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## MINUTES

Meeting: **National Park Authority**

Date: Friday 28 July 2023 at 10.00 am

Venue: Aldern House, Baslow Road, Bakewell

Chair: Mr K Smith

Present: Mr J W Berresford, Cllr M Beer, Cllr P Brady, Cllr M Chaplin, Cllr N Gourlay, Cllr A Gregory, Prof J Haddock-Fraser, Cllr B Hanley, Ms A Harling, Cllr L Hartshorne, Cllr Mrs G Heath, Cllr I Huddleston, Cllr D Murphy, Cllr A Nash, Cllr V Priestley, Cllr K Richardson, Miss L Slack, Dr R Swetnam, Mr S Thompson, Cllr J Wharmby and Ms Y Witter

Apologies for absence: Cllr M Buckler, Cllr C Farrell, Cllr C Greaves, Cllr A Hart, Cllr Mrs K Potter and Cllr B Woods.

**63/23 ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS PRESENT, APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest from Members.

**64/23 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS HELD ON 28 APRIL AND 19 MAY 2023**

The minutes of the last National Park Authority Meetings held on the 28<sup>th</sup> April and 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment to minute number 31/23 from the 28<sup>th</sup> April:

Where, in the second bullet point, it reads Michael Dover, it should read Michael Dower.

**65/23 URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

**66/23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

No members of the public were present to make representations to the Meeting.

**67/23 CHAIR'S REPORT**

The Chair of the Authority provided the following verbal update to Members:

He had attended and spoken at the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Environmental Quality Mark. He had joined other Members in attending Andrew McCloy's leaving party.

He had met with the Chief Executive of the Derbyshire Dales District Council and they had discussed several topics, including:

- Local needs housing
- Visitor centres, especially Bakewell Visitor Centre
- The need for strong partnership between the PDNPA and its constituent authorities
- DDDC had provided data on second home ownership across the Derbyshire Dales, which was being shared with the Policy team at the Authority
- The single funding grant figure for housing providers, which is the same across the country regardless of the cost of provision

The Chair had also been to Edale to attend the funeral of Gordon Miller, a long-standing, influential, and much loved Peak District Ranger.

He also reminded Members that they should have received a copy of the newsletter that goes out to constituent MP's.

The Chair had also received the annual letter from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman reviewing the complaints they'd received during 2022-23 which said that 2 complaints had been received and neither were upheld. The letter will be reported to the Authority meeting in September.

He finished by saying he'd had lots of invitations to attend meetings, notably from National Parks England and National Parks Partnership.

**Cllr Gregory entered the meeting at 10:07**

#### **68/23 CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT (PM)**

The Chief Executive's report gave an update to Members on recent meetings with stakeholders, partners and other organisations.

Members questioned if the Authority is looking to replace the database in regards to the Core IT systems maintenance and delivery section on the Risk Register. The CEO confirmed that this was the case, and that they were looking at ways to design out the need for this current system which they are struggling to recruit for, due to it requiring a very specific skillset to manage.

**RESOLVED:**

**To note the report.**

#### **69/23 INTERNAL AUDIT 2023/24 ANNUAL PLAN**

Ian Morton, the Internal Auditor, introduced the report and explained the purpose of the Internal Audit Plan. The Internal Auditor stated that the Items proposed for the 2023/24 Plan and the plan itself were still subject to changes which would be agreed with officers, and notification of any proposed changes would be brought to Authority Meetings.

Members asked the Internal Auditor to confirm whether the monitoring of enforcement was for breaches of planning conditions or of planning law more generally, to which Mr Morton confirmed they will be monitoring both conditions and all other breaches of planning approval.

Members were assured that due to the size of the organisation, compared to other larger ones the Auditors are used to dealing with, the allotted time for completing the Audit is reasonable. The Internal Auditor also confirmed that the monitoring of vehicles carbon emissions is something that can be discussed with officers.

There were concerns about the audit of performance management, which relates to the delivery against the Management Plan, and whether the expected audit date of September is too soon. This was considering guidance that the Authority were expecting from DEFRA which impacts the Management Plan but that had been delayed and there was no due date yet for it. The Internal Auditor confirmed that they mostly look at how the Authority collects and monitors performance management data so the lack of the DEFRA guidance might not affect the audit too significantly.

Members wanted to make sure that the Audit definitely links back to the delivery of the Management Plan and the objectives that the Authority has set.

The recommendation as set out in the report was moved, seconded, voted on and carried.

The Chair offered his thanks to the diligence, in both professional and personal terms, that Ian Morton had applied as the Authority's internal auditor and wished him well for the future as he was retiring.

**RESOLVED:**

**To approve the 2023/24 Internal Audit Plan as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.**

**70/23 FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2022/23**

The Head of Finance presented the report and briefly explained the appendices and the different financial reserves to Members.

It should be noted that on page 31 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> bullet point, the figure should read £735k, instead of £735.

Officers gave the following responses to Member questions/comments:

- The majority of underspend comes from vacancies and recruitment issues and the lack of activities which aren't being carried out and subsequent underspend of resources because positions aren't filled. It is, however, better to be in an underspend situation than a deficit situation. These reserves should be used on an 'invest to operate' basis to improve efficiencies. A plan for this will be brought to Members when it's ready.
- The renaming of reserves is about defining a clear purpose for the reserve as beforehand it was unclear.
- The post-covid working reserve is set aside for the restructuring of teams around the offices as a result of covid, as well as for additional occupational health and safety requirements and helping to tackle mental health problems caused to staff by the pandemic. Officers said that it would be reviewed.
- The significant challenges which limit external auditors from completing Local Authority audits in a timely manner are to do with recruitment and staffing changes. It's currently being looked at by central government but at the moment, only around 27% of audits are signed off.
- Although visitor centres look like they're generating considerable profit, the costs to operate them outweigh the profits that they bring in. Consultations will look at

how to provide the visitor service to more people than what the centres currently reach.

Members were very concerned about the job vacancy issues which were widespread across the organisation. Officers were similarly concerned and had plans in place, as well as the organisational change proposals, to tackle this issue. Members welcomed the Chief Executive's approach towards solving the big issues around recruitment and retention.

Members found the accounts difficult to understand. It was suggested that activities that have significant income and significant costs should be broken down further in the report to make it more clear where issues lie.

The Head of Finance confirmed that a new financial system was coming soon which would be easier to understand and there would be a Member's workshop arranged then to help everyone get up to speed with it.

A motion to approved the recommendations was moved and seconded, voted on and carried.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. To note the outturn position and variance analysis for 2022/23 as shown in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report.**
- 2. To approve specific reserve appropriations of £1.7m as shown in Appendix 3 of the report.**

**71/23 REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES - EAST MIDLANDS COUNCIL AGM (JB)**

There was one Outside Body report submitted by the Deputy Chair of the Authority, who had attended the East Midlands Council Annual General Meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> July. The meeting discussed regional priorities including rail improvements, climate change challenges and central government funding.

The Deputy Chair encouraged Members to report back from their Outside Body appointments, a comment which was endorsed by the Chair of the Authority.

The Deputy Chair also added that the emerging combined authority of the East Midlands Council would make the Peak District National Park the principal rural asset in the East Midlands Councils and that Members should be mindful of this in regards to funding for planning, transport and other issues.

**RESOLVED:**

**To note the report.**

**72/23 EXEMPT INFORMATION S100(A) LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

**RESOLVED:**

**To exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of agenda items 11 & 12 to avoid disclosure of Exempt Information under S100 (A) (4) Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A paragraph 3 "information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the Authority holding that information).**

**73/23 EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE MEETINGS HELD ON 28 APRIL AND 19 MAY 2023**

The exempt minutes of the National Park Authority Meetings held on the 28<sup>th</sup> April and 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023 were approved as a correct record.

Summary:

The following Item was considered in Part B of the meeting.

74/23 – Organisational Change Proposal