

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **20 February 2025**
By **Chief Finance Officer**
Title of Report **Audited Statement of Accounts 2023/24 and Letter of Representation**

Decision

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Note the Commentary on the Statement of Accounts 2023/24 set out in Appendix 1.**
 - 2. Approve the Statement of Accounts 2023/24 as set out in Appendix 2 for publication.**
 - 3. Authorise the Chief Finance Officer to make any final amendments to the accounts required, providing that the amendments have no impact on the financial position (outturn) of the Authority.**
 - 4. Authorise the Chief Finance Officer to sign the formal Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3 on the conclusion of all audit queries.**
 - 5. Approve the amended Annual Governance Statement at Appendix 4.**
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I. Introduction

- I.1** This report provides information about the preparation and audit of the Authority's 2023/24 Statement of Accounts and recommends approval of the 2023/24 audited Statement of Accounts and Letter of Representation on behalf of the Authority. Under the Committee's terms of reference, the Policy & Resources Committee is charged with this responsibility.
- I.2** The provisional outturn position for 2023/24 was reported to the National Park Authority meeting on 9 July 2024. The Statement of Accounts at **Appendix 2** presents the audited outturn position for the Authority following conclusion of the audit and receipt of the External Auditor's Audit Findings Report which is elsewhere on this committee agenda.
- I.3** The main legislative requirements relating to the preparation, publication and audit of the Authority's accounts are contained in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 as amended by the Accounts and Audit (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (statutory instrument 2021/263). It is a requirement that the annual accounts should be published in draft by 31 May and made available for public inspection for 30 days. Under the current rules for managing national audit backlogs, the External Auditor has until 28 February 2025 to complete the audit of the 2023/24 accounts. The draft 2023/24 accounts were published on the Authority's website on 30 May 2024 and the audited version is presented here.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1 There are no direct policy implications within this report. The financial statements publicly report the Authority's financial standing and demonstrate how the authority has deployed its resources during the financial year.

3. Issues for consideration

Format of the Statement of Accounts

- 3.1 The purpose of the Statement of Accounts is to provide information to a whole range of stakeholders and the general public about the financial position, financial performance and cash flows of the Authority and to provide answers to basic questions such as:
- What did the Authority's services and capital programme cost?
 - Where did the money come from?
 - What does the Authority own?
 - What amounts were due and what was owed at the end of the financial year?
 - What commitments does the Authority have and what provision and reserves has the Authority set against these?
- 3.2 A brief commentary on the key aspects of the Statement of Accounts 2023/24 is included in **Appendix I** of this report.
- 3.3 The audited Statement of Accounts 2023/24 are included in **Appendix 2** of this report. In accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Statement of Accounts include:
- Narrative report;
 - Statement of responsibilities;
 - Core financial statements;
 - Notes to the accounts (including group accounts);
 - Accounting policies.
- 3.4 The Statement of Accounts comprises the Single Entity Accounts, which are in respect of wholly owned Authority controlled activities. In the 2023/24 financial year, due to the Authority's financial interest and equity share in the Seven Sisters Country Park trading company for part of the year until October 2024, group accounts have been produced.
- 3.5 The Single Entity core financial statements included within the Statement of Accounts comprise the following:
- Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statements (CIES);
 - Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS);
 - Balance Sheet;
 - Cash Flow Statement;
 - Other Notes to the Financial Statements (including group accounts);
 - Statement of Accounting Policies.
- 3.6 The Expenditure and Funding Analysis (EFA) is a note to the financial statements which demonstrates how funding available to the Authority for the year has been used in providing services as specified by the Authority's management reporting structure.

Preparation of the Statement of Accounts

- 3.7 The Authority is required to present its financial statements on an International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) basis in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 (the Code), issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. There has been no deviation from the requirements of the Code and all accounting policies adopted by the Authority for the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts are in line with the requirements of the Code.
- 3.8 The accounts have been prepared by appropriately qualified and trained officers from Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) as the Authority's financial services provider. BHCC officers who are involved in the preparation of the Statement of Accounts attend regular training to ensure they maintain an up to date knowledge of requirements, including continuous professional development.
- 3.9 BHCC officers have made reference to CIPFA's Practitioners' Guidance Notes, disclosure checklists and other technical guidance in preparing the Statement of Accounts to ensure compliance with all statutory and other regulatory requirements.
- 3.10 The Authority makes critical judgements, accounting estimates and assumptions in the preparation of the financial statements which are disclosed in Note 3 "Critical Judgements and Assumptions Made" to the financial statements.
- 3.11 As part of the accounts preparation process, a full review of the financial statements, notes and critical accounting transactions was undertaken by senior officers of BHCC. Following this review, the Unaudited Statement of Accounts were then reviewed and approved by the Chief Finance Officer to be issued for public inspection and audit on 30 May 2024.
- 3.12 It should be noted that the 2023/24 accounts include a number of adjustments relating to 'Revenue Expenditure funded by Capital under Statute' (known as REFCUS), This relates to the accounting treatment of 5 projects which incurred expenditure on assets not owned by the authority. Following a review, these projects were found to be incorrectly classified as revenue expenditure projects with the associated expenditure and income being charged to the cost of services in the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement (CIES). In effect, these projects should have been treated as capital projects with their expenditure being treated as revenue expenditure funded by capital under statute. These adjustments have no impact on the financial position of the Authority but correctly restate the type of expenditure incurred.
- 3.13 For future projects this principle will be applied in accordance with the CIPFA Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting. This will enable the authority to charge similar revenue costs for projects to capital in future. The authority then has then the choice of funding such expenditure from either capital or revenue resources.

Audit of the Statement of Accounts

- 3.14 The primary purpose of the work of the external auditor is to:
- express an opinion on the 2023/24 financial statements and the consistency of other information published with them;
 - consider and report any matters that prevent them being satisfied that the Authority has put in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources;
 - discharge their statutory duties and responsibilities as established by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and Code of Audit Practice.
- 3.15 The outcome of the audit is reported in the external auditor's Audit Findings Report, also on this committee agenda.

- 3.16 Members are advised that the external auditors have substantially completed their audit of the Statement of Accounts. Any outstanding issues are detailed in their Audit Findings Report elsewhere on the agenda.
- 3.17 As part of working with the external auditor to review the accounts a small number (7) of changes were identified and have been adjusted in the accounts. These are described in the auditor’s report as Adjusted Misstatements. Similarly, a small number of misclassification or disclosure changes (9) were also identified and have all been adjusted for. There is no impact on the Authority’s financial position arising from these changes. The auditor has also recommended a number of management actions to improve accounting processes, reporting or data capture and these have all been accepted as part of the process of continuous improvement as indicated by the disclosed management responses. All of these changes and recommendations are set out in the auditor’s Audit Findings Report elsewhere on the agenda.
- 3.18 The Letter of Representation as set out in Appendix 3 provides the external auditor with written representation from the Chief Finance Officer and the Committee on matters material to the financial statements when other sufficient, appropriate audit evidence cannot be reasonably expected to exist. The letter is a significant procedure in enabling the external auditor to form an opinion as to whether the financial statements give a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority.

Public Inspection of Accounts

- 3.19 The period for public inspection was 1 June 2024 to 12 July 2024. Members of the public, in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, are granted access for a minimum period of 30 working days to the Authority’s Unaudited Statement of Accounts and were invited to enquire on any aspect of the accounts. There were no public enquires made as part of this process.

4. Revised Annual Governance Statement (AGS) 2023/24

- 4.1 In discussions with the External Auditor, the auditor has requested that the change in the relationship and status of the South Downs Trading Co be reflected in the 2023/24 AGS and a revised AGS approved. Revised wording is provided in Appendix 4 at paragraph 3.28, highlighted yellow, for the committee’s approval.

5. Options & cost implications

- 5.1 The Statement of Accounts represents the final outturn position of the Authority for the 2023/24 financial year of a £0.377 million below budget variance as reported to the Authority in the Provisional Outturn report 9 July 2024.

6. Next steps

- 6.1 There are no further Committee decisions required relating to the report.

7. Other implications

| Implication | Yes/No |
|---|---|
| Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority? | No |
| Does the proposal raise any Resource implications? | Associated resource decisions including agreement of budget carry forwards and reserves were made by the NPA in July 2024. The below budget outturn position will result in an increased contribution to the Authority’s reserves balance as previously reported. |

| Implication | Yes/No |
|---|---|
| How does the proposal represent Value for Money? | The financial statements are important in terms of publicly reporting and demonstrating how the authority has deployed its resources during the financial year. |
| Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal? | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Has due regard been taken of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010? | Yes. There are no implications arising directly from this report. The preparation, publication and audit of the Authority's accounts are undertaken in line with the responsibilities and processes set out in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. Copies of the accounts and associated document are available to all upon request and available in alternative formats if requested. |
| Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal? | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal? | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal? | There are no implications arising from this report. |
| Are there any Data Protection implications? | There are no implications arising from this report. |

8. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision

8.1 There are no risks associated to the proposed decisions arising from this report.

NIGEL MANVELL

Chief Finance Officer

South Downs National Park Authority

Contact Officer: Nigel Manvell

Tel: 01273 291233

Email: Nigel.Manvell@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Appendices

1. Commentary on the Statement of Accounts 2023/24
2. Statement of Accounts 2023/24
3. Letter of Representation 2023/24
4. Revised Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| SDNPA Consultees | Chief Executive; Director of Landscape and Strategy; Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer; Legal Services; Head of Finance & Corporate Services. |
| External Consultees | None |
| Background Documents | None |

Commentary on the Statement of Accounts 2023/24

Revenue Income and Expenditure

The Authority reports its financial performance across four service areas known as ‘operating segments’. In 2023/24 the Authority spent a net £10.609 million (2022/23 £12,265 million).

In 2023/24 the Authority received revenue income of £19.714 million (2022/23 £18.699 million); £1.015 million higher than that received in 2022/23. The income relates to various sources such as government grants and contributions of £12.232 million; fees, charges and other service income of £6.729 million; and interest receivable of £0.753 million. Income was higher in 2023/24 due to some recovery of planning incomes together with higher investment income due to the higher interest rate environment.

For the 2023/24 financial year, the accounts report the Authority’s outturn variance of £0.377 million below the approved budget.

Capital Investment

In 2023/24, the Authority incurred £2.446 million (2022/23 £2.384 million) of capital investment which included costs associated with Seven Sisters Country Park projects, IT infrastructure and other invest-to-save investments. This was fully funded in year (no external borrowing).

Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE)

The Authority holds land and buildings including the South Downs Centre, Seven Sisters property and land, vehicles, plant, furniture and equipment as assets. The value of the Authority’s assets is £9.851 million (2022/23 £9.857 million). All the property and land assets are revalued each year for balance sheet purposes.

Debtors and Creditors

At 31 March 2024, £3.537 million (2022/23 £2.187 million) was owed to the Authority by debtors over the short term (i.e. 12 months). At 31 March 2024, the Authority owed £5.686 million (2022/23 £6.691 million) to short term creditors. The short-term creditor includes £2.532 million (£2.832 million in 2022/23) of Section 106 receipts.

Reserves

The level of General Fund balance held is a professional judgment by the Authority based on the recommendation of the Chief Finance Officer taking into account local circumstances including the overall budget size, assessed risks, robustness of estimates, major initiatives being undertaken, budget assumptions and the levels of other earmarked reserves and provisions. The Authority holds £13.585 million of usable reserves (2022/23 £11.546 million) which includes a working balance of £1.060 million (2022/23 £1.102 million).

Pension Fund Assets/Liabilities

The overall pension fund position represents the difference between the value of the Authority’s pension fund assets at 31 March 2024 and the estimated present value of the future pension payments due at the balance sheet date. This is an accounting requirement with the Authority holding an equal and opposite entry (reserve) for the estimated net pension asset/liability. The entries included in the Authority’s financial statements in relation this have no impact on the General Fund balance (the Authority’s financial position).

The Authority’s net liability for future pension payments, as estimated by the pension actuary, is actually a net asset and has increased in the financial year from £6.531 million as at 31 March 2023 to £8.980 million as at 31 March 2024. The pension fund asset will be restated once the actuary has revised the 31 March 2024 IAS19 actuarial valuation report (“an assessment of the pension fund current and future liabilities generated by employee benefits promises”) to take account of the limit on a defined benefit asset/asset ceiling (application/interpretation of IFRIC14). Please note that this

only applies where a defined benefit pension scheme has a net asset (rather than net liability) at the year end.

Investments

On 31 March 2023 the Authority held investments and cash/cash equivalents of £14.877 million (31 March 2022 was also £14.877 million).



Audited Statement of Accounts 2023/24

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Chief Finance Officer's Narrative Report

Introduction

The impact of the UK's economic challenges (high pay and price inflation environment) continues to be felt across the South Downs National Park area and its communities and partners. These impacts are also felt by the Authority but as a body largely supported directly by central government (and planning fees) the park has remained financially viable.

Authority Overview

The South Downs National Park Authority was established in April 2010 (and fully operational from April 2011). From July 2021, the park's operations expanded to include Seven Sisters Country Park. The South Downs National Park covers the chalk downland, heaths, woodlands and river valleys of the South Downs, Western Weald and Seven Sisters within the three counties of Hampshire, West Sussex, and East Sussex.

As a National Park, the Authority has two statutory purposes which are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage of the area and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park by the public. The Authority also has a duty to work in partnership to foster the economic and social wellbeing of local communities within the national park. The Authority is a public body run by a board of 27 members. Operationally the park is managed by its Senior Leadership Team and structured into five service areas - Planning, Countryside and Policy Management, Corporate Services (support services), Strategic Investment Fund (projects), and Seven Sisters Country Park.

Partnership Management Plan 2020-2025 and Corporate Plan

The Authority's overarching strategy documents are its Partnership Management Plan 2020-2025, and an annually updated Corporate Plan which includes high level targets focused on Nature Recovery, Climate Action and creating 'A National Park for All'. Key Performance Indicators are in place to measure the delivery of these plans. Performance reports monitoring the progress of key projects, plans and actions are reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team and the Policy & Resources Committee at least quarterly. A full annual review of the Authority's performance for 2023/24 was reported to the Authority's Policy and Resources Committee in June 2024, a copy of the report can be found [here](#). The report narrates the progress towards the High Level Targets in 2023/24, which are:

- HLT#1: To secure an additional 13,000ha, or 33% of land managed for nature by 2030 from a baseline of 25%;
- HLT#2: Work to maintain, enhance and/or restore 30% of existing Core Nature sites and support key species recovery within the SDNP by 2030;
- HLT#3: To prepare for and implement Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG);
- HLT#4: South Downs National Park Authority to reduce its carbon footprint by 150 tonnes per annum in line with the 2030 net zero target;
- HLT#5: 5% reduction per annum in the overall carbon footprint of the South Downs National Park from the baseline reported in 2019;
- HLT#6: Increase diversity of those engaging with the South Downs National Park;
- HLT#7: Work to make sure the landscape, scenery and tranquillity of SDNP is available to everyone, no matter what their access needs are;
- HLT#8: Digitally engage 100,000 people per year with the SDNP.

The report also shows the Authority's progress towards delivering the Corporate Plan Priorities of:

- Place making;
- Generating Income;
- Land Management;
- Economy;
- Authority Process.

Future Opportunities

The Authority has a number of significant future opportunities that it may explore, these include:

- Diversified income generation through wider implementation of cost recovery in line with the Authority's current powers;
- Expanding Green Finance initiatives to deliver both nature recovery for the National Park and cost recovery for the Authority;
- Possible future widening of the Authority's power of competence would provide greater opportunities for sustainable income generation to support the core grant;
- Further development of the visitor experience and other income generation opportunities at Seven Sisters Country Park;
- Appropriate land acquisition opportunities may support further delivery on the National Park's purposes;
- Continued development and expansion of project funding through close partnership with the SDNP Trust;
- Bedding in and greater understanding of the new section 245 duty to 'seek to further' (LURA 2023) across public bodies offers greater opportunity for cooperative working to further the National Park's purposes;
- Greater opportunities to work with partners across the National Park to deliver on the National Park's purposes through the review of the National Park Management Plan;
- The review of the South Downs Local Plan offers the opportunity to deliver appropriate and sustainable growth and development within the National Park, delivering affordable housing, increased biodiversity, opportunities for adaptation to climate change, etc;
- Following on from the success of the Farming in Protected Landscapes initiative, the developing Environmental Land Management Schemes across England may provide the Authority the opportunity to work more closely with landowners and farmers on delivery against the National Park's purposes;
- Opportunities to introduce greater diversity into our governance structures to widen the voices heard in the development of policy and in decision making.

Risks

The Authority has put in place a risk management framework as a key part of its corporate governance and monitors risks and opportunities through its officer body and its Corporate Risk Register which is reported to each meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee providing members with the opportunity to raise questions and issues and consider the proposed mitigation strategies. The Authority has currently identified 8 corporate-level risks.

A key risk relates to Finance and Budgets where potential risks include either the failure of the Defra National Parks Grant to increase in real terms over a period of years, or a reduction of the Defra

grant, or an in-year requirement for savings. Similarly, there are risks related to the impacts of increased inflation rates or increased employer pension or national insurance contributions on costs. The mitigations for these risks are set out under Risk 2.1 (Finance and Budgets) in each Policy & Resources Committee report. However, longer term sustainability is also addressed by the Authority's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) approved by the Authority in March of each year. The MTFS has been developed in line with the Authority's approved Budget Framework and agreed organisational approach which is as follows:

- to be an administratively lean, efficient organisation;
- to work with others (stakeholders and partners);
- to use limited contributions to activities to encourage and lever greater contributions from others;
- to focus on S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time bound) targets and outcomes;
- and to maintain flexibility (for example; able to change quickly if circumstances alter).

The MTFS has been developed using the following principles:

- Identifying and recognising core and short-term commitments and pressures;
- Including planned savings measures and programmes;
- Setting a balanced annual budget and maintaining adequate reserves to meet commitments and identified risks;
- Identifying potential additional savings requirements for future years to enable early action;
- Avoiding aspirations or commitments which are ultimately unaffordable and avoid making ongoing commitments unless they are essential;
- Seeking to secure efficiency gains and improvements in value for money, for example, by contracting out services where appropriate;
- Seeking to maximise income and fund-raising opportunities taking into account any related additional costs;
- Not incorporating contingencies into individual budgets but instead retaining appropriate risk reserves and overall contingency against potential risks.

The Authority has continued to adopt a prudential approach to budget setting with an established permanent staffing structure and temporary posts for short term projects. This approach ensures that the Authority does not recruit to posts that become unaffordable in the longer term and provides some flexibility in resources to fund priorities identified in the Partnership Management Plan.

The financial assumptions underpinning the current Medium Term Financial Strategy are:

- DEFRA National Park Grant allocation for 2024/25 at flat cash on the 2023/24 allocation and, with no confirmation for future years, a prudent approach has been taken with a zero increase assumed over the next five years;
- allocation of 2.5% plus £500 fund cost of living pay awards in 2024/25, 3% for 2025/26 and 1% from 2027/28 to 2029/30;

cash limits and/or prudent provision for inflation on other headings in line with government inflation forecasts.

South Downs National Park Trust

The South Downs National Park Trust was established by the Authority in April 2017 to raise funds to benefit the National Park. The Trust is governed by an independent board of nine trustees who

oversee its work, two of which are members of the Authority. Not more than one or one third of the Trustees, whichever is the higher number, shall be members of the Authority.

In 2023/24 the South Downs National Park Trust made contributions to the Authority of £0.949 million (£0.589 million 2022/23) to fund various project costs. The creditors balance of the Authority at 31 March 2024 includes £0.216 million (£0.418 million 2022/23) relating to the South Downs National Park Trust.

Group Accounts for South Downs Commercial Operations (Ltd)

The Authority took over the management of the Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) in July 2021 and has made a substantial capital investment in the Seven Sisters assets. A new company, wholly owned by the Authority – South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd – runs the Seven Sisters commercial activities via an operating agreement with the Authority which has been operational from 1 April 2022. Full details can be found on the Authority's website: www.southdowns.gov.uk.

At its meeting on 9 July 2024, the Authority accepted the outcome of a review of operations at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) and agreed to the recommendation to return control of the SSCP operation to the Authority and seek early termination of the Operating Agreement with South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (the Company) with effect from 9 October 2024. Note, this does not mean liquidation of the company which will remain in dormant form but with no further transactions flowing through it following termination. Termination of the Operating Agreement will therefore mean that all SSCP operations revert to the management and control of the Authority. While there is therefore likely to be a requirement for Group Accounts in 2024/25 to recognise activities of the company from April to October 2024, transactions thereafter will fall within the Authority's accounts and will be reported accordingly along with other services and activities of the Authority.

2023/24 Budget Setting

In 2023/24, the Authority set an original revenue budget of £9.769 million funded by £10.486 million of Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs national park grant and a £0.717 million contribution to reserves. The park also agreed a 5-year capital programme of £0.909 million funded from internal borrowing (£0.410 million), capital receipts (£0.120 million) and existing resources (reserves) (£0.379 million).

The [Budget Setting Report 2023/24](#) (including the Capital Strategy 2023/24, Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 and Medium Term Financial Strategy) was approved by the March 2023 National Park Authority meeting and can be found on the Authority's website.

2023/24 Outturn

Revenue

The revenue outturn is an overall underspend of £0.377 million below budget, which represents approximately 4.35% of the revised service net budget.

| Spending on Services by Operating Segment | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Segments | Budget | Actual | Variance |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Corporate Services | 3,362 | 3,521 | 159 |
| Seven Sisters Country Park | (55) | (73) | (18) |
| Countryside and Policy Management | 2,747 | 2,563 | (184) |
| Planning | 2,353 | 2,019 | (334) |
| Strategic Investment Fund | 256 | 256 | 0 |
| Total | 8,663 | 8,286 | (377) |
| National Park Grant | (10,486) | (10,486) | 0 |
| Contributions to/(from) reserves | 1,823 | 1,823 | 0 |
| Total Underspend | 0 | (377) | (377) |

Capital

The Authority made £0.602 million of capital investment in 2023/24 (of which £0.030 million was a loan to South Downs Commercial Operations Limited). The bulk of this was investment in Seven Sisters assets and was funded from £0.120 million of internal borrowing (i.e. from cash balances) with the balance from existing resources.

Full 2023/24 outturn details will be reported to the National Park Authority meeting in July 2024.

Cash Flow Management

The Authority regularly reviews its cash flow requirements and approves an annual Treasury Management Strategy as part of its budget setting report which sets parameters within which the Authority's cash balances and reserves will be invested. Please see the relevant section of the [Budget Setting Report 2023/24](#) approved by the March 2023 National Park Authority meeting.

Budget Planning 2024/25 and Beyond

Future years' budgets and corporate planning processes assume zero increase ("flat cash") funding settlements from government over the medium term. Due to the size and nature of the budgets, and this potential lack of increase in the annual DEFRA grant settlements, the Authority continues to work hard to achieve financial sustainability and maintain some flexibility to fund one-off projects and unexpected costs.

Given the current high inflationary environment against a backdrop of zero increases to the grant settlements, all budgets were reviewed during the 2024/25 budget planning process regarding their value for money and fit with the Authority's business model to assess the extent to which they are currently committed and to identify the recurring requirements over the medium term. This process identified the requirement for short term funding for one-off proposals in 2024/25 as well as a number of permanent budget changes (including savings), which were reflected in the agreed budget.

The [Budget Setting Report 2024/25](#) (including the Capital Strategy 2024/25, Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy) was approved by the March 2024 National Park Authority meeting and can be found on the Authority's website.

Explanation of the Financial Statements

The Statement of Accounts sets out the Authority's income and expenditure for the year, and its financial position at 31 March 2024. It comprises core and supplementary statements together with disclosure notes. The Statement of Accounts has been prepared and published in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in

the United Kingdom 2023/24 (“the Code”) issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. The Code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards, as adapted for the UK public sector under the oversight of the Financial Reporting Advisory Board.

The four core statements are:

- The **Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES)** which records the Authority’s income and expenditure for the year. The top half of the statement provides an analysis by service area (operating segment). The bottom half of the statement deals with corporate transactions and funding.
- The **Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS)** is a summary of the changes to the Authority’s reserves over the course of the year. Reserves are divided into “usable”, which can be invested in capital projects or service improvements, and “unusable” which must be set aside for specific legal or accounting purposes.
- The **Balance Sheet** is a “snapshot” of the Authority’s assets, liabilities, cash balances and reserves at the year-end date.
- The **Cash Flow Statement** shows the reason for changes in the Authority’s cash balances during the year, and whether that change is due to operating activities, new investment, or financing activities (such as repayment of borrowing and other long-term liabilities).
- The **Group Accounts** show the Authority’s single entity financial statements combined with the assets and liabilities of group companies and similar entities, which the Authority either controls or significantly influences.

The notes to these financial statements provide further detail about the Authority’s accounting policies and individual transactions. A glossary of key terms can be found at the end of this publication.

Further Information

These financial statements have been prepared by Brighton & Hove City Council in accordance with the terms of the Financial Services contract with South Downs National Park Authority. Further information about the financial statements is available from Brighton & Hove City Council. In addition, interested members of the public have a statutory right to inspect the financial statements and their availability is advertised on the South Downs National Park Authority’s website.

Nigel Manvell CPFA, Chief Finance Officer

Statement of Responsibilities

The Authority's Responsibilities

The Authority is required to:

- (i) make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. In this Authority that officer is the Chief Finance Officer;
- (ii) manage its affairs to secure economic, efficient, and effective use of resources and safeguard its assets;
- (iii) approve the Statement of Accounts.

The Chief Finance Officer's Responsibilities

The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the preparation of the Authority's Statement of Accounts in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. The Chief Finance Officer is required to sign and date the Statement of Accounts, stating that it presents a true and fair view of the financial position of the Authority at the 31 March and its income and expenditure for the financial year.

In preparing this Statement of Accounts the Chief Finance Officer has:

- (i) selected suitable accounting policies and then applied them consistently;
- (ii) made judgements and estimates that were reasonable and prudent;
- (iii) complied with the local authority Code.

The Chief Finance Officer has also:

- (i) kept proper accounting records which were up to date;
- (ii) taken reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

I certify that the Statement of Accounts presents a true and fair view of the financial position of the South Downs National Park Authority as at 31 March 2024 and its income and expenditure for the financial year ended 31 March 2024.

Nigel Manvell CPFA
Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer)
[insert date]

Certification by Chair

I confirm that this Statement of Accounts was approved by the Policy & Resources Committee at a meeting held on

Signed on behalf of the South Downs National Park Authority

Melanie Hunt
Chair, Policy & Resources Committee
[insert date]



Core Financial Statements 2023/24

Movement in Reserves Statement

The Movement in Reserves Statement Shows the movement in year on reserve balances held by the Authority.

| Movement in Reserves Statement | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Balance as at 1 April | Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure | Adjustments between Accounting Basis and Funding Basis under Regulations | (Increase) / Decrease in Year | Balance as at 31 March |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| 2023/24 | | | | | |
| Working balance and earmarked reserves | (5,077) | (1,815) | 1,258 | (557) | (5,634) |
| Capital receipts reserve | (28) | 0 | (6) | (6) | (34) |
| Capital contributions unapplied | (6,440) | 0 | (1,476) | (1,476) | (7,917) |
| Usable Reserves | (11,545) | (1,815) | (224) | (2,039) | (13,585) |
| Pensions reserve | 0 | (58) | 58 | 0 | 0 |
| Accumulated absences account | 78 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 79 |
| Revaluation reserve | (3,809) | (123) | 225 | 102 | (3,708) |
| Capital adjustment account | (4,188) | 0 | (59) | (59) | (4,248) |
| Unusable Reserves | (7,919) | (180) | 224 | 44 | (7,877) |
| Total Reserves | (19,464) | (1,995) | (0) | (1,995) | (21,462) |
| 2022/23 | | | | | |
| Working balance and earmarked reserves | (4,700) | (73) | (304) | (377) | (5,077) |
| Capital receipts reserve | (28) | 0 | 0 | 0 | (28) |
| Capital contributions unapplied | (5,993) | 0 | (447) | (447) | (6,440) |
| Usable Reserves | (10,721) | (73) | (751) | (824) | (11,546) |
| Pensions reserve | 4,023 | (5,181) | 1,158 | (4,023) | 0 |
| Accumulated absences account | 93 | 0 | (15) | (15) | 78 |
| Revaluation reserve | (4,563) | 731 | 23 | 754 | (3,809) |
| Capital adjustment account | (3,774) | 0 | (414) | (414) | (4,188) |
| Unusable Reserves | (4,221) | (4,450) | 751 | (3,698) | (7,920) |
| Total Reserves | (14,942) | (4,523) | 0 | (4,522) | (19,466) |

Balance Sheet

The balance sheet shows the values of assets and liabilities held by the Authority. The net assets are matched by the reserves.

| Balance Sheet | | | |
|------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| As at 31 March 2023 | Note | | As at 31 March 2024 |
| £'000 | | | £'000 |
| Long Term Assets | | | |
| 9,857 | 10 | Property, plant and equipment | 9,851 |
| 0 | 12,13 | Long term debtors | 27 |
| 100 | 17 | Investment in subsidiary | 100 |
| 9,957 | | Long Term Assets | 9,978 |
| Current Assets | | | |
| 6,082 | 12 | Short term investments | 8,668 |
| 5 | 23 | Inventories | 10 |
| 2,187 | 12,13 | Short term debtors | 3,537 |
| 8,795 | 12 | Cash and cash equivalents | 6,209 |
| 17,069 | | Current Assets | 18,425 |
| Current Liabilities | | | |
| (2,538) | 12,14 | Short term creditors | (2,253) |
| (4,153) | 12,14 | Receipts in advance (revenue) | (3,433) |
| (6,691) | | Current Liabilities | (5,686) |
| Long Term Liabilities | | | |
| (770) | 12 | Long term borrowings | (735) |
| (100) | 15 | Capital Grants RIA | (522) |
| 0 | 20 | Pension asset | 0 |
| (870) | | Long Term Liabilities | (1,257) |
| 19,466 | | Net Assets | 21,462 |
| (11,546) | 8 | Usable reserves | (13,585) |
| (7,920) | 9 | Unusable reserves | (7,877) |
| (19,466) | | Total Reserves | (21,462) |

These financial statements replace the unaudited 2023/24 Statements of Accounts approved by the [insert date] Policy & Resources Committee.

Nigel Manvell CPFA, Chief Finance Officer (Section 151 Officer), [insert date]

Cash Flow Statement

The cash flow statement shows the changes in cash and cash equivalents of the Authority during the reporting period. The statement shows how the Authority generates and uses cash and cash equivalents by classifying cash flows as relating to operating, investing, or financing activities.

| Cash Flow Statement | | |
|---------------------|--|----------------|
| 2022/23 | | 2023/24 |
| £'000 | | £'000 |
| 73 | Net surplus/(deficit) on the provision of services | 1,815 |
| (149) | Non-current asset charges - depreciation and revaluation | 522 |
| (637) | Increase/(decrease) in creditors | (1,005) |
| 313 | (Increase)/decrease in debtors | (1,347) |
| 11 | (Increase)/decrease in inventories | (5) |
| 1,158 | Movement in the pension liability (element charged to the surplus/(deficit) on the provision of services) | 58 |
| 35 | (Increase)/decrease in deferred liability | 0 |
| 186 | Other Non-Cash Adjustments | (86) |
| 917 | Adjustment to surplus/(deficit) on the provision of services for non-cash movements | (1,864) |
| 0 | Adjustment for items included in the net surplus / (deficit) on the provision of services that are investing and financing activities | 0 |
| 990 | Net Cash Flows from Operating Activities | (49) |
| (1,147) | Purchase of non-current assets (including the movement in capital creditors) | (572) |
| 100 | Capital Grants Received | 600 |
| (7,500) | Purchase of short term investments | (13,000) |
| 6,500 | Proceeds from sale of short term investments | 9,000 |
| (2,047) | Net Cash Flows from Investing Activities | (3,972) |
| (35) | Repayment of deferred liability | (35) |
| (100) | Equity investment in South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd | (30) |
| (135) | Net Cash Flows from Financing Activities | (65) |
| 1,500 | Reclassification of investments from short term to cash equivalents | 1,500 |
| 308 | Net Increase/(Decrease) in Cash and Cash Equivalents | (2,586) |
| 44 | Bank current accounts | (189) |
| 8,443 | Short term deposits | 8,984 |
| 8,487 | Cash and Cash Equivalents as at 1 April | 8,795 |
| (189) | Bank current accounts | 56 |
| 8,984 | Short term deposits | 6,153 |
| 8,795 | Cash and Cash Equivalents as at 31 March | 6,209 |
| 307 | Movement in Cash and Cash Equivalents | (2,586) |

Notes to the Core Financial Statements

I. Accounting Policies (summary)

The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 (SI 2015 No 234 as amended) require the Authority to prepare a Statement of Accounts for each financial year in accordance with proper accounting practices. For 2023/24, these proper accounting practices principally comprise:

- the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 (the Code) supported by International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS)
- the Service Reporting Code of Practice 2023/24 (SeRCoP).

The Statement of Accounts has been prepared on a 'going concern' basis. The accounting convention adopted in the Statement of Accounts is principally historical cost modified by the revaluation of certain categories of non-current assets and financial instruments. The detailed accounting policies are set out at the end of this document.

2. Accounting Standards that have been Issued but not yet Adopted

At the balance sheet date, the following new standards and amendments to existing standards have been published but not yet adopted by the Code of Practice of Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom and will be adopted in 2024/25:

- a) IFRS 16 Leases issued in January 2016 (but only for those local authorities that have decided to voluntarily implement IFRS 16 in the 2023/24 year which the Authority has not)
- b) Classification of Liabilities as Current or Non-current (Amendments to IAS 1) issued in January 2020. The amendments:
 - specify that an entity's right to defer settlement must exist at the end of the reporting period;
 - clarify that classification is unaffected by management's intentions or expectations about whether the entity will exercise its right to defer settlement;
 - clarify how lending conditions affect classification; and,
 - clarify requirements for classifying liabilities an entity will or may settle by issuing its own equity instruments.
- c) Lease Liability in a Sale and Leaseback (Amendments to IFRS 16) issued in September 2022. The amendments to IFRS 16 add subsequent measurement requirements for sale and leaseback transactions.
- d) Non-current Liabilities with Covenants (Amendments to IAS 1) issued in October 2022. The amendments improve the information an entity provides when its right to defer settlement of a liability for at least 12 months is subject to compliance with covenants.
- e) International Tax Reform: Pillar Two Model Rules (Amendments to IAS 12) issued in May 2023. Pillar Two applies to multinational groups with a minimum level of turnover. The amendments introduce:
 - a temporary exception to the requirements to recognise and disclose information about deferred tax assets and liabilities related to Pillar Two income taxes, and
 - targeted disclosure requirements for affected entities.
- f) Supplier Finance Arrangements (Amendments to IAS 7 and IFRS 7) issued in May 2023. The amendments require an entity to provide additional disclosures about its supplier finance

arrangements. The IASB developed the new requirements to provide users of financial statements with information to enable them to:

- assess how supplier finance arrangements affect an entity’s liabilities and cash flows, and
- understand the effect of supplier finance arrangements on an entity’s exposure to liquidity risk and how the entity might be affected if the arrangements were no longer available to it.

It is anticipated that, though they provide clarifications, items b), c) and d) will not have a significant impact on the amounts anticipated to be reported in the financial statements. There will be limited application by local authorities of items e) and f) and therefore it is anticipated that this will have no impact on the Authority’s financial statements.

Please note that IFRS 16 Leases implementation, item a) (which will require authorities that are lessees to recognise most leases on their balance sheets as right-of-use assets with corresponding lease liabilities) has been deferred to 1 April 2024. The impact on the Authority’s balance sheet will be net neutral (with lease assets matching lease liabilities).

3. Critical Judgements and Assumptions Made

In preparing the statement of accounts, the Authority has had to make judgements, estimates and assumptions that affect the application of its policies and reported levels of assets, liabilities, income, and expenses. The estimates and assumptions have been used to inform the basis for judgements about the carrying values of assets and liabilities, where these are not readily available from other sources. Estimates and underlying assumptions are regularly reviewed by the Authority.

The statement of accounts contains estimated figures that are based on assumptions made by the Authority about the future or that are otherwise uncertain. Estimates are made taking into account historical experience, current trends and other relevant factors that are considered to be reasonable. The assumptions and other sources of estimation uncertainty disclosed below relate to the estimates that require the Authority’s most difficult, subjective or complex judgements. As the number of variables and assumptions affecting the possible future resolution of the uncertainties increases, those judgements become more subjective and complex. As a result, balances cannot be determined with certainty and actual results could be materially different from the assumptions and estimates.

The items in the Authority’s Balance Sheet at 31 March 2024 for which there is a significant risk of material adjustment in the forthcoming financial year are as follows:

| Item | Uncertainties | Effect if actual results differ from assumptions |
|----------------------------|---|---|
| Pensions liability (asset) | Estimation of the net pension liability (asset) depends on a number of complex judgements relating to the discount rate used, the rate at which salaries are projected to increase, changes in retirement ages, mortality rates and expected returns on pension fund assets. A firm of consulting actuaries is engaged to provide the Authority with expert advice about the assumptions to be applied. The actuaries provided the Authority with the estimate of the pension fund assets / | The effects on the net pension liability (asset) of changes in individual assumptions can be measured. The sensitivities regarding the principle assumptions made by the actuaries are set out in Note 20 Defined Benefit Pensions Schemes . |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| | liabilities including the asset ceiling considerations. The underlying assumptions and the application of the asset ceiling are set out in Note 20 Defined Benefit Pensions Schemes. | |
| Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE) | <p>Assets are depreciated over useful lives that are dependent on assumptions such as the repairs and maintenance that will be incurred in relation to the individual assets and the length of service potential of the asset. The current economic climate brings potential uncertainty about the level of spend on repairs and maintenance, bringing into doubt the useful lives assigned to assets.</p> <p>Assets are valued on an annual basis The balance sheet value is also highly sensitive to estimates of value. The Authority engages appropriately qualified valuers to value land and property assets.</p> <p>More details are set out in Note 10 Property, Plant & Equipment.</p> | <p>If the useful life of assets is reduced, depreciation increases and the carrying amount of the assets falls. It is estimated that the annual depreciation charge for buildings would increase by £0.002 million for every year that useful lives had to be reduced.</p> <p>A 1% movement in the estimate of value for property assets would result in a £0.094 million movement in the balance sheet value.</p> |

4. Events after the Reporting Period and Prior Period Adjustment

Events after the Reporting Period

There are no significant post balance sheet events which might impact on the Authority’s 2023/24 Statement of Accounts or the understanding of the Authority’s financial position and status.

Prior Period Adjustment

The authority has made an adjustment in the financial statements in respect of the accounting treatment of five projects which incurred expenditure on assets not owned by the authority. These projects were incorrectly classified as revenue projects with the associated expenditure and income being charged to the cost of services in the CIES. These projects should have been treated as capital projects with their expenditure being treated as revenue expenditure funded by capital under statute.

The authority has made an adjustment in the financial statements in respect of the presentation of revenue grants receipts in advance. These grants were incorrectly presented as short term creditors in the Balance Sheet.

Given that the amounts are material, this results in the requirement to adjust the financial statements and apply the adjustment retrospectively whereby the expenditure was also incurred in previous

years. The Code requires correction a prior period adjustment with disclosure of the impact at the start of the comparative period (the "third balance sheet" disclosure).

The adjustments made for the third balance sheet are as follows. Please note the following tables only show extracts of the balance sheet where figures have been adjusted to take account of these changes.

Effect on the Balance Sheet as at 1 April 2022 (the third Balance Sheet)

| Balance Sheet | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Originally stated as at 1 April 2022 | Revenue Expenditure funded from capital under statute adjustment | Revenue Grants Receipts in Advance | Restated as at 1 April 2022 |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Current Liabilities | | | | |
| Short term creditors | (7,327) | 0 | 5,961 | (1,366) |
| Receipts in advance (revenue) | 0 | 100 | (5,961) | (5,861) |
| Current Liabilities | (7,327) | 0 | 0 | (7,327) |
| Long Term Liabilities | | | | |
| Capital Grants RIA | 0 | (100) | | (100) |
| Long Term Liabilities | (4,828) | (100) | 0 | (4,928) |
| Net Assets | 14,943 | 0 | 0 | 14,943 |
| Usable reserves | (10,721) | | | (10,721) |
| Unusable reserves | (4,221) | | | (4,221) |
| Total Reserves | (14,943) | 0 | 0 | (14,943) |

Effect on the Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2023 (comparative figures)

| Balance Sheet | | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Originally stated as at 1 April 2023 | Revenue Expenditure funded from capital under statute adjustment | Revenue Grants Receipts in Advance | Restated as at 1 April 2023 |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Current Liabilities | | | | |
| Creditors | (6,791) | | 4,253 | (2,538) |
| Receipts in advance (revenue) | 0 | 100 | (4,253) | (4,152) |
| Current Liabilities | (6,791) | 100 | 0 | (6,691) |
| Long Term Liabilities | | | | |
| Capital Grants RIA | 0 | (100) | | (100) |
| Long Term Liabilities | (770) | (100) | 0 | (870) |
| Net Assets | 19,466 | 0 | 0 | 19,466 |
| Usable reserves | (11,546) | | | (11,546) |
| Unusable reserves | (7,920) | | | (7,920) |
| Total Reserves | (19,466) | 0 | 0 | (19,466) |

Effect on the Comprehensive Income & Expenditure Statement 2022/23

| CIES | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| | Originally stated as at 1 April 2023 | Revenue Expenditure funded from capital under statute adjustment | Revenue Grants Receipts in Advance | Restated as at 1 April 2023 |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Planning - Gross Expenditure | 6,911 | (312) | | 6,599 |
| Strategic Investment Fund - Gross Income | (2,514) | 1,122 | | (1,392) |
| Cost of Services | 11,455 | 810 | 0 | 12,265 |
| Capital grants and contributions | (446) | (810) | | (1,256) |
| Total Non-Specific Grant Income | (11,373) | (810) | 0 | (12,183) |
| (Surplus)/Deficit on the Provision of Services | (73) | (0) | 0 | (73) |
| Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure | (4,524) | (0) | 0 | (4,524) |

5. Expenditure and Funding Analysis

The Expenditure and Funding Analysis demonstrates how the Authority has used available funding for the year (i.e. government grants, rents) in providing services, in comparison with those resources that the Authority has consumed or earned in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices.

| | 2023/24 | | | | | 2022/23 | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|---|--|-----------------------------|
| | As reported for resource management | Adjustments to arrive at expenditure charged to reserve balances | Expenditure chargeable to reserves balances | Adjustments between Funding and Accounting Basis | Net Expenditure in the CIES | As reported for resource management | Adjustments to arrive at expenditure charged to reserve balances | Expenditure chargeable to reserves balances | Adjustments between Funding and Accounting Basis | Net Expenditure in the CIES |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Planning | 2,020 | (730) | 1,289 | 256 | 1,545 | 3,055 | (772) | 2,283 | 457 | 2,740 |
| Countryside and Policy Management | 2,563 | (327) | 2,236 | 327 | 2,563 | 3,733 | (1,106) | 2,627 | 1,096 | 3,723 |
| Seven Sisters Country Park | (73) | (50) | (123) | 49 | (74) | 30 | (87) | (57) | 88 | 31 |
| Corporate Services | 3,521 | 270 | 3,791 | 747 | 4,537 | 4,129 | (435) | 3,694 | 687 | 4,381 |
| Strategic Investment Fund | 256 | (124) | 132 | 1,905 | 2,038 | 266 | (104) | 162 | 1,229 | 1,391 |
| Net Cost of Services | 8,286 | (961) | 7,325 | 3,284 | 10,609 | 11,213 | (2,504) | 8,709 | 3,557 | 12,266 |
| Other Income and Expenditure/Financing | (8,286) | (1,440) | (9,726) | (2,698) | (12,423) | (11,213) | 991 | (10,222) | (2,117) | (12,339) |
| (Surplus)/Deficit on Provision of Services | 0 | (2,401) | (2,401) | 586 | (1,815) | 0 | (1,513) | (1,513) | 1,440 | (73) |

| | 2023/24 | | | | 2022/23 | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------------|---|-----------------|--|-----------------|---|
| | Opening Balance | (Surplus)/Deficit on Provision of Services | Closing Balance | Memorandum: Transfer (to)/from working balances per resource management | Opening Balance | (Surplus)/Deficit on Provision of Services | Closing Balance | Memorandum: Transfer (to)/from working balances per resource management |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| General Fund Working Balance | (1,102) | 41 | (1,061) | (376) | (1,011) | (91) | (1,102) | (509) |
| General Fund Earmarked Reserves | (3,976) | (598) | (4,574) | 0 | (3,688) | (287) | (3,975) | 0 |
| Total Revenue Reserves | (5,078) | (556) | (5,634) | (376) | (4,699) | (379) | (5,077) | (509) |

Explanatory Notes

Adjustments for Capital Purposes

These adjustments include items charged to services in relation to non-current assets (depreciation and revaluation gains and losses) and adjustments for grants - revenue grants are adjusted from grants received in year to those which are received in year without conditions or for which conditions were satisfied during the year.

Net Change for the Pensions Adjustments

These adjustments relate to the removal of pension contributions and the addition of IAS 19 Employee Benefits pension related expenditure and income. For services (operating segments) this represents the removal of the employer pension contributions made by the Authority as allowed by statute and the replacement with current service costs and past service costs. For other income and expenditure this represents the net interest on the defined benefit liability (asset) charged to the CIES.

Other Differences

This column includes other statutory adjustments between amounts debited / credited to the CIES and amounts payable/receivable to be recognised under statute and includes adjustments to the General Fund surplus/deficit for employees' paid absences.

6. Adjustments between an accounting basis and a funding basis under regulation

The resources available to the Authority in any financial year and the expenses that are charged against those resources are specified by statute (the Local Government Act 2003 and the 2003 Regulations). Where the statutory provisions differ from the accruals basis used in the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, adjustments to the accounting treatment are made in the Movement in Reserves Statement so that usable reserves reflect the funding available at the year-end. Unusable reserves are created to manage the timing differences between the accounting and funding bases.

| Adjustments between Accounting Basis and Funding Basis under Regulations | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | General Reserves | Capital Receipts Reserve | Capital Contributions Unapplied | Total Adjustments |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| 2023/24 | | | | |
| Amounts by which income and expenditure included in the CIES are different from revenue for the year | | | | |
| Pension costs (transferred to / (from) the pensions reserve) | (58) | 0 | 0 | (58) |
| Employees' paid absences (transferred to the accumulated absences account) | (1) | 0 | 0 | (1) |
| Reversals of entries included in the CIES in relation to capital expenditure (these items are charged to the capital adjustment account) | (980) | 0 | 0 | (980) |
| Adjustments to Revenue Resources | (1,039) | 0 | 0 | (1,039) |
| Non-current asset sale proceeds | 6 | (6) | 0 | 0 |
| Capital expenditure financed from revenue balances (transfer from the capital adjustment account) | 63 | 0 | 0 | 63 |
| Statutory provision for the repayment of debt (transfer from the capital adjustment account) | 54 | 0 | 0 | 54 |
| Adjustments between Revenue and Capital Resources | 123 | (6) | 0 | 116 |
| Use of earmarked reserves to finance capital expenditure | 303 | 0 | 0 | 303 |
| Application of capital grants to finance capital expenditure | 395 | 0 | 0 | 395 |
| Reversal of entries included in the CIES in relation to capital contributions unapplied | 1,476 | 0 | (1,476) | 0 |
| Total Adjustments to Capital Resources | 2,174 | 0 | (1,476) | 698 |
| Total Adjustments | 1,258 | (6) | (1,476) | (224) |
| 2022/23 | | | | |
| Amounts by which income and expenditure included in the CIES are different from revenue for the year | | | | |
| Pension costs (transferred to / (from) the pensions reserve) | (1,158) | 0 | 0 | (1,158) |
| Employees' paid absences (transferred to the accumulated absences account) | 15 | 0 | 0 | 15 |
| Reversals of entries included in the CIES in relation to capital expenditure (these items are charged to the capital adjustment account) | (29) | 0 | 0 | (29) |
| Adjustments to Revenue Resources | (1,172) | 0 | 0 | (1,172) |
| Non-current asset sale proceeds | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Capital expenditure financed from revenue balances (transfer from the capital adjustment account) | 24 | 0 | 0 | 24 |
| Statutory provision for the repayment of debt (transfer from the capital adjustment account) | 41 | 0 | 0 | 41 |
| Adjustments between Revenue and Capital Resources | 65 | 0 | 0 | 65 |
| Use of earmarked reserves to finance capital expenditure | 43 | 0 | 0 | 43 |
| Application of capital grants to finance capital expenditure | 312 | 0 | 0 | 312 |
| Reversal of entries included in the CIES in relation to capital contributions unapplied | 447 | 0 | (447) | 0 |
| Total Adjustments to Capital Resources | 802 | 0 | (447) | 355 |
| Total Adjustments | (305) | 0 | (447) | (751) |

7. Expenditure and Income by Nature

The Authority's expenditure and income subjectively analysed is as follows:

| Expenditure and Income analysed by Nature | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Employee expenses | 7,251 | 8,624 |
| Other service expenses | 9,954 | 9,853 |
| Non-current asset charges | 464 | 149 |
| Total Expenditure | 17,669 | 18,626 |
| Interest receivable | (753) | (313) |
| Fees, charges and other service income | (6,729) | (5,688) |
| Government grants and contributions | (12,232) | (12,698) |
| Total Income | (19,714) | (18,699) |
| Net loss / (gain) on disposal of non-current assets | 231 | 0 |
| (Surplus)/Deficit on the Provision of Services | (1,814) | (73) |

Fees, charges, and other service income (income received from external customers) is analysed by service area below.

| Income received from External Customers on an Operating Segment Basis | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Planning | (5,198) | (3,858) |
| Countryside and Policy Management | (124) | (215) |
| Seven Sisters Country Park | (448) | (434) |
| Corporate Services | (185) | (193) |
| Strategic Investment Fund | (2,317) | (1,539) |
| Total Income received from External Customers | (8,272) | (6,239) |

IFRS 15 Revenue from contracts with customers

Of the £8.272 million of income from fees, charges, and other service income, £1.917 million is income from contracts with customers. The balance of £6.355 million is outside the scope of this reporting standard and includes, for example, Community Infrastructure Levy income, donations, and contributions from outside bodies.

8. Usable Reserves (Earmarked Reserves)

The Authority sets aside specific amounts as reserves for future policy purposes or to cover contingencies.

| Transfers to/from Usable Reserves | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Usable Reserve | Balance at 31 March 2022 | Transfers To/From 2022/23 | Balance at 31 March 2023 | Transfers To/From 2023/24 | Balance at 31 March 2024 |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Revenue Reserves | | | | | |
| Affordable Housing | (161) | 0 | (161) | 0 | (161) |
| Carry Forwards | (580) | (490) | (1,070) | 306 | (764) |
| Climate Change | (2) | 0 | (2) | (50) | (52) |
| Green Finance (Nitrates) | 0 | (167) | (167) | (9) | (176) |
| Invest To Save | 0 | 0 | 0 | (1,156) | (1,156) |
| Partnership Management Plan | (301) | 0 | (301) | 85 | (216) |
| Planning | (558) | 200 | (358) | 0 | (358) |
| Repairs and Renewals - Vehicles | (2) | 0 | (2) | (27) | (29) |
| Revenue Grants | (450) | 405 | (45) | (102) | (147) |
| SI06 Receipts (including interest) | (633) | 10 | (623) | (150) | (773) |
| South Downs Way | (20) | 0 | (20) | 0 | (20) |
| Strategic Fund | (653) | 149 | (504) | 54 | (450) |
| Trading Company Borrowing | 0 | (80) | (80) | (140) | (220) |
| Transition | 0 | (593) | (593) | 593 | 0 |
| Capital Reserves | | | | | |
| Estates Management | (50) | 0 | (50) | 0 | (50) |
| Total Earmarked Reserves | (3,410) | (566) | (3,976) | (596) | (4,572) |
| Other Usable Reserves | | | | | |
| Capital Receipts | (28) | 0 | (28) | (6) | (34) |
| CIL Contributions Unapplied | (5,993) | (447) | (6,440) | (1,477) | (7,917) |
| General Reserves | (279) | 279 | 0 | (1) | (1) |
| General Fund Working Balance | (1,011) | (91) | (1,102) | 42 | (1,060) |
| Total Other Usable Reserves | (7,311) | (259) | (7,570) | (1,442) | (9,012) |
| Total Usable Reserves | (10,721) | (825) | (11,546) | (2,038) | (13,585) |

The **Affordable Housing reserve** is held to fund actions identified in the Authority's Affordable Housing Strategy.

The **Carry Forwards reserve** holds approved carry forward of budget to meet future specific costs.

The **Climate Change reserve** exists to support the Authority becoming a 'net-zero' organisation by 2030.

The **Estates Management reserve** is used to fund capital projects as part of the Authority's capital investment programme.

The **Green Finance (Nitrates) reserve** is for ongoing nitrates monitoring and mitigation costs.

The **Invest to Save reserve** is to support future schemes to save money in future years.

The **Partnership Management Plan reserve** is held to fund outcomes identified in the Authority's Partnership Management Plan.

The **Planning reserve** is a long term risk reserve covering potential costs resulting from planning inquiries, changes to future delegation agreements and significant falls in planning income and support for neighbourhood plans.

The **Repairs and Renewals – Vehicles reserve** is used to replace existing vehicles as they come to the end of their useful life.

The **Revenue Grants reserve** holds approved carry forward of budget received from revenue grants, which have no conditions attached, to meet future specific costs.

The **SI06 Receipts reserve** holds contributions made to the Authority by developers under a non-statutory agreement.

The **South Downs Way reserve** has been funded from reserves held by other local authorities from the South Downs Joint Committee. This reserve will be used to fund expenditure incurred on this area in the future.

The **Strategic Fund reserve** provides funding for specific strategic projects.

The **Trading Company Borrowing reserve** is a fund setup for South Downs Commercial Operations Limited if there is the need to borrow money from the Authority in the short term.

The **Transition reserve** is a restructure fund for staff leaving by voluntary or compulsory severance.

The **Capital Receipts reserves** hold resources which are used to fund capital projects as part of the Authority's capital investment programme. These funds come from the disposal of fixed assets (usually vehicles).

The **CIL Contributions Unapplied reserve** is made up of contributions from developers towards infrastructure schemes in the park.

9. Unusable Reserves

Unusable reserves are held to manage accounting processes and do not represent usable resources.

| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
|-------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Balance as at 1 April | (7,921) | (4,221) |
| Pensions Reserve | 0 | 0 |
| Capital Adjustment Account | (4,248) | (4,189) |
| Revaluation Reserve | (3,708) | (3,810) |
| Accumulated Absences Account | 79 | 78 |
| Balance as at 31 March | (7,876) | (7,921) |

The Capital Adjustment Account (CAA) absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for the consumption of non-current assets and for financing the acquisition, construction, or enhancement of those assets under statutory provisions.

| Capital Adjustment Account | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Balance as at 1 April | (4,189) | (3,775) |
| Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | | |
| Charges for depreciation of non-current assets | 204 | 205 |
| Upward revaluations reversing previous revaluation losses on non-current assets | 0 | (56) |
| Revaluation losses on non-current assets | 260 | 0 |
| Amounts of non-current assets written off on disposal as part of the gain/loss on disposal to the CIES | 237 | 0 |
| Adjusting amounts written out to the revaluation reserve | (210) | 0 |
| Revenue expenditure funded from capital under statute | 1,844 | 1,136 |
| Capital grants and contributions credited to the CIES that have been applied to capital financing | (1,565) | (1,256) |
| Application of grants to capital financing from the capital grants unapplied account | (395) | (312) |
| Capital investment charged against the General Fund balance | (63) | (24) |
| Use of earmarked reserves to finance new capital investment | (303) | (43) |
| Minimum Revenue Provision | (54) | (41) |
| Difference between fair value and historic cost depreciation | (15) | (23) |
| Total adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | (59) | (414) |
| Balance as at 31 March | (4,248) | (4,189) |

The Revaluation Reserve contains the gains arising from increases in the value of property, plant, and equipment. The balance on the reserve is reduced when assets with accumulated gains are revalued downwards or impaired (gains lost), used in the provision of services and (gains consumed via depreciation) or disposed of (gains realised).

| Revaluation Reserve | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Balance as at 1 April | (3,810) | (4,563) |
| Other comprehensive income and expenditure | | |
| Upward revaluation of non-current assets | (123) | 0 |
| Revaluation losses on non-current assets | 0 | 731 |
| Total other comprehensive income and expenditure | (123) | 731 |
| Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | | |
| Difference between fair value and historic cost depreciation | 15 | 23 |
| Accumulated gains on non-current assets disposals | 210 | 0 |
| Total adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | 225 | 23 |
| Balance as at 31 March | (3,708) | (3,810) |

The pensions reserve absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for post-employment benefits and for funding benefits in accordance with statutory provisions. The balance on the pensions reserve therefore shows the difference in the benefits earned by past and current employees and the resources the Authority has set aside to meet them. The statutory arrangements in place ensure that funding will have been set aside by the time the benefits come to be paid.

| Pensions Reserve | | |
|---|-------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Balance as at 1 April | 0 | 4,023 |
| Other comprehensive income and expenditure | | |
| Remeasurements of the net defined benefit liability | (58) | (5,181) |
| Total other comprehensive income and expenditure | (58) | (5,181) |
| Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | | |
| Reversal of items relating to retirement benefits charged to the surplus / deficit on the provision of services in the CIES | 1,126 | 2,478 |
| Employer's pensions contributions payable | (1,068) | (1,320) |
| Total adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | 58 | 1,158 |
| Balance as at 31 March | 0 | 0 |

The accumulated absences account absorbs the differences that would otherwise arise on the General Fund balance from accruing for compensated absences earned but not taken during the financial year (e.g. annual leave entitlement carried forward at 31 March). Statutory arrangements require that the impact on the General Fund balance is neutralised by transfers to / from the accumulated absences account.

| Accumulated Absences Account | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Balance as at 1 April | 78 | 93 |
| Adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | | |
| Settlement/cancellation of accrual made at the end of the preceding financial year | (78) | (93) |
| Amounts accrued at the end of the current financial year | 79 | 78 |
| Total adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations | 1 | (15) |
| Balance as at 31 March | 79 | 78 |

10. Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE)

The Authority categorises its PPE into sub categories, namely other land and buildings, vehicles, plant, furniture and equipment, and infrastructure assets. The following table shows the gross carrying amount and the accumulated depreciation at the beginning and end of the financial year and summarises the movement in value over the financial year for each sub category of PPE:

| Non-Current Assets | | | | |
|--|------------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| 2023/24 | Other Land & Buildings | Vehicles, Plant, Furniture & Equipment | Infrastructure Assets | Total PPE |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Gross carrying amount | 9,553 | 954 | 0 | 10,507 |
| Accumulated depreciation | 0 | (649) | 0 | (649) |
| Net Carrying Amount at 1 April 2023 | 9,553 | 304 | 0 | 9,857 |
| Capital Additions | | | | |
| Additions | 367 | 44 | 161 | 572 |
| Asset Disposals | | | | |
| Derecognition - disposals | (237) | (16) | 0 | (252) |
| Derecognition - disposals (depreciation) | 0 | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| Transactions in respect of the surplus on revaluation of non current assets within the CIES recognised in the revaluation reserve | | | | |
| Revaluation increases | 672 | 0 | 0 | 672 |
| Revaluation increases (depreciation) | 6 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Revaluation losses | (585) | 0 | 0 | (585) |
| Revaluation losses (depreciation) | 30 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
| Transactions charged to the surplus / deficit on the provision of services in the CIES | | | | |
| Revaluation losses | (322) | 0 | 0 | (322) |
| Revaluation losses (depreciation) | 62 | 0 | 0 | 62 |
| Depreciation charge | (98) | (107) | 0 | (204) |
| Net Carrying Amount at 31 March 2024 | 9,448 | 242 | 161 | 9,851 |
| Gross carrying amount | 9,448 | 982 | 161 | 10,591 |
| Accumulated depreciation | (0) | (740) | 0 | (740) |
| Net Carrying Amount at 31 March 2024 | 9,448 | 242 | 161 | 9,851 |

| Non-Current Assets | | | | |
|--|------------------------|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| 2022/23 | Other Land & Buildings | Vehicles, Plant, Furniture & Equipment | Infrastructure Assets | Total PPE |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Gross carrying amount | 9,219 | 926 | 0 | 10,145 |
| Accumulated depreciation | 0 | (555) | 0 | (555) |
| Net Carrying Amount at 1 April 2022 | 9,219 | 371 | 0 | 9,590 |
| Capital Additions | | | | |
| Additions | 1,104 | 43 | 0 | 1,147 |
| Asset Disposals | | | | |
| Derecognition - disposals | 0 | (16) | 0 | (16) |
| Derecognition - disposals (depreciation) | 0 | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| Transactions in respect of the surplus on revaluation of non current assets within the CIES recognised in the revaluation reserve | | | | |
| Revaluation increases | 9 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Revaluation increases (depreciation) | 9 | 0 | 0 | 9 |
| Revaluation losses | (779) | 0 | 0 | (779) |
| Revaluation losses (depreciation) | 31 | 0 | 0 | 31 |
| Transactions charged to the surplus / deficit on the provision of services in the CIES | | | | |
| Reversal of previous revaluation losses | 56 | 0 | 0 | 56 |
| Depreciation charge | (95) | (110) | 0 | (205) |
| Net Carrying Amount at 31 March 2023 | 9,553 | 304 | 0 | 9,857 |
| Gross carrying amount | 9,553 | 954 | 0 | 10,507 |
| Accumulated depreciation | 0 | (649) | 0 | (649) |
| Net Carrying Amount at 31 March 2023 | 9,553 | 304 | 0 | 9,857 |

Valuations

The valuations of other land and buildings are based upon valuation reports issued annually by the Authority's valuers, Savills UK Ltd. The valuations are carried out as at 31 March 2024 in accordance with the methodologies and bases for estimation set out in the professional standards of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS).

Componentisation and Useful Lives

For the purposes of calculating depreciation, the Authority componentised the South Downs Centre using information provided by Brighton & Hove City Council's quantity surveyors. The building is componentised into five components: main asset building, roof, windows and external doors, mechanical installations, and electrical installations. The separate components have individual useful lives: 50 years for the main asset building, 25 years for electrical installations and 20 years for the remaining components. Asset lives for vehicles, plant, furniture, and equipment are set at five years. The asset life for infrastructure assets is set at 20 years.

Contractual Commitments

At 31 March 2024, the Authority had entered into the following contractual commitments in respect of non-current assets:

| Commitments in respect of Property, Plant and Equipment | | |
|---|--|-------|
| Scheme Name | Description | Total |
| | | £'000 |
| Other Land and Buildings | | |
| Phase I SSCP Capital Scheme | Building works across SSCP | 22 |
| South Downs Centre Cladding | Cladding/render works at SDC | 98 |
| Seven Sisters Energy Efficiency | Works at SSCP to improve energy efficiency | 32 |
| Vehicles, Plant, Furniture and Equipment | | |
| Vehicle Purchase | Purchase of vehicle | 24 |
| National Park Signage Project Phase 2 | Signage | 7 |
| Infrastructure | | |
| Seven Sisters Reed Bed | Sewage treatment & reed bed works | 288 |

II. Capital Investment and Capital Financing

The Authority incurred £2.446 million of capital investment in 2023/24 funded as set out below.

| Capital Investment and Capital Financing | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Capital Investment | | |
| Property, plant and equipment | 572 | 1,147 |
| Cashflow loan to South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd | 30 | 0 |
| Equity investment in South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd | 0 | 100 |
| Revenue expenditure funded from capital under statute | 1,844 | 1,136 |
| Total Capital Investment | 2,446 | 2,384 |
| Sources of finance | | |
| Capital grants and contributions | (1,960) | (1,568) |
| Reserves | (303) | (43) |
| Revenue contributions | (63) | (24) |
| Borrowing | (120) | (748) |
| Total Capital Financing | (2,446) | (2,384) |

| Capital Financing Requirement | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| | Underlying need to borrow | Long Term Leases | Total |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| Opening Balance | 1,120 | 840 | 1,960 |
| In year borrowing requirement | 120 | 0 | 120 |
| Minimum Revenue Provision | (19) | (35) | (54) |
| Closing Balance | 1,221 | 805 | 2,026 |

The Authority's Capital Financing Requirement is the value of historic capital investment funded from borrowing which will be repaid in future years.

12. Financial Instruments

The Authority's treasury management function is provided by Brighton & Hove City Council through a service contract.

Fair Value of Financial Assets and Liabilities carried at Amortised Cost

All financial liabilities and financial assets (represented by amortised cost and debtors and creditors) are carried on the Balance Sheet at amortised cost. Their fair value can be assessed by calculating the present value of the cash flows that take place over the remaining life of the financial instruments using the following assumptions:

- where a financial instrument has a maturity of less than 12 months the fair value is taken to be the principal outstanding,
- the fair value of creditors is taken to be the invoiced amount and the fair value of debtors is taken to be the billed amount.

Financial Assets

Financial assets are investments, cash and equivalents and some debtors both long and short term. Please see also [Note 13 Debtors](#).

| Financial Assets | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | | | 31 March 2023 | | |
| | Long Term | Short Term | Total | Long Term | Short Term | Total |
| | £'000 | | £'000 | £'000 | | £'000 |
| Amortised Cost | | | | | | |
| Cash Equivalents | 0 | 6,153 | 6,153 | 0 | 6,085 | 6,085 |
| Investments | 0 | 8,670 | 8,670 | 0 | 8,984 | 8,984 |
| Cash at bank | 0 | 56 | 56 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Debtors | 27 | 1,558 | 1,585 | 0 | 747 | 747 |
| Total Financial Assets | 27 | 16,437 | 16,464 | 0 | 15,816 | 15,816 |

All financial assets are short term or contractually fixed (long term debtor) at 31 March 2024 so the fair value of investments is equal to the carrying amount. The basis for determining the fair values of the financial assets is Level 2 inputs (using other significant observable inputs).

Financial Liabilities

Financial liabilities are borrowing, long-term liabilities (excluding the pension fund liability) and some creditors. Please see also [Note 14 Creditors](#).

| Financial Liabilities | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | | | 31 March 2023 | | |
| | Long Term | Short Term | Total | Long Term | Short Term | Total |
| | £'000 | | £'000 | £'000 | | £'000 |
| Amortised Cost | | | | | | |
| Bank overdraft | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | (189) | (189) |
| Long term borrowing | (735) | 0 | (735) | (770) | 0 | (770) |
| Creditors | 0 | (2,010) | (2,010) | 0 | (2,270) | (2,270) |
| Receipts in Advance (Revenue) | 0 | (2,532) | (2,532) | | (2,832) | (2,832) |
| Total Financial Liabilities | (735) | (4,542) | (5,277) | (770) | (5,291) | (6,061) |

Financial liabilities are either short term or contractually fixed (long term borrowing) at 31 March 2024 so the fair value of liabilities is equal to the carrying amount. The basis for determining the fair values of the financial liabilities is Level 2 inputs (using other significant observable inputs).

Income, Expense, Gains and Losses

In 2023/24 there was a net gain of £0.754 million (£0.313 million 2022/23) on loans and receivables which has been charged to the CIES. This is interest income that has been generated through a combination of external investments and balances invested in Brighton & Hove City Council.

Nature and extent of risks arising from financial instruments and how the Authority manages those risks

The Authority's activities expose it to a variety of financial risks. The key risks are:

- credit risk – the possibility that other parties might fail to pay amounts due to the Authority;
- liquidity risk – the possibility that the Authority might not have funds available to meet its commitments to make payments;
- refinancing risk – the possibility that the Authority might be required to renew a financial instrument on maturity at disadvantageous interest rates or terms;
- market risk – the possibility that financial loss might arise as a result of changes in such measures as interest rate movements.

Overall procedures for managing risk

The Authority's overall risk management procedures focus on the unpredictability of the financial markets and implementing restrictions to minimise the losses resulting from this risk. Risk management is carried out by a central treasury team through a management agreement with Brighton & Hove City Council, under policies approved by the Authority in the annual treasury management strategy. The Authority provides written principles for overall risk management, as well

as written policies covering specific areas, such as interest rate risk, credit risk and the investment of surplus cash.

Credit Risk

Credit risk arises from deposits with banks and financial institutions, as well as credit exposures to the Authority's customers. Deposits are not made with banks and financial institutions unless they meet the minimum requirements set out in the Authority's investment strategy. Additional selection criteria are also applied before an investment is made.

The minimum criteria set out in the investment strategy for investment counterparties were major banks and building societies to have a short term rating that indicates the highest credit quality and money market funds to have a rating equal to "AAA" (triple A).

Investment counterparties also included other local authorities and government institutions. All investments were subject to a maximum period dependent upon their credit rating.

The Authority uses the creditworthiness service provided by Link Asset Services. This service uses a sophisticated modelling approach with credit ratings from all three rating agencies – Fitch, Moody's and Standard and Poor's, forming the core element. However, it does not rely solely on the current credit ratings of counterparties but also uses the following as overlays – credit watches and credit outlooks from credit rating agencies and CDS (Credit Default Swaps) spreads to give early warning of likely changes in credit ratings.

Customers for goods and services are assessed, considering their financial position, past experience and other factors, with individual credit limits being set in accordance with parameters set by the Authority.

Amounts Arising from Expected Credit Losses

The loss allowance for financial assets carried at amortised cost bought forward at 1 April 2023 was £0.002 million, and the loss allowance calculated at 31 March 2024 was £0.001 million.

Aside from the long term debtor, the Authority's financial assets are all due within 12 months, and no significant increase in risk has been assessed. All the expected credit loss on all investments in financial institutions has therefore been calculated on a 12-month expected loss basis, taking account of the credit rating of each investment, the historic default experience for each credit rating and the time to maturity of each investment.

Collateral

During the financial year, the Authority did not hold collateral as security for any investment.

Liquidity Risk

The Authority has projected that it will have sufficient funds to cover any day to day cash flow need. There is therefore no significant risk that it will be unable to meet its commitments under financial instruments. The Authority manages its liquidity position through the risk management procedures mentioned above (the setting and approval of prudential indicators and the approval of the treasury and investment strategies), as well as through cash flow management procedures required by the Code of Practice.

Refinancing and Maturity Risk

The Authority maintains an investment portfolio, with a proportion of the funds available at call. The Authority is not exposed to refinancing and maturity risk as all financial instruments are held for less than one year.

Market Risk

Interest rate risk

The Authority is exposed to interest rate movements on its investments. Movements in interest rates have a complex impact on the Authority, depending on how variable and fixed interest rates move across differing financial instrument periods. For instance, a rise in interest rates would have the following effects:

- investments at variable rates - the interest income credited to the CIES will rise;
- investments at fixed rates - for long term investments the fair value of the assets will fall.

Changes in interest receivable on variable rate investments are posted to the surplus / deficit on the provision of services and affect the Authority's General Fund balance.

The Authority has a number of strategies for managing interest rate risk. The annual TMS draws together the Authority's prudential indicators and its expected treasury operations, including an expectation of interest rate movements. From this statement a prudential indicator is set which provides maximum and minimum limits for fixed and variable interest rate exposure. Brighton & Hove City Council's treasury management team monitors market and forecast interest rates within the financial year to adjust exposures appropriately.

The Authority held £0.735 million of long term borrowing and £4.587 million investments subject to variable interest rates at 31 March 2024. A 1% change in interest rates would have the impact of increasing or decreasing the interest receivable on this investment during 2023/24 by £0.054 million.

Price risk

The Authority does not invest in equity shares.

Foreign exchange risk

The Authority has no financial assets or liabilities denominated in foreign currencies; therefore, it has no exposure to loss arising from movements in exchange rates.

13. Debtors

| Short Term Debtors | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | 31 March 2023 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Community Infrastructure receipts | 1,434 | 577 |
| Central Government | 589 | 617 |
| Payments in Advance | 235 | 33 |
| HMRC | 227 | 193 |
| S106 Developers receipts | 179 | 142 |
| Local Authorities | 66 | 180 |
| Other debtors | 807 | 445 |
| Total Short Term Debtors | 3,537 | 2,187 |

£1.558 million of short term debtors are classed as financial instruments and are included in **Note 12 Financial Instruments** (excluded are statutory debtors, grant debtors and payments in advance).

During 2023/24, the Authority made a cash loan of £0.030 million to South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd, repayable over 10 years, to assist with the furnishing of the rental cottages at Seven

Sisters Country Park. This is the amount drawn down so far from a larger loan facility of £0.250 million that was approved at P&R Committee on 23 November 2023. The cash loan is classified as a long term debtor on the balance sheet. £0.003 million loan repayments were made in the financial year.

14. Creditors and Revenue Grants Receipts in Advance

| Short Term Creditors | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | 31 March 2023 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Local Authorities | (883) | (1,076) |
| Pensions | (333) | (136) |
| HMRC | (126) | (412) |
| Other Creditors | (911) | (915) |
| Total Short Term Creditors | (2,253) | (2,538) |

| Receipts in Advance (Revenue) | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | 31 March 2023 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| S106 Development Contributions | (2,532) | (2,832) |
| Non-Government Grants | (866) | (688) |
| Central Government Grants | 47 | (500) |
| Local Authorities | (82) | (133) |
| Total Receipts in Advance | (3,433) | (4,153) |

£2.270 million of short term creditors and £2.832 of revenue receipts in advance are classed as financial instruments and are included in **Note 12 Financial Instruments** (excluded are statutory creditors and receipts in advance).

15. Grant Income and Contributions

The Authority receives grants from central government and contributions for revenue purposes.

Government Revenue Grants

| Government Revenue Grants | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs | (10,486) | (10,926) |
| Non-ring fenced government grants credited to taxation and non-specific grant income | (10,486) | (10,926) |
| Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs | (64) | (174) |
| Natural England | (117) | 0 |
| Heritage Lottery Fund | 0 | (235) |
| Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities | 0 | (98) |
| Rural Payments Agency | 0 | (3) |
| Other Government Departments | 0 | (6) |
| Ring fenced government grants credited to cost of services | (181) | (1,087) |
| Total Government Revenue Grants | (10,667) | (12,013) |

Revenue and Capital Contributions

| Revenue Contributions | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Other contributions, donations and sponsorship | (1,352) | (813) |
| Contributions from developers and stakeholders | (571) | (601) |
| Contributions from other agencies / external bodies | (220) | (185) |
| Contributions from other local authorities | (247) | (498) |
| Total Revenue Contributions credited to cost of services | (2,389) | (2,098) |
| Capital Grants and Contributions | | |
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Other contributions | (1,566) | (1,267) |
| Capital grants and contributions credited to taxation and non-specific grant income | (1,566) | (1,267) |

Capital Grants with Conditions Attached

The Authority has received a capital grant that is yet to be recognised as income as it has conditions attached to it that will require the funds to be returned if the conditions are not met (this capital grant is shown as "Capital grant receipts in advance" on the balance sheet).

| Capital Grants and Contributions with Conditions attached | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Grants and contributions held under capital grants receipts in advance | | |
| Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs | (355) | 0 |
| Total Grants and Contributions with Conditions | (355) | 0 |

16. Leases

The Authority leases office space and vehicles under operating leases with lease periods of between one and five years.

| Future Minimum Lease Payments under Operating Leases (Lessee) | | |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | 31 March 2023 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Not later than one year | 55 | 24 |
| Later than one year and not later than five years | 154 | 12 |
| Total Future Minimum Lease Payments | 209 | 36 |

17. Related Parties

The Authority has the following material related party transactions:

Central Government

Central government has significant influence over the general operations of the Authority and provides the statutory framework within which the Authority operates. Central government also provides most of its funding in the form of grants and prescribes the terms of many of the transactions that the Authority has with other parties. Details of the grants received from government departments in 2023/24 can be found in [Note 15 Grants and Contributions](#).

Members

Members of the Authority have direct control over the Authority's financial and operating policies. The total of members' allowances paid in 2023/24 is shown in [Note 21 Member's Allowances and Expenses](#). Details of the entities that members are involved with are recorded in the Register of Members' Interests which is held by the Authority.

The following member holds a position of control or significant influence in a related party to the Authority in 2023/24. Annie Brown is a trustee of B D Harris Farm Trust, which has received a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant of £0.008m in 2023/24.

Some members have relationships or hold positions with other public bodies, schools, charities, voluntary organisations, and trusts with which the Authority interacts but does not have a financially material relationship.

Officers

Senior officers of the Authority, such as the Chief Executive and other chief officers have the authority and responsibility for planning, directing, and controlling the activities of the Authority, including the oversight of these activities.

During 2023/24, Brighton & Hove City Council provided Chief Finance Officer (S151) and other financial services to the Authority on a contractual basis to the value of £0.317 million (£0.332 million 2022/23). The Authority also had an investment in Brighton & Hove City Council of £4.587 million held as a cash equivalent on 31 March 2024 (£7.455 million 31 March 2023) in accordance with the service contract and the Authority's Annual Investment Strategy. The Authority has a contract with Brighton & Hove City Council for financial services from 1 April 2022 for three years. The contract is independently monitored by the Authority's Head of Finance and Corporate Services.

During 2023/24, Hampshire County Council provided Monitoring Officer services to the Authority on a contractual basis to the value of £0.048 million (2023/23 £0.037 million). The Monitoring Officer contract was secured through a formal tender process and is independently monitored by the Authority's Head of Business Services. Senior officers of Hampshire County Council were not in a position to influence these financial transactions as they were paid in accordance with the agreed contract terms.

Entities Controlled or Significantly Influenced by the Authority

South Downs Commercial Operations Limited

As part of the appropriate legal management of the Seven Sisters County Park commercial operations (the visitor centre, holiday lets, etc.), the Authority has set up a separate commercial company to operate these activities on its behalf. The company was active from 1 April 2022 under an operating agreement with the Authority.

The company board of directors is made up of representatives of the Authority including an independent director with land management experience and an independent director with experience of the tourist accommodation industry. Please note the number of directors varied between four and five during the year. Two of the directors were officers of the Authority and also members of the Authority's senior leadership team and were therefore in a position to influence.

During 2023/24, the company received a £0.030 million cash loan from the Authority to assist with the furnishing of the rental cottages at Seven Sisters Country Park, this loan is repayable over 10 years with £0.003 million repayments being made in 2023/24. The company also received an equity investment of £0.100 million from the Authority in 2022/23 to cover its start-up costs. As the company is under the sole control of the Authority, group accounts are required for the Authority and South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd from 2022/23 onwards. Please see [note 24 Group Accounts and Explanatory Notes](#) for further information.

18. Officers' Remuneration

In 2023/24 senior employee posts (the Chief Executive and the directors who make up the Senior Management Team of the Authority) and other officer posts of the Authority were filled through permanent appointments and interim and agency appointments. The remuneration paid to the Authority's senior employees is as follows:

| Senior Employee Remuneration of Permanent Appointments - salary between £50,000 and £149,999 per the reporting period | | | | | | | |
|---|---|------|--|---------------------------------|--|-----------------------|--|
| 2022/23 | 2023/24 | | | | | | |
| Total Remuneration including Pension Contributions | Post Holder Information | Note | Salary (including Fees and Allowances) | Compensation for Loss of Office | Total Remuneration excluding Pension Contributions | Pension Contributions | Total Remuneration including Pension Contributions |
| £ | | | £ | £ | £ | £ | |
| 138,228 | Chief Executive | 1 | 119,493 | 0 | 119,493 | 22,884 | 142,378 |
| 120,427 | Director of Planning | 2 | 101,498 | 0 | 101,498 | 19,792 | 121,291 |
| 106,733 | Director of Countryside Policy and Management | 3 | 77,540 | 136,773 | 214,314 | 14,847 | 229,161 |
| 0 | Director of Landscape and Strategy | 4 | 19,113 | 0 | 19,113 | 3,727 | 22,840 |
| 365,388 | Total | | 317,645 | 136,773 | 454,418 | 61,251 | 515,669 |

Notes

1. The previous Chief Executive left on 31/12/2023 and was replaced by an Interim Chief Executive from 01/01/2024.
2. The incumbent Director of Planning is currently acting as Interim Chief Executive as of 01/01/2024 and this role is currently being covered by an interim Director of Planning.
3. This role was made redundant with effect from 31/01/2024.
4. This is a new role created in 2023/24 with effect from 15/01/2024.

Other Employee Remuneration

The following table provides an analysis of the remuneration paid to other employees receiving more than £50,000 remuneration (excluding employer’s pension contributions):

| Other Officer Remuneration | | |
|----------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Remuneration Band | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | Employees | Employees |
| £50,000 - £54,999 | 8 | 7 |
| £55,000 - £59,999 | 7 | 4 |
| £60,000 - £64,999 | 1 | 1 |
| £65,000 - £69,999 | 1 | 2 |
| £70,000 - £74,999 | 0 | 1 |
| £75,000 - £79,999 | 0 | 0 |
| £80,000 - £84,999 | 1 | 0 |
| £85,000 - £89,999 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 19 | 16 |

19. Exit Packages

The Authority terminated the contract of three employees during 2023/24 and 11 employees during 2022/23. The following table shows the number of exit packages with the total cost per band and total cost of compulsory and other redundancies:

| Exit Packages | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|--|---------|--|---------|
| Exit Package Cost Band (including special payments) | Number of Compulsory Redundancies | | Number of Other Departures Agreed | | Total Number of Exit Packages by Cost Band | | Total Cost of Exit Packages in Each Band | |
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2022/23 | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | | | | | | | £'000 | £'000 |
| £0 - £20,000 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 28 | 47 |
| £20,001 - £40,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| £40,001 - £60,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 104 |
| £60,001 - £80,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 136 |
| £80,001 - £100,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 192 |
| £100,001 - £150,000 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 137 | 0 |
| | 0 | 0 | 3 | 11 | 3 | 11 | 165 | 478 |

Note: the costs included in the above table include voluntary redundancy costs, early retirement pension costs and pay in lieu of notice.

20. Defined Benefit Pension Schemes

The Authority makes contributions towards the cost of post-employment benefits as part of the terms and conditions of employment of its employees. Although these benefits will not actually be payable until employees retire, the Authority has to disclose the commitment in respect of the future payment of these benefits at the time that the employees earn their future entitlement. The Authority participates in the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and West Sussex County Council acts as the Scheme Administrator of the West Sussex Pension Fund and is responsible for the management and administration of the Fund in line with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations. The scheme is a funded defined benefit scheme, meaning that the Authority and employees pay contributions into a Fund, calculated at a level intended to balance the pension liabilities with investment assets.

Hymans Robertson LLP, an independent firm of actuaries, provides the financial assessment of the Authority's Pension Fund. The calculations and advice given by Hymans Robertson LLP in their actuarial report have been carried out in accordance with the Pensions Technical Actuarial Standard adopted by the Financial Reporting Council.

Transactions relating to Post-Employment Benefits

The cost of post-employment benefits in the reported cost of services is recognised when they are earned by employees, rather than when the benefits are eventually paid as pensions. However, the charge the Authority is required to make to its General Fund balance is based on the cash payable during the financial year rather than the earned post-employment benefits, so the real cost of post-employment benefits is reversed out of the General Fund balance to the pensions reserve via the MiRS.

The following transactions have been made in the CIES and MiRS during the financial year in relation to the scheme:

| Transactions relating to Post Employment Benefits | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES) | | |
| Cost of services | | |
| Service cost comprising: | | |
| Current service cost | 974 | 2,321 |
| Past service cost | 154 | 28 |
| Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure | | |
| Interest income on plan assets | (1,283) | (714) |
| Interest cost on defined benefit obligation | 971 | 843 |
| Interest on the effect of the asset ceiling | 310 | 0 |
| Total Post Employment Benefits charged to the Surplus / Deficit on the Provision of Services | 1,126 | 2,478 |
| Other Post Employment Benefits charged to the CIES | | |
| Remeasurement of the net defined benefit liability (asset) comprising: | | |
| Return on scheme assets (excluding the amount included in the net interest expense) | (921) | 1,450 |
| Actuarial gain / (loss) arising on changes in demographic assumptions | (122) | (2,426) |
| Actuarial gain / (loss) arising on changes in financial assumptions | (1,660) | (14,826) |
| Other experience adjustments | 645 | 3,780 |
| Changes in the effect of the asset ceiling | 2,139 | 6,531 |
| Adjustment for pension strain not yet paid | (139) | 310 |
| Total Post Employment Benefits charged to Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure | (58) | (5,181) |
| Actual amount charged against the General Fund for pensions in the reporting period | | |
| Employer's contributions payable to the scheme | (1,068) | (1,320) |
| Movement in Reserves Statement | | |
| Reversal of net charges made to the surplus / deficit for the provision of services for post employment benefits | 1,126 | 2,478 |
| Net Adjustment to the Pension Reserve | 0 | (4,023) |

Pensions Assets and Liabilities recognised in the Balance Sheet

The amount included on the Balance Sheet in respect of the scheme is shown in the following table:

| Pension Assets and Liabilities recognised in the Balance Sheet | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Present value of the scheme liabilities | (20,945) | (19,802) |
| Fair value of scheme assets | 29,925 | 26,333 |
| Net Asset (unadjusted) | 8,980 | 6,531 |
| Asset ceiling adjustment for economic benefit | (8,980) | (6,531) |
| Net Asset / (Liability) | 0 | 0 |

Reconciliation of the movements in the fair value of scheme (plan) assets and defined benefit obligation

| 2023/24 | | | | | 2022/23 | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Assets | Obligations | Impact of asset ceiling adjustments | Net asset / (liability) | | Assets | Obligations | Impact of asset ceiling adjustments | Net asset / (liability) |
| £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| 26,333 | | | 26,333 | Fair value of plan assets | 25,414 | | | 25,414 |
| | (19,802) | | (19,802) | Present value of funded obligations | | (29,437) | | (29,437) |
| | | (6,531) | (6,531) | Effect of the asset ceiling | | | | 0 |
| 26,333 | (19,802) | (6,531) | 0 | Opening position as at 31 March | 25,414 | (29,437) | 0 | (4,023) |
| Service cost | | | | | | | | |
| | (974) | | (974) | Current service cost | | (2,321) | | (2,321) |
| | (154) | | (154) | Past service cost (including curtailments) | | (28) | | (28) |
| 0 | (1,128) | 0 | (1,128) | Total service cost | 0 | (2,349) | 0 | (2,349) |
| Net interest | | | | | | | | |
| 1,283 | | | 1,283 | Interest income on plan assets | 714 | | | 714 |
| | (971) | | (971) | Interest cost on defined benefit obligation | | (843) | | (843) |
| | | (310) | (310) | Interest on the Effect of the asset ceiling | | | | 0 |
| 1,283 | (971) | (310) | 2 | Total net interest | 714 | (843) | 0 | (129) |
| Cashflows | | | | | | | | |
| 397 | (397) | | 0 | Participants' contributions | 403 | (403) | | 0 |
| 1,207 | | | 1,207 | Employer contributions | 1,010 | | | 1,010 |
| (216) | 216 | | 0 | Benefits paid | (267) | 267 | | 0 |
| 29,004 | (22,082) | (6,841) | 81 | Expected closing position | 27,274 | (32,765) | 0 | (5,491) |
| Remeasurements | | | | | | | | |
| | 1,660 | | 1,660 | Changes in financial assumptions | | 14,826 | | 14,826 |
| | 122 | | 122 | Changes in demographic assumptions | | 2,426 | | 2,426 |
| 0 | (645) | | (645) | Other experience | 509 | (4,289) | | (3,780) |
| 921 | | | 921 | Return on assets excluding amounts included in net Interest | (1,450) | | | (1,450) |
| | | (2,139) | (2,139) | Changes in the Effect of the asset ceiling | | | (6,531) | (6,531) |
| 921 | 1,137 | (2,139) | (81) | Total remeasurements | (941) | 12,963 | (6,531) | 5,491 |
| 29,925 | | | 29,925 | Fair value of plan assets | 26,333 | | | 26,333 |
| | (20,945) | | (20,945) | Present value of funded obligations | | (19,802) | | (19,802) |
| 29,925 | (20,945) | (8,980) | 0 | Closing Position as at 31 March | 26,333 | (19,802) | (6,531) | 0 |

Asset Ceiling

The closing position at 31 March 2024 is a net asset of £8.980 million (net asset of £6.531 million at 31 March 2023) before any adjustment for the asset ceiling. The Authority’s chosen methodology, as advised to the actuary, assumes that it has no unconditional right to a refund from the Fund and therefore there is no economic benefit available in this form. The methodology assumes that economic benefit is available to the Authority as a reduction in future contributions; the asset ceiling therefore reflects the economic benefit that may be achieved through future contributions and has been calculated on this basis. The economic benefit available as a reduction in future contributions cannot be negative and is therefore restricted to the size of the net asset.

Local Government Pension Scheme assets comprised

The scheme assets are broken down into categories that accurately reflect the risks that are faced by the scheme, splitting the assets into two types, those that have a quoted market price in an active market and those that do not. The pension scheme assets comprised:

| Proportion of the Fair Value of the Scheme Assets by Category | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| | 2023/24 | | | | 2022/23 | | | |
| | Quoted prices in active markets £'000 | Quoted prices not in active markets £'000 | Total £'000 | Percentage of Total Assets % | Quoted prices in active markets £'000 | Quoted prices not in active markets £'000 | Total £'000 | Percentage of Total Assets % |
| Property | | | | | | | | |
| UK | 0.0 | 2,468.8 | 2,468.8 | 8% | 0.0 | 2,620.8 | 2,620.8 | 10% |
| Total | 0.0 | 2,468.8 | 2,468.8 | 8% | 0.0 | 2,620.8 | 2,620.8 | 10% |
| Other Investment Funds | | | | | | | | |
| Infrastructure | 0.0 | 1,424.2 | 1,424.2 | 5% | 0.0 | 1,281.4 | 1,281.4 | 5% |
| Equities | 14,992.1 | 0.0 | 14,992.1 | 50% | 13,031.8 | 0.0 | 13,031.8 | 49% |
| Bonds | 8,636.1 | 0.0 | 8,636.1 | 29% | 7,502.1 | 0.0 | 7,502.1 | 28% |
| Other | 0.0 | 1,166.3 | 1,166.3 | 4% | 0.0 | 1,006.5 | 1,006.5 | 4% |
| Total | 23,628.2 | 2,590.5 | 26,218.7 | 88% | 20,533.9 | 2,287.9 | 22,821.8 | 87% |
| Private Equity | 0.0 | 893.8 | 893.8 | 3% | 0.0 | 750.0 | 750.0 | 3% |
| Cash and cash equivalents | 343.7 | 0.0 | 343.7 | 1% | 140.4 | 0.0 | 140.4 | 1% |
| Total Assets | 23,971.9 | 5,953.1 | 29,925.0 | 100.0% | 20,674.3 | 5,658.7 | 26,333.0 | 100.0% |

Scheme Liabilities in respect of Active Members, Deferred Members and Pensioner Members

The following table shows the scheme liabilities in respect of active members, deferred members and pensioner members:

| Scheme Liabilities in respect of Active, Deferred and Pensioner Members | | |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Liability Split | Liability Split |
| 2023/24 | £'000 | % |
| Active members | 14,495 | 69.2% |
| Deferred members | 3,767 | 18.0% |
| Pensioner members | 2,683 | 12.8% |
| Total | 20,945 | 100% |
| 2022/23 | £'000 | % |
| Active members | 13,420 | 67.8% |
| Deferred members | 3,825 | 19.3% |
| Pensioner members | 2,557 | 12.9% |
| Total | 19,802 | 100% |

Note: the figures in the above tables are for the funded liabilities only and do not include any unfunded pensioner liabilities.

Basis for Estimating Assets and Liabilities

The scheme has been estimated by the actuary based on the latest full valuation of the scheme as at 31 March 2022. Liabilities for the scheme have been assessed on an actuarial basis using the projected unit credit method (i.e. an estimate of the pensions that will be payable in future years dependent on assumptions about mortality rates, salary levels etc.).

Actuarial assumptions are used by the actuary to calculate the valuation of the scheme. Risks and uncertainties are inherently associated with the assumptions that are adopted. The assumptions are in effect projections of future investment returns and demographic experience many years into the future and there is inevitably a great deal of uncertainty inherent in what constitutes the “best estimate” with such projections as required by IAS 19. The actuary has interpreted “best estimate” to mean that the proposed assumptions are “neutral” and has advised that there is an equal chance of actual experience being better or worse than the assumptions used. The following table shows the principal assumptions used by the actuary at 31 March 2024:

| Basis for Estimating Assets and Liabilities | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| | 31 March 2024 | 31 March 2023 |
| Long term expected rate of return on assets in the scheme | | |
| Equity investments | 4.85% | 4.75% |
| Bonds | 4.85% | 4.75% |
| Property | 4.85% | 4.75% |
| Cash | 4.85% | 4.75% |
| Mortality assumptions | | |
| Longevity at 65 for current pensioners: | | |
| • men | 21.1 years | 21.2 years |
| • women | 24.9 years | 25.1 years |
| Longevity at 65 for future pensioners: | | |
| • men | 22.9 years | 23.0 years |
| • women | 25.7 years | 26.0 years |
| Financial assumptions | | |
| Rate of inflation | 2.75% | 2.95% |
| Rate of increase in salaries | 4.25% | 4.45% |
| Rate of increase in pensions | 2.75% | 2.95% |
| Rate for discounting scheme liabilities | 4.85% | 4.75% |
| Expected total return on assets | 4.85% | 4.75% |
| Take up of option to convert annual pension in retirement grant | * | * |

* Pre April 2008 50% and post April 2008 75%

IAS 19 requires the discount rate to be set with reference to the yields on high quality corporate bonds irrespective of the actual investment strategy of the Fund. As such, the figures prepared by the actuary in their actuarial report are unlikely to reflect either the actual eventual cost of providing the benefits or the likely level of contributions to fund the Authority's obligations to the Fund. Also, the net liability (asset) position may change significantly due to relative changes in the equity and bond markets at the reporting date.

Sensitivity to Assumptions

The estimation of the defined benefit obligation is sensitive to the methods and assumptions used by the actuary:

- the costs of a pension arrangement require estimates regarding future experience. The financial assumptions used by the actuary are largely prescribed at any point and reflect market conditions at the reporting date. Changes in market conditions that result in changes in the net discount rate (essentially the difference between the discount rate and the assumed rates of increase of salaries, deferred pension revaluation or pensions in payment) can have a significant effect on the value of the liabilities reported. In order to quantify the impact of a change in the financial assumptions used, the actuary has calculated and compared the value of the scheme liabilities at 31 March 2024 on varying bases;
- a reduction in the net discount rate will increase the assessed value of liabilities as a higher value is placed on benefits paid in the future. A rise in the net discount rate will have an opposite effect of similar magnitude;

- there is also uncertainty around life expectancy of the UK population. The value of current and future pension benefits will depend on how long they are assumed to be in payment. To quantify the uncertainty around life expectancy, the actuary has calculated the difference in cost to the Authority of a one year increase in life expectancy. For sensitivity purposes, this is assumed to be an increase in the cost of benefits of broadly 3% to 5%. In practice the actual cost of a one year increase in life expectancy will depend on the structure of the revised assumption (i.e. if improvements to survival rates predominately apply at younger or older ages).

The following table shows the sensitivities regarding the principle assumptions that show the increase in percentage terms and monetary values that the changes have on the scheme liabilities.

| Change in assumptions at 31 March 2024 | Approximate % increase to Employer Liability | Approximate monetary amount £'000 |
|--|---|--|
| 0.1% decrease in Real Discount Rate | 3.00% | 530 |
| 1 year increase in member life expectancy | 4.00% | 838 |
| 0.1% increase in the Salary Increase Rate | 0.00% | 18 |
| 0.1% Increase in the Pension Increase Rate (CPI) | 2.00% | 523 |

The figures in the above table have been derived based on the membership profile of the Authority as at the date of the most recent actuarial valuation. The approach taken by the actuary in preparing the sensitivity analysis in the table above is consistent with that adopted in the previous reporting period.

Asset and Liability Modelling (ALM) Strategy

The Fund has the following objectives to reduce the risk of deficits emerging to protect against increases in the secondary (deficit contribution) rate and to generate sufficient returns to keep the cost of new benefits accruing reasonable. The future service rate is difficult to manage through an investment strategy, but the investment strategy must support the Actuary’s funding assumptions and identify sources of income to generate cash as the Fund requires. The Fund is currently cash flow positive but if cash-flow drops then the Fund does not want to be a forced seller of assets to pay benefits.

The panel have translated their objectives and beliefs into a suitable customised benchmark which is based on advice from the Fund Actuary and Investment Adviser, and which sets out the intended long term weighting to various types of investment (or asset classes), such as equities, bonds and property and reflects the Pension Fund’s investment strategy. The benchmark is set using Asset Liability Modelling to understand the impact of different investment strategies on the chances of “success” and corresponding downside risks. “Success” here is defined as maintaining a two-thirds or better chance of being fully funded (on an on-going basis) over 20 years. Risk is also constrained by diversification of managers and assets, scrutiny of monitoring of performance, asset allocation and risk and investment restrictions within the Investment Manager Agreements. The fund managers are required to implement appropriate risk management measures and to operate in such a way that the probability of undershooting the performance target is kept within acceptable limits. Performance for all mandates is calculated by an independent performance measurement company and is reported to the Pensions Panel quarterly. An extensive review of Fund performance is conducted each July.

Impact on the Authority’s Cash Flows

The Fund strives to maintain reasonably stable employer contribution rates where appropriate and possible. The overall funding position for the Pension Fund is monitored each quarter. The contributions paid by the Authority are set by the Fund actuary at each triennial actuarial valuation (the most recent being as 31 March 2022) or at any other time as instructed to do so by the administering authority. The contributions payable over the period to 31 March 2024 are set out in

the Rate and Adjustments certificate. The following table is the projected amount to be charged to the CIES for the financial year to 31 March 2025:

| Projected Defined Benefit Cost for the Period Ended 31 March 2025 | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| | Assets | Liabilities |
| | £'000 | £'000 |
| Projected current service cost | 0 | 853 |
| Total Service Cost | 0 | 853 |
| Interest income on plan assets | 1,479 | 0 |
| Interest cost on defined benefit obligation | 0 | 1,040 |
| Total Net Interest Cost | 1,479 | 1,040 |
| Total Charge to CIES | 1,479 | 1,893 |

The actuary has estimated the employer's contributions for the period to 31 March 2025 will be approximately £0.989 million.

The weighted average duration (the weighted average time until payment of all expected future discounted cash flows, determined based on membership and the financial and demographic assumptions as at the most recent actuarial valuation) of the defined benefit obligation for scheme members is 25 years.

21. Members' Allowances and Expenses

During 2023/24, the Authority paid £0.133 million (2022/23 £0.131 million) of allowances to members. Members claimed £0.013 million (2022/23 £0.007 million) in expenses which were reimbursed by the Authority. Details of allowances and expenses paid in 2023/24 are published on the Authority's website.

22. External Audit Costs

The Authority is due to pay £0.053 million (2022/23 £0.022 million) to the external auditor in respect of the audit of the financial statements. In 2023/24 the Authority received a contribution from central government of £0.006 million towards the increase in the 2023/24 audit fee (£0.006 million 2022/23).

23. Agency Services

The Authority has the following agency arrangements:

Value Added Tax (VAT)

The Authority acts as an agent of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for the collection of VAT. The Authority has a net debtor of £0.226 million at 31 March 2024 (2022/23 £0.331 million) for the amount due from HMRC at the end of the financial year.

Payroll Taxes and National Insurance

The Authority acts as an agent of HMRC for the collection of income tax and national insurance on behalf of employees. The Authority has a net creditor of £0.125 million at 31 March 2024 (2022/23 £0.130 million) for the amount due to HMRC at the end of the financial year.

Planning Service

There are 15 local authorities whose boundaries fall within the Park. During 2023/24, five of these local authorities provided the majority of the planning service on behalf of the Authority under a legal agreement signed between each local authority and the park. The remaining ten local authorities

continue to opt out of this arrangement and applications within these boundaries were dealt with by the Authority. The net payment to these five local authorities in 2023/24 amounted to £1.607 million which included £0.556 million income received in relation to application fees

24. Group Accounts and Explanatory Notes

The purpose of the Group Accounts is to provide a picture of the Authority and the group of companies and other entities which are either controlled or are significantly influenced by the Authority. The Group Accounts show the full extent of the Authority's wider assets and liabilities, provide transparency, and enable comparison with other entities.

The Group Accounts include the following:

- Group Income and Expenditure Statement – summarises the resources that have been generated and consumed in providing services and managing the Group during the financial year. It includes all day-to-day expenses and related income on an accruals basis.
- Group Movement in Reserves Statement – shows the movement in the financial year on the Authority's single entity usable and unusable reserves together with the Authority's share of the Group reserves.
- Group Balance Sheet – reports the Authority's Group financial position at the year-end.
- Group Cash Flow Statement – shows the changes in cash and cash equivalents of the Group during the financial year. The statement shows how the Group generates and uses cash and cash equivalents by classifying cashflows as operating, financing, and investing activities.
- Notes to the Group Accounts where the balances are materially different to those in the single entity accounts.

The following notes provide additional details about the Authority's involvement in the entities consolidated to form the group accounts.

South Downs Commercial Operations Limited

South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (a private limited Teckal company) was incorporated in July 2021 with its first year of trading being the financial year beginning 1 April 2022 and ending 31 March 2023. It was incorporated to operate, in the first instance, Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) and to manage the commercial activities at SSCP. It does so pursuant to an operating agreement with the Authority. The company is wholly owned by the Authority and therefore group accounts are required. Its operations are not strictly limited to SSCP although its operations to date have been limited to SSCP. The company board of directors is made up of representatives of the Authority, further details are included in [Note 17 Related Parties](#).

For 2023/24, the company's results showed a loss of £0.208 million (£0.214 million loss in 2022/23), and net liabilities of £0.422 million (£0.214 million at 31 March 2023). Loans outstanding from the Authority to the company total £0.127 million (£0.100 million at 31 March 2023).

A full copy of the company's accounts is available on request from the Authority. A tender exercise was undertaken during 2023/24 to procure an external auditor to undertake a full audit of the South Downs Commercial Operations Limited accounts. Unfortunately, this tender exercise proved unsuccessful. Grant Thornton UK LLP will provide appropriate assurances from a group perspective on all material aspects, as part of their audit of the Authority's accounts.

Group Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement

| Group Accounts Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|--|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Year Ended 31 March 2023 | | | | Year Ended 31 March 2024 | | |
| Gross Expenditure | Gross Income | Net Expenditure | | Gross Expenditure | Gross Income | Net Expenditure |
| £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| 6,599 | (3,858) | 2,741 | Planning | 6,354 | (4,809) | 1,545 |
| 4,037 | (315) | 3,722 | Countryside and policy management | 2,804 | (241) | 2,563 |
| 902 | (942) | (40) | Countryside and policy management - Seven Sisters | 854 | (1,175) | (321) |
| 4,585 | (205) | 4,380 | Corporate services | 4,722 | (185) | 4,537 |
| 2,783 | (1,392) | 1,391 | Strategic investment fund | 3,264 | (1,226) | 2,038 |
| 18,906 | (6,712) | 12,194 | | 17,999 | (7,637) | 10,361 |
| Other operating expenditure | | | | | | |
| 0 | | | (Gains)/losses on the disposal of non-current assets | | | 231 |
| 0 | | | Total Other Operating Expenditure | | | 231 |
| Financing and investment income and expenditure | | | | | | |
| 157 | | | Net interest on the net defined benefit pension liability | | | 152 |
| (313) | | | Interest receivable | | | (755) |
| (156) | | | Total Financing and Investment Income and Expenditure | | | (603) |
| Non-specific grant income | | | | | | |
| (10,926) | | | National Park grant | | | (10,486) |
| (1,256) | | | Capital grants and contributions | | | (1,565) |
| (12,182) | | | Total Non-Specific Grant Income | | | (12,052) |
| (144) | | | (Surplus)/Deficit on the Provision of Services | | | (2,062) |
| Items that will not be reclassified to the (Surplus) / Deficit on the Provision of | | | | | | |
| 731 | | | (Surplus)/deficit on the revaluation of non-current assets | | | (123) |
| (5,181) | | | Remeasurements of the net defined benefit liability | | | (58) |
| (4,450) | | | Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure | | | (180) |
| (4,594) | | | Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure | | | (2,242) |

Group Movement in Reserves Statement

| Group Accounts Movement in Reserves Statement | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|--|--|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | Balance as at 1 April | Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure | Adjustments between Accounting Basis and Funding Basis under Regulations | (Increase) / Decrease in Year | Balance as at 31 March |
| | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 | £'000 |
| 2023/24 | | | | | |
| Working balance and earmarked reserves | (5,149) | (1,777) | 1,258 | (519) | (5,668) |
| Capital receipts reserve | (28) | 0 | (6) | (6) | (34) |
| Capital contributions unapplied | (6,441) | 0 | (1,476) | (1,476) | (7,917) |
| Usable Reserves | (11,617) | (1,777) | (224) | (2,001) | (13,618) |
| Pensions reserve | 0 | (58) | 58 | 0 | 0 |
| Accumulated absences account | 78 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 79 |
| Revaluation reserve | (3,810) | (123) | 225 | 102 | (3,708) |
| Capital adjustment account | (4,189) | 0 | (59) | (59) | (4,248) |
| Unusable Reserves | (7,920) | (180) | 224 | 44 | (7,876) |
| Total Reserves | (19,537) | (1,957) | 0 | (1,957) | (21,494) |
| 2022/23 | | | | | |
| Working balance and earmarked reserves | (4,700) | (145) | (304) | (449) | (5,149) |
| Capital receipts reserve | (28) | 0 | 0 | 0 | (28) |
| Capital contributions unapplied | (5,993) | 0 | (447) | (447) | (6,441) |
| Usable Reserves | (10,720) | (145) | (751) | (896) | (11,617) |
| Pensions reserve | 4,023 | (5,181) | 1,158 | (4,023) | 0 |
| Accumulated absences account | 93 | 0 | (15) | (15) | 78 |
| Revaluation reserve | (4,563) | 731 | 23 | 754 | (3,810) |
| Capital adjustment account | (3,774) | 0 | (414) | (414) | (4,189) |
| Unusable Reserves | (4,221) | (4,450) | 751 | (3,698) | (7,920) |
| Total Reserves | (14,941) | (4,595) | 0 | (4,594) | (19,537) |

Group Balance Sheet

| Group Accounts Balance Sheet | | | |
|------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| As at 31 March 2023 | Note | | As at 31 March 2024 |
| £'000 | | | £'000 |
| Long Term Assets | | | |
| 9,857 | 10 | Property, plant and equipment | 9,851 |
| 0 | 12,13 | Long term debtors | 0 |
| 0 | 17 | Investment in subsidiary | 0 |
| 9,857 | | Long Term Assets | 9,851 |
| Current Assets | | | |
| 6,082 | 12 | Short term investments | 8,668 |
| 27 | 24 | Inventories | 35 |
| 2,268 | 12,13 | Short term debtors | 3,628 |
| 8,921 | 12 | Cash and cash equivalents | 6,293 |
| 17,298 | | Current Assets | 18,625 |
| Current Liabilities | | | |
| (2,596) | 12,14 | Short term creditors | (2,292) |
| (4,151) | 12,14 | Receipts in advance (revenue) | (3,432) |
| (6,748) | | Current Liabilities | (5,724) |
| Long Term Liabilities | | | |
| (770) | 12 | Long term borrowings | (735) |
| (100) | 15 | Capital Grants RIA | (522) |
| 0 | 20 | Pension liability | 0 |
| (870) | | Long Term Liabilities | (1,257) |
| 19,537 | | Net Assets | 21,495 |
| (11,617) | 8 | Usable reserves | (13,618) |
| (7,920) | 9 | Unusable reserves | (7,876) |
| (19,537) | | Total Reserves | (21,495) |

Group Cash Flow Statement

| Group Accounts Cash Flow Statement | | |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| 2022/23 | | 2023/24 |
| £'000 | | £'000 |
| 145 | Net surplus/(deficit) on the provision of services | 2,062 |
| (149) | Non-current asset charges - depreciation and revaluation | 522 |
| (580) | Increase/(decrease) in creditors | (1,323) |
| 232 | (Increase)/decrease in debtors | (1,343) |
| (12) | (Increase)/decrease in inventories | (8) |
| 1,158 | Movement in the pension liability (element charged to the surplus/(deficit) on the provision of services) | 58 |
| 35 | (Increase)/decrease in deferred liability | 0 |
| 186 | Other Non-Cash Adjustments | (86) |
| 870 | Adjustment to surplus/(deficit) on the provision of services for non-cash movements | (2,180) |
| 0 | Adjustment for items included in the net surplus / (deficit) on the provision of services that are investing and financing activities | 0 |
| 1,015 | Net Cash Flows from Operating Activities | (118) |
| (1,147) | Purchase of non-current assets (including the movement in capital creditors) | (572) |
| 100 | Capital Grants Received | 600 |
| (7,500) | Purchase of short term investments | (13,000) |
| 6,500 | Proceeds from sale of short term investments | 9,000 |
| (2,047) | Net Cash Flows from Investing Activities | (3,972) |
| (35) | Repayment of deferred liability | (35) |
| 0 | Cash Loan to South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd | (3) |
| (35) | Net Cash Flows from Financing Activities | (38) |
| 1,500 | Reclassification of investments from short term to cash equivalents | 1,500 |
| 433 | Net Increase/(Decrease) in Cash and Cash Equivalents | (2,628) |
| 44 | Bank current accounts | (189) |
| 8,443 | Short term deposits | 8,984 |
| 8,487 | Cash and Cash Equivalents as at 1 April | 8,795 |
| (63) | Bank current accounts | 14 |
| 8,984 | Short term deposits | 6,153 |
| 8,921 | Cash and Cash Equivalents as at 31 March | 6,167 |
| 433 | Movement in Cash and Cash Equivalents | (2,628) |

Notes to the Group Accounts

I. Inventories (Stock)

| Inventories (Stock) | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|
| | 2023/24 | 2022/23 |
| Inventories held by South Downs National Park Authority for sale / distribution in the ordinary course of operations | 10 | 5 |
| Total South Downs National Park Authority | 10 | 5 |
| Stock held by South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd | | |
| Visitor Centre stock | 21 | 16 |
| Food and beverage stock | 4 | 6 |
| Total South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd | 25 | 22 |
| Total Inventories (Stock) | 35 | 27 |

Accounting Policies (detailed)

General

The Statement of Accounts (i.e. financial statements) summarises the Authority's transactions for the reported financial year and its position at the end of the financial year. The Authority is required to prepare an annual Statement of Accounts by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, which require the accounts to be prepared in accordance with proper accounting practices. These practices primarily comprise the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom (the Code) supported by International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

The accounting convention adopted in the financial statements is principally historical cost, modified by the revaluation of certain categories of non-current assets and financial instruments.

It is not the Authority's policy to adjust for immaterial cross-casting differences between the main statements and the disclosure notes.

Prior Period Adjustments, Changes in Accounting Policies and Estimates and Errors

Prior period adjustments may arise as a result of a change in accounting policies or to correct a material error. Such errors include the effects of mathematical mistakes, mistakes in applying accounting policies, oversights or misinterpretations of facts and fraud.

Changes in accounting estimates are accounted for prospectively (i.e. in the current and future financial years affected by the change) and do not give rise to a prior period adjustment.

Changes in accounting policies are only made when required by proper accounting practices or the change provides more reliable or relevant information about the effect of transactions, other events and conditions on the Authority's financial position or financial performance. Where a change is made, it is applied retrospectively (unless stated otherwise) by adjusting opening balances and comparative amounts for the prior period as if the new policy had always been applied.

Material errors discovered in prior period figures are corrected retrospectively by amending opening balances and comparative amounts for the prior period.

Accounting Concepts

The Code specifies many of the accounting policies and estimation techniques to be adopted for material items within the financial statements. In preparing information for the financial statements, the Authority has regard to the underlying assumptions and qualitative characteristics:

- **Relevance** – the financial statements are prepared with the objective of providing information about the Authority's financial performance and position that is useful for assessing the stewardship public funds and for making financial decisions;
- **Materiality** – the concept of materiality has been utilised in preparing the financial statements (i.e. if omitting or misstating information would affect the interpretation of the financial statements and influence decisions that users make);
- **Faithful Representation** – the financial information included in the financial statements is complete within the boundaries of materiality, free from material error and free from deliberate or systematic bias;
- **Comparability** – the financial statements are prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Code which establishes proper practice in relation to consistent financial reporting and aids comparability with other national park authorities;

- **Verifiability** – the financial information included in the financial statements faithfully represents the financial position, performance, and cash flows of the Authority. The Authority includes explanations and disclosures of the judgements, assumptions, methodology and other factors and circumstances in preparing its financial statements;
- **Timeliness** – the information included in the financial statements is available to decision makers in time to be capable of influencing their decisions;
- **Understandability** – the financial statements are based on accounting concepts and terminology which require reasonable knowledge of accounting and local government. Every effort has been made to ensure that the financial information included in the financial statements is presented clearly and concisely and notes and commentaries are provided that explain and interpret the key elements of the financial statements for the user;
- **Going Concern** – the financial statements are prepared on the assumption that the functions of the Authority will continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future. As National Park Authorities cannot be created or dissolved without statutory prescription, the Authority must prepare its financial statements on a going concern basis.

Grants and Contributions

Whether paid on account, by instalments or in arrears, grants and contributions are recognised as due to the Authority when there is reasonable assurance that the Authority will comply with the conditions attached to the payments and the grants or contributions will be received.

Amounts recognised as due to the Authority are not credited to the CIES until conditions attached to the grant or contribution have been satisfied. Conditions are stipulations that specify that the future economic benefits or service potential embodied in the asset acquired using the grant or condition are required to be consumed by the recipient as specified, or future economic benefits or service potential must be returned to the transferor.

Revenue grants or contributions received for which conditions have not been satisfied are carried on the Balance Sheet as creditors. When conditions are satisfied, the grant or contribution is credited to the relevant service (in respect of attributable revenue grants and contributions) or taxation and non-specific grant income and expenditure (in respect of non-ring fenced revenue grants) within the CIES. Revenue grants or contributions with no conditions attached are recognised as income within the CIES at the point of receipt.

Capital grants or contributions received for which conditions have not been satisfied are carried on the Balance Sheet as capital grants receipts in advance. When the conditions are satisfied, the grant or contribution is credited to taxation and non-specific grant within the CIES. Where capital grants or contributions are credited to the CIES, they are reversed out of the General Fund balance in the MiRS.

Revenue Recognition

Revenue is recognised in accordance with IFRS 15 - Revenue Recognition from Contracts with Customers and IPSAS 23 Revenue from Non-Exchange Transactions (Taxes and Transfers). Prior to this revenue was recognised under IAS 18 – Revenue. Under IFRS15, the principles of revenue recognition are determining if the transaction is an exchange or non-exchange transaction. With non-exchange transactions there is no or only nominal consideration in return. The obligating extent is often determined by statutory prescription (e.g. VAT or a fine for breach of law) or may be a donation or bequest. For exchange transactions, assets or services and liabilities of approximately equal value are exchanged. There is a contract which creates right and obligations. Performance obligations in the contract have to be measured and the transaction price allocated to these obligations. Revenue is recognised when the performance obligations are satisfied. Examples include sales, fees and charges for services provided by the Authority.

Charges to Revenue for Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE)

Services and support services are debited with the following amounts to record the cost of holding non-current assets during the financial year: depreciation attributable to the assets used by the relevant service; revaluation losses on assets used by the service where there are no accumulated gains in the revaluation reserve against which losses can be written off. The Authority is not required to raise funds to fund depreciation and revaluation losses, therefore the charges are transferred from the General Fund balance to the CAA through the MiRS.

Value Added Tax (VAT)

The CIES excludes amounts relating to VAT and VAT payable is included as an expense only to the extent that it is not receivable from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). VAT receivable is excluded from income within the CIES. The net amount due to / from HMRC in respect of VAT is included as a creditor / debtor on the Balance Sheet.

Cash and Cash Equivalents

Cash is represented by cash in hand and deposits with financial institutions repayable without penalty on demand. The Authority defines cash equivalents as highly liquid investments which are no longer than three months and represent the investment of cash surpluses lent to cover cash shortages. They are readily convertible to known amounts of cash with insignificant risk of change in value.

In terms of cash flow and treasury management, the Authority collectively manages its cash equivalents and cash on the Balance Sheet. The Authority uses the indirect method to present its revenue activities cash flows, whereby the surplus/deficit on the provision of services is adjusted for the effects of transactions of a non-cash nature, any deferrals or accruals of past or future operating cash receipts or payments, and items of revenue or expense associated with investing cash flows.

Employee Benefits

Benefits Payable during Employment

Short term employee benefits are those due to be settled within 12 months of the end of the financial year. They include such benefits as wages and salaries, paid annual leave and paid sick leave and non-monetary benefits for current employees. They are recognised as an expense for services in the financial year in which employees render service to the Authority. An accrual is made for the cost of holiday entitlements (or any form of leave) earned by the employees but not taken before the end of the financial year which employees can carry forward into the next financial year in which the employee takes the benefit. The accrual is charged to services within the CIES but then reversed out through the MiRS to the accumulated absences account so that holiday entitlements are charged to revenue in the financial year in which the leave absence occurs.

Termination Benefits

When the Authority is demonstrably committed to the termination of the employment of an employee or making an offer to encourage voluntary redundancy, the costs of termination benefits are charged on an accruals basis to the respective service within the CIES, this is at the earlier of when the Authority can no longer withdraw the offer of those benefits or when the Authority recognises costs for a restructuring.

Where termination benefits involve the enhancement of pensions, statutory provisions require the General Fund balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Authority to the pension fund or pensioner in the financial year, not the amount calculated according to the relevant accounting standards. In the MiRS, transfers are required to and from the pensions reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for pension enhancement termination benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension fund and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid at the end of the financial year.

Post Employment Benefits

Employees of the Authority are entitled to become members of the Local Government Pension Scheme, administered by West Sussex County Council, according to the terms of their employment.

The scheme provides defined benefits to members (retirement lump sums and pensions), earned as employees worked for the Authority.

The Local Government Pension Scheme

The Local Government Pension Scheme is accounted for as a defined benefit scheme.

The liabilities of the pension scheme attributable to the Authority are included on the Balance Sheet on an actuarial basis. The basis of calculation is the projected unit method (i.e. an assessment of the future payments that will be made in relation to retirement benefits earned to date by employees, based on assumptions about mortality rates, employee turnover rates etc. and projections of earnings for current employees).

Liabilities are discounted to their present value, using a discount rate (determined in reference to market yields at the 31 March of high quality bonds).

The assets of the pension scheme attributable to the Authority are included on the Balance Sheet at their fair value:

- quoted securities – current bid price;
- unquoted securities – professional estimate;
- unitised securities – current bid price;
- property – market value.

The change in the net pension liability (asset) of the Authority is analysed into the following components:

- service cost comprising:
 - current service cost – the increase in liabilities as a result of years of service earned in the current financial year – this cost is allocated within the CIES to the services for which the employees worked;
 - past service cost – the increase in liabilities as a result of a scheme amendment or curtailment whose effect relates to years of service earned in earlier financial years – this cost is debited to non-distributed costs within the CIES;
 - net interest on the net defined benefit liability (asset) (i.e. net interest expense for the Authority) – the change during the financial year in the net defined benefit liability (asset) that arises from the passage of time calculated by multiplying the net defined benefit liability (asset) by the discount rate, both as determined at the start of the financial year taking into account any changes in the net defined benefit liability (asset) during the financial year as a result of contribution and benefit payments – this is charged to financing and investment income and expenditure within the CIES;
- remeasurements comprising:
 - the return on plan assets – excluding amounts included in net interest on the net defined benefit liability (asset) – these are charged to other comprehensive income and expenditure within the CIES and to the pensions reserve;
 - actuarial gains and losses – changes in the net pensions liability that arise because events have not coincided with assumptions made at the last actuarial valuation or because the actuaries have updated their assumptions – these are charged to other comprehensive income and expenditure within the CIES and to the pensions reserve;

- contributions paid to the pension scheme – cash paid as employer’s contributions to the scheme in settlement of liabilities – these are charged to services within the CIES.
- any change in the effect of the asset ceiling, excluding amounts included in net interest on the net defined benefit liability (asset).

In relation to retirement benefits, statutory provisions require the General Fund balance to be charged with the amount payable by the Authority to the pension scheme or directly to pensioners in the financial year, not the amount calculated according to the relevant accounting standards. Transfers are made through the MiRS to and from the pensions reserve to remove the notional debits and credits for retirement benefits and replace them with debits for the cash paid to the pension scheme and pensioners and any such amounts payable but unpaid the end of the financial year. The negative balance that arises on the pensions reserve thereby measures the beneficial impact to the General Fund balance of being required to account for retirement benefits on the basis of cash flows rather than as benefits earned by employees.

Discretionary Benefits

The Authority also has restricted powers to make discretionary awards of retirement benefits in the event of early retirements. Any liabilities estimated to arise as a result of an award to any employee are accrued during the financial year of the decision to make the award and accounted for using the same accounting policies as are applied to the Local Government Pension Scheme.

Financial Assets and Liabilities – Financial Instruments

Financial Liabilities

Financial liabilities are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Authority becomes party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value and are carried at their amortised cost.

Financial Assets

Financial Assets are classified based on a classification and measurement approach which reflects the business model for holding the financial assets and their cash flow characteristics. There are three main classes of financial assets measured at:

- amortised cost
- fair value through profit or loss (FVPL), and
- fair value through other comprehensive income (FVOCI).

The Authority's business model is to hold investments to collect contractual cashflows. Financial assets are therefore classified as amortised cost.

Financial assets measured at amortised cost are recognised on the Balance Sheet when the Authority becomes party to the contractual provisions of a financial instrument and are initially measured at fair value. They are subsequently measured at their amortised cost.

Annual credits for interest receivable are credited to financing and investment income and expenditure within the CIES and are based on the carrying amount of the asset multiplied by the effective rate of interest for the instrument; for most of the loans that the Authority has made, this means that the amount presented on the Balance Sheet is the outstanding principal receivable (plus accrued interest) and interest credited to the CIES is the amount receivable for the loan agreement in the financial year.

Any gains / losses that arise on derecognition of the asset are credited / debited to financing and investment income and expenditure within the CIES.

Expected Credit Loss Model

The Authority recognises expected credit losses on all its financial assets held at amortised cost on either a 12 month or lifetime basis. Only lifetime losses are recognised for trade receivables (debtors) held by the Authority.

Impairment losses are calculated to reflect the expectation that the future cash flows might not take place because the borrower could default on their obligations. Credit risk plays a crucial part in assessing losses. Where risk has significantly increased since an instrument was initially recognised, losses are assessed on a lifetime basis. Where risk has not significantly increased, or remains low, losses are assessed on the basis of 12-month expected losses.

Provisions

Provisions are made where an event has taken place whereby the Authority has a legal or constructive obligation that probably requires settlement by a transfer of economic benefits or service potential to settle the obligation and a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation. For example, the Authority may be involved in a court case that could eventually result in the making of a settlement or the payment of compensation.

Provisions are charged as an expense to the appropriate service within the CIES in the year that the Authority becomes aware of the obligation and are measured at the best estimate at the Balance Sheet date of the expenditure required to settle the obligation, considering relevant risks and uncertainties.

When payments are eventually made, they are charged to the provision carried on the Balance Sheet. Estimated settlements are reviewed at the year end. Where it becomes less than probable that a transfer of economic benefits will now be required or a lower settlement than anticipated is made, the provision is reversed and credited back to the relevant service within the CIES.

Reserves

The Authority sets aside specific amounts as reserves for future policy purposes or to cover general contingencies and cash flow management.

When expenditure to be financed from a reserve is incurred, it is charged to the appropriate service within the CIES. The reserve is then transferred back to the General Fund balance in the MiRS so that there is no net charge against the General Fund for the expenditure.

The category of unusable reserves includes those reserves which manage the accounting processes for non-current assets, financial instruments, and retirement and employee benefits and do not represent usable resources for the Authority; these reserves are covered in the relevant accounting policies and explained in the relevant notes.

The Authority conducts an annual review of the reserves to ensure they are still required and are set at the appropriate level.

Overheads and Support Services

The costs of central and departmental overheads (i.e. management and administration costs) and support services are charged to those services that benefit from the supply or service in accordance with the Authority's arrangements for accountability and financial performance.

Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE)

Assets that have physical substance and are held for use in the production or supply of goods or services, for rental to others, or for administrative purposes and that are expected to be used during more than one financial year are classified as PPE.

Recognition

Expenditure on the acquisition, creation or enhancement of PPE is capitalised on an accruals basis provided that it is probable that the future economic benefits or service potential associated with the item will flow to the Authority and the cost of the item can be measured reliably. Expenditure that maintains but does not add to an asset's potential to deliver economic benefits or service potential (i.e. repairs and maintenance) is charged as an expense to the relevant cost of service within the CIES as it is incurred. The Authority has a de minimis level of £5,000 for land and buildings and vehicles, plant, and equipment; items of expenditure below this de minimis level are charged to the relevant cost of services within the CIES in the year it is incurred. The Authority has no de minimis level for enhancement expenditure and therefore all enhancement expenditure is capitalised.

Measurement

PPE assets are initially measurement at cost comprising purchase price, any costs attributable to bringing the asset to the location and condition necessary for it to be capable of operating in the manner intended by the Authority, and the initial estimate of the costs of dismantling and removing the item and restoring the site on which it is located.

The costs of assets acquired other than by purchase is deemed to be its fair value unless the acquisition does not have commercial substance (i.e. it will not lead to a variation in the cash flows of the Authority).

Assets are then carried on the Balance Sheet using the following measurement bases:

- non-property assets that have short useful lives or low values (or both) (i.e. vehicles, plant, and equipment) – depreciated historical cost is used as a proxy for current value;
- land and building assets – current value determined as the amount that would be paid for the asset in its existing use (existing use value – EUV)
- infrastructure assets - depreciated historical cost.

Assets included on the Balance Sheet at current value are revalued annually by the Authority. The Authority's land and building asset became operational in 2014/15 at which time it was revalued incurring a decrease in revaluation. As there are no historic revaluation gains a revaluation reserve has not been created and therefore decreases in valuations are charged to the CIES against the relevant service as a revaluation loss. Revaluation losses are not permitted by statutory arrangements to have an impact on the General Fund balance therefore they are reversed out of the General Fund balance in the MiRS and posted to the CAA. At the end of each financial year, assets are assessed as to whether there is any indication that an asset may be impaired.

Depreciation

Depreciation is applied to all PPE assets, except for assets without a determinable finite useful life (i.e. freehold land). The depreciation charge is based on the depreciable amount allocated over the useful life of the asset, using a straight line allocation method, and is charged to the relevant service(s) within the CIES. General Fund depreciation charges are not permitted by statutory arrangements to have an impact on the General Fund balance therefore they are reversed out of the General Fund balance in the MiRS and posted to the CAA. The Authority does not charge depreciation in the year of acquisition but does charge a full year's depreciation in the year of disposal.

Disposals

When an asset is disposed of or decommissioned, the carrying amount of the asset on the balance sheet is written off to other operating expenditure in the CIES as part of the gain or loss on disposal. Receipts from disposals (if any) are credited to the same line in the CIES also as part of the gain or loss on disposal (i.e. netted off against the carrying value of the asset at the time of disposal).

Capital receipts are required to be credited to the capital receipts reserve and can then only be used for new capital investment. Receipts are credited to the CIES and subsequently transferred to the

capital receipts reserve from the General Fund balance in the MiRS. The written off value of disposals is not a charge against the General Fund balance, as the cost of PPE is fully provided for under separate arrangements for capital financing. Amounts are transferred to the CAA from the General Fund balance in the MiRS.

Asset Componentisation

The Authority only considers assets for componentisation in the financial year the assets are valued and / or in the year following capital investment being incurred on the asset. As the Authority does not depreciate assets in the year of acquisition, capital additions are not considered for componentisation until the following financial year.

Componentisation is only applied to building elements of assets categorised as PPE and that are subject to depreciation. Vehicles, plant, and equipment assets are not componentised as they do not have separately identifiable components of significant value or a significant difference in asset life. The Authority does not currently consider infrastructure assets for componentisation.

Leases

The Authority classifies leases as either finance leases or operating leases based on the extent to which risks and rewards incidental to ownership of a leased asset lie with the lessor or the lessee. A lease is classified as a finance lease where the terms of the lease transfer substantially all the risks and rewards incidental to ownership of the asset from the lessor to the lessee. All other leases are classified as operating leases. Where a lease covers both land and buildings, the land and buildings elements are considered separately for classification. When the land has an indefinite economic life, the land element is normally classified as an operating lease unless title is expected to pass to the lessee by the end of the lease term. When accounting for a lease of land and buildings, the minimum lease payments are allocated between the land and the buildings elements in proportion to their relative fair values. Where the amount that would initially be recognised for the land element is immaterial, the land and buildings are treated as a single unit for lease classification. The Authority only has leases, as lessee, which have been classified as operating leases.

Lessee Operating Leases

Rentals paid under operating leases are charged to the CIES as an expense of the services benefiting from use of the leased asset. Charges are made on a straight line basis over the life of the lease; even if this does not match the pattern of payments (e.g. there is a rent free period at the commencement of the lease).

Events after the Reporting Period

Events after the end of the financial year are those events, both favourable and unfavourable, that occur between the end of the financial year and the date when the statement of accounts is authorised for issue. Two types of events can be identified: adjusting events - those that provide evidence of conditions that existed at the end of the financial year. In this instance, the statement of accounts is adjusted to reflect such events; non-adjusting events - those that are indicative of conditions that arose after the financial year end. In this instance, the statement of accounts is not adjusted to reflect such events but where a category of events would have a material effect, disclosure is made in the notes of the nature of the events and their estimated financial effect.

Events taking place after the date of authorisation for issue are not reflected in the statement of accounts.

Interests in Companies & Other Entities

An assessment of the authority's interest in companies and other entities has been carried out during the year in accordance with the Code to determine the group relationships that exist. Group accounts are required where the authority has interest in subsidiaries, associates and/or joint

ventures, subject to consideration of materiality. The authority has a material interest in the South Downs South Downs Commercial Operations Limited which requires it to prepare group accounting alongside its own financial statements.

Revenue Expenditure Funded from Capital under Statute

Legislation allows some expenditure (e.g. grants and expenditure on property not owned by the authority) incurred by the authority to be classified as capital for funding purposes when it does not result in the expenditure being carried on the Balance Sheet as a non-current asset; this is to enable the expenditure to be funded from capital resources rather than be charged to the General Fund balance. Such expenditure is charged to the relevant service within the CIES. The authority accounts for this statutory provision that allows capital resources to meet the expenditure by debiting the Capital Adjustment Account and crediting the General Fund balance with the transfer being reported in the MiRS.

Glossary of Terms

Accounting Estimates are monetary amounts in financial statements that are subject to measurement uncertainty

Accounting Policies are the specific principles, bases, conventions, rules and practices applied by the Authority in preparing and presenting its financial statements.

The **Accruals Basis** is the recognition of items as assets, liabilities, income, and expenses when they satisfy the definitions and recognition criteria. The accruals basis of accounting requires the non-cash effects of transactions to be reflected in the financial statements for the financial year in which those effects are experienced and not necessarily in the period in which any cash is received or paid.

The **Accumulated Absences Account** absorbs the differences that would otherwise arise on the General Fund balance from accruing for compensated absences earned but not taken in the financial year (e.g. annual leave entitlement carried forward at 31 March). Statutory arrangements require that the impact on the General Fund balance is neutralised by transfers to or from the accumulated absences account.

Actuarial Gains and Losses (Pensions) are changes in the present value of the defined benefit obligation resulting from:

- experience adjustments (the effects of differences between the previous actuarial assumptions and what has actually occurred);
- the effects of changes in actuarial assumptions.

The **Amortised Cost of a Financial Asset or Financial Liability** is the amount at which the financial asset or financial liability is measured at initial recognition minus principal repayments, plus or minus the cumulative amortisation using the effective interest method (i.e. a method of calculating the amortised cost of a financial asset or a financial liability and of allocating the interest income or interest expense over the relevant period) of any difference between that initial amount and the maturity amount, and minus any reduction (directly or through the use of an allowance account) for impairment or collectibility.

An **Asset** is a resource controlled by the Authority as a result of past events and from which future economic or service potential is expected to flow to the Authority.

The **Asset Ceiling (Pensions)** is the present value of any economic benefit available to the Employer in the form of refunds from the plan or reduced future employer contributions to the plan.

An **Audit of Financial Statements** is an examination by an independent expert of the Authority's financial affairs to check that the relevant legal obligations and codes of practice have been followed.

The **Balance Sheet** shows the value of the assets and liabilities recognised by the Authority as at the 31 March.

Benefits Payable during Employment covers:

- short term employee benefits, such as wages and salaries, paid annual leave and paid sick leave, and non-monetary benefits for current employees;
- benefits earned by current employees but payable 12 months or more after the end of the financial year, such as long service leave or jubilee payments and long term disability benefits.

A **Budget** expresses the Authority's service delivery plans and capital investment programmes in monetary terms.

The **Capital Adjustment Account (CAA)** absorbs the timing differences arising from the different arrangements for accounting for the consumption of PPE and for financing the acquisition, construction, or enhancement of those assets under statutory provisions.

Capital Investment is expenditure on the acquisition of an asset that will be used to provide services beyond the financial year or expenditure which adds to and not merely maintains the value of existing PPE.

The **Capital Investment Programme** is a financial summary of the capital projects that the Authority intends to carry out over a specified period of time.

A **Capital Receipt** is the proceeds from the sale of an asset.

The **Capital Receipts Reserve** holds the proceeds from the disposal of non-current assets, which are restricted by statute from being used other than to fund new capital investment to be set aside to finance historical capital investment.

Capital Reserves represent resources earmarked to fund capital schemes as part of the Authority's capital investment strategy.

The **Carrying Amount** is the amount at which an asset is recognised on the Balance Sheet after deducting any accumulated depreciation.

Cash comprises cash in hand and demand deposits.

Cash Equivalents are short term, highly liquid investments that are readily convertible to known amounts of cash and which are subject to an insignificant risk of changes in value.

Cash Flows are the inflows and outflows of cash and cash equivalents.

The **Cash Flow Statement** shows the changes in cash and cash equivalents of the Authority during the financial year.

The **Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement (CIES)** shows the accounting cost in the financial year of providing services in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices, rather than the amount to be funded from the National Park Grant.

Cost is the amount of cash or cash equivalents paid or the fair value of the other consideration given to acquire an asset at the time of acquisition or construction.

Creditors are financial liabilities arising from the contractual obligation to pay cash in the future for goods or services or other benefits that have been received or supplied and have been invoiced or formally agreed with the supplier.

A **Current Asset** is an asset that is intended to be sold within the normal operating cycle; the asset is held primarily for the purpose of trading, or the Authority expects to realise the asset within 12 months after the reporting date.

A **Current Liability** is an amount which will become payable or could be called in within the next financial year.

Current Service Cost (Pensions) is the increase in the present value of a defined benefit obligation resulting from employee service in the current period.

Current Value is the amount that reflects the economic environment prevailing for the service or function the asset is supporting.

Debtors are financial assets not traded in an active market with fixed or determinable payments that are contractual rights to receive cash or cash equivalents.

A **Defined Benefit Scheme (Pensions)** is a pension scheme where the benefits to employees are based on their salaries, and where employers' contributions have to be adjusted to match estimates of future liabilities.

Depreciation is a method of allocating the cost of a tangible asset over its useful life.

Employee Benefits are all forms of consideration given by the Authority in exchange for service rendered by employees.

Employee Expenses include total salaries, employers' national insurance contributions, employers' pension contributions and indirect employee expenses including redundancy costs and pension accounting adjustments.

Estimation Techniques are the methods adopted to arrive at estimated monetary amounts, corresponding to the measurement bases selected, for assets, liabilities, gains, losses, and changes to reserves.

Events after the Reporting Period are those events, both favourable and unfavourable, that occur between the end of the financial year and the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

The **Expenditure and Funding Analysis (EFA)** shows how the available funding (i.e. the National Park Grant) has been used in providing services in comparison with those resources consumed or in accordance with generally accepted accounting practices. It also shows how this expenditure is allocated for decision making purposes between the service directorates.

Exit Packages are departure costs paid to former employees who negotiate a package as part of their terms of leaving the Authority.

Expenses are decreases in economic benefits or service potential during the financial year in the form of outflows or consumption of assets or increases of liabilities that result in decreases in reserves.

Fair Value is the amount for which an asset could be exchanged, or a liability settled, between knowledgeable, willing parties in an arm's length transaction.

Fees, Charges and Other Service Income include contributions received from other local authorities and other bodies.

A **Financial Asset** is any asset that is:

- cash;
- an equity instrument of another entity;
- a contractual right to receive cash or another financial asset from another entity, or to exchange financial assets or financial liabilities with another entity under conditions that are potentially favourable to the Authority.

A **Financial Liability** is any liability that is a contractual obligation to deliver cash or another financial asset to another entity, or to exchange financial assets or financial liabilities with another entity under conditions that are potentially unfavourable to the Authority.

A **Financial Instrument** is any contract that gives rise to a financial asset of one entity and a financial liability or equity instrument of another entity and includes trade payables and other payables, bank deposits, trade receivables and loans receivable.

Financing Activities are activities that result in changes in the size and composition of the principal received from or repaid to external providers of finance.

The **General Fund** is the statutory fund into which all the receipts of the Authority are required to be paid and out of which all liabilities of the Authority are to be met, except to the extent that statutory rules might provide otherwise.

The **General Fund Balance** shows the resources that the Authority is statutorily empowered to spend on its services or on capital investment (or the deficit of resources that the Authority is required to recover) at the end of the financial year.

Going Concern defines that the functions of the Authority will continue in operational existence for the foreseeable future.

Government Grants are grants made by the Government towards either revenue or capital investment to support the cost of the provision of the Authority's services.

Grants and Contributions are assistance in the form of transfers of resources to an Authority in return for past or future compliance with certain conditions relating to the operation of activities.

Historical Cost is the carrying amount of an asset at the date of acquisition and adjusted for subsequent depreciation.

Income is the gross inflow of economic benefits or service potential when those inflows or enhancements of assets or decreases of liabilities result in an increase in reserves.

An **Infrastructure Asset** is an inalienable asset, expenditure on which is only recoverable by continued use of the asset created, i.e. there is no prospect of sale or alternative use.

The **Interest Cost (Pensions)** is the expected increase in the present value of the scheme liabilities because the benefits are one period closer to settlement.

Interest Income (Pensions) is a component of the return on plan assets and is determined by multiplying the fair value of the plan assets by the discount rate.

International Accounting Standards (IAS) are standards for the preparation and presentation of financial statements.

International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) advise the accounting treatment and disclosure requirements of transactions so that the Authority's accounts present fairly the financial position of the Authority.

Inventories are assets:

- in the form of materials or supplies to be consumed in the production process;
- in the form of materials or supplies to be consumed or distributed in the rendering of services;
- held for sale or distribution in the ordinary course of operations; or
- in the process of production for sale or distribution.

Investing Activities are activities relating to the acquisition and disposal of PPE and other investments not included in cash equivalents.

A **Lease** is an agreement whereby the lessor conveys to the lessee in return for a payment or series of payments the right to use an asset for an agreed period of time.

A **Liability** is a present obligation of the Authority arising from past events, the settlement of which is expected to result in an outflow from the Authority of resources embodying economic benefits or service potential.

Loans and Receivables are financial assets with fixed or determinable payments that are not quoted in an active market, other than:

- those that the entity intends to sell immediately or in the near term (held for trading); or
- those for which the holder may not recover substantially all of its initial investment, other than because of credit deterioration (available for sale).

Materiality - omissions or misstatements of items are material if they could, individually or collectively, influence the decisions or assessments of users made on the basis of the financial statements. Materiality depends on the nature or size of the omission or misstatement judged in the surrounding circumstances. The nature or size of the item, or a combination of both, could be the determining factor.

The **Movement in Reserves Statement (MiRS)** shows the movement during the financial year on the different reserves held by the Authority, analysed into usable reserves and unusable reserves.

The **Net Defined Benefit Liability (Obligation) (Pensions)** is the deficit, adjusted for any effect of limiting a net defined benefit asset to the asset ceiling.

The **Net Interest on the Net Defined Benefit Liability (Pensions)** is the change during the period in the net defined liability that arises from the passage of time.

The **Net Realisable Value** is the estimated selling price in the ordinary course of operations less the estimated costs of completion and the estimated costs necessary to make the sale, exchange, or distribution.

Non-Ring Fenced Government Grants are revenue grants distributed by central government that do not relate to the performance of a specific service. The Authority is free to use all of its non-ring fenced funding as it sees fit to support the delivery of local, regional, and national priorities in the Park's area.

An **Operating Lease** is a type of lease, e.g. computer equipment, office equipment, furniture etc. where the balance of risks and rewards of holding the asset remains with the lessor.

Operating Activities are the activities of the Authority that are not investing or financing activities.

Other Comprehensive Income and Expenditure comprises items of expense and income (including reclassification adjustments) that are not recognised in the surplus / deficit on the provision of services as required or permitted by the Code. Examples include changes in the remeasurement of the net defined benefit pension liability (asset) on a defined benefit scheme.

Other Service Expenses include:

- premises expenses including all running costs, expenditure on goods, services and contractors directly related to property;
- transport expenses including all costs connected with the provision, hire or use of transport;
- supplies and services covering all direct supplies and services expenditure incurred;
- third party payments including, for example, payments to third party providers of local authority services and other bodies;
- support service charges including the recharge of management and administration costs and support service costs (e.g. financial services, human resources, legal services, and property services) to front line services and internal recharges between services.

Past Service Cost (Pensions) is the change in the present value of the defined benefit obligation for employee service in prior periods, resulting from a scheme amendment (the introduction of, or withdrawal of, or changes to, a defined benefit scheme) or a curtailment (a significant reduction by the Authority in the number of employees covered by a scheme).

The **Pension Reserve** is a specific accounting mechanism used to reconcile the payments made for the year to various statutory pension schemes in accordance with those schemes' requirements and the net charge in the Authority's recognised liability under IAS 19 "*Employee Benefits*", for the same period.

Post Employment Benefits are employee benefits (other than termination benefits and short term employee benefits) that are payable after the completion of employment.

The **Present Value of a Defined Benefit Liability (Pensions)** is the present value, without deducting any scheme assets, of expected future payments required to settle the liability resulting from employee service in the current and prior periods.

Property, Plant and Equipment (PPE) are tangible assets (i.e. assets with physical substance) that are held for use in the production or supply of goods and services, for rental to others, or for administrative purposes, and which are expected to be used during more than one financial year.

A **Provision** is a liability of uncertain timing or amount. The Authority recognises a provision where an event has taken place that gives the Authority a present obligation (legal or constructive) that requires settlement by either a transfer of economic benefits or service potential to settle the obligation, and a reliable estimate can be made of the amount of the obligation.

A **Qualified Valuer** is a person conducting the valuations who holds a recognised and relevant professional qualification and having sufficient current local and national knowledge of the particular market, and the skills and understanding to undertake the valuation competently.

Related Party - parties are considered to be related if one party has the ability to control the other party or exercise significant influence over the other party in making financial and operating decisions or if the related party entity and another entity are subject to common control.

A **Related Party Transaction** is a transfer of resources or obligations between related parties, regardless of whether a price is charged.

Reserves are the residual interest in the assets of the Authority after deducting all its liabilities.

The **Residual Value** is the estimated amount that the Authority would currently obtain from the disposal of an asset, after deducting the estimated costs of disposal, if the asset were already of the age and in the condition expected at the end of its useful life.

Revenue is the gross inflow of economic benefits or service potential during the financial year when those inflows result in an increase in the Authority's net assets.

Revenue Expenditure is the day to day running costs relating to the financial year irrespective of whether or not the amounts due have been paid. Examples are salaries, wages, materials, supplies, and services.

Revenue Expenditure Funded from Capital under Statute is revenue expenditure incurred that may be funded from capital resources under statutory provisions but does not result in the creation of non-current assets.

Ring Fenced Government Grants are revenue grants distributed by central government that relate to a specific service.

A **Scheme Amendment (Pensions)** occurs when the Authority introduces or withdraws a defined benefit scheme or changes the benefits payable under an existing defined benefit scheme.

Scheme Assets (Pensions) comprise assets held by a long term employee benefit scheme.

Scheme Liabilities (Pensions) comprise liabilities in relation to a long term employee benefit scheme.

Short Term Paid Absences are periods during which an employee does not provide services to the Authority, but benefits continue to be paid.

Short Term Employee Benefits are employee benefits (other than termination benefits) that fall due wholly within 12 months after the end of the period in which the employees render the related service.

The **Surplus or Deficit on the Provision of Services** is the total of income less expenses, excluding the components of other comprehensive income and expenditure.

A **Tangible Asset** is an asset that has a physical form.

Termination Benefits are employee benefits provided in exchange for the termination of an employee's employment as a result of either the Authority's decision to terminate an employee's

employment before the normal retirement date, or the Authority's decision to accept an offer of benefits in exchange for the termination of employment.

Total Comprehensive Income and Expenditure comprises all components of surplus / deficit on the provision of services and of other comprehensive income and expenditure.

Unusable Reserves are those reserves that the Authority is not able to use to provide services and includes reserves that hold unrealised gains and losses where amounts would only become available to provide services if the assets are sold and reserves that hold timing differences shown in the MiRS as adjustments between accounting basis and funding basis under regulations.

Usable Reserves are those reserves that may be used to provide services, subject to the need to maintain a prudent level of reserves and any statutory limitations on their use.

The **Useful Life** is the period which an asset is expected to be available for use by the Authority.

Value Added Tax (VAT) is an indirect tax levied on most business transactions and on many goods and some services.

Independent Auditor's Report to the Members of the South Downs National Park Authority

Report on the audit of the financial statements

Opinion on financial statements

We have audited the financial statements of South Downs National Park Authority (the 'Authority') and its subsidiary (the 'group') for the year ended 31 March 2024, which comprise the Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, Movement in Reserves Statement, the Balance Sheet, the Cash Flow Statement, the Group Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement, the Group Movement in Reserves Statement, the Group Balance Sheet, the Group Cash Flow Statement and notes to the financial statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24.

In our opinion, the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the financial position of the group and of the Authority as at 31 March 2024 and of the group's expenditure and income and the Authority's expenditure and income for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law, as required by the Code of Audit Practice (2024) ("the Code of Audit Practice") approved by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the 'Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements' section of our report. We are independent of the group and the Authority in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We are responsible for concluding on the appropriateness of the Chief Finance Officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the group and the Authority's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify the auditor's opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our report. However, future events or conditions may cause the Authority or the group to cease to continue as a going concern.

In our evaluation of the Chief Finance Officer's conclusions, and in accordance with the expectation set out within the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 that the Authority's and group's financial statements shall be prepared on a going concern basis, we considered the inherent risks associated with the continuation of services provided by the group and the Authority. In doing so we had regard to the guidance provided in Practice Note 10 Audit of financial statements and regularity of public sector bodies in the United Kingdom

(Revised 2022) on the application of ISA (UK) 570 Going Concern to public sector entities. We assessed the reasonableness of the basis of preparation used by the group and Authority and the group and Authority's disclosures over the going concern period.

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the Chief Finance Officer's use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the Authority's and the group's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the Chief Finance Officer with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the Annual Governance Statement and Statement of Accounts, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Other information we are required to report on by exception under the Code of Audit Practice

Under the Code of Audit Practice published by the National Audit Office in November 2024 on behalf of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the Code of Audit Practice) we are required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement does not comply with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24, or is misleading or inconsistent with the information of which we are aware from our audit. We are not required to consider whether the Annual Governance Statement addresses all risks and controls or that risks are satisfactorily addressed by internal controls.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinion on other matters required by the Code of Audit Practice

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit of the financial statements, the other information published together with the financial statements in the Statement of Accounts for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to report to you if:

- we issue a report in the public interest under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make a written recommendation to the Authority under section 24 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or

- we make an application to the court for a declaration that an item of account is contrary to law under Section 28 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or;
- we issue an advisory notice under Section 29 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit; or
- we make an application for judicial review under Section 31 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, in the course of, or at the conclusion of the audit.

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matters.

Responsibilities of the Authority and the Chief Finance Officer

As explained more fully in the Statement of Responsibilities, the Authority is required to make arrangements for the proper administration of its financial affairs and to secure that one of its officers has the responsibility for the administration of those affairs. In this authority, that officer is the Chief Finance Officer. The Chief Finance Officer is responsible for the preparation of the Statement of Accounts, which includes the financial statements, in accordance with proper practices as set out in the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24, for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the Chief Finance Officer determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the Chief Finance Officer is responsible for assessing the Authority's and the group's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless they have been informed by the relevant national body of the intention to dissolve the Authority and the group without the transfer of its services to another public sector entity.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists.

Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements. Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud, is detailed below.

We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory frameworks that are applicable to the group and Authority and determined that the most significant which are directly relevant to specific assertions in the financial statements are those related to the reporting frameworks (the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24, the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Local Government Act 2003).

We enquired of management and the Policy and Resources Committee, concerning the group and Authority's policies and procedures relating to:

- the identification, evaluation and compliance with laws and regulations;
- the detection and response to the risks of fraud; and
- the establishment of internal controls to mitigate risks related to fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations.

We enquired of management, internal audit and the Policy and Resources Committee, whether they were aware of any instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations or whether they had any knowledge of actual, suspected or alleged fraud.

We assessed the susceptibility of the Authority and group's financial statements to material misstatement, including how fraud might occur, by evaluating management's incentives and opportunities for manipulation of the financial statements. This included the evaluation of the risk of management override of controls. We determined that the principal risks were in relation to journal entries outside the normal course of business and significant management estimates, including Land and Building valuations and the valuation of the Pension Fund IAS19 net asset. Our audit procedures involved:

- evaluation of the design effectiveness of controls that management has in place to prevent and detect fraud,
- journal entry testing, with a focus on unusual and high-risk journals made at the year-end accounts production stage,
- challenging assumptions and judgements made by management in its significant accounting estimates in respect of land and buildings and the defined benefit pensions asset, and
- assessing the extent of compliance with the relevant laws and regulations as part of our procedures on the related financial statement item.

These audit procedures were designed to provide reasonable assurance that the financial statements were free from fraud or error. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement due to fraud is higher than the risk of not detecting one resulting from error and detecting irregularities that result from fraud is inherently more difficult than detecting those that result from error, as fraud may involve collusion, deliberate concealment, forgery or intentional misrepresentations. Also, the further removed non-compliance with laws and regulations is from events and transactions reflected in the financial statements, the less likely we would become aware of it.

We communicated relevant laws and regulations and potential fraud risks to all engagement team members, including management override of controls. We remained alert to any indications of non-compliance with laws and regulations, including fraud, throughout the audit.

Our assessment of the appropriateness of the collective competence and capabilities of the group and Authority's engagement team included consideration of the engagement team's:

- understanding of , and practical experience with audit engagements of a similar nature and complexity through appropriate training and participation
- knowledge of the local government sector in which the group and Authority operates
- understanding of the legal and regulatory requirements specific to the Authority and group including:
 - the provisions of the applicable legislation
 - guidance issued by CIPFA/LASAAC and SOLACE
 - the applicable statutory provisions.

In assessing the potential risks of material misstatement, we obtained an understanding of:

- the Authority and group's operations, including the nature of its income and expenditure and its services and of its objectives and strategies to understand the classes of transactions, account balances, expected financial statement disclosures and business risks that may result in risks of material misstatement.

- the Authority and group's control environment, including the policies and procedures implemented by the Authority and group to ensure compliance with the requirements of the financial reporting framework.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at: www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our auditor's report.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

Matter on which we are required to report by exception – the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

Under the Code of Audit Practice, we are required to report to you if, in our opinion, we have not been able to satisfy ourselves that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources for the year ended 31 March 2024.

We have nothing to report in respect of the above matter.

Responsibilities of the Authority

The Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

Auditor's responsibilities for the review of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources

We are required under Section 20(1)(c) of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 to be satisfied that the Authority has made proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. We are not required to consider, nor have we considered, whether all aspects of the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources are operating effectively.

We undertake our review in accordance with the Code of Audit Practice, having regard to the guidance issued by the Comptroller and Auditor General in November 2024. This guidance sets out the arrangements that fall within the scope of 'proper arrangements'. When reporting on these arrangements, the Code of Audit Practice requires auditors to structure their commentary on arrangements under three specified reporting criteria:

- Financial sustainability: how the Authority plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;
- Governance: how the Authority ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks; and
- Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the Authority uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.

We document our understanding of the arrangements the Authority has in place for each of these three specified reporting criteria, gathering sufficient evidence to support our risk assessment and commentary in our Auditor's Annual Report. In undertaking our work, we consider whether there is evidence to suggest that there are significant weaknesses in arrangements.

Report on other legal and regulatory requirements – Delay in certification of completion of the audit

We cannot formally conclude the audit and issue an audit certificate for South Downs National Park Authority for the year ended 31 March 2024 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 and the Code of Audit Practice until we have completed the work necessary in relation to consolidation returns, including Whole of Government Accounts (WGA), and the National Audit Office has concluded their work in respect of WGA for the year ended 31 March 2024. We are satisfied that this work does not have a material effect on the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the members of the Authority, as a body, in accordance with Part 5 of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 [and as set out in paragraph 85 of the Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies published by Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited]. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the Authority's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the Authority and the Authority's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

Signature:

Beth Bowers, Key Audit Partner

for and on behalf of Grant Thornton UK LLP, Local Auditor

Bristol

South Downs National Park Authority

Statement of Accounts 2023/24

South Downs Centre, North Street, Midhurst, West Sussex GU29 9DH

T: 0300 303 1053 E: info@southdowns.gov.uk www.southdowns.gov.uk

A copy of this document can be found on the Authority's website www.southdowns.gov.uk

Letter of Representation 2023/24



Grant Thornton UK LLP
 2 Glass Wharf
 Temple Quay
 Bristol
 BS2 0EL

20 February 2025

Dear Grant Thornton UK LLP,

South Downs National Park Authority Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024

This representation letter is provided in connection with the audit of the financial statements of South Downs National Park Authority and its subsidiary undertaking, South Downs Commercial Operations Ltd for the year ended 31 March 2024 for the purpose of expressing an opinion as to whether the group and Authority financial statements give a true and fair view in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 and applicable law.

We confirm that to the best of our knowledge and belief having made such inquiries as we considered necessary for the purpose of appropriately informing ourselves:

Financial Statements

- i. We have fulfilled our responsibilities for the preparation of the group and Authority's financial statements in accordance with International Financial Reporting Standards and the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2023/24 ("the Code"); in particular the financial statements are fairly presented in accordance therewith.
- ii. We have complied with the requirements of all statutory directions affecting the group and Authority and these matters have been appropriately reflected and disclosed in the financial statements.
- iii. The Authority has complied with all aspects of contractual agreements that could have a material effect on the group and Authority financial statements in the event of non-compliance. There has been no non-compliance with requirements of any regulatory authorities that could have a material effect on the financial statements in the event of non-compliance.
- iv. We acknowledge our responsibility for the design, implementation and maintenance of internal control to prevent and detect fraud.

- v. Significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates, including those measured at fair value, are reasonable. Such accounting estimates include the valuation of land and buildings, and the net pension Asset. We are satisfied that the material judgements used in the preparation of the financial statements are soundly based, in accordance with the Code and adequately disclosed in the financial statements. We understand our responsibilities includes identifying and considering alternative, methods, assumptions or source data that would be equally valid under the financial reporting framework, and why these alternatives were rejected in favour of the estimate used. We are satisfied that the methods, the data and the significant assumptions used by us in making accounting estimates and their related disclosures are appropriate to achieve recognition, measurement or disclosure that is reasonable in accordance with the Code and adequately disclosed in the financial statements.
- vi. We confirm that we are satisfied that the actuarial assumptions underlying the valuation of pension scheme assets and liabilities for IAS19 Employee Benefits disclosures are consistent with our knowledge. We confirm that all settlements and curtailments have been identified and properly accounted for. We also confirm that all significant post-employment benefits have been identified and properly accounted for.
- vii. Except as disclosed in the group and Authority financial statements:
 - a. there are no unrecorded liabilities, actual or contingent
 - b. none of the assets of the group and Authority has been assigned, pledged or mortgaged
 - c. there are no material prior year charges or credits, nor exceptional or non-recurring items requiring separate disclosure.
- viii. Related party relationships and transactions have been appropriately accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards and the Code.
- ix. All events subsequent to the date of the financial statements and for which International Financial Reporting Standards and the Code require adjustment or disclosure have been adjusted or disclosed.
- x. We have considered the adjusted misstatements, and misclassification and disclosures changes schedules included in your Audit Findings Report. The group and Authority financial statements have been amended for these misstatements, misclassifications and disclosure changes and are free of material misstatements, including omissions.
- xi. We have considered the unadjusted misstatements schedule included in your Audit Findings Report. We have not adjusted the financial statements for these misstatements brought to our attention as they are immaterial to the results of the Authority and its financial position at the year-end. The financial statements are free of material misstatements, including omissions.
- xii. Actual or possible litigation and claims have been accounted for and disclosed in accordance with the requirements of International Financial Reporting Standards. We confirm that we have no knowledge of any ongoing equal pay claims.
- xiii. We have no plans or intentions that may materially alter the carrying value or classification of assets and liabilities reflected in the financial statements.
- xiv. The prior period adjustments disclosed in Note 4 to the financial statements are accurate and complete. There are no other prior period errors to bring to your attention.
- xv. We have updated our going concern assessment. We continue to believe that the group and Authority's financial statements should be prepared on a going concern basis and have not identified any material uncertainties related to going concern on the grounds that :

- a. the nature of the group and Authority means that, notwithstanding any intention to cease the group and Authority operations in their current form, it will continue to be appropriate to adopt the going concern basis of accounting because, in such an event, services it performs can be expected to continue to be delivered by related public authorities and preparing the financial statements on a going concern basis will still provide a faithful representation of the items in the financial statements
- b. the financial reporting framework permits the entity to prepare its financial statements on the basis of the presumption set out under a) above; and
- c. the group and Authority's system of internal control has not identified any events or conditions relevant to going concern.

We believe that no further disclosures relating to the group and Authority's ability to continue as a going concern need to be made in the financial statements

- xvi. The group and Authority has complied with all aspects of ring-fenced grants that could have a material effect on the group and Authority's financial statements in the event of non-compliance.

Information Provided

- xvii. We have provided you with:
 - a. access to all information of which we are aware that is relevant to the preparation of the group and Authority's financial statements such as records, documentation and other matters;
 - b. additional information that you have requested from us for the purpose of your audit; and
 - c. access to persons within the Authority via remote arrangements, from whom you determined it necessary to obtain audit evidence.
- xviii. We have communicated to you all deficiencies in internal control of which management is aware.
- xix. All transactions have been recorded in the accounting records and are reflected in the financial statements.
- xx. We have disclosed to you the results of our assessment of the risk that the financial statements may be materially misstated as a result of fraud.
- xxi. We have disclosed to you all information in relation to fraud or suspected fraud that we are aware of and that affects the group and Authority, and involves:
 - a. management;
 - b. employees who have significant roles in internal control; or
 - c. others where the fraud could have a material effect on the financial statements.
- xxii. We have disclosed to you all information in relation to allegations of fraud, or suspected fraud, affecting the financial statements communicated by employees, former employees, analysts, regulators or others.
- xxiii. We have disclosed to you all known instances of non-compliance or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations whose effects should be considered when preparing financial statements.
- xxiv. We have disclosed to you the identity of the group and Authority's related parties and all the related party relationships and transactions of which we are aware.

xxv. We have disclosed to you all known actual or possible litigation and claims whose effects should be considered when preparing the financial statements.

Annual Governance Statement

xxvi. We are satisfied that the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) fairly reflects the Authority's risk assurance and governance framework and we confirm that we are not aware of any significant risks that are not disclosed within the AGS.

Narrative Report

xxvii. The disclosures within the Narrative Report fairly reflect our understanding of the group and Authority's financial and operating performance over the period covered by the financial statements.

Approval

The approval of this letter of representation was minuted by the Authority's Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 20 February 2025.

Yours faithfully

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....

Name.....

Position.....

Date.....

Signed on behalf of the Authority

South Downs National Park Authority
Annual Governance Statement 2023-24

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Review Date | Annual |
| Responsibility | Chief Executive |
| Approved by | Policy & Resources Committee |

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY 2023-24

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 framework also includes the Authority's activities through which it is accountable 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 2024 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 also established a refreshed South Downs Partnership in 2021, 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, review progress against it and embed the PMP across those organisations and sectors operating within the National Park. The Authority is currently reviewing the PMP in order to adopt a new five year management plan in 2025. The South Downs Partnership will continue to play a key role in both the development of the new PMP and the delivery of it once approved.
- 3.3 The Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee has considered during this period, a number of items relating to the delivery of the PMP, and with a view to the development of the next PMP, including the SDNPA Climate Change programme, SDNPA's role in Local Nature Recovery Strategies and its approach to Cultural Heritage and Volunteering.
- 3.4 The Local Plan sets out how the National Park Authority will manage development until 2033. 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 is ongoing and a revised Local Development Scheme has been approved for consultation. The Local Plan review will, alongside reviewing local planning policies in relation to climate change, park for all and renature, also consider the impacts of changing national planning legislation and a new plan-making system.
- 3.6 The SDNPA's Corporate Plan 2020-25 establishes the high-level objectives and priorities for the organisation and includes an action plan setting out detailed proposals for the forthcoming financial year. The Corporate Plan also sets out our values and includes the climate change action plan. The Corporate Plan action plan has been reviewed during this period and, as the Authority will soon be coming to the end of the current five-year Corporate Plan, an action plan covering both years 4 and 5 was agreed in July 2023. Some revised Corporate Plan measures for year 5 were agreed in March 2024. The action plan was considered in the development of the 24-25 budget to ensure the budget aligned with the organisational priorities for the remaining year of the current Corporate Plan. The action plan set out clear priorities and targets which reflect the Authority's continued flat cash grant settlement from Defra.
- 3.7 During this period the Authority also, with a mind to the general election expected during 2024, approved a set of 5 key "asks" along with their surrounding narratives which would be used as the basis for the Authority's advocacy work ahead of the general election.

Service Quality

- 3.8 Progress against the SDNPA's objectives, and the National Park Authority performance indicators is identified via performance reporting to the P&R Committee and, where appropriate, Planning Committee. The P&R Committee considered the schedule of performance reporting to the committee and agreed that biannual performance reporting was appropriate and an effective use of the Authority's resources. The Performance Management Framework reflects the development of high-level objectives for the Partnership Management Plan. Performance is monitored by the P&R 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 delivered by the South Downs National Park Trust, is subject to annual reporting to the Committee.

- 3.9 The P&R Committee receives an annual report on the performance of the SDNPA's planning function. This includes an overview of a wide variety of areas of the Authority's planning function which are monitored regularly by officers, including appeals, enforcement, speed and quality of decisions, and the performance of the local authorities who deliver planning services on our behalf. A more detailed report on planning appeal outcomes is considered by the Planning Committee on a quarterly basis.
- 3.10 Key data sets, as specified by Defra are reported to allow for national data comparison.
- 3.11 The service quality and performance of the Authority's Teckal Company in its management of Seven Sisters Country Park against the agreed Operating Agreement, KPIs and Business Plan is also monitored by P&R Committee through a quarterly performance report.

Decision Making

- 3.12 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 reviewed regularly and changes recommended to the Authority at least annually to ensure these reflect best practice and latest legislative requirements. During this period, following a review, the Standing Orders in relation to the appointment of and disciplinary action against chief officers of the Authority have been updated amendments were made to reflect best practice in terms of the approval of meeting minutes and, the P&R Committee's role in monitoring the Authority's compliance with relevant health and safety policies and plans adopted by the Authority was clarified, as well as other minor amendments for clarification or update.
- 3.13 The Authority makes use of virtual and hybrid meetings in its informal meeting arrangements, including for Member training, workshops, and briefing sessions as appropriate. These on-line and hybrid meetings continue to have advantages in terms of enabling Member attendance and reducing travel across the National Park. Where it is considered more conducive to detailed debate and discussion, for example budget and strategic workshops, meetings are held in person. Key workshops are often available for Members to join online so that any who are not able to attend in person can observe and keep up to date with discussions that have taken place. The Authority will continue to use virtual/hybrid meetings where it considers it appropriate and within its powers to do so.
- 3.14 Member training and engagement activity continued using a blend of in person, hybrid, and on-line 'virtual' meetings. Member training, knowledge and skills development, and other workshops have been held on the following subjects:
- Partnership Management Plan
 - South Downs Local Plan
 - SDNPA Budget
 - Climate Change
 - Seven Sisters Country Park
 - Development Management
 - Community Infrastructure Levy
 - Corporate Risk Register
 - SDNPA Risk Appetite and Strategy

- Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
 - Committee Away Days
 - Finance training
 - Audit training
 - Whole Estate Plans
 - New Member Induction
- 3.15 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 are periodically reviewed and updated as required to ensure they are effective and provide Members with the necessary information for them to deliver their decision-making responsibilities.
- 3.16 Each of the SDNPA's committees has distinct terms of reference, which are kept under review and, where necessary, updated by the NPA. The P&R Committee has five co-opted members that serve on the committee, two Independent (CIPFA) co-opted members and three to further diversify the range of voices the Committee hears as part of its decision making and consideration of issues. During this period one of the three further co-opted members resigned in order to take up a role in the Authority so a recruitment process was undertaken to co-opt a third member. The process was successful, attracting a wide range of applicants. The recommendation for the appointment was approved at the Authority AGM in July 2024. As part of the review of Standing Orders, in the interests of efficiency of decision-making, the power to commence the recruitment of co-opted members was delegated to the Chief Executive.
- 3.17 The Authority has appointed two independent persons to advise on standards matters.
- 3.18 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.
- 3.19 The Authority continues to webcast meetings of the Full Authority, and its Planning and P&R Committees. An archive of webcast meetings in the last 6 months is maintained and is publicly available through the Authority website and our webcasting provider, Public-i.
- 3.20 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 and have been updated to ensure that the governance framework reflects changes in roles and responsibilities of committees, Members and/or Officers. During this period the terms of reference of both the P&R Committee and the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee have been updated, the former now includes confirmation of P&R Committee's role in monitoring compliance with adopted health and safety policies and plans.
- 3.21 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.

- 3.22 During this period the first permanent Chief Executive of the Authority retired on 31 December 2023. The Authority agreed arrangements for an Interim Chief Executive to fulfil the role of National Park Officer and Head of Paid Service until the first working day of a new permanent Chief Executive. The Director of Planning was appointed to this role. The Authority also agreed that the appointment should not be made exclusively from among the existing Officers of the Authority, ensuring that the search for suitability qualified candidates for the role would take place both within and outside of the Authority. The Appointments, Management and Standards (AMS) Committee, under its delegations, has been undertaking the necessary processes in relation to the recruitment of the Chief Executive with the aim of appointing a permanent Chief Executive in late summer 2024. In order for the AMS Committee to effectively undertake these processes its membership was amended to include the Chairs of the Planning and P&R Committees as it was considered particularly important in recruiting a new Chief Executive that the senior Members of the Authority be involved in leading this process.
- 3.23 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 (CFO) 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.
- 3.24 There is a contract in place with Brighton & Hove City Council for the provision of financial services and Chief Finance Officer support. Under this contract the Authority has appointed its CFO who has a nominated Deputy Chief Finance Officer.
- 3.25 The contracts for legal services and provision of the Monitoring Officer (MO) are managed by the Head of Governance. Under a contract with Hampshire County Council the Authority has appointed its MO.
- 3.26 There are arrangements for consultation with the Monitoring Officer, CFO or Deputy CFO on key decisions and advice to the Authority and its Committees.
- 3.27 Over this period the Authority, through its Teckal Company (South Downs Commercial Operations Limited), has continued its operations at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP). An operating agreement is in place between the Teckal Company and the Authority which defines the relationship between the company and the Authority. The Company's Articles of Association are also agreed by the Authority, as is the annual business plan for the company which sets out the approved functions to be delivered by the company and incorporates key performance indicators (KPIs). These KPIs are reviewed on a quarterly basis by the P&R Committee and were amended, along with the approval of the business plan, in July 2023. The developments undertaken on site have been very positive, with significant improvements to both the landscape management and the visitor experience. Challenges have continued into the Company's second year of trading and the Board of Directors and the Authority continue to have constructive discussions to ensure improvements continue. The Authority has been kept informed of the progress of the Company and considered a report at its meeting in July 2024 on a review of operating arrangements at SSCP.
- 3.28 By way of an update as part of the annual audit, it should be noted that the Authority considered the report into the operational arrangements at SSCP at its meeting on 9 July 2024. The report presented the outcome of the review alongside a number of recommendations to bring the management of SSCP within the Authority. Members considered the financial impacts of the decision alongside efficiency improvements and savings that could be achieved by managing operations at SSCP within the Authority. The recommendations agreed by Members included the termination of the operating agreement with the Teckal Company and agreement that the company would be made dormant.

- 3.29 During 2022-23 a review of byelaws at SSCP was undertaken. It was identified that any byelaws the Authority may consider making on the site needed to be evidence based, as such, the starting point would be monitoring at SSCP to identify if there was a need for a particular byelaw. A monitoring regime has been agreed for SSCP and this will be reviewed annually to consider if any further action is required.
- 3.30 The Authority has continued its relationship with the South Downs Trust – which is an independent charity established by the Authority. The Authority continues to have a licence agreement for the use of the shared identify and seconds staff to the Trust. The Authority appoints two Authority members as trustees. The Trust provides an annual update to the Authority, with the update being presented in public. The Trust complies with the reporting requirements of the Charity Commission and Companies House, has undertaken a thorough audit of the its account, and keeps its governance and policy framework under review to ensure it is robust and fit for purpose.
- 3.31 The annual review of governance has been undertaken, particularly taking into consideration the actions from the 2022-23 AGS which have been implemented during this period. With the growing work in the green finance market teams across the Authority have worked collaboratively to ensure that good governance mechanisms were developed to support this work.
- 3.32 Members of the P&R Committee, at their away day, reviewed the committee’s terms of reference and felt the oversight of the Authority’s communications and engagement work needed to be clarified and that this should be proposed as part of changes to Standing Orders. Members of the committee also considered the Authority’s audit arrangements against the CIPFA audit guidance and it was acknowledged that the Authority is not in alignment with all CIPFA’s recommendations so this will be considered further. Some actions were also considered to support the committee’s audit function and the effectiveness of these will be kept under review over the coming year and the Authority will consider this matter in further detail. Timely reporting from the Authority’s external auditors is also considered of particular importance and had become an area of concern during 2022-23. This was addressed with the external auditors during this period and their response was encouraging with improvements in the timeliness of reports to the P&R Committee. It should also be noted that the Authority continues the streamlined schedule of Authority and Committee meetings and other Member events as part of the Member Development Programme, which were highlighted in the 2022-23 AGS, with at least one meeting of the Authority or one of its committees being held in Lewes with the aim of improving local engagement.

Risk management

- 3.33 The SDNPA has a well-established systematic strategy, framework, and processes for managing risk. These are set out in the Authority’s Risk Strategy and Guidance which also includes the Authority’s risk appetite statement. 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) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The Policy and Resources committee has opportunities for members to better engage with the corporate risk register though 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.
- 3.34 Directorate level risk monitoring is in place and has been reviewed to ensure consistency across the organisation. Risk is also monitored at project level and there is an escalation process from project and directorate risk registers to the corporate risk register. The Authority’s Risk Strategy and Guidance is being reviewed during 2024 and was the subject of

an initial workshop with Members to engage them in a consideration of the Authority's appetite to risk and future risk strategy which will inform the Risk Strategy and Guidance document which will include a revised risk appetite statement.

- 3.35 The Authority's insurance arrangements have been kept under review and updated as required.
- 3.36 The Authority has a Procurement Strategy 2021-26 in place which 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. The Procurement Strategy Action Plan was reviewed and revised during this period. The action plan looks to embed social value and sustainability in the procurement process and provides for training and the updating of policies and procedures in line with the Procurement Act 2023 and Procurement Regulations 2024.

Conduct and behaviour

- 3.37 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 biennially by external experts. There is a Register of Members' Interests. The Authority operates standards arrangements for the conduct of Members in accordance with 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.
- 3.38 A thorough review of the Member Code of Conduct was undertaken by the Monitoring Officer and the Head of Governance, considering both the Local Government Association's Model Councillor Code of Conduct and the Cabinet Office Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies, which those Members appointed by the Secretary of State are also required to comply with. The revised Code of Conduct was considered by the Appointment, Management and Standards Committee and subsequently approved by the Authority. Throughout the year individual and collective guidance has been issued to Members on the management of standards issues. Based on some of the standards issues considered during this period, the protocols which support the Member Code of Conduct, including the Local Protocol for Members and Officer Relations, will be reviewed during 2024-25 and revised as appropriate.
- 3.39 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 whistleblowing. There is an Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy in place. The Whistleblowing Policy and Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy will be reviewed during 2024-25.
- 3.40 The Authority has implemented a revised performance and development review process for staff which incorporates clear competencies across the grades to assist with staff development. The Authority also has in place a set of corporate values which were developed through collaboration with both staff and Members. A comprehensive online EDI training and development programme for both staff and Members has been implemented. A full staff survey was undertaken during this period by an independent agency with very positive staff engagement and overall results. An action plan has been developed from the results and is being implemented.

Financial accountability

- 3.41 The SDNPA's Financial Regulations and Procedures, provide a framework for the management of the Authority's financial affairs. 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. Monitoring of the operational budget is conducted during the year and findings incorporated into the budget planning process.

- 3.42 The Scheme of Members' Allowances will be subject to a partial review in 2024 with a full review in 2025 to set a scheme for 2025-29.
- 3.43 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 are agreed by the Authority following scrutiny by all Members via a series of workshops. The P&R 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.
- 3.44 The Authority's project funds are allocated through the budget setting process by the NPA and are administered on a day to day basis by the Authority's Operational Management Team (OMT). The projects the Authority undertakes continue to be driven by the objectives set out in the PMP and Corporate Plan and in approving these projects OMT aims to reflect the priorities of the Authority.
- 3.45 During this period the Authority has also continued to carefully consider how it can best prepare itself to respond to future grant settlements. During 2022-23 the Authority undertook changes in the organisation and approved the creation of an invest to save reserve to be used to assist with the reduction of overheads. The changes to the Authority were concluded during 2023-24 and works, funded from the invest to save reserve, have commenced. This invest to save package has been reviewed and altered appropriately as part of the 2024-25 budget.
- 3.46 The Authority's accounts are subject to external audit on an annual basis and reported to the P&R Committee at a public meeting. During this period the P&R Committee also received and considered the Value for Money Audit. During 2022-23 the Authority had expressed concerns, both in a public meeting and in a letter to the external auditor, about the performance of the external auditor in regard to the timeliness of their reports. This has been the subject of work by officers with the external auditor during 2023-24 and the timeliness of reports has been improved with the audited accounts and the Value for Money audit being reported on time.
- 3.47 An Internal Audit service is provided under a service level agreement by Brighton & Hove City Council's Internal Audit Services. The Internal Audit strategy and annual plan is agreed by the P&R Committee. The outcomes of internal audits are reported to the P&R Committee and the full reports are sent to the Chair and Deputy Chairs and the Independent co-opted Members of the committee. The Authority's external auditors review the appropriateness of internal audit arrangements and accordingly place reliance on the work done where applicable.
- 3.48 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.
- 3.49 Authority contracts have, since June 2013, been procured through e-sourcing using the Intend system or national frameworks as appropriate. In exceptional circumstances a waiver has been agreed in compliance with Contract Standing Orders.

Constructive working relationships between officers and Members

- 3.50 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.
- 3.51 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.
- 3.52 SLT 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 ensures activities are informed by a wide range of views.
- 3.53 The Authority has continued its practice of a small number of Members who are not appointed to committees, this enables the particular skills of these Members to be best employed in the work of the Authority in specific policy areas or activities. 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 Local Government Act 1972 and the Authority's Standing Orders. The matter of the approval of any reason for non-attendance at meetings, particularly for Members who are not appointed to a committee, was considered by the AMS Committee and it was concluded that it remained appropriate for the committee to continue to consider and, where appropriate, approve reasons for non-attendance.
- 3.54 The induction of new Members continues to be delivered using a variety of in person events with SLT and other officers, along with Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs, 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

- 3.55 Member and Officer learning and development needs are identified and met through induction programmes, the Performance and Development Review process, individual staff learning and development plans, and the Member Engagement Protocol. There are annual Member discussions between individual Members and the Chair of the Authority which include a consideration of any development needs.
- 3.56 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 and Development Review process.
- 3.57 The learnings from mid and end of Project evaluations are reported to the Policy and Resources Committee and key organisational learnings are used to inform the development of future projects and ways of working.
- 3.58 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 procedures. All financial guidance and procedure notes are available on the Authority's Intranet. Contract management training has been provided to relevant staff.

Clear relationships with Partners and the public

- 3.59 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 the Authority communicates with parishes and local communities through parish workshops. These workshops include in person events alongside on-line webinars and Q&A sessions. 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 Parks and the South Downs National Park Trust.

- 3.60 The independently chaired South Downs Partnership, established in 2021, continues to champion the outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) by providing 'integrated thinking' and seeking to resolve issues arising when there is a conflict between competing policy objectives as well as providing a forum for those with a stake in delivery of the PMP. As the Authority undertakes the review of the PMP, the role of and partners in the South Downs Partnership becomes even more important in informing the direction of the PMP.
- 3.61 We continue to work with neighbourhood planning groups across 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. The Planning Committee receives regular updates on neighbourhood planning across the National Park.
- 3.62 During this period a revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was approved for consultation to reflect legislative changes and best practice. The SCI sets out how the Authority will consult with all stakeholders, including local communities, businesses and public bodies, on planning matters.
- 3.63 The Authority have also been working with a number of partner authorities on the West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan, the East Sussex Minerals and Waste Plan, and the Hampshire Joint Minerals and Waste Plan. The West Sussex Plan has been considered by the Authority and it was agreed that an update was not required at this time. The East Sussex Plan has been considered at main modifications stage, and the Hampshire Plan has been considered at regulation 19 stage.
- 3.64 During this period negotiations on the S101 agreements with the 5 Planning Host authorities have taken place with 4 of those 5 authorities renewing the agreements. These agreements define the relationship with the host Authorities who deliver planning services on behalf of the SDNPA and include quality and performance measures which are reported to the Policy and Resources Committee as part its performance monitoring. Horsham District Council has decided not to renew the S101 agreement and the Authority will recover the delivery of planning services in that area of the National Park over the coming year. The Authority has also commenced a procurement process for its planning administration system which, amongst other things, delivers the statutory register of planning applications.
- 3.65 Whole Estate Plans (WEPs) are seen as a key way of deepening engagement with estates and landowners. 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 context of these plans and the issues facing landowners in the National Park. These visits have proved to be effective in ensuring improved Member engagement with emerging WEPs at the most appropriate time and have been a valued tool to increase the knowledge and understanding of Members about land ownership and land management across the National Park.
- 3.66 The Authority uses a range of methods to maintain regular contact with its communities and wider public, including through its two regular newsletters and its presence on social media on the work of the Authority and its activities in the National Park. Engagement through in person and virtual events across the year also form an important aspect of the Authority's engagement programme and the Authority has actively worked to increase the diversity of the audiences, both locally and nationally, of these events.

- 3.67 The Authority has in place appropriate policies to ensure it complies with its duties under the Equality Act 2010. Every report considered by the NPA, or its committees includes a consideration of whether the decision would impact upon groups with protected characteristics, with full equality impact assessments being undertaken where this is considered necessary. The introduction of a new EDI training platform for both staff and Members has contributed to the ongoing organisational development in this area. The Authority's EDI action plan has also been reviewed during this period to ensure a strong focus continues on embedding of this work within the Authority and to promote and encourage access to the National Park to all individuals and communities. The Authority has sought to engage with communities across the national park and beyond and, through its comms, engagement and outreach work, improve awareness of the National Park across a wide range of groups.
- 3.68 The P&R Committee has, as part of its membership, co-opted members from communities in and around the National Park with the aim of diversifying the range of voices the Committee hears as part of its decision making and consideration of issues. A recruitment process for a new co-opted member has been undertaken during this period with 19 applications received representing a broad range of voices.
- 3.69 The Authority has 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.
- 3.70 The Authority has engaged with partners across a range of consultations including in relation to the M3 Junction 9, the Rampion 2 offshore wind farm, and reforms to national planning policy.
- 3.71 During this period the Authority has been working closely with a range of partners in relation to an emerging proposal from Natural England to extend the Lullington Heath National Nature Reserve to include, amongst other land, land at Seven Sisters Country Park to create a new Super National Nature Reserve, currently named the Chalk Coast National Nature Reserve.
- 3.72 The Authority has also been working closer with partners to take forward the provisions set out in the Environment Act 2021, particularly in relation to the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies, the impact of the strengthened Biodiversity Duty, and the possible future use of Conservation Covenants to secure land for nature recovery.

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 Leadership 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. In 2024 the P&R Committee met to consider the effectiveness of the Committee, its performance against its terms of reference, and its delivery of the functions of an audit committee.
- 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 Senior Leadership 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 2024. Of the five audits undertaken, there were three substantial assurance opinions given and one partial assurance opinion given as set out below, along with a further audit, the

details of which are exempt under paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

- Substantial Assurance – Capital Accounting
- Substantial Assurance – Treasury Management
- Substantial Assurance – Income Processing
- Partial Assurance – Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) Operational Activities

4.4 The substantial assurance in the three audits covering financial matters evidences the Authority's good and well-established accounting practices, processes and procedures. The partial assurance on SSCP Operational Activities identified some of the challenges in running the site. In particular it was found "... difficult to differentiate where the SDNPA roles and responsibility ends and SDCOL [the management company] responsibility begins as clear operating boundaries have not been formed between the two entities ...". This has led to agreed actions in the areas of finance and contracts management, health and safety, site security, and general governance. Some of the actions have already been implemented, others are, to a certain extent, dependant on the outcomes of the review of the operating arrangements at SSCP which will report to the NPA meeting in July 2024.

4.5 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.

4.6 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 is evident from reports and from other management reporting processes taken throughout the year.

4.7 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 2023-24:

- **Review the Authority's arrangements against the CIPFA Audit Committee Guidance.** The Authority's current arrangements were considered by P&R Committee members at their away day and it was acknowledged that the Authority is not in alignment with all CIPFA's recommendations so this will be considered further. Some actions were also considered to support the committee's audit function, including an additional quarterly Member audit workshop to promote a better understanding of audit and the matters being raised in relation to the Authority. The effectiveness of these will be kept under review over the coming year and the Authority will consider this matter in further detail.

- **Implement suitable monitoring at Seven Sisters Country Park to inform the future development of any byelaw required.** Following on from work in 2023-24 which identified byelaws that the Authority could look to make at SSCP, should it choose to, a monitoring regime has been agreed with the Strategic and Commercial Manager at SSCP. This will be reviewed on an annual basis to understand any areas which the making of a byelaw may need to be considered.
- **Work with the Authority's External Auditors to improve the timeliness of reports to the Policy and Resources Committee.** Whilst the delays in audits nationally are well understood by the Authority, it was encouraging that the external auditors were able to improve the timeliness of reports to the P&R Committee; in particular the Value for Money audit and the audit of the Annual Statement of Accounts, both of which were completed and reported to the committee in a timely manner.
- **Ensure good governance mechanisms are in place to support the Authority's growing work in the area of Green Finance.** Green finance has been a fast-moving area of work, both locally and nationally, over the past year and the Authority has had to be agile to adapt to changes throughout the year. Particular emphasis and work has been done on the cost recovery nature of the work and ensuring it continues to fully align with our purposes as a National Park Authority. This remains an evolving area of work and the pace of this evolution is acknowledged through the inclusion of an action for 2024-25 to ensure the good governance of this area of work continues.
- **Review of the Authority's Fraud and Anti-corruption and Whistleblowing Policies.** This work is ongoing and will continue into 2024-25.
- **Develop an Authority policy on the use of non-corporate communication channels.** The Authority has developed a new policy covering the use of both corporate and non-corporate communication channels. This was based on the Cabinet Office guidance which was released in 2023, but tailored to the particulars of the Authority.

5.2 Actions for 2024-25 include the following:

- Review of the Authority's Fraud and Anti-corruption and Whistleblowing Policies (ongoing from 23-24).
- Continue to ensure good governance mechanisms are in place to support the Authority's evolving work in the area of Green Finance.
- Review the Authority's Risk Strategy and Guidance, including the Authority's risk appetite statement.
- Review the Authority's protocols, including the Local Protocol for Members and Officer Relations, which support the Member Code of Conduct.
- Take appropriate actions to ensure the good governance of Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP) following the review into the operating arrangements at SSCP which will report to the NPA in July 2024.
- Given the changes in the Senior Leadership team, additional support, as appropriate, through liaison, advice and training, to maintain good governance of the Authority.

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

Chief Executive Officer

Date:

On behalf of the SDNPA

