

Report to **National Park Authority**
Date **28 March 2024**
By **HR Manager and Head of Governance**
Title of Report **Recruitment of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer)**
Decision

Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to:

- 1. Agree that the appointment of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) should not be made exclusively from among the existing Officers of the Authority;**
 - 2. Note the process and intended timeline leading to the appointment of the permanent Chief Executive which is delegated to the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee to undertake.**
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I. Introduction

- I.1** At the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) meeting on 12 December 2023, Trevor Beattie announced his retirement from the role of Chief Executive of the Authority. At that meeting the Authority appointed Tim Slaney as the Interim Chief Executive until the first working day of the new permanent Chief Executive. The Authority also noted that the timing and process leading to the appointment of the permanent Chief Executive would be considered by the Appointments, Management and Standards (AMS) Committee and reported back to the Authority.
- I.2** The purpose of this report is for the Authority to consider the recommendation from the AMS Committee that the appointment of the Chief Executive should not be made exclusively from among the existing Officers of the Authority. In layman's terms, this means that the search for suitability qualified candidates for the role will take place both within and outside of the Authority. However, this does not predetermine that the appointment of the Chief Executive must be someone who is not an existing Officer of the Authority; the appointment of the Chief Executive may ultimately be a person from either within or outside of the Authority. The requirement for the Authority to take this decision is set out in the Authority's Standing Orders which is in line with the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 1993.
- I.3** This report also seeks to ensure the Authority is aware of the process and timeline that is proposed to be followed, should the Authority agree with the AMS Committee's recommendation, which will lead to the appointment of the permanent Chief Executive. Approval of these processes by the Authority is not required as much of this is required by legislation (as detailed in Appendix 6 of the Authority's Standing Orders) and the Authority has delegated the Chief Executive recruitment and selection process to the AMS Committee in the Authority's Standing Orders.

2. Policy context

- 2.1 Under the Environment Act 1995 the Authority is required to have “at all times an officer appointed by that authority to be responsible to the authority for the manner in which the carrying out of its different functions is co-ordinated.” This officer is the Chief Executive. The Authority is also required, under the same Act, to consult with Natural England before making such an appointment.
- 2.2 Under the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) Regulations 1993, where the Authority proposes to appoint a Chief Executive, it is required to consider whether or not the appointment should be made exclusively from among the existing officers of the Authority. In practice, this is whether the search for a Chief Executive would be limited to Officers of the Authority or not.

3. Issues for consideration

- 3.1 At its meeting on 14 February 2024, the AMS Committee considered the question of whether the search for a Chief Executive should be limited to Officers of the Authority or not.
- 3.2 Given the very significant and strategic importance of the role of Chief Executive, the AMS Committee considered it important that a thorough search and assessment process be undertaken as part of the recruitment of the Authority’s next Chief Executive. In order to ensure this, the AMS Committee considered it wholly appropriate that the search be undertaken both within and outside of the Authority. The AMS Committee therefore resolved to recommend to the Authority that the appointment of the Chief Executive should not be made exclusively from among the existing Officers of the Authority.
- 3.3 In order to undertake this search, the services of a specialist recruitment consultant with experience of recruiting both at this level of seniority and within this sector would be sought.
- 3.4 In line with its delegations and the provisions of Appendix 6 of Standing Orders, the AMS Committee has drawn up a Job Description and Person Specification for the role. It has also discussed the necessary arrangements for the advertisement of the role, which it considers is best managed through the use of a specialist recruitment consultant.
- 3.5 Should the Authority agree to the recommendation, the intended timeline leading to the appointment of the Chief Executive is set out below.
- April 2024 – Procurement process for a specialist recruitment consultant undertaken.
 - May / June 2024 – Advertisement of the role through the specialist recruitment consultant.
 - July 2024 – Shortlisting, assessment and interviewing of candidates.
 - Early August 2024 – Appointment of permanent Chief Executive.
- 3.6 Should the Authority agree to the recommendation, the committee will also consider the arrangements for the assessment and interview of shortlisted candidates, and the most appropriate way to satisfy the requirement to consult with Natural England before making an appointment.

4. Options and cost implications

- 4.1 The Authority could decide to appoint exclusively from among the existing Officers of the Authority, which would avoid the costs in relation to the employment of a recruitment consultant and would reduce the workload of the overall recruitment process. However, the AMS Committee considers that the Authority should not limit its search for the permanent Chief Executive to within the Authority. As the person who will hopefully lead the Authority for several years, it is felt that a thorough search for the most suitable and qualified candidates should be undertaken, some of whom may or may not be existing Officers of the Authority.

4.2 There are not insignificant cost implications associated with the recommendation. The recruitment process and management of this process by the AMS Committee is being led by the Authority’s HR Manager and the Head of Governance and will require support from Officers in the HR and Procurement Teams. In addition, the employment of a specialist recruitment consultant is expected to cost approximately £20k. The AMS Committee considers the cost acceptable and commensurate with the work to be undertaken in the recruitment of a role of this level of seniority and importance to the Authority. The net cost is expected to be managed within existing budget resources but where this is not possible, this would be a first call on the forecast outturn 2023-24 underspend held in General Reserves.

5. Next steps

5.1 Should the Authority agree the recommendation that the appointment of the Chief Executive Officer should not be made exclusively from amongst the existing Officers of the Authority, a procurement process for a specialist recruitment consultant will be undertaken. The procurement process is expected to take approximately 4 weeks until a consultant is appointed.

5.2 Once the consultant is appointed, the AMS Committee and SDNPA Officers will work with the consultants to advertise the role in such a way as to ensure a high profile and to attract and identify suitably qualified candidates.

5.3 The recruitment, assessment, and interview process is expected to take approximately 12 weeks. This would lead to the AMS committee making an appointment, likely in early August 2024.

6. Other implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Yes, the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee will undertake the recruitment process and will make the appointment of the permanent Chief Executive as is delegated to the Committee in the Authority’s Standing Orders.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	Yes. Officers from the Authority’s HR and Governance Teams are leading on this recruitment process and their involvement will be required throughout the process. A procurement process will be undertaken to appoint a recruitment consultant, with the cost expected to be approximately £20k.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Ensuring the recruitment of the best person for the role of Chief Executive of the SDNPA is key to the Authority’s delivery of its purposes and duty and other statutory responsibilities.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	The role of Chief Executive supports the SDNPA’s ability to deliver against all PMP Outcomes and Corporate Plan Objectives
Links to other projects or partner organisations	The Chief Executive liaises with a wide variety of organisations representing the interests of the Authority and the wider National Park.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority’s climate change objectives	The role of Chief Executive is key to the SDNPA’s ability to deliver its climate change objectives.

Implication	Yes*/No
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. An equality and diversity impact assessment has been undertaken to inform the recruitment process to ensure the Authority not only complies with its duties under the Equality Act 2010 but also to ensure that best practice is considered throughout the recruitment process.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report
Are there any Data Protection implications?	None directly arising from this report. Personal data will be collected as part of the recruitment process. This will be handled in line with established processes by the HR Team. Any recruitment consultant employed to work with the Authority will also be required to handle personal data in line with Data Protection legislation and the Authority's data protection policies.

7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

- 7.1 The role of Chief Executive is key to the Authority and its ability to meet its objective; therefore, it is important that a thorough search be undertaken as part of the recruitment process to ensure the Authority appoints the best person for the role. If it did not, the Authority would risk missing out on high quality candidates.

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Appendices

None

SDNPA Consultees

Director of Planning; Head of Finance and Corporate Services; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer.

External Consultees

None

Background Documents

None