainable Communities Fund, which is now delivered by the South Downs National Park Trust, is subject to annual reporting to the Committee.
- 3.8 Key data sets, as specified by Defra are reported to allow for national data comparison.

### Decision Making

- 3.9 The SDNPA's Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation, Financial Regulations, Contract Standing Orders and other procedures prescribe how the Authority operates and how decisions are made to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Standing Orders are regularly reviewed and changes recommended to the Authority at least annually to ensure these reflect best practice and latest legislative

requirements. Financial Procedures and Financial Regulations were both updated during 20/21.

- 3.10 Although no longer having powers to hold Formal decision making meetings electronically, the Authority has continued to make use of virtual and hybrid meetings in its informal meeting arrangements , with some member training, workshops and updates continuing to be held on-line. The Authority acknowledges that whilst on-line meetings are not always the best forum for detailed debate and discussion amongst members , they do have advantages in terms of member attendance and engagement and will therefore continue to use virtual/hybrid meetings where it considers these appropriate and within its powers to do so. The Authority responded positively to the implementation of The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, which during the 20/21 period enabled national park authorities to hold meetings in public by electronic means, in order to operate effectively during the period of the pandemic and has transited back to face to face meetings – ensuring compliance with relevant rules and Covid restrictions at all times.
- 3.11 Member training and engagement activity continued using a blend of in person and on-line ‘virtual’ meetings. Member training, knowledge and skills development, and other workshops have been held on the following subjects:
- Nature Recovery
  - Climate Change
  - Health and Wellbeing Strategy
  - Rural Economy
  - National Park for All
  - Nature Based Solution and Green Financing
  - Shoreham Cement Works Area Action Plan
  - Government Landscapes Review Consultations ( Landscapes Review)
  - Whole Estate Plans
  - Byways Open to All Traffic
  - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
  - Member Code of Conduct
  - Member engagement online and at events
  - Community Infrastructure Levy Allocation
  - Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects
  - SDNPA Risk Register
  - SDNPA Budget
  - SDNPA Corporate Plan
  - SDNPA Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document
  - South Downs Local Plan
  - Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
- 3.12 There is a programme for reviewing and updating key documentation. We have a research and evidence strategy, which ensures that comprehensive, good quality data is available to base our decisions on and allow us to monitor progress. Committee reporting templates

ensure these capture all relevant information to inform member decision making and promote consistency. These templates have been periodically reviewed and have been updated during this period to ensure they are effective and provide Members with the necessary information for them to deliver their decision-making responsibilities.

- 3.13 Each of the SDNPA's committees has distinct terms of reference, which are kept under review and, where necessary, updated by the NPA. In response to some of the findings of the Landscapes Review and with the aim of increasing the range of voices heard in its decision making and consideration of issues, the Authority has co-opted 2 additional members to the P&R committee. Following a pilot year these appointments have been extended for a further 18 months. The Scheme of Member's allowances now provides all co-optees with an allowance, and a process to identify a third co-optee is underway. These additional co-optees compliment the two Independent (Cipfa) co-opted members that also serve on the P&R committee. A process to refresh these appointments has been undertaken with recommendations being made to the NPA for appointment.
- 3.14 Meetings of the Authority and its committees are held in public (save for individual items of a sensitive nature properly considered in private session, in line with LGA 1972) with publicly available agendas and minutes published on the Authority's website. Members of the public may ask questions and make representations on relevant matters at meetings in accordance with a defined protocol for public engagement, which enshrines the rights of the public to address meetings.
- 3.15 The Authority continues to webcast meetings of the Full Authority, and its committees. An archive of webcast meetings in the last 6 months is maintained and is publicly available through the Authority website and You Tube. Work to move to paperless meetings, which has been delayed due to remote working and prioritisation of the delivery of decision making during the pandemic has resumed in 2021/22 with a paperless pilot starting in quarter 2 of 2022.
- 3.16 The Authority operates a series of "task and finish groups" to undertake in-depth work and analysis of key issues, prior to presentation to committee or the Authority for decisions. Each Group has terms of reference which are agreed by its parent committee, the full Authority or the Chief executive in consultation with the Chair of the Authority. Groups are supported by senior officers and where appropriate specialist advisors.
- 3.17 The Authority's governance framework is kept under review by the Head of Governance, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer who are responsible for ensuring that the framework complies with changes in legislation, regulations, codes or guidance issued by government departments, regulatory bodies or relevant professional bodies. Committee and Officer Delegations and terms of reference are also kept under review to ensure that the governance framework reflects changes in roles and responsibilities of committees, members and/or Officers. The scheme of delegation and committee terms of reference have been updated to ensure they reflect new ways of working as well as the performance of additional functions such as in relation to the establishment of the Teckal Company by the Authority. Changes have also been made to the Authority's indemnity arrangements for members and officers, rules of debate and in relation to reserved matters arising from the establishment of the Teckal Company.
- 3.18 The roles and responsibilities of the Members and officers are defined in Member/Officer job descriptions and there is a Local Protocol for Member and Officer Relations. The roles of Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer and Chief Finance Officer are filled. The SDNPA has a range of contracts for key support services. This includes the provision of the Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer functions. In reaching this decision the SDNPA took into account the governance requirements of CIPFA's Statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010). The CFO accordingly has full responsibility for reporting on financial performance and presenting financial performance updates and the

annual budget report to members, as well as Internal Audit reviews and the Statement of Accounts.

- 3.19 The contract for the provision of financial services and Chief Finance Officer support has been renewed during this period. The CFO function continues to be performed under this contract by the CFO, appointed by the Authority, and the CFO's nominated Deputy Chief Finance Officer at Brighton & Hove City Council.
- 3.20 The contracts for legal services and provision of the Monitoring officer have both been retendered during this period and new contracts entered into, in both cases with the previous supplier.
- 3.21 There are arrangements for consultation with the Monitoring Officer, CFO or Deputy CFO on key decisions and advice to the Authority and its Committees. Arrangements are in place for the CFO's nominated deputy to attend management meetings on the CFO's behalf in order to ensure a sound understanding of the organisation's key priorities and risks.
- 3.22 During this year the Authority has launched its operations at Seven Sisters Country Park. In order to support delivery of the improvements the Authority wishes to see at the site it has established a Teckal company (South Downs Commercial Operations Limited) which enables activities for a commercial purpose to be undertaken. The implications of this have been reviewed and the scheme of delegation and committee terms of reference have been updated to ensure monitoring and oversight of the activities of the company and the performance of shareholder functions, some of which have been delegated to the Chief Executive. An operating agreement has been entered into between the Teckal Company and the Authority which defines the relationship between the company and the Authority and the Authority has agreed the Articles of Association for the Company. In addition an Annual business plan for the company has been agreed by the SDNPA as shareholder setting out the approved functions to be delivered by the company and incorporating key performance indicators which will be kept under review by the Policy and Resources Committee.
- 3.23 The Authority has also continued its relationship with the South Downs Trust – which is an independent charity established by the Authority. The Authority continues to have a license agreement for the use of the shared identify and seconds staff to the trust. The Authority appoints two Authority members as trustees and continues to make a payment to the trust to support its administrative costs, however this is on a tapering basis. The Trust continues to provide updates twice a year to the Authority, with these updates being presented in public. The Trust complies with the reporting requirements of the Charity Commission and Companies House and keeps its governance and policy framework under review to ensure it is robust and fit for purpose. The Trust also publishes an annual report.
- 3.24 The annual review of governance has been supported by a member survey and a Member Tasks and Finish Group which has resulted in a range of proposals to further improve the operation of the authority's governance procedures and ensure these are proportionate and reflect the needs of the membership – these include changes to the committee schedule, reporting of member attendance at meetings and changes to the member development programme amongst other things.
- 3.25 The Authority has developed and approved its response to the Government's response to the Landscapes Review and has identified where further powers would support the NPA to deliver against its purposes. The Authority continues to work closely with Defra at an Officer and Member level as the proposals from the consultation are developed.

#### Risk management

- 3.26 The SNDPA has established a systematic strategy, framework and processes for managing risk. A corporate risk register is maintained and has been reviewed on an ongoing basis at meetings of the Policy & Resources Committee as well as being subject to regular review by Operational Management Team (OMT). The Policy and Resources committee has

introduced opportunities for members to better engage with the corporate risk register through a series of meetings – enabling committee members to dig deeper into issues on the risk register in advance of the Committee meeting and better inform the discussions which take place in Committee. This enables relevant risks to be identified and evaluated, with consideration given to appropriate mitigation strategies.

- 3.27 Directorate level risk monitoring is in place. Risk is also monitored at project level. There is an escalation process from project and directorate risk registers to the corporate risk register.
- 3.28 The Authority's insurance arrangements have been kept under review and updated as new risks identified including the operations at Seven Sisters Country Park . The Insurance Services contract has been renewed during this period.

#### Conduct and behaviour

- 3.29 There are Codes of Conduct for Members and officers, in place and performance appraisal processes for both. Training is given to new Members on the Code of Conduct as part of the induction process and an all –member training event on standards has been provided by external experts during this period. There is a Register of Members' Interests. The Authority operates successor standards arrangements for the conduct of Members following the implementation of the Localism Act 2011. The Appointment Management & Standards Committee is responsible for monitoring the ethical framework of the Authority. The Authority has appointed two independent persons to oversee the investigation of complaints about the conduct of Members.
- 3.30 The Member Code of Conduct aligns with the updated Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies issued by the Cabinet Office which those Members appointed by the Secretary of State are also required to comply with. Throughout the year individual and collective guidance has been issued to Members on the management of standards issues.
- 3.31 An annual update on complaints received, and matters referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman is considered by the Policy and Resources Committee, so that the Authority can seek service improvement. The SDNPA has a Whistleblowing Policy, with confidential reporting arrangements in place to enable internal and external whistle-blowing. There is an Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy in place.
- 3.32 Competencies are incorporated into the performance and development review process for staff and a staff and member working group have developed and communicated a series of corporate values. The last full staff survey was undertaken in 2018, however a number of surveys have been undertaken during the pandemic to ensure staff welfare is monitored and Senior managers and Members are kept apprised of any issues resulting from new ways of working during the pandemic.
- 3.33 The Authority has continued to work on the development of an action plan to assist in improving the Authority's Equality, Diversity and inclusion work. The Action Plan Objectives were presented to members at the Authority meeting in July 2022. This work has included staff and member surveys and sessions in order to ensure all staff and members have an opportunity to participate in this work. Member training on EDI has been provided during this period.

#### Financial accountability

- 3.34 The SDNPA's Financial Regulations and Procedures, provide a framework for the management of the Authority's financial affairs and are subject to ongoing review. The SDNPA has an approved Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Policy and Annual Investment Strategy detailing its approach and risk appetite for managing financing, treasury and non-treasury investments. The Annual Investment Strategy was amended during this period to add additional approved counterparties within the strategy. Monitoring of the

operational budget is conducted during the year and findings incorporated into the budget planning process.

- 3.35 Payment of allowances to Members is made in accordance with the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003. Allowances have continued to increase with the staff cost of living pay award and will be subject to a full review in 2024.
- 3.36 Members have a key role in providing assurance that the Authority's funds are used economically, efficiently and effectively in accordance with agreed policies, and the Authority's general Duty of Best Value under the Local Government Act 1999. The financial strategy and budget is agreed by the Authority following scrutiny by all Members via a series of workshops. The Policy & Resources Committee receives regular reports on budget monitoring and treasury management performance and has a membership that includes two independent co-opted members who have relevant finance and governance experience. This committee undertakes the core functions of an audit committee. This ensures the provision of appropriate skills and experience in the scrutiny of the Authority's arrangements for financial control and risk management and enhances transparency.
- 3.37 The Authority has maintained its approach of allocating budgets to the Authority's Theme Programme Boards enabling these boards to be more responsive to opportunities to deliver projects on the ground. The work of the Boards is driven by the objectives set out in the PMP and Corporate Plan. Budget allocations are agreed by the NPA through the budget setting process and reflect the relative priorities of the Authority.
- 3.38 The boards are led by senior managers within the Countryside and Policy Management directorate, who are each accountable for the spend and delivery against targets, although membership of boards is cross directorate.
- 3.39 The Authority's accounts are subject to external audit on an annual basis and reported to the Policy & Resources Committee at a public meeting. During this period the Authority determined to accept the Public Sector Appointments Limited's invitation to become an opted-in Authority for the purposes of the appointment of a local Auditor.
- 3.40 An Internal Audit service is provided under a service level agreement by Brighton & Hove City Council's Internal Audit Services. The outcome of internal audits are reported to the Policy and Resources Committee and the full reports are sent to the Chair and Deputy Chairs and the Independent co-opted Members of the committee. An independent and external review of internal audit to ensure compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards was carried out in January 2018. The Authority's external auditors, Grant Thornton review the appropriateness of internal audit arrangements and accordingly place reliance on the work done where applicable.
- 3.41 The Authority has also embedded processes to oversee the delivery of the Infrastructure business plan and for allocating monies generated through the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- 3.42 All contracts since June 2013 have been procured through e-sourcing using the In-tend system, or through National frameworks.

#### Constructive working relationships between officers and Members

- 3.43 Compliance with relevant legal requirements and the SDNPA's procedures is facilitated by a range of controls. Policies are in place to regulate how the Members and Officers use the resources available to them.
- 3.44 The SDNPA receives legal advice and Monitoring Officer support as appropriate via separate contracts with West Sussex County Council and Hampshire County Council. This advice includes input into significant Committee/Authority papers. During this period no formal reports by the Monitoring Officer, further to section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, were necessary.



- 3.45 Senior managers and Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs meet monthly in an informal capacity to horizon scan and consider the forward management of Authority business. Although this is not a decision making body it allows for a constructive dialogue between officers and Members and ensure activity is informed by a wide range of views.
- 3.46 The Authority has continued its practice to create a small number of Members who are not appointed to committees, but rather work more closely with officers on specific policy areas or activities, such as health and wellbeing and the rural economy. This has resulted in a small number of Members not being appointed to serve on the Authority's committees and has enabled Members, who may have had difficulty in attending scheduled Committee meetings, to participate in and contribute to the work of the Authority. All Members are still required to attend NPA meetings and other Member development and engagement activities and are subject to the requirements to attend meetings set out in the LGA 1972 and the Authority's Standing Orders
- 3.47 The induction of new Members has been reviewed and will be delivered using a mix of in person events and online roundtable sessions with SMT and Committee Chairs and Deputies to ensure that new Members joining the Authority are able to fully engage in the work of the Authority.

#### Skills and Learning for staff and Members

- 3.48 Member and Officer learning and development needs are identified and met through induction programmes, the Performance and Development Review process, the Learning and Development Policy for officers (with individual staff learning and development plans) and the Member Engagement Protocol. There are annual Member discussions about development needs between individual members and the Chair of the Authority.
- 3.49 An e-learning platform is maintained as part of a blended approach to training delivery. This includes a series of mandatory courses to be undertaken by all staff as well as optional courses focussing on personal development and growth. These courses are also available to Members. For staff, completion of courses is linked to the annual performance assessment process.
- 3.50 Mid and end of Project evaluations are reported to the Policy and Resources Committee and key learning is identified from these and used to inform the development of future projects and ways of working.
- 3.51 Budget managers have access to one to one support for budget management and also briefings on financial procedures and administration, further budget management and closedown. All financial guidance and procedure notes are available on the Authority's Intranet. Contract management training has been provided to relevant staff, and the Policy and Resources Committee approved the Authority's procurement strategy 2021-26. This strategy sets out how 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.

#### Clear relationships with Partners and the public

- 3.52 A key element in the SDNPA's guiding principles is working with partners and community groups. The SDNPA has therefore developed and maintained a range of relationships and arrangements with other agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors to ensure that they are able to engage with and contribute to the work of the Authority. The SDNPA has an Accord with Natural England and Memoranda of Understanding with the South Downs Network and South Downs Land Management Group. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Association of Local Councils within the South Downs is also in place and communications with parishes and local communities has been improved through the approach to parish workshops – including on-line webinars and Q&A sessions enabling meeting on a more frequent basis. During 2021/22 we also held 4 online parish workshops and 2 parish webinars (topics were dark night skies and nature recovery). The Authority has

continued Member appointments to a number of local and national partner organisations and groups including the South Downs Local Access Forum, Campaign for National Park's and the South Downs National Park Trust.

- 3.53 The Authority has overseen the establishment of an independently chaired South Downs Partnership with a remit to Champion the Outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) through:
- Being a strong partnership in pursuit of common goals across the diverse landscape and communities of the SDNP and its environs
  - Working alongside the NPA and other partners to drive and monitor continual improvement across the landscape and communities of the National Park
  - Embedding the PMP as a vehicle for change across the National Park
  - Providing 'integrated thinking' and seeking to resolve issues arising when there is a conflict between competing policy objectives;
  - Providing a forum for those with a stake in delivery of the PM
- 3.54 We continue to work with neighbourhood planning groups across the breadth of the National Park, to prepare neighbourhood plans that respect the purposes and duty of the National Park Authority and enhance the special qualities the National Park
- 3.55 A revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) has been adopted during this period.
- 3.56 SI01 agreements with the 5 Planning Host authorities have been approved by the NPA during this period. These agreements define the relationship with the host Authorities who deliver planning services on behalf of the NPA and include quality and performance measures which are reported to the Policy and Resources Committee as part its performance monitoring.
- 3.57 Whole Estate Plans are seen as a key way of deepening engagement with estates and landowners, and these plans are subject to consideration by the Policy and Resources Committee, and involve visits to the estate to help Members and officers understand the issues facing land owners in the National Park. A review of the processes associated with the delivery of WEPs has also been undertaken and new practices introduced to ensure Members engage with emerging WEPs at the most appropriate time.
- 3.58 The Authority uses a range of methods to maintain regular contact with its communities and wider public, for example, the e-newsletter and planning newsletter, which provide regular updates to 8,786 and 1,207 subscribers respectively on the work of the Authority and activities within the National Park.
- 3.59 Learning from the positive and negatives of the move to virtual we rolled out a programme of hybrid engagement with hybrid festivals including Wild Chalk, Secrets of the Heath and Dark Night Skies, and in person pop up events at hot spots and urban fringe areas. Through this engagement we reached an online audience of 275,000 and 15,466 people in person. During the year we launched a new website and social media channels for Seven Sisters Country Park, and reached a combined total of 13.6 million people through our digital channels
- 3.60 In July 2021, The Authority, working with the South Downs National Park Trust launched its Nature recovery campaign, ReNature with the aim of increasing awareness of the 33% (13,000 ha) ambition;
- to secure inward investment of at least £100m through public, private and charitable finance; and
  - to mobilise and inspire landowners, communities and the public to take action.

- 3.61 The campaign is a focal point for the work of the Authority with regards to nature recovery and will involve significant fund raising activities from a range of sources to help achieve the 33% for nature target. The campaign reached over 378,000 people online and the campaign film was seen by 258,000 people online or in cinemas across the south east. The media launch of the campaign and the call for sites reached 7.5 million people with 221 separate pieces of media coverage.
- 3.62 The Authority has in place appropriate policies for in relation to Equalities issues and every report considered by the NPA or its committees considered whether the decision would impact upon groups with protected characteristics, with full equalities impact assessments being undertaken where this is considered necessary. The delivery of EDI training for all staff has contributed to the effectiveness of this. The Authority has sought to engage with communities across the national park and through its comms, engagement and outreach work has improved awareness of the National Park across a wide range of groups. An EDI action plan has been developed which will further support the embedding of this work in the Authority and will contribute to the work of the Authority and the National Park itself in providing access to all individuals and communities.
- 3.63 The Authority has also maintained youth ambassador roles to strengthen engagement with young people across the National Park and has in place the appropriate safeguarding policies and mechanisms, all approved through the Authority's HR Team.
- 3.64 The SDNP Citizens Panel currently consists of around 700 people living within or near the National Park. Panel members are surveyed twice a year on a variety of subjects, most recently on sustainability and local business, awareness and usage of Seven Sisters Country Park, and public transport use in the National Park. The Research Team writes all research questions in collaboration with colleagues and only includes questions where we are able to act on the research results and recommendations. All feedback from the Panel is shared with the relevant colleagues/teams and this information is utilised in their work.). In addition, a Citizens Panel e-newsletter is sent to panel members bi-annually, keeping them updated with the latest developments in and around the Park as well as informing them how their survey responses have shaped or contributed to our work as an Authority.
- 3.65 During this period, the Authority has adopted a wildlife delivery plan and associated high level targets too underpin its work on nature recovery and the renature campaign. This has supported a call for sites and associated process to identify appropriate sites for further action in relation to renaturing.
- 3.66 The authority has engaged with partners across a range of consultations including in relation the M3 J9 and minerals and waste consultations.
- 4. Review of Effectiveness**
- 4.1 The SDNPA has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Senior Management Team and other officers within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the work done to review the Local Code of Corporate Governance, and also by responding to comments and recommendations made by external auditors and others.
- 4.2 The annual review exercise, which incorporated a review of the Local Code of Corporate Governance, was initiated by the Head of Governance and the Monitoring Officer and included consultations with the Strategic Management Team, the Chief Finance Officer and the Internal Auditor.
- 4.3 The Internal Audit Annual Opinion is that Reasonable Assurance can be provided that an effective system of internal control is in place at the SDNPA for the year ended 31 March 2022. Of the five audits undertaken, there were three reasonable assurance opinions given in

the year, along with one substantial assurance opinion and one partial assurance opinion. Significant improvements have been made as a result of the internal audit process particularly in relation to ICT arrangements, which received a partial assurance. Amongst other improvements, this Audit has resulted in increasing the regularity of patch management to support the resilience of the Authority's IT systems. A follow up audit is planned in 2022/23

4.4 The SDNPA's Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer have also provided assurance that there have been no significant control issues which have:

- Required the need for formal action or reporting in their respective roles,
- Required the need for significant additional funding not already provided for within the approved budget,
- Had a material impact on the accounts; or
- Resulted in significant public interest, damaging the reputation of the Authority.

4.5 Although a review of the effectiveness of the Governance arrangements is reported once per year to the Authority, the process of gathering evidence and monitoring performance is continual and is managed through reports to the Authority and its Committees, and through the improvement planning process. Management action required to maintain effective governance arrangements evident from reports and from other management reporting processes is taken throughout the year.

4.6 We have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework and that the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework. The areas already addressed and those to be specifically addressed with new actions planned are outlined below.

## **5. Governance issues**

5.1 No significant governance issues have been identified. The following key areas of work have been conducted during 2021/22:

- Further embedding of processes related to paperless meetings as face to face meetings return
- Delivery of Member Code of Conduct training
- Embedding necessary governance changes as a result of the establishment of a Teckal company
- Review of governance structures to ensure learning from Covid 19 Pandemic is embedded in governance arrangements
- Review organisational policies as part of new ways of working as part of a move to a blended style of working
- Finalising the operating agreement with the Authority's Teckal company

5.2 Actions for 2022-2023 include the following:

- Further embedding of processes related to paperless meetings (ongoing from 21/22)
- Review the position regarding the use of byelaws at Seven Sisters Country Park (ongoing from 21/22)
- Implementation of changes arising from the review of the staff PDR process (ongoing from 21/22)

- Complete the review of the model councillor code of conduct recently published by the Local Government Association to identify whether further revision of the Member Code of Conduct is needed
- Implement the outcomes of the 2022 member survey and review of governance as reported to the NPA in May 2022.

5.3 We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements, and delivery against these will continue to be monitored by the P&R committee.

5.4 We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Chair



On behalf of the SDNPA

Chief Executive Officer

