

Report to **Policy & Resources Committee**
Date **26 June 2025**
By **Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer**
Title of Report **Annual Governance Statement and Local Code of Corporate Governance**

Decision

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

- 1. Approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2024-25 (Appendix 1) to accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts; and**
 - 2. Note the Local Code of Corporate Governance (Appendix 2).**
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Under the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 the Authority is required to conduct a review at least once a year of the effectiveness of its system of internal control. The findings of that review must be considered by a committee of the Authority, or by the Members of the Authority as a whole. Following that review, an annual governance statement, prepared in accordance with "proper practices in relation to internal control", must be approved. The approved statement must then accompany the Authority's Statement of Accounts. It is the role of the Committee to review the outcome of the annual review of governance arrangements and approve the Annual Governance Statement, ensuring it contains any actions for improvement.
- 1.2 The "proper practices", in accordance with which the Annual Governance Statement is to be prepared, are set out in guidance ("Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework" as amended in 2016) to local authorities (including National Park Authorities) issued by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief executives (SOLACE).
- 1.3 CIPFA and SOLACE have, in May 2025, issued new guidance on the annual review of governance and internal controls and the preparation of an annual governance statement. This addendum to the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework applies to all UK local governance statements from 2025/26 onwards. The content of the new guidance will be considered in advance of the 2025/26 annual review of governance and any impacts it may have on the preparation of the annual governance statement.
- 1.4 This report presents the Annual Governance Statement for 2024-25 for approval.

2. Policy Context.

- 2.1 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 Chief Internal Auditor's annual internal audit report, the review of the Local Code of Corporate Governance, and also by responding to comments and recommendations made by external auditors and others.

2.2 The Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer, Chief Finance Officer, Senior Leadership Team and Chief Internal Auditor have liaised to review the organisation's governance arrangements and prepare the Annual Governance Statement for 2024-25, in compliance with the guidance, and which records the ongoing work that has been undertaken to establish and review governance arrangements. The Annual Governance Statement is set out in **Appendix I** to this report.

2.3 No significant governance issues have been identified. The actions for further improvement in 2025-26 are listed in paragraph 5.2 of the Annual Governance Statement (**Appendix I**).

2.4 The outcome of this process has been that the Authority's Governance arrangements are considered to continue to be fit for purpose.

3. Issues for consideration

3.1 The guidance advises that it is up to each authority to set out its commitment to the seven core principles of corporate governance detailed in the guidance, determining its own governance structure, underpinned by these principles and ensuring that it operates effectively in practice. The core principles are:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits
- Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes
- Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and individuals within it
- Managing risks and performance through robust internal controls and strong public finance management
- Implement good practice in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability

3.2 In respect of each core principle, the guidance offers more detailed advice concerning the requirements of good corporate governance and includes an example of how an annual governance statement may look. This guidance has been taken into account in the production of the Annual Governance Statement.

4. Local Code of Corporate Governance

4.1 **Appendix 2** is the Local Code of Corporate Governance which sets out the governance structure in place within the organisation.

5. Options & cost implications

5.1 This process is mandatory and therefore there are no alternatives.

5.2 The costs associated with undertaking this work are met from within the Authority's core budget.

6. Next steps

6.1 Subject to approval, the Annual Governance Statement will be submitted along with the

Authority's Statement of Accounts.

7. Other Implications

Implication	Yes*/No
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	No
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	There are no implications arising from this report
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	Effective governance supports the efficient operation of the organisation
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	A strong and effective governance framework supports the organisation in its delivery of all PMP Outcomes and the Corporate Plan objectives
Links to other projects or partner organisations	None
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	A strong and effective governance framework supports the organisation in its delivery of its climate change objectives
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	There are no implications arising from this report
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	There are no implications arising directly from this report. Any equalities implications arising from the activities or actions outlined in the Code of Corporate Governance and annual Governance statement are considered and addressed as part of the Authority's ongoing delivery.
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 The carrying out of an annual review, together with the reporting of its outcome to Members, is a legal requirement and provides assurance that arrangements are adequate and operating effectively in practice and, where gaps are identified, that action is planned to

address this for the future.

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Appendices: 1. Annual Governance Statement
2. Local Code of Corporate Governance

SDNPA Consultees: Chief Executive Officer, Director of Planning, Director of Landscape and Strategy, Director of Business Development and Income Generation, Chief Finance Officer, Solicitor.

External Consultees: None

Background Documents: None

South Downs National Park Authority

Annual Governance Statement 2024-25

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

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT FOR SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY 2024-25

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 2025 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 December 2025. In order to support the review of the PMP and fully engage with relevant stakeholders, a new PMP Steering Group was established which has been working closely with officers on the review of the PMP.
- 3.3 The Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee has received a comprehensive update on the delivery of the current PMP and considered and approved the proposed approach to the review of the PMP. It also recommended a number of matters to the Authority for approval in relation to the review of the PMP, including the establishment of the PMP Steering Group and the issuing of the relevant notices of the review. These recommendations were subsequently approved by the Authority.
- 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. A number of workshops have been held with Member during this period to inform the development of the Local Plan.
- 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. As the review of the PMP will lead to a new five-year Corporate Plan the Authority approved a bridge-year Corporate Plan for 2025/26 which largely carried forward the objectives and priorities from the previous Corporate Plan.

Service Quality

- 3.7 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 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.
- 3.8 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.

- 3.9 Key data sets, as specified by Defra are reported to allow for national data comparison.
- 3.10 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 was also monitored by P&R Committee through a quarterly performance report up to the termination of the operating agreement with the company on 9 October 2024. Following that, P&R Committee continued to monitor the performance of SSCP and the management of its operations within the Authority through reports from officers.

Decision Making

- 3.11 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, a number of amendments and updates were made to the Standing Orders. These included, amongst other minor amendments:
 - Clarity on delegations to committees to ensure the efficient and effective consideration and approval of Minerals and Waste Plans by the Authority.
 - Clarity on the P&R Committee's role in monitoring and reviewing the Authority's communications and engagement activities.
 - Removal of references to the Coast to Capital Joint Committee, including its Heads of Terms, as the Joint Committee was no longer in operation.
 - Delegations in relation to Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- 3.12 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. The Authority will continue to use virtual/hybrid meetings where it considers it appropriate and within its powers to do so.
- 3.13 During this period the Government consulted on introducing powers for local authority members to attend formal authority meetings remotely and vote by proxy in certain circumstances in its consultation "Enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings." The Authority responded to this consultation and indicated its general agreement with the introduction of Members being able to attend meetings remotely, whilst acknowledging that in person attendance would remain the preferred method of attendance. The Authority did not support the introduction of proxy voting.
- 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
 - SDNPA Corporate Plan

- Development Management
 - Community Infrastructure Levy
 - Corporate Risk Register
 - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
 - Local and National Energy Production and Distribution
 - Nature Recovery
 - Rivers and Streams
 - Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation
 - Committee Away Days
 - Audit
 - Whole Estate Plans
 - New Member Induction
 - Code of Conduct Training
- 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 a third co-opted member was appointed by the Authority in July 2024 following a successful recruitment process.
- 3.17 During the period the Authority has agreed to participate in the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme, sponsored by MHCLG. The scheme aims to develop a pipeline of talent for future appointments across the UK. In January 2025 the Authority welcomed its first boardroom apprentice who will attend meetings of the Authority and the P&R Committee along with Member Strategic Days and workshops.
- 3.18 The Authority has appointed two independent persons to advise on standards matters.
- 3.19 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.
- 3.20 The Authority continues to webcast meetings of the Full Authority, and its Planning and P&R Committees. A review of the Authority's webcasting provision was undertaken during this period with value for money a particular consideration. The Authority has subsequently moved from the use of an external webcasting provider to an in-house solution. Since the start of 2025 meetings have been webcast via YouTube and an archive of webcast meetings of the last 6 months continues to be maintained and is publicly available through the Authority's YouTube channel.

- 3.21 The Authority's governance framework is kept under review by the Head of Governance and 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 Planning Committee, P&R Committee and the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee have been updated. These updates included ones to provide clarity on the Planning Committee's consideration of the Local Plan and Minerals and Waste Plans, and on P&R Committee's role in monitoring and reviewing the Authority's communications and engagement activities and their role in monitoring the performance of Seven Sisters Country Park and the management of its operations within the Authority.
- 3.22 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.
- 3.23 During this period the Authority successfully recruited its second permanent Chief Executive, Siôn McGeever. The Authority made the appointment at its meeting on 22 August 2024 with Siôn McGeever taking up the post of Chief Executive on 25 November 2024. Until that date the Director of Planning continued to fulfil the role of Chief Executive. Once the Appointment, Management and Standards Committee had completed the recruitment processes for the Chief Executive its membership was amended to reduce it to the previous size of three members. The additional two members had been added to the committee to ensure an effective and comprehensive recruitment process.
- 3.24 The SDNPA has a range of contracts for key support services. This includes the provision of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO). In reaching this decision the SDNPA took into account the governance requirements of CIPFA's Statement on the role of the 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.
- 3.25 There is a contract in place with Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) for the provision of financial services and CFO support. Under this contract the Authority has appointed its CFO who has a nominated Deputy CFO. During this period the Authority's CFO retired and, under the contract with BHCC, the Authority appointed an Interim CFO at its meeting on 10 December 2024.
- 3.26 During this period the Authority appointed a new Monitoring Officer (MO). The Authority's previous MO provided through a contract with Hampshire County Council (HCC) stepped down from the role due to increased governance work at HCC. The Authority undertook a review of best practice in the sector and what approach for the future would be in the best interests of the Authority. It was recommended that a MO internal to SDNPA be appointed in the future and the Authority appointed the Head of Governance as the MO at its meeting on 9 July 2024. An amended contract with HCC was subsequently agreed for the provision of a Deputy MO and specialist legal advice. The contracts for legal services with West Sussex County Council and the provision of a Deputy MO are managed by the Head of Governance and MO.
- 3.27 There are arrangements for consultation with the MO or Deputy MO, and CFO or Deputy CFO on key decisions and advice to the Authority and its Committees.
- 3.28 There have been significant changes over this period to the way the Authority manages its operations at Seven Sisters Country Park (SSCP). During this period a thorough review of the operating arrangements for SSCP was undertaken. Whilst developments undertaken on site at SSCP were very positive, with significant improvements to both the landscape

management and the visitor experience, the review considered in depth the benefits and challenges of continuing with the arrangements of managing SSCP through the Authority's Teckal Company, South Downs Commercial Operations Limited (SDCOL), or of bringing the management of operations at SSCP within the Authority. The review benefited from two years of full operations at SSCP and had input from Members, officers, and the Board of SDCOL.

- 3.29 In a report to the Authority in July 2024 which presented the outcome of the review, Members considered a variety of matters on the operations at SSCP, including financial impacts on the Authority and efficiency improvements which could result, and concluded that in future the operations at SSCP should be managed within the Authority rather than through the Authority's Teckal Company. The Authority agreed that the operating agreement with SDCOL should be terminated with effect from 9 October 2024 and agreed a new operating model for SSCP within the Authority. The Authority also agreed that the Company Business Plan would become the Operating Plan for SSCP following the termination of the operating agreement. A new Operating Plan for SSCP was considered and agreed by the Authority in March 2025.
- 3.30 As a result of the Authority's decision, during this period, between 1 April and 9 October SSCP operations were managed by SDCOL under the terms of the operating agreement with the Authority and in line with the agreed Business Plan. Then between 9 October and 31 March 2024 the operations at SSCP were managed within the Authority and continue to be managed this way to date.
- 3.31 The Authority also considered the future position of its Teckal Company, SDCOL, and as a result of the Authority's decision on operations at SSCP, the Authority, in its role as Shareholder of SDCOL, agreed that as SDCOL undertook no other business at this time other than the management of SSCP the company would be made dormant. Arrangements to facilitate this were considered and agreed by the Authority at its meeting in October 2024.
- 3.32 To support future decision-making on potential land acquisitions by the Authority, an Environmental Land Acquisition Framework was considered and approved by the Authority in October 2024. The framework sets out a two-stage approach which considers the best use of Authority resources and will ensure any acquisition being considered meets the agreed acquisition principles and that due diligence is undertaken before any recommendation for the acquiring of land comes before the Authority.
- 3.33 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.
- 3.34 The annual review of governance has been undertaken, particularly taking into consideration the actions from the 2023-24 AGS implemented during this period which are summarised in section 5 of this AGS.
- 3.35 The P&R Committee held an away day to consider their effectiveness and the Chair of the P&R Committee has reported on this and their finding in **Annex A** to this AGS.

Risk management

- 3.36 The SDNPA has a well-established systematic and robust strategy, framework, and process 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 through a series of meetings – enabling committee members to dig deeper into issues on the risk register in advance of the Committee meeting and better inform the discussions which take place in Committee. This enables relevant risks to be identified and evaluated, with consideration given to appropriate mitigation strategies. 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.

- 3.37 The Authority's Risk Strategy and Guidance has been reviewed during 2024 and was approved in September 2024. This was the subject of an initial workshop with Members in early 2024 to engage them in a consideration of the Authority's appetite to risk and future risk strategy to inform the Risk Strategy and Guidance document which included a revised risk appetite statement. To further support risk management at the Authority the Head of Governance will undertake with the Senior Leadership Team an annual radar / PESTEL analysis of overarching risks to the Authority. A central record of all key risks being managed through both the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers will also be created to ensure simpler monitoring of all risks managed at these levels.
- 3.38 The Authority's insurance arrangements have been kept under review and updated as required.
- 3.39 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 will ensure compliance with the Procurement Act 2023 and new Procurement Regulations and looks to measure scope 3 emissions for SDNPA contracts to support sustainable procurement in the future.
- 3.40 During the period the Authority has also undertaken the procurement process for the provision of ICT infrastructure and support services to the Authority. The provision of suitable and secure ICT services and systems is vital to the effective running of the Authority and to ensuring we operate in a safe and secure way. The contract was awarded in February 2025 and the systems and services with the new provider is expected to go live no later than 1 July 2025.

Conduct and behaviour

- 3.41 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.
- 3.42 A thorough review of the Officer Code of Conduct by the Monitoring Officer commenced during this period and is expected to conclude with an updated Officer Code of Conduct in Q2 2025/26. Following the Member Code of Conduct training undertaken in this period a review of the Member Code of Conduct will also take place with a particular focus on ensuring expectations around behaviour is clear and to support the Authority in complying with the new duty to prevent sexual harassment. This will in turn inform reviews to various protocols which support the Member and Officer Codes of Conduct, including the Local Protocol for Members and Officer Relations.

- 3.43 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 Whistleblowing Policy, confidential reporting arrangements in place to enable internal and external whistleblowing, has been reviewed during this period and has been recently approved. There is an Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy in place which will be reviewed during 2025/26.
- 3.44 The Authority has in place a 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. An action plan based on the results of the full staff survey undertaken in 2023/24 is in the process of being implemented.

Financial accountability

- 3.45 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.
- 3.46 The Scheme of Members' Allowances was subject to an independent review during this period resulting in a new four-year scheme which was approved by the Authority at its meeting in March 2025.
- 3.47 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.
- 3.48 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.
- 3.49 During this period the Authority has continued to carefully consider how it can best prepare itself to respond to future grant settlements. During 2024/25 the Authority continued work on the approved invest to save package. Members were engaged in budget planning through two budget workshops with officers, which included scenario planning. The robustness of the Authority's processes was tested when officers were informed of a change in the expected budget settlement from Defra which, rather than being a flat cash settlement, was likely to include a reduction in the Authority's revenue funding, but an increase in capital funding. The Authority considered this matter as part of the approval of the budget, capital strategy, and capital strategy at its meeting in March 2025, including the reduction in the National Park revenue grant of 8.2% to £0.860m and the increase of the National Park capital grant to £1.974m. A revised capital programme is under development to ensure the Authority is able to maximise the use of the increased capital grant during the current period.

- 3.50 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 which identified no significant weaknesses in the Authority's arrangements and set out four improvement recommendations around the medium term financial strategy, forecasting and tracking external grants and income streams, mapping of corporate priorities on the risk register, and changes to the performance, financial, and risk reporting schedule.
- 3.51 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. Quarterly progress reports are presented to the P&R Committee summarising the audits undertaken in the period, the reports also contain information on the performance of the Internal Audit Service. An Annual Report and Opinion is presented to the P&R Committee which summarises all the audit work in the period and provides an annual opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control environment. The report also outlines the effectiveness of the Internal Audit Service. Internal Audit Reports to P&R Committee support the committee in discharging its responsibilities in terms of enduring the effectiveness of the internal control environment and the effectiveness of the internal audit service. The Authority's external auditors review the appropriateness of internal audit arrangements and accordingly place reliance on the work done where applicable.
- 3.52 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.
- 3.53 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

- 3.54 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.
- 3.55 The SDNPA receives legal advice and support as appropriate via separate contracts with West Sussex County Council and Hampshire County Council. This includes the provision of a Deputy Monitoring Officer and input into significant Committee and Authority reports.
- 3.56 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.
- 3.57 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

- 3.58 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.

- 3.59 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.
- 3.60 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.
- 3.61 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

- 3.62 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.
- 3.63 The independently chaired South Downs Partnership, established in 2021, has continued to champion the outcomes in the Partnership Management Plan (PMP) by supporting. As the Authority undertakes the review of the PMP, the role of and partners and stakeholders across South Downs National Park becomes even more important in informing the direction of the PMP. To support this work a PMP Steering Group has been established to ensure key partners and stakeholders are integral to the development of the PMP.
- 3.64 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 of the National Park. The Planning Committee receives regular updates on neighbourhood planning across the National Park.
- 3.65 The Authority has continued with the review of the South Downs Local Plan and the Local Plan was approved for regulation 18 consultation in December 2024. During this period a revised Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was also approved to support the review of the Local Plan. The SCI sets out how the Authority will consult with all stakeholders, including local communities, businesses and public bodies, on planning matters.
- 3.66 To support the reviews and consultations of both the Local Plan and the PMP the Authority has undertaken significant engagement activities during this period to encourage input from partners, stakeholders and the wider public. A wide variety of events were delivered including ones open to the general public and other focussed on engaging diverse groups or a range of partners and stakeholders with some of these events looking to engage people on both the Local Plan and the PMP, thereby maximising the exposure of our two key policy documents and making best use of available resources. Over 1100 people and groups engaged with the review of the PMP and over 20000 comments have been received on the regulation 18 consultation of the Local Plan.

- 3.67 The Authority has also been working with a number of partner authorities on the West Sussex Joint Minerals Local Plan, and the East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Waste and Minerals Plan. The West Sussex Plan has been considered by the Authority, including the second five-year assessment on the relevance and effectiveness of the plan and it was agreed that a formal review was not required at this time. The East Sussex, South Downs and Brighton and Hove Plan has been adopted.
- 3.68 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 in the previous period not to renew the S101 agreement with the Authority; the planning service was successfully recovered from Horsham during this period. The Authority has also entered into a S101 agreement with West Sussex County Council to manage a cross-boundary planning application for water recycling pipeline between Ford and Hardham.
- 3.69 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.
- 3.70 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.
- 3.71 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 EDI training platform for both staff and Members also contributes to the ongoing organisational development in this area. The Authority has continued to seek 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.
- 3.72 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 had been undertaken and the Authority appointed a new co-opted member to the Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting in July 2024.
- 3.73 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.
- 3.74 The Authority has engaged with partners across a range of consultations and other matters including in relation to the Rampion 2 offshore wind farm, highways matters at Seven Sisters Country Park, the River Meon, reforms to national planning policy, and changes to local government originating from the English Devolution White Paper.

- 3.75 The English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, sets out a path for the resetting of the relationship between central, regional and local government. The proposals set out the establishment of Strategic Authorities led by a Mayor with a variety of new powers, along with the abolishment of two-tier local authorities and a move to unitary authorities across the country. This will impact the South Downs National in the immediate future as both the Hampshire and Solent, and Sussex and Brighton areas have been accepted onto the Government's devolution priority programme, meaning that devolution and local government reorganisation will progress on an accelerated timeframe. Officers and Members have been liaising with colleagues in local authorities across the National Park and with officials in Defra and MHCLG to represent the interests of the National Park and the National Park Authority as this substantial change develops. The Authority also responded to the Government's devolution consultations for both these areas.
- 3.76 During this period the Authority has also been working closely with a range of partners on the establishment of an extended National Nature Reserve – a Super National Nature Reserve (SNNR) – extending from Lullington Heath to include land at and surrounding Seven Sisters Country Park. The SNNR is expected to be called the Seven Sisters Nature Reserve. The Authority has also continued working with partners to deliver the Centurion Way from Chichester into the National Park with the aim of joining the route with the South Downs Way at Cocking.
- 3.77 The Authority has also been working closer with partners to take forward various legislative provisions set out in the Environment Act 2021, particularly in relation to the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the impact of the strengthened Biodiversity Duty. Also, on the impact of the strengthened duty set out in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 for relevant authorities to seek to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes. The Government released statutory guidance in December 2024 on the Protected Landscapes duty and officers have been working closely with local authorities and other public bodies on how they are able to meet this new duty.

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 2025 the P&R Committee met to consider the effectiveness of the Committee and this is summarised in the report from the Chair at **Annex A**.
- 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 Monitoring Officer and included consultations with the Senior Leadership Team, the Chief Finance Officer and the Chief 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 2025. Of the six audits undertaken, there were four substantial assurance opinions given, one reasonable assurance opinion, and one partial assurance opinion given as set out below.
- Substantial Assurance – Creditors / accounts payable
 - Substantial Assurance – Health and Safety
 - Substantial Assurance – Payroll
 - Substantial Assurance – Main Accounting and Budget Management
 - Reasonable Assurance – Asset Management

- Partial Assurance – Financial Management of Project Budgets

- 4.4 The substantial assurance in the four audits covering financial matters and health and safety evidences the Authority's good and well-established accounting practices, processes and procedures and the emphasis the Authority places on Health and Safety in general. The reasonable assurance on Asset Management identified that the majority of controls were operating as expected. An improvement in the some reconciliations between records has been recommended; also it is recommended that an Additions and Disposal Policy be adopted. The partial assurance on Financial Management of Project Budgets identified a lack of standard budget monitoring processes for projects and limited access to financial information for projects officers. Two actions were raised to address these matters and implementation of one already having taken place.
- 4.5 In addition to the audit opinions, the Chief Internal Auditor also noted as part of their annual opinion that during the 2024/25 financial year they had seen an increased number of high and medium agreed actions not being implemented in-line with the target implementation dates. Whilst not felt by the Auditor to be of significant concern at this time, following discussions between the Auditor and officers, it is felt appropriate that this be addressed through an action in this Annual Governance Statement.
- 4.6 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.
- 4.7 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.
- 4.8 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 of the Authority's Fraud and Anti-corruption and Whistleblowing Policies.** The Whistleblowing Policy has been reviewed and revised to bring it in line with ACAS and Government guidance. The work to review the Authority's Fraud and Anti-corruption Policy is ongoing and will be completed in 2025-26.
 - **Continue to ensure good governance mechanisms are in place to support the Authority's evolving work in the area of Green Finance.** Green Finance has continued to be a fast-moving area of work and officers have worked closely to ensure the good governance of the Authority's work in this area. The Authority received an update at its meeting in October 2024 which considered the Authority's powers to deliver the Green Finance work, the financial management of the service, and possible future work, including the voluntary biodiversity credits markets which the Authority

exploring further. Opportunities for the Authority to work in this area will continue to evolve and officers will continue to work together to assess them and ensure the good governance of the work in this area.

- **Review the Authority's Risk Strategy and Guidance, including the Authority's risk appetite statement.** The Authority's Risk Strategy and Guidance has been reviewed during 2024 and was approved in September 2024. This was the subject of an initial workshop with Members in early 2024 to engage them in a consideration of the Authority's appetite to risk and future risk strategy to inform the Risk Strategy and Guidance document which included a revised risk appetite statement. To further support risk management at the Authority the Head of Governance will undertake with the Senior Leadership Team an annual radar / PESTEL analysis of overarching risks to the Authority. A central record of all key risks being managed through both the Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers will also be created to ensure simpler monitoring of all risks managed at these levels.
- **Review the Authority's protocols, including the Local Protocol for Members and Officer Relations, which support the Member Code of Conduct.** Work has commenced, but not yet concluded, on reviews of both the Authority's Officer and Member Codes of Conduct. The reviews have been informed by recent training sessions on the Code of Conduct and bullying, harassment and sexual harassment. The reviews will be completed during 2025/26 and will include the various supporting protocols.
- **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.** The outcome in the review in the operating arrangements at SSCP resulted in significant governance changes for the management of SSCP. Following the decisions taken at the Authority's meeting in July 2024, a further report was considered by the Authority at its meeting in October 2024 which provided further clarification on the operating arrangements for SSCP within the Authority, including the operating model, staffing, decision-making, and financial matters. It also set out the arrangements for the future administration of the dormant company, SDCOL. The work to bring all operations within the Authority has now been completed.
- **Given the changes in the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), additional support, as appropriate, through liaison, advice and training, to maintain good governance of the Authority.** During this period the Authority has recruited a new permanent Chief Executive Officer and a Director of Landscapes and Strategy on a fixed term contract with a particular remit to deliver the PMP. Officers with particular responsibilities for the financial arrangements and the good governance of the Authority have had induction sessions with new members of SLT and continue to provide updates to SLT and to brief them on individual matters as they arise.

5.2 Actions for 2024-25 include the following:

- Review of the Authority's Fraud and Anti-corruption Policy (ongoing from 2024/25)
- Review of the Officer and Member Codes of Conduct and the associated protocols (partially ongoing from 2024/25)
- Work with Internal Audit and colleagues across the Authority to ensure that high and medium priority agreed actions from internal audits are implemented in-line with the target implementation dates.
- Work closely with officers and SLT, in particular the new Director of Business Development and Growth, to ensure the good governance of the Authority's work to grow its sources of income.

- Given the internal changes at the Authority, including changes in SLT and directorates, a review of internal delegations will be undertaken, following on from any changes to Standing Orders, to ensure decision-making responsibilities are clear, transparent and easily understandable.
- 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

Annex A

Chair's Report

Policy and Resources Committee Effectiveness Review 2024-25

Members of the Policy and Resources met for their annual away day on 22 April 2024 at the Weald and Downland Museum.

In order to conduct the review, the Chair had asked all members to complete a short questionnaire which considered the different aspects of the Committee's Terms of Reference, and asked members to rate how effectively they considered the Committee was fulfilling them. Additionally, members were asked for suggestions for improvement, along with a brief training needs analysis.

On the day, the Chair presented the findings from the questionnaires, and members of the committee discussed with officers the actions that could be taken to drive continuous improvement in the operation and impact of the Committee.

The following is a summary of the key areas discussed:

Audit Responsibilities

Positives

- Presentations from both internal and external auditors are invariably of high quality and presenters open to reasonable questions
- Strengthened risk management due to our informal discussions prior to meetings
- Good relationship between Chief Internal Auditor and the Committee
- Some members have recognised expertise in this area providing assurance to the wider committee

Suggestions for improvement

- Informal audit meetings to consider full internal audit reports, instead of summaries which are presented to Committee, to build understanding of the work of internal audit
- Place audit items earlier on the committee meeting agenda
- Internal Audit should present options the committee with options for consideration for the internal audit programme rather than be presented with a *fete accompli* for approval
- Audit training could assist members without recognised expertise to feel more confident to contribute

Strategies and Policies

Positives

- P&R is strong in this area. Good discussions and probing questions.

Suggestions for improvement

- The committee could exercise more positive challenge to the Chief Executive and his team
- We should enhance our focus on future financial security given the current policy and financial environment

- We need an enhanced focus on brand and identity and a wider communications strategy, possibly kicked off by a Member workshop, to ensure audience buy-in to the NPA's work and a greater understanding of the benefits for residents in the Park and for visitors to the Park (we are a 'National' Park)
- We must ensure – with the new PMP - that the Committee can redirect efforts and priorities based on project outcomes, changes in the external environment and audience feedback
- Whole Estate Plans – consider the effectiveness of resource deployment, direction and rigour of WEPs in the light of the emerging PMP and PLTOF

Grants and Projects

Positives

- Introduction of Project Bulletin makes updates more readable and easier to share more widely
- Items reporting on project progress with regard to the Corporate Plan are detailed and comprehensive
- Committee's responsibilities are satisfactorily discharged

Suggestions for improvement

- Consider alternative ways to present large volumes of data, rather than only in complex spreadsheets
- Greater scrutiny of projects to ensure alignments with the Authority's aims and objectives
- The process for approval of grant bids should be reviewed, along with the committee's terms of reference (ToRs), as short timescales for grant bids preclude serious consideration by the committee, as should the balance between small and large funding allocations in the ToRs.

Performance and Procurement

Positives

- Confident that SDNPA is well placed to deliver due to pragmatic budgeting by SLT following Members' Budget workshops
- Committee's responsibilities are satisfactorily discharged

Suggestions for improvement

- The Committee needs to understand how SDNPA intends to improve health and safety, and not just monitor performance
- The Committee should have more challenge and involvement in SSCP strategy and performance now it has been brought in-house
- The Committee should have a greater focus on organisational learning from project evaluations and their impact - might be a good area for internal audit to consider

Mechanisms – suggestions for improvement

Formal Committee meetings

- Re-order agenda to consider finance and audit items first
- Shift the emphasis to debate and decision rather than clarification
- Consider more use of visuals and site visits to enhance appreciation of the issues under consideration

Papers for Committee meetings

- Earlier release of papers would be helpful
- Officers to identify what they need from the Committee (how can Members help?) We should be doing more than 'noting' papers

Officer presentations

- Encourage all officers to see Members as allies and that our questioning is designed to help not intimidate. We all share the same goals and want to succeed.

Training needs analysis

The training needs analysis highlighted Audit, Key Authority Plans and Policies, Access Land and Public Rights of Way, and Project Reporting and Evaluation as priority areas the committee would like training on of to gain a greater understanding of. The Committee made the following comments under these priority areas:

Audit

- Would be helpful to base this around fictional good / poor audits and identify the sorts of questions that Members should be asking. Also a greater appreciation of the risks being addressed.
- Similar to above – identify what has gone wrong elsewhere and how the Committee can ensure this doesn't happen at SDNPA
- The Committee's role in getting the best from our auditors
- Update on counter fraud measures is overdue

Key Plans and Policies

- Broad discussion on the scope to open up the Park to a wider range of activities and pursuits that would attract a broader visitor population – away from the 'honeypots'.
- Noted the great value of having partners involved in training sessions / seminars
- Explanation of how plans and policies are turned into deliverables for staff

Access Land and Public Rights of Way

- Probably a short briefing session to provide clarity on the role and responsibilities of the Authority - and landowners - regarding access land and PRoWs

Project reporting and evaluation

- How projects are managed with and without partners, how the objectives are set; how evaluation takes place against those objectives; timescale for evaluation; one-off or continuing evaluation

Other areas

- A session reviewing **WEPs** would be helpful – especially in the light of PLTOF and new PMP priorities. We should consider: the value of WEPs, duration, expected content, approval, review, and recording outcomes.
- A brief session, possibly as part of budget setting workshop, on **finance** - How to read and interpret accounts and helpful questions that members can ask.
- A seminar with a focus on partnerships – making them work effectively. How can we encourage / ensure that partners deliver on the new **PMP**? How does SDNPA work with and look to nurture partners?
- Explore the **Communications** Strategy – especially in the light of a new PMP and Local Plan. Is our Comms function for the Authority or the Park?
- **EDI** in communications – how to reach an audience of different cultural and language backgrounds, socio-economic status and physical and cognitive abilities.
- A brief session on the main **Health and Safety** risks for staff, volunteers and visitors – and mechanisms in place to mitigate those risks.

These priority areas and comments have been taken forward with officers in planning for future away days and workshops

Melanie Hunt

Chair, SDNPA Policy and Resources Committee

South Downs National Park Authority

Local Code of Corporate Governance 2025

I. Introduction

- I.1 Corporate Governance has been defined “...the arrangements put in place to ensure that the intended outcomes for stakeholders are defined and achieved.” (The International Framework: Good Governance in the Public Sector (CIPFA/IFAC, 2016))
- I.2 The term ‘local code of governance’ essentially refers to the governance structure in place within the organisation although, in practice, the governance structure will consist of a number of codes and documents. The development and review of the local code of governance helps to ensure that proper governance arrangements are in place and serves as a means of increasing credibility, accountability and public confidence in the organisation.
- I.3 The South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) has produced a local code of corporate governance which is based upon the guidance published jointly by CIPFA (The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) and SOLACE (The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) entitled ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework’ which applies to National Park Authorities. The Guidance sets out seven core principles of corporate governance, together with various supporting principles in respect of each core principle. The SDNPA’s Local Code of Corporate Governance, set out below, incorporates these principles and identifies the source documents, good practice and other means of demonstrating the SDNPA’s compliance with the principles of good governance.

The SDNPA’s Values

- I.4 The SDNPA has agreed the following corporate values and key behaviours that staff and Members strive to demonstrate.

I.5 **Collaboration** – Working together we achieve more.

- We listen to understand
- We create opportunities for sharing knowledge, ideas and expertise
- We work together and deliver across teams and directorates
- We take collective ownership for creating a successful organisation
- We trust in each others’ expertise
- We support our colleagues

I.6 **Innovation** – We encourage and support creativity, learning and adaptability.

- We promote progressive and creative thinking
- We acknowledge and learn from our mistakes
- We accept that implementing new ideas involves an element of risk taking
- We adopt and develop good ideas and best practices

I.7 **Respect** – We value each other and take responsibility for our behaviour.

- We respect and value people’s differences
- We are honest and act with integrity
- We value other people’s opinions
- We consider the impact of our behaviour on others
- We welcome the giving and receiving of supportive feedback
- We challenge inappropriate behaviour
- We communicate in a clear, timely and appropriate manner

- 1.8 In addition to these values, the Authority will act in accordance with the Nolan principles:
1. **Selflessness:** Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.
 2. **Integrity:** Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.
 3. **Objectivity:** In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
 4. **Accountability:** Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
 5. **Openness:** Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
 6. **Honesty:** Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
 7. **Leadership:** Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

2. Monitoring and Review

- 2.1 All Members and officers of the Authority share responsibility for good governance. In particular, the Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for receiving the Annual Report prepared by the External Auditor as well as the Annual Governance Statement prepared jointly by the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer.
- 2.2 Delegated Authority is given to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee to make any necessary amendments to the Local Code of Corporate Governance. Where the Local Code has been amended, it shall be reported annually to the Policy and Resources Committee

Principle A:

Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

We Will:	Evidenced by:
<p>Behave with integrity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure members and officers behave with integrity and lead a culture where acting in the public interest is visibly and consistently demonstrated thereby protecting the reputation of the organisation • Ensure members take the lead in establishing specific standard operating principles or values for the organisation and its staff and that they are communicated and understood. These should build on the Seven Principles of Public Life (the Nolan Principles) • Lead by example and using the above standard operating principles or values as a framework for decision making and other actions • Demonstrate, communicate and embed the standard operating principles or values through appropriate policies and processes which are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are operating effectively 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Governance Statement approved by the Policy and Resources Committee • Appointment, Management and Standards Committee role in standards matters for Members • Independent persons appointed • Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy in place and reported on annually to Committee • Arrangements for handling complaints against Members considered by the Independent Persons <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Code of Conduct • Register of Interests for Members and declarations of interests made at meetings and recorded in minutes • Officer Code of Conduct and associated declarations of interest • Financial Regulations • Contract Standing Orders • Register of Declarations of Gifts and Hospitality for Members and Officers • Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy • Whistleblowing Policy • Local Protocol for Member and Officer Relations • SDNPA Values and Competencies • SDNPA's Guiding Principles • Arrangements for managing conflicts of interest in place for Teckal Company <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction programme for new Members and staff including standards of behaviour expected • Annual performance appraisal for staff and Members • Procedures for dealing with perceived conflicts of interests • Report template for decision making • Key processes audited and reported on • Individual guidance issued to members in relation to managing standards issues. • Process in place for disclosure of Related Parties and Outside Interests

<p>Demonstrate strong commitment to ethical values:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to establish, monitor and maintain the organisation's ethical standards and performance • Underpin personal behaviour with ethical values and ensuring they permeate all aspects of the organisation's culture and operation • Develop and maintain robust policies and procedures which place emphasis on agreed ethical values • Ensure that external providers of services on behalf of the organisation are required to act with integrity and in compliance with ethical standards expected by the organisation 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointments, Management and Standards Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memoranda of Understanding with various partners and Natural England Accord • Member and Officer Codes of Conduct • Whistleblowing Policy • Equality and Diversity Policy • Procurement strategy • Recruitment Procedure • Contract Standing Orders • Treasury Management Policy & Annual Investment Strategy (Ethical Investment Statement) • SDNPA Values and Competencies • SDNPA's Guiding Principles • Partnership management plan sets out approach to partnership working <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member/officer performance appraisal process • Equality and Diversity Training • Report template requires consideration of ethical issues • Job descriptions • Staff competency framework • Treasury Management practices
<p>Respect the rule of law</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure members and staff demonstrate a strong commitment to the rule of law as well as adhering to relevant laws and regulations • Create the conditions to ensure that the statutory officers, other key post holders, and members, are able to fulfil their responsibilities in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements • Strive to optimise the use of the full powers available for the benefit of citizens, communities and other stakeholders • Deal with breaches of legal and regulatory provisions effectively • Ensure corruption and misuse of power are dealt with effectively 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory Officers appointed by the Full Authority • Committee structure in place with terms of reference • Monitoring Officer in place • Officer support for committees <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing policy • Financial Regulations, Contract Standing orders and Procurement Strategy • Codes of conduct • Anti-fraud and corruption policy • Scheme of delegation • Establishment of Teckal Company with reserved matters set out in its Articles of Association • Operating agreement and Annual business plan for Teckal company approved by NPA as shareholder of the Company

	<p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report templates set out legal considerations for all decisions • Member induction programme and development programme • Provision of legal advice to officers and members to ensure compliance with law • Compliance with CIPFA's statement on the role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Govt (CIPFA 2015) • Job descriptions • Internal and external audit • Annual Management Assurance statement to the External Auditor • Register of member and officer interests and related party interests • Engagement at national level with regards to reviews of available powers and their use
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Principle B:

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

We Will:	Evidenced by:
<p>Be open</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure an open culture through demonstrating, documenting and communicating the organisation's commitment to openness • Make decisions that are open about actions, plans, resource use, forecasts, outputs and outcomes. The presumption is for openness. If that is not the case, a justification for the reasoning for keeping a decision confidential should be provided • Provide clear reasoning and evidence for decisions in both public records and explanations to stakeholders and being explicit about the criteria, rationale and considerations used. In due course, ensuring that the impact and consequences of those decisions are clear • Use formal and informal consultation and engagement to determine the most appropriate and effective interventions/ courses of action 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority and Committee meetings accessible to the public with various meetings webcast • Publication of agendas and reports in line with Local Government Act 1972 requirements • Member workshops • Decision Records • Public participation at SDNPA meetings <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Management Plan • 2050 vision • Communication and Engagement Strategy • Statement of Community Involvement • Financial Regulations and Standing Orders • Procurement Policy • Corporate Plan and annual action plan • Annual review • Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy • Whistleblowing Policy • Publication Scheme • Access to information policy • Member Allowance Scheme • SDNPA Guiding Principles

We Will:	Evidenced by:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDNPA Values and Competencies Operational Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report template • Financial statements • Annual performance reporting • Information published in respect of expenditure over £250 • Tracking spreadsheets used for key public consultations recording changes as a result of consultation • SDNPA website (includes - publicly available information including committee papers, who the Members are, what they do and their attendance at formal meetings, who the officers are and how the public can input and influence Authority decisions) • Farmer engagement workshops • Parish newsletters and member attendance at parish meetings • Programme of Parish workshops and webinars • Publication of South Downs View • E-newsletter and Planning E newsletter published
<p>Engage with stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective engagement with institutional stakeholders to ensure that the purpose, objectives and intended outcomes for each stakeholder relationship are clear so that outcomes are achieved successfully and sustainably • Develop formal and informal partnerships to allow for resources to be used more efficiently and outcomes achieved more effectively • Ensure that partnerships are based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – trust – a shared commitment to change – a culture that promotes and accepts challenge among partners and that the added value of partnership working is explicit 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversight of projects with partners and stakeholders by Policy and Resources Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the National Park Partnership Management Plan • Corporate Plan • Communication and Engagement Strategy • Public affairs strategy • Memoranda of Understanding with various partners including shared values and Natural England Accord • Statement of Community Involvement • Guidance to Members on outside bodies <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Downs Partnership acting as a shared vehicle for collaborative working and delivery across partners and sectors • National Park Authority performance indicators • Visitor surveys • Formal mechanism for evaluation and learning from major pieces of work and important partnerships. • Tracking spreadsheets used for key public

We Will:	Evidenced by:
	<p>consultations recording changes as a result of consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Customer Survey • Individual campaigns and communications activity • Parish workshops • Farmer workshops • Seven Sisters Country Park Stakeholder group
<p>Engage with individual citizens and service users:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a clear policy on the type of issues that the organisation will meaningfully consult with or involve communities, individual citizens, service users and other stakeholders to ensure that service (or other) provision is contributing towards the achievement of intended outcomes • Ensure that communication methods are effective and that members and officers are clear about their roles with regard to community engagement • Encourage, collection and evaluation of the views and experiences of communities, citizens, service users and organisations of different backgrounds including reference to future needs • Implement effective feedback mechanisms in order to demonstrate how views have been taken into account • Balance feedback from more active stakeholder groups with other stakeholder groups to ensure inclusivity • Take account of the impact of decisions on future generations of tax payers and service users 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints, Compliments and Comments reported on annually. • Meeting between Authority Members and South Downs Partnership • Endorsement of Whole Estate Plans by Policy and Resources Committee • Membership of Policy and Resources Committee expanded through additional Co-optees to broaden input from different communities into the committee deliberations <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process in place for disclosure of Related Parties and Outside Interests • Statement of Community Involvement in relation to planning matters • Public Affairs Strategy • Memoranda of Understanding with various partners and Natural England Accord • Corporate objectives and success measures (in the Corporate Plan) • Communication and Engagement Strategy • National Park Authority performance indicators • Performance Management Framework • Rights of Way Accord <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings with partner Local Authorities within the NP to discuss shared issues /priorities. • Engagement of youth ambassadors in the work of the NPA • Local Access Forum • Quarterly and annual performance reporting • Consultation on the review of the Local Plan • Planning Service Customer Survey and associated action plan • Tracking spreadsheets used for key public

We Will:	Evidenced by:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultations recording changes as a result of consultation E-newsletter and planning e-newsletter

Principle C:

Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

We will:	Evidenced by:
<p>Define outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a clear vision, which is an agreed formal statement of the organisation's purpose and intended outcomes containing appropriate performance indicators, which provide the basis for the organisation's overall strategy, planning and other decisions Specify the intended impact on, or changes for, stakeholders including citizens and service users. It could be immediately or over the course of a year or longer Deliver defined outcomes on a sustainable basis within the resources that will be available Identify and manage risks to the achievement of outcomes Manage service users' expectations effectively with regard to determining priorities and making the best use of the resources available 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership Management Plan (PMP), Corporate Plan (CP) and other strategic documents approved by NPA and/or committees <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement of Community Involvement in relation to planning matters Memoranda of Understanding with various partners and Natural England Accord Purposes and Duty set out in legislation and incorporated into all strategic documents. Corporate Plan and associated action plan based on the shared vision for the SDNP agreed with partners National Park 2050 vision Publication of the PMP including the development of measures as a basis for monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Vision State of the Park Report Risk Management approach Local Development Scheme Neighbourhood Plans Local Plan Public Affairs Strategy Operating agreement in place with Teckal company for the management of Seven Sisters Country Park <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 yearly review of PMP, Local Plan and CP South Downs Integrated Landscape Character Assessment Annual review Risk management processes
<p>Consider the social, economic and environmental benefits:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and balance the combined economic, social and environmental impact of policies and plans when taking decisions about service provision Take a longer-term view with regard to 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considerations tabled as part of committee reports Policy and Resources (P&R) Committee oversight of Corporate Risk Register Membership of P&R Committee expanded through additional Co-optees to broaden

We will:	Evidenced by:
<p>decision making, taking account of risk and acting transparently where there are potential conflicts between the organisation's intended outcomes and short-term factors such as the political cycle or financial constraints</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the wider public interest associated with balancing conflicting interests between achieving the various economic, social and environmental benefits, through consultation where possible, in order to ensure appropriate trade-offs Ensure fair access to services 	<p>input into the committee deliberations.</p> <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of 5 year medium term financial strategy Development of position statements on key topics EDI Action Plan and online training Annual Review Treasury management policy <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approvals Process for Projects and project evaluation Risk Register Sustainability Action Plan Support for South Downs Volunteering Network Report template including sections to consider value for money, climate change objectives, social value, equality duty, human rights, crime and disorder, health and safety, and data protection implications. Evidence base maintained to inform decision making Application of Sandford Principle, as set out in the Environment Act 1995 Section 11A and following guidance in Circular 12/96, in decision making involving making every effort to reconcile any conflicts that may arise between the two National Park purposes, but if the conflict proves irreconcilable, attaching greater weight to the first purpose. Role of Operational Management Team in project decision making and approval

Principle D:

Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

We will:	Evidenced by:
<p>Determining interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure decision makers receive objective and rigorous analysis of a variety of options indicating how intended outcomes would be achieved and associated risks. Therefore ensuring best value is achieved however services are provided Consider feedback from citizens and service users when making decisions about service improvements or where services are no longer required in order to prioritise competing demands within limited resources available including 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> SLT Strategic session discussions Chair's briefing Committee chairs and SLT discussions Member workshops Conduct of Authority and committee meetings enabling officers' presentation of reports for Member consideration and discussion. Policy and Resources Committee oversight of complaints, compliments and comments. <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p>

We will:	Evidenced by:
<p>people, skills, land and assets and bearing in mind future impacts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Plan • SDNP Vision published following wide engagement with stakeholders and partners providing the strategic steer for the South Downs • Partnership Management Plan and review • Local Plan and review • Publication of the Partnership Management Plan including the development of impact measures as a basis for monitoring progress towards the achievement of the Vision • Financial Regulations and Contract Standing orders • Standing orders for Regulation of Authority Proceedings and Business <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget setting process • Committee reporting template and approvals process
<p>Planning interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish and implement robust planning and control cycles that cover strategic and operational plans, priorities and targets • Engage with internal and external stakeholders in determining how services and other courses of action should be planned and delivered • Consider and monitor risks facing each partner when working collaboratively, including shared risks • Ensure arrangements are flexible and agile so that the mechanisms for delivering goods and services can be adapted to changing circumstances • Establish appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the planning process in order to identify how the performance of services and projects is to be measured • Ensure capacity exists to generate the information required to review service quality regularly • Prepare budgets in accordance with objectives, strategies and the medium term financial plan • Inform medium and long term resource planning by drawing up realistic estimates of revenue and capital expenditure aimed at developing a sustainable funding strategy , taking into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Downs Partnership • Annual budget processes involving approval by the NPA and oversight by the Policy and Resources Committee • Committee review of Corporate Risk Register • Performance reporting to Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Management Plan including performance measures with 5-yearly review • Corporate Plan with annual action plans and 5-yearly review • Local Plan with 5-yearly review • Social Value Act implications consideration for all decisions taken at committee. • Performance reporting to Committee • Project appraisals reported to Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium Term Financial Strategy • Corporate plan and budget setting cycles interlinked <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social value implications of decisions part of standard reporting template • Budget setting process includes Members

We will:	Evidenced by:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the medium term financial strategy sets the context for ongoing decisions on significant delivery issues or responses to changes in the external environment that may arise during the budgetary period in order for outcomes to be achieved while optimising resource usage • Ensure the achievement of 'social value' through service planning and commissioning 	
<p>Optimise achievement of outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the medium term financial strategy integrates and balances service priorities, affordability and other resource constraints • Ensure the budgeting process is all-inclusive, taking into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term • Ensure the medium term financial strategy sets the context for ongoing decisions on significant delivery issues or responses to changes in the external environment that may arise during the budgetary period in order for outcomes to be achieved while optimising resource usage • Ensure the achievement of 'social value' through service planning and commissioning 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget monitored by Committee • Annual budget setting process through workshops and Authority meetings • Link between budget process and Corporate Plan • Social value implications considered for all decisions taken at committee. • Performance reporting to Committee • Project appraisals reported to Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium Term Financial Strategy • Corporate plan and budget setting cycles interlinked <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social value implications of decisions part of standard reporting template • Budget setting process includes members and senior managers

Principle E:

Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capacity of its leadership and the individuals within it.

We will:	Evidenced by:
<p>Develop capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review operations, performance and use of assets on a regular basis to ensure their continuing effectiveness • Improve resource use through appropriate application of techniques such as benchmarking and other options in order to determine how resources are allocated so that defined outcomes are achieved effectively and efficiently • Recognise the benefits of partnerships and collaborative working where added value can be achieved • Develop and maintain an effective workforce plan to enhance the strategic allocation of resources 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PMP performance monitoring by Policy and Resources Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational structure focused on delivery model for PMP and Corporate Plan • Member/officer induction and appraisal programmes • Learning and Development Policy for officers • IT strategy • Establishment of Teckal company with ability to appoint independent directors <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Development Protocol and

We will:	Evidenced by:
	<p>individual Member development meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Role Description • Appropriate job profiles used in recruitment • Learning and Development Plans • Training events • Performance and development review scheme • Staff survey and associated action plan developed • E-learning platform with mandatory courses linked to annual performance review for all staff • Member and staff induction programme
<p>Develop the capability of leadership:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop protocols to ensure that elected and appointed leaders negotiate with each other regarding their respective roles early on in the relationship and that a shared understanding of roles and objectives is maintained • Publish a statement that specifies the types of decisions that are delegated and those reserved for the collective decision making of the governing body • Ensure the Leader and the chief executive have clearly defined and distinctive leadership roles within a structure whereby the chief executive leads in implementing strategy and managing the delivery of services and other outputs set by members and each provides a check and a balance for each other's authority • Develop the capabilities of members and senior management to achieve effective leadership and to enable the organisation to respond successfully to changing legal and policy demands as well as economic, political and environmental changes and risks • Ensure that there are structures in place to encourage public participation • Take steps to consider the leadership's own effectiveness and ensuring leaders are open to constructive feedback from peer review and inspections • Holding staff to account through regular performance reviews which take account of training or development needs • Ensure arrangements are in place to maintain the health and wellbeing of the workforce and support individuals in 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee Chairs and SLT meetings • Appointments, Management and Standards Committee Terms of reference <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job descriptions and performance and development review process for Members and officers, including the Chair of the SDNPA • Local Protocol for Member and Officer Relations • Member Development Protocol • Standing Orders contain scheme of delegations to officers and terms of reference for committees • Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy • Financial Regulations and Standing Orders • Communication and Engagement Strategy • HR policies in place <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Finance Officer support procured and compliance with both the <i>CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government</i> and the <i>CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations</i> • Monitoring Officer support contract in place • South Downs Partnership • Conditions of employment • Contract management in respect of externally provided services • Member workshops on key issues • Leadership and Management development training for officers

We will:	Evidenced by:
maintaining their own physical and mental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising Member vacancies • Induction programme for all • Staff appraisal process and policy, including for the Chief Executive Officer with the Appointments, Management, and Standards Committee. • Annual Member 1-2-1 process with Chair of the Authority

Principle F:

Managing risks and performance through robust internal controls and strong public finance management.

We will	Evidenced by:
Manage risk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise that risk management is an integral part of all activities and must be considered in all aspects of decision making • Implement robust and integrated risk management arrangements and ensuring that they are working effectively • Ensure that responsibilities for managing individual risks are clearly allocated 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular risk reporting to Committee • Annual Health and Safety reporting <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Management Strategy, risk register template and risk appetite statement • Insurance policies • Whistleblowing Policy • Anti-fraud and Corruption Policy • Health and Safety policies and procedures • ICT User Policy and information security policy in place • Policy on use of corporate and non-corporate communication channels • Treasury Management Policy <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk assessment as part of service planning • Corporate Risk Register reviewed by the Operational Management Team, and SLT, and in regular risk register review meetings with Chair, Deputy Chairs and members of the Policy and Resources Committee. • Directorate Risk Registers reviewed by the individual directorate management teams • Annual Management Assurance statement to the External Auditor
Manage performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor service delivery effectively including planning, specification, execution and independent post implementation review • Make decisions based on relevant, clear objective analysis and advice pointing out the implications and risks inherent in the organisation's financial, social and environmental position and outlook 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chairs and SLT meetings • Chair's briefings • Committee terms of reference include regular performance monitoring • P&R Committee annual review of effectiveness <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Regulations and Procedures

<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging effective and constructive challenge and debate on policies and objectives to support balanced and effective decision making • Provide members and senior management with regular reports on service delivery plans and on progress towards outcome achievement. • Ensure there is consistency between specification stages (such as budgets) and post implementation reporting (e.g. financial statements) 	<p>Evidenced by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Orders <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic sessions • National Park Authority performance indicators reported quarterly or annually as appropriate including corrective action as necessary to relevant committees • Appropriate systems in place to support monitoring performance against measures • Operational management team monitoring of performance • Statutory requirements for decision making met • Committee Report templates
<p>Develop robust internal control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align the risk management strategy and policies on internal control with achieving objectives • Evaluate and monitor risk management and internal control on a regular basis • Ensure effective counter fraud and anti-corruption arrangements are in place • Ensure additional assurance on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the framework of governance, risk management and control is provided by the internal auditor • Ensure an audit committee or equivalent group/ function, which is independent of the executive and accountable to the governing body 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and Resources Committee with terms of reference reviewed annually • Independent co-opted members on the Policy and Resources Committee • Training for Committee members • Publication of reports and meeting minutes showing declarations of interest made • Statement of Community Involvement in relation to planning matters • Risk management strategy • Audit plan agreed by Policy and Resources Committee and regular audit reporting to Committee • Annual Governance Statement <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing Orders • Scheme of Delegation • Financial Regulations • Anti-fraud and corruption policy • Whistleblowing Policy • Contract Standing Orders and Procurement Strategy • Members' and Officer Codes of Conduct • Communication and Engagement Strategy • Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy framework kept under review by Operational Management team • Effective internal audit function resourced and maintained
<p>Manage data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective arrangements are in place for the safe collection, storage, use and 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Project approval and monitoring by Committee

We will	Evidenced by:
<p>sharing of data, including processes to safeguard personal data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective arrangements are in place and operating effectively when sharing data with other bodies • Review and audit regularly the quality and accuracy of data used in decision making and performance monitoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance data reported quarterly <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security arrangements in place in IT contract • Information security policy • Acceptable use of ICT policy • Data Protection Policies and practices implemented • Policy on use of corporate and non-corporate communication channels <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems for managing performance data • Data Protection Officer • Data protection policies in place • Report template including section on data protection implications • Training on data protection • Data processing agreements where appropriate • Role of Research and Evidence Officer in validating data for PMP and other indicators • Methodology sheets developed for Corporate plan measures and PMP indicators
<p>Have strong public financial management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure financial management supports both long term achievement of outcomes and short-term financial and operational performance • Ensure well-developed financial management is integrated at all levels of planning and control, including management of financial risks and controls 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External Auditor's value for money opinion • Quarterly budget monitoring reports to Committee • Annual budget approved by Authority • Annual Statement of Accounts approved by Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial statements • Financial Regulations and procedures • Medium Term Financial Strategy <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Finance Officer support procured and compliance with both the <i>CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government</i> and the <i>CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations</i>

Principle G:

Implement good practice in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

We will	Evidenced by:
<p>Implement good practice in transparency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write and communicate reports for the public and other stakeholders in a fair, 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Governance Statement approved by

We will	Evidenced by:
<p>balanced and understandable style appropriate to the intended audience and ensuring that they are easy to access and interrogate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strike a balance between providing the right amount of information to satisfy transparency demands and enhance public scrutiny while not being too onerous to provide and for users to understand 	<p>Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual and quarterly performance reporting to Committee • Accessible report template • Decision Records • Webcasting of meetings <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of Community Involvement • Communication and Engagement Strategy • Standing Orders • Scheme of delegation • Complaints, Compliments and Comments Policy • Publication Scheme • Code of Corporate Governance • Access to information policy • SDNPA Values and Competencies <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SDNPA website • Visitor survey • Tracking spreadsheets used for key public consultations • Corporate Plan • Annual review • Financial statements • Contributions to parish newsletters and attendance by members at parish meetings / AGMs • All published reports reviewed through accessibility filter to ensure compliance
<p>Implement good practice in reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report at least annually on performance, value for money and stewardship of resources to stakeholders in a timely and understandable way • Ensure members and senior management own the results reported • Ensure robust arrangements for assessing the extent to which the principles contained in this Framework have been applied and publishing the results on this assessment, including an action plan for improvement and evidence to demonstrate good governance (the annual governance statement) • Ensure that this Framework is applied to jointly managed or shared service organisations as appropriate • Ensure the performance information that 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual and quarterly performance reporting to Committee • S151 officer reporting requirements • Annual Governance Statement approved by Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Plan <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Park Authority performance indicators reported quarterly or annually as appropriate including corrective action as necessary to relevant committees • Report template • Annual review document • Financial statements • Summary versions of Corporate Plan and Partnership Management Plan

We will	Evidenced by:
<p>accompanies the financial statements is prepared on a consistent and timely basis and the statements allow for comparison with other, similar organisations</p>	

<p>Develop assurance and effective accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that recommendations for corrective action made by external audit are acted upon • Ensure an effective internal audit service with direct access to members is in place, providing assurance with regard to governance arrangements and that recommendations are acted upon • Welcome peer challenge, reviews and inspections from regulatory bodies and implementing recommendations • Gain assurance on risks associated with delivering services through third parties and that this is evidenced in the annual governance statement • Ensure that when working in partnership, arrangements for accountability are clear and the need for wider public accountability has been recognised and met 	<p>Committee Oversight & Scrutiny:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Internal Audit Strategy, Annual Audit Plan and Charter approved by Policy and Resources Committee with regular audit progress reporting • Regular Attendance of internal and external audit at Policy and Resources Committee • Independent (co-opted) members appointed to Policy and Resources Committee <p>Corporate Policies and Strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Governance Statement • Statement of community involvement • Internal audit function delivered by contract and meets PSIAS requirements with an independent assessment of the internal audit function undertaken every 5 years. • Risk Management Policy • Oversight of operating agreement with the Authority’s Teckal company and performance monitoring against agreed KPIs undertaken by Policy and Resources Committee • Risk Registers <p>Operational Procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit actions are formally logged and followed up and reported to committee
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