

Date: 29 May 2007

Report: MEMBERSHIP CHANGES TO COMMITTEES

Purpose of the report

1. For members to consider the options for reducing the size of the Authority's committees for changes to take effect from 1 August 2007.

Background

2. At the Authority meeting on 30 January 2007 Members considered a paper entitled 'Preparing for Changes to the Authority's Membership'. This paper dealt with issues arising from the reduction in the Authority's membership from 26 to 22. This took effect on 8 May 2007.

3. After consideration of the paper Members resolved, amongst other recommendations, that:-

A paper on future proposals for the size of the Authority's Committees is brought to the Authority meeting in May 2007.

4. One of the reasons for considering these matters at today's meeting is so that the necessary committee nominations can be made by the 4 'groups' before the AGM takes place in July.
5. Clearly, the reduction in the size of the Authority's membership does necessitate a re-examination of Committee membership. However, the issue has also recently become more urgent with what has now emerged as the potential impact on the Authority's 'champions' initiative. This has a particular resonance for the size of the planning committee.

The Authority's Committees

Finance & Resources/Audit & Review Committees

6. The Authority currently has in place a policy whereby members are on one of these two committees but not both. This is seen as good practice in that members who are determining budgets and programmes are then not part of the group that is auditing and scrutinising the performance of the Authority.

Options

Option 1

7. If the above principle is to be retained then the most obvious solution is to reduce the size of the Finance & Resources and Audit & Review Committees from 13 members down to 11. Each member of the National Park Authority would continue to have membership of one or other of these two committees. The benefit is that all members would continue to be directly involved in the `programme' or `scrutiny' function of the Authority.

Option 2

8. However, there is no reason why these committees cannot be smaller if that is members' wish. This can be any number greater than 2 though for practical reasons it should be at least 7.

Standards Committee

Option 1

9. Retain the status quo. Currently there are 3 members drawn from the District/County group; 2 from the Secretary of State/Parish group; and 2 Independent members.

Option 2

10. The Committee could be reduced in size comprising 2 District/County members; 1 Secretary of State/Parish member; 2 Independent members to reflect their representation on the Authority.

Option 3

11. The Committee could be increased in size to 10 comprising 4 District/County members; 3 Secretary of State/Parish members; and 3 Independent members.

Access Committee

Option 1

12. Retain the status quo of 8 members, who are drawn from the 4 groups in equal number.

Option 2

13. Reduce the size of the Committee to 7, comprising 2 District, 2 County, 2 Secretary of State and 1 Parish to reflect their representation on the Authority.

Option 3

14. Reduce the size of the Committee below 7. However, it is felt this would make the responsibilities and duties of this Committee extremely difficult to carry out.

Option 4

15. Increase the size of the Committee. This could be on the same proportion as at present so that a committee of 12 members were established – (3 from each group) or 11 (reducing the parish group to 2).

Planning Committee

16. It is the Planning Committee that is the most contentious when determining its membership. At present the membership is 15 made up of 4 District, County and Secretary of State members and 3 Parish members.
17. At the Authority meeting on 30 May 2006 members considered the arrangements for the new Planning Committee. Among the recommendations was that review of the operation of the Planning Committee would be considered in July 2008. Although not specifically stated it is believed that these arrangements would have included consideration of the size of the Planning Committee. However, Members have now resolved to examine the question of the size of the membership earlier than 2008 (along with all the other committee memberships) in response to issues arising from the 'champions initiative'.
18. A fundamental difficulty is, because the Authority's total membership has reduced from 26 to 22, if the Planning Committee membership remains at 15, only 7 Members are eligible to become champions. This considerably reduces the 'field'. It should also be recognised that some Members wish neither to be on the Planning Committee nor serve as 'champions' reducing the field still further.
19. A review of the first year's experience of the champions' initiative will be considered at the AGM in July. A fundamental principle regarding the introduction and development of this initiative was contained in the National Park Authority Performance Assessment (NPAPA) Review of 2005 which concluded that more member time should be spent on the overall responsibilities of the Authority and less on development control. Members accepted this recommendation and indeed put it into effect when they reduced the Planning Committee from 26 to 15 during August 2006. The difficulty now is the other recommendation (in NPAPA). That being that in order to release member time they should not serve as members of the Planning Committee and be champions, at the same time.

Option 1

20. Retain the status quo with the membership of the Planning Committee remaining at 15.

Option 2

21. Increase the size of the Planning Committee back up to the full membership of the Authority at 22 and abandon the 'champions initiative'.

Option 3

22. Reduce the size of the Committee to 13 and, rather than recognising 4 groups, recognise 2. Those being 7 members selected from the District/County group and 6 from the Secretary of State/Parish group.

Option 4

23. Reduce the size of the Committee to 11 and appoint in the same proportion as at present. This would mean 3 members appointed from each of the District, County and Secretary of State group and 2 from the Parish Group. This would retain 11 members (the same as at present) who could be considered for the role of member champions.

Conclusion

24. Most of the reductions on the size of the Authority's committees, as a result of the overall reduction in the size of the Authority, should be quite straight forward to implement without any appreciable difference to the performance of those committees. However, the Planning Committee is a special case. The hybrid nature of the Authority (part local government/part quango) with a particular responsibility for an area of public policy (development control) that is ordinarily left with elected Authorities means Members need to give careful consideration to the arrangements for the Planning Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

25. Members' views on the options above are sought.

David Butterworth
Chief Executive

14 May 2007

Background documents:

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act - 2006

National Park Authority Performance Assessment (NPAPA) Review - 2005