

**YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUDIT & REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**17<sup>th</sup> March 2006**

**REPORT OF THE CORPORATE GOVERNANCE WORKING GROUP**

The Corporate Governance Working Group met on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

Members present: Yvonne Peacock, John Blackie, Shelagh Marshall, Malcolm Petyt and Yvonne Rose.

Officers present: David Butterworth and Richard Daly

Election of Chair

Yvonne Peacock was elected as Chair of the Working Group.

Terms of Reference

The Audit & Review Committee asked the Working Group to consider what its precise terms of reference should be, and to put forward suggested terms of reference for the Committee's approval. The suggested terms of reference of the Working Group are attached as an Appendix to this report.

Approach to the Task

The Working Group will operate on the basis of focussed meetings of around two hours. Each meeting will look at one of the Core Principles from the "Good Governance Standard for Public Services", examining how the Principle applies in the context of the YDNPA, and what issues arise from it. The Group will do this by looking at the chart prepared by Richard Daly which compares YDNPA practice against the principles, together with the assessment questions suggested by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services in Appendices A and B of their paper. Other "cross cutting" issues such as corporate social responsibility will be taken into account where relevant. Some of the resulting issues will be ones for the Working Group, others will need to be referred to the Audit & Review Committee, or other appropriate persons or bodies within the Authority. Pursuing this approach, the Working Group looked at Principle 1 at this meeting (see below).

At the start of each future meeting, the Group will look back at the issues arising from its last meeting, and how they have been or might be taken forward.

The Working Group will also look at other specific issues, as may be appropriate from time to time.

The Working Group will produce reports of its meetings, which will be presented to the next meeting of the Audit and Review Committee.

The next meeting of the Working Group will be at 1pm on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> March 2006, at Yoredale.

## Principle 1

Principle 1 is that good governance means focussing on the organisation's purpose, and on outcomes for citizens and service users.

**Question 1:** *How clear are we about what we are trying to achieve as an organisation? Do we always have this at the front of our minds when we are planning, or taking decisions? How well are we doing in achieving our intended outcomes?*

Committee reports explicitly address the question of the consistency of the proposals or information in the report with the Authority's strategic planning framework. However, this is not the case in reports to the Planning Committee about development control issues. The Planning Performance Working Group will be looking at how reports to the Planning Committee can be more explicit about the policy context, and how it applies to the matter in hand.

The Authority has adopted a rigorous, and well recognised, process to get clarity about what it is doing. This is based on the statutory purposes, but goes much further, including processes to identify which partnerships the NPA should (and should not) be involved with, and what priorities are assigned to the various programmes. When this is combined with the extensive amount of external verification to which the Authority is subject (NPAPA, external audit, internal audit, IIP), there is a good story to tell about the Authority's own clarity about its objectives.

The Appendix B questions address this issue from the point of view of how clear members of the public can readily be about what the Authority is seeking to achieve. It was noted that the Authority's new website has recently been launched, and Yvonne Rose volunteered to approach this with an outsider's eye, to see how easy it was to find key information about the Authority, and what it is seeking to achieve, how much it spends and on what, etc.

**Question 2:** *To what extent does the information that we have about the quality of service for users help us to make rigorous decisions about improving quality? Do we receive regular and comprehensive information on users' views of quality? How could this information be improved? How effectively do we use this information when we are planning and taking decisions?*

Extensive work is done both internally (staff survey, survey of particular services such as finance, personnel, IT, legal) and externally (visitors' survey, residents' survey) to ascertain views about service quality. This throws up some interesting issues, which are referred to members. The information we have is generally referred to, when relevant, when decisions are being considered.

However, there is scope for the Authority to use other approaches, in particular to explore whether it could key into consultation exercises run by other public bodies locally – eg citizens' juries. Also, there is scope to see whether the website could be developed to explore users' views.

The Appendix B questions raise the issue of clarity of communications, and the Authority's performance in that regard is patchy. There is scope for improved clarity / plain English in communications to the public, and in other information to which the public have access. We also need to try to help the public understand the Authority's improvement agenda, and the rationale for it. This includes why our performance may drop in some (non priority) areas, or we may stop doing some things altogether.

**Question 3:** *To what extent does the information that we have on costs and performance help us to make rigorous decisions about improving value for money? How effectively do we use this information when we are planning and taking decisions? How well do we understand how the value we provide compares with that of similar organisations?*

The Authority has a good story to tell on the first two questions – as is exemplified, for example, by the decision making about TICs, and the outcome of that process at Clapham, Sedbergh and Reeth. That is not to say that the story is in fact told effectively – improvements could be made in improving the clarity of explanation to the public about the rationale for decisions. The External Affairs Department could look at improving the Authority's performance in that area.

We are not strong currently in the area of comparison with other organisations. The outcome of NPAPA nationally will help with this. However, we ought to look at other measures too, such as how we compare with other NPAs on relevant BVPI indicators. Often, comparisons with other NPAs are hampered by the fact that different NPAs collect different data, or hold it in ways that do not allow for direct comparison. The Audit Commission may be able to do something to change that.

We should also look to compare ourselves with other organisations in the environmental field, eg the National Trust, English Heritage, English Nature.

The NPAPA peer review report states a need for the Authority to develop an asset management strategy and a procurement strategy. These issues should be picked up in the Improvement Plan. Any Procurement Strategy should take account of "green" issues, corporate social responsibility, and the impact the Authority can have on the sustainability of local communities.

#### Role of the Standards Committee

This needs looking at quite urgently. Although a change in the role and profile of the Standards Committee is prefigured in the ODPM paper of December 2005, that change may take some time, and meanwhile we have a situation where it is not clear what the terms of reference of the Standards Committee are, but the document which should describe them omits certain key functions.

The Working Group decided that the Standards Committee should be asked to consider this matter at its next meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, and to put positive proposals forward which CGWG could consider on 17<sup>th</sup> March, prior to their submission to the Authority at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> March.

Yvonne Peacock

25<sup>th</sup> January 2006



**Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority**

**Audit & Review Committee**

**Working Group on Corporate Governance**

**Terms of Reference**

The Working Group was established on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2005 by the Audit & Review Committee, with the following membership: John Blackie, Shelagh Marshall, Yvonne Peacock, Malcolm Petyt and Yvonne Rose. Precise terms of reference were to be drafted, these to be approved by Audit & Review Committee.

The Audit & Review Committee agreed that the “Good Governance Standard for Public Services”, published by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services, would be an appropriate framework for the Authority’s corporate governance arrangements.

The proposed terms of reference of the Working Group are as follows:

1. To assist the Audit and Review Committee to discharge its responsibilities in relation to the corporate governance of the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority by:
  - a) Identifying any gaps in current arrangements for corporate governance;
  - b) Examining the appropriateness of policies and procedures which do exist and are relevant to corporate governance, and proposing changes where necessary;
  - c) Considering the structure of, and roles within, the Authority’s corporate governance arrangements, including the roles of Authority members;
  - d) In the light of the above, developing a corporate governance policy for the Authority and making recommendations to the Committee on these matters.
2. If thought appropriate following the above work, to offer advice to the Standards Committee in relation to any issues which fall within its terms of reference and are relevant to the corporate governance of the Authority.

In considering these matters, the Working Group will have regard to national initiatives and developments in relation to public sector governance and standards, as well as to the Authority’s particular circumstances, including in particular the outcomes of the National Park Authorities Performance Assessment process. The Group will work collaboratively with officers, in a spirit of partnership, to develop excellent governance arrangements for the Authority.

The Working Group aims to have completed its task by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006, though an extension beyond that time may be agreed by the Audit & Review Committee if necessary.