

PEAK DISTRICT NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

URGENT BUSINESS ITEMS SUB-COMMITTEE

17 AUGUST 2001

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT NATIONAL PARK OFFICER – HEAD OF CONSERVATION

URGENT BUSINESS

PART A

1. FARM & COUNTRYSIDE SERVICE ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANCE FOR EXTERNALLY FUNDED PROJECTS (A.12031/JJL)

Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report proposes the extension until 31 March 2002 of the present administrative support arrangements within Farm & Countryside Service using funding from external sources. These arrangements combine funds from the Department of Food, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the European Union under the Objective 5b programme.

Background

- 1.2 Resources Committee on 19 January 2001 approved continued administration assistance requirements within Farm & Countryside Service until 30 September 2001 for the support of two Objective 5b projects (Minute 20/01). The Objective 5b funds have been used to provide support by the Farm & Countryside Administration Officer, up to two days per week, and two Administration Assistant contract posts totalling three days per week.

Proposal

- 1.3 At the time of the January meeting it was assumed that the funding for the two Objective 5b projects would come to an end on 30 September 2001. However, the work of the projects has been delayed by difficulties of access to farms caused by the Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak. One of the projects in particular relies on the involvement of partner organisations whose work had to be totally suspended. Many action plans and programmes were halted part way through. Therefore the Head of Conservation, acting as manager of the two projects, has been negotiating with DEFRA for extensions to the end date of the projects to enable the work to be properly completed. Extensions, until 31 December 2001 for the smaller project and until 31 March 2002 for the larger project, have now been agreed – this process of negotiation was begun in March but has only been completed in the last few days.
- 1.4 Administration support will continue to be needed right up to completion of the projects. As the projects near completion the burden of administration work is increasing in complexity. The work at present is being carried out by a contracted person covering for the Farm & Countryside Service Administration Officer who is on maternity leave until 3 September 2001, supported by 2 contract Administration Assistants working a total of 3 days per week. One of the Assistants leaves in mid-August to take up a permanent post in Ranger Service.

1.5 The complex nature of the administration work is primarily because of the nature of the budgets of the projects. This requires involvement of the Head of Conservation as project manager but has largely been dealt with by the acting Administration Officer. It is vital that in the closing six months of the projects this work is done to a high standard, to reduce the burden on the Head of Conservation. It is therefore proposed that for the remaining periods of the projects the administration support arrangements are as follows.

(a) The present acting Administration Officer be offered a contract of 1 day per week, under the same terms and conditions of employment as at present, for the main task of administration and budget management of the projects. This would be with effect from 3 September 2001.

(b) Administration Assistant post (or posts) totalling 2 days per week, under the same terms and conditions of employment as at present.

In the first instance, discussions on the Administration Assistant work would be with the remaining current contract postholder but if that is not continued then the assistance would be filled in accordance with normal Authority recruitment procedures.

Financial Consideration

1.6 The full costs of the administration assistance arrangements including all overheads will continue to be met from the Objective 5b projects.

1.7 For the Administration Officer, experience of settling budgets with DEFRA has already shown that the time initially allocated has to be exceeded. This is likely to occur at times throughout the closing six months and would be covered by extra hours at single rate of pay, in agreement with the postholder. In addition, one of the Objective 5b projects uses the mechanism of DEFRA's Countryside Stewardship scheme for implementation. That scheme brings in separate income to Farm & Countryside Service in addition to the 5b funded work and that income can be available to cover any 'troughs' which might occur in the Objective 5b workload.

Human Rights aspects (including Equal Opportunities, Health & Safety)

1.8 There are no apparent human rights aspects.

Consultations

1.9 The Chief Finance Officer, Financial and Personnel Services Managers, UNISON representative and Chair of Staff Committee have been consulted on this report.

1.10 RECOMMENDATION:

That for the period 3 September 2001 to 31 March 2002 the administration assistance requirements within Farm & Countryside Service arising from the two Objective 5b projects are filled on the basis outlined in the report.

List of Background Papers (not previously published)

Nil