

## YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

31 January 2006

NPA Performance Assessment – Improvement PlanPurpose of report

To seek Member approval for the implementation of the improvements identified through the National Park Authority Performance Assessment (NPAPA) process.

Strategic Planning Framework

The information and recommendation(s) contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:

- ***Best Value Performance Plan***

Our aims

The National Park Authority is a forward-thinking, focused and influential organisation, which provides its staff, Members and volunteers with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to make the most effective use of its resources to:

- Deliver clear aims and objectives;
- Provide high standards of service;
- Give the public a sound understanding of our work;
- Meet public expectations; and,
- Continuously review and improve its performance.

Actions 2005/06

Implement the provisions of the National Park Authority Performance Assessment regime.

Background

Members will recall that 'Improvement Planning' is the third stage of the NPAPA process. The first stage – the Authority's own self-assessment - was considered and approved in September 2005. The second stage was the Peer Review Team's assessment, which was reported, and accepted by the Authority in November 2005.

Overall, the Peer Review Team supported much of the Authority's own assessment, concluding that:

*The Team's impression was of an Authority with well-regarded, confident and able staff, who are comfortable working in partnership and who have a good record of achievement. It is an Authority committed to delivering its purposes and duties,*

*and stays focused on what it considers to be the right approach for the area. It is keen to explore new and challenging ways of working, adding value through collaborative working with others. The Authority has committed Members who could contribute significantly more with a widened governance role.*

Following receipt of that report, Members asked that a report on the draft Improvement Plan be brought to the January meeting of the Authority for consideration and adoption.

### **Improvement Plan process**

An initial outline Improvement Plan was prepared as part of the self-assessment, and approved by the Authority at its September meeting. Since then the Improvement Plan has been through a number of development stages:

1. The Peer Review Team made 18 recommendations for improvement. While many of these were in line with the Authority's own assessment, the Team also made a number of additional recommendations, which need to be incorporated into the Improvement Plan.
2. All the Members and officers from the KloE groups met for a final time at the start of December to consider the content of the various strands of the draft Improvement Plan.

Following the meeting of the KloE groups, a first draft of a more detailed Improvement Plan was produced and circulated to all Members and staff on 19 December. Since then, the draft has been discussed and considered in a number of different forums:

- meetings of each Department.
- a meeting between the Audit Commission and the Members who were represented on the KloE groups
- Policy Development Forum on 19 January, which looked specifically at the planning issues covered by the Plan

In the light of these meetings, and comments received from individual Members and staff, a revised Improvement Plan has now been prepared. A copy is attached as an **Annex** to this report.

### **The Improvement Plan**

All the recommendations, and proposed actions to implement them, have been grouped into six broad categories.

The vast majority of the recommendations, and many of the actions, set out in the Plan should come as little surprise to Members. Most were identified in our self-assessment. In a number of cases, action has already taken place or a clear plan of future action has already been approved by the Authority. **These are shown in italics.**

However, the Peer Review Team made a number of additional recommendations, the most significant of which relate to the need to strengthen the Authority's organisational capacity through:

- Improving Member engagement on wider governance and leadership of the Authority;
- Creating Member capacity by freeing up some of the resources currently devoted to development control issues

The Improvement Plan contains initial proposals for tackling both of these issues, as well as the other high-level 'outcomes'. However, it is self-evident that the issues raised can only be resolved through more detailed consideration than has been possible in the limited time since the Peer Assessment. Given the significant amount of resources and Member and officer time that will need to go into effective implementation of the Improvement Plan, it is essential that the Authority commit itself now, at least in principle, to the implementation of the recommendations.

Subject to this agreement, the second stage will be to identify timescales and lead responsibility for implementation of each action. It is clear that many of the issues to be resolved will require the direct involvement of Members, either individually or through the establishment of task and finish groups. It is intended that proposals will be brought forward for Members' consideration at the March Authority meeting. This will allow them to be incorporated into the BVPP Action Plan for 2006/07.

However, there is one area that will not wait until March. Discussions at the Policy Development Forum emphasised the importance that Members attach to the Development Control service, and the need to make early improvements in performance. The proposals in the Improvement Plan relating to the size and operation of the Planning Committee are also fundamental in determining the capacity of the Authority to respond to, and implement, the other recommendations. The Planning Committee has already established a 'Planning Performance Working Group' to look at how the Authority might best implement a number of the issues raised in the Improvement Plan. It is, therefore, proposed that this group be tasked by the Authority to continue this work and take forward recommendations 11-13, including making recommendations to the Authority on what the most appropriate arrangements would be for operating a smaller planning committee. This will allow the various matters raised at the Policy Development Forum meeting to be addressed.

## **Conclusions**

The Authority has been through a well-managed and structured process to deal with the considerable demands of NPAPA, leading up to the production of the Improvement Plan. The Plan itself has been the subject of wide consultation both internally (with staff and Members) and externally (with the Audit Commission).

The challenge now is to drive through the improvements and build on the Authority's many strengths. It is important that Members set a clear direction of travel at this stage so that a robust implementation timetable can be developed (and resources allocated) for inclusion in the Best Value Performance Plan for 2006/07.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That Members:

- a) approve, in principle, the package of recommendations and actions set out in the Improvement Plan;
- b) confirm their belief that there are advantages to the suggestion made by the Peer Review Team to reduce the size of the Planning Committee;
- c) extend the remit of the Planning Performance Working Group to take forward recommendations 11-13 of the Improvement Plan, and report back to the Authority with recommendations on what the most appropriate arrangements would be for operating a smaller Planning Committee;
- d) ask that a report setting out proposals for the way in which Members will be involved in the implementation of the other recommendations and actions be brought to the March meeting of the Authority for consideration and adoption.

David Butterworth  
Chief Executive

24 January 2006