

5. UK NATIONAL PARKS COMMUNICATIONS FUNCTION – 3 YEAR HOSTING PROJECT (PM)

1. Purpose of the report:

To seek approval for the Authority to host the National Parks UK Communications function for three years.

Key Issues

- Following an expression of interest (see Appendix 1), the PDNPA has been awarded the three-year project to host the UK National Parks Comms Function. This project requires the recruitment of up to 3 new posts, support from HR, ICT and Finance for the Comms Function and an investment of time and resources by the Chief Executive over the project period (roughly equivalent to having an additional role to line manage).
- The development of the UK National Parks Comms Function is in response to a strategic review and the enhanced function is expected to provide an integrated communications service which meets the collective needs of all 15 UK National Park Authorities, National Parks England (NPE) and National Parks Partnership (NPP).
- The budget for the three-year project totals £585k or £195k fixed per year, funded by contributions from individual National Park Authorities of £8,000 per annum, together with contributions from National Parks England and National parks Partnerships. It provides comprehensive cost cover however, there is little contingency and the contribution towards overheads is unlikely to provide for the internal costs of the support services to the function and/or the time input provided from the Chief Executive. The resource the PDNPA is willing to put into hosting this function is based on our relatively large size and budget compared to other National Parks and the leadership we are prepared to show in making this new arrangement work for everyone.
- The PDNPA is well placed to host the UK Comms function, based on previous experience of hosting collaborative UK-wide projects for example, the award-winning National Parks Experiences Collection, Farming in Protected Landscapes programme and the 20+ year delivery of the Moors for the Future Partnership.
- Overall project details are still being discussed and the budget indicated in appendix one is still draft (not the total amount available but how it will be allocated between the contributing organisations). Timescales for deliverables are now later than stated in the Expression of Interest (EOI), as they were not realistic. There are risks associated with taking on this project, which will need to be diligently managed. However, on balance the PDNPA is proud and honoured to host this function and play our part in helping to make it deliver successfully for all the National Parks.

2. Recommendations:

- 1. To enter into Service Level Agreement(s) (SLAs) with (1) National Parks Partnership and (2) National Parks England and (3) National Park Authorities for terms of three years for a value of up to £585,000 to deliver the expected outcomes of National Parks UK Communications.**
- 2. That the terms of the SLAs are delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with Head of Finance and the Legal Team.**
- 3. To establish up to 3 posts (1 Director and up to two Officers – subject to budget details being agreed) to deliver the function.**
- 4. The Authority may, subject to compliance with its procurement standing**

orders, enter into contracts in order to deliver the outcomes of the SLAs.

3. How does this contribute to our policies and legal obligations?

This project doesn't directly contribute to the Authority Plan, but as a member of the family of national parks and being relatively longstanding and well resourced, the PDNPA is keen to step up and demonstrate leadership commitments by offering to host the UK Comms function for the benefit of all UK national parks. Indirectly, the project fits with the Enabling aim of the Authority Plan: The Authority is inspiring, pioneering and enabling in delivering the National Park Vision. There may be some performance advantage to the existing PDNPA communications team if close relationships, support and peer learning can take place. There may be some reputational advantage to the PDNPA if our hosting creates a more positive impression of the Authority or raises our profile with government or partners.

4. Background Information:

The National Parks UK Communications unit was formed in 2019 “to establish and embed a UK-wide National Parks brand identity and narrative” and to “develop and deliver UK National Parks engagement with the wider public across the UK, particularly through an improved website and online channels”. The unit was tasked to position the UK Parks “as one strong, impactful, collective voice at UK level, and part of the global family of National Parks”, encouraging UK citizens to feel that “all National Parks are relevant to them, and are a valuable part of the fabric of national life.”

In early 2023 a review was commissioned to provide a strategic and evidence-based assessment of the effectiveness of the unit since it began its work, identifying any constraints which might have inhibited delivery or impact over the past three years and to identify any new or emerging areas of work which have influenced the work of the unit beyond that originally envisaged. In particular, the review was asked to focus on the collective needs of UK NPAs, taking account of the communications work of NPE and NPP.

The review panel has concluded that the National Park UK communications unit, which currently consists of a Digital Officer, should evolve to provide a new integrated service covering UK communications, NPE and NPP needs.

The proposal is for a virtually based communications function supported by a steering group with representation from all three nations, NPE and NPP, with support for Finance, HR and IT provided by a UK National Park Authority, decided through a competitive Expression of Interest process.

5. Proposal:

PDNPA hosting project overview

The Authority will host the National Park UK Communications function for three years. The team, to be recruited, will consist of one Communications Director, and up to two Communications Officers. The anticipated grades of the posts are subject to job evaluation.

The PDNPA Chief Executive will have overall responsibility for the function, he is expected to provide day to day line managerial support to the Comms Director and be one of a panel of three CEOs monitoring overall role performance, with appointees from a Welsh and a Scottish National Park completing the panel.

With centrally located offices in the UK, the PDNPA is ideally placed to host internal and external meetings as required by the UK Comms Team and provide hotdesking facilities for the team to utilise as a hub outside of their virtual/home location base.

Anticipated changes to the PDNPA organisational structure should see HR, Finance and ICT moved into a new Resources service, led by a newly created Head of

Resources position. This service will provide support functions under the hosting contract which will be underpinned by, yet to be developed, Service Level Agreements (SLAs) that the Authority, as host for the UK Comms unit will have with the 15 UK Parks, NPP and NPE, that will be reviewed annually. The Chief Executive would therefore work closely with the Head of Resources to ensure successful hosting of the UK Comms function.

Anticipated contribution from internal support service teams:

HR

An HR advisor will be assigned to lead the function, provide the recruitment support to build the team, onboard new recruits and provide ongoing HR support including any implications triggered at the end of the project period.

Finance

The UK Comms team will be treated as a funded project, with budget ring fenced within the finance system. Contributions will be collected in advance annually with an expected commencement date of October 2023.

ICT

ICT support services will be available Monday to Friday (09:00 – 16:00) with the support ticket system featuring as a measurable component within the terms of the SLA. PDNPA standard provision for hardware and software will be extended to the UK Comms function and compliance with PDNPA ICT policies is expected. The function will retain control of its Personal Data however in the event of a breach under data protection legislation, the PDNPA would expect notification.

The timescales outlined to recruit the Director of Communications role was highlighted as unrealistic in the EOI. These have now been updated with the recruitment process running through summer and interviews of candidates expected in September. Once in post, it is envisaged that the Director of Communications will begin their tenure by preparing a three-year strategy for the function.

Purpose of NP UK Communications Function

The purpose of the function is to deliver high quality, high impact communications within the parameters of the annual work plan and SLAs. Specifically, a function:

- that manages common National Park brand assets – website, social media channels and which:
 - aggregates National Park key messaging and achievements across its channels; and
 - produces web and social media content for UK/global audiences, and the development of customisable assets to fulfil shared communications needs (for example, visitor messaging).
- capable of providing communications counsel, content, and collateral (on defined issues) which support advocacy activities undertaken by NPE.
- capable of providing communications counsel, support, channels access, and the co-curation and production of content for NPP programmes and developments.
- that acts as a central media handling point for enquiries on issues common to National Parks in the UK, delivering reactive and proactive media relations services and story/feature placement.
- that will commission and account manage specialist communications, marketing, and creative agencies.
- that provides opportunities for National Parks across the UK, NPE and NPP to participate in additional, bespoke funded campaigns and marketing activity.

- that provides opportunities to highlight and share best practice in professional communications; to support professional development and networking across the fifteen National Parks; to gather audience insights; and to accumulate and exploit UK level data in support of impact and efficiency.

Are there any corporate implications Members should be concerned about?

6. Financial:

The three-year project budget is £585k. This is fixed at £195k pa which accommodates annual pay awards (5% assumed) but does not allow for any redundancy costs which might occur at the end of the project. The SLAs shall address how this cost is shared between all 15 UK National Park Authorities, NPE and NPP (to be agreed).

Budget provision covers, cost of recruitment, staff salary costs, limited training provision, travel and subsistence for networking events, IT, mobile phone, some comms associated operating costs (does not include paid for social media, website upgrades, freelance specialists) plus an annual contribution to PDNPA overheads (circa £9k-10k).

Within project underspends will be carried forward to the following year with any overall project underspend being returned proportionally to the UK National Parks, NPE and NPP.

7. Risk Management:

It is acknowledged in the EOI that there are very few advantages for the Authority to host the NP UK Communication function, rather there are mainly additional workload implications and risks. In accepting this project, the PDNPA will be taking on additional organisational risks which have been fully detailed in the EOI under the categories of; financial, capacity, reputational and practical. These risks will be managed within the Authority Risk Management Framework. On balance we believe the PDNPA is well placed to host the UK Comms function and that this project will also provide advantages including demonstration of our leadership commitment to UK national parks family, cross fertilisation of ideas and working practices for our communications team, increased profile for the Authority with government, partners and the wider public.

8. Sustainability:

There are no sustainability issues to highlight in this report.

9. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

There are no equality issues to outline in this report.

10. Climate Change:

There are no climate change issues to highlight in this report.

11. Background papers (not previously published) - None

12. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Expression of Interest for hosting the UK National Parks Communications Function (submitted by PDNPA on 16th June 2023).

Report Author, Job Title and Publication Date

Phil Mulligan, Chief Executive Officer, 13 July 2023.