Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority **Item 9**

16 December 2025

Recruitment of Chief Executive

Purpose of the Report

1. To outline the proposed process for the recruitment of a Chief Executive, agree the associated budget and establish a Recruitment Committee.

Recommendations

2. That Members:

   i. Agree the proposed process for the appointment of a new Chief Executive (National Park Officer) as outlined in this report;
   ii. Agree a budget provision of up to £30,000, funded from salary savings in the current year – 2025-26; and
   iii. Agree the establishment and membership of a Recruitment Committee and agree to delegate the ability to confirm the appointment of the new Chief Executive (National Park Officer) to this Committee;

Strategic Framework

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

   - Corporate Plan Objective 30: Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose, as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance report.

Background

4. The current Chief Executive, David Butterworth, will retire on 31 March 2026 after over 25 years in the role, and more than 34 with the National Park Authority.

5. Under the terms of the Environment Act 1995 ("Act") which established the Authority as a special purpose local authority, it is a requirement upon the Authority to appoint a National Park Officer, now more commonly referred to as Chief Executive. The Chief Executive also incorporates the statutory function of the Head of Paid Service.

6. The Scheme of Delegation provides that the appointment of a Chief Executive must be approved by the Authority.

Recruitment Process

7. Given the significance of the appointment and the time elapsed since the last recruitment, the Authority has engaged an executive search agency following a competitive tender process. Gatenby Sanderson have been engaged to assist in the recruitment and selection process to attract the best candidates for the role.

8. The choice of recruitment agency was confirmed following a procurement exercise involving four companies. The quotation from Gatenby Sanderson was the second lowest obtained and demonstrated the strongest proposal in addition to experience of working with other National Park Authorities.

9. Gatenby Sanderson will provide assistance with the role profile and pre recruitment process, advertise the role, conduct an executive search and candidate profiling, carry out the longlisting process, assist with the shortlisting selection process, provide due diligence in checking applications and seek references.

10. As part of preparation of the CEO recruitment pack, key stakeholders will be consulted for their views. Members and staff will also be involved in the process.

11. It is expected that shortlisted candidates will undergo a rigorous selection process, consisting of formal interviews and presentations. While selecting the right candidate is clearly critical for the Authority, the candidate needs to see enough of the Authority, and its work, to ensure that we are the right choice for them as well. Advice on how to incorporate all this properly and fairly into the selection process will be sought from Gatenby Sanderson.

12. HR advice will be provided by the Head of HR and legal and procedural advice provided by the Director of Corporate Services. Administrative support will be provided by the Chief Executive's Executive Assistants, and the Communications Team will also be involved.

Recruitment Committee

13. Following discussion with the Chair, it is proposed that the Authority delegates the task of recruitment and appointment to a Committee which will, as part of its work, ensure there is provision for Members to meet the candidates shortlisted and give feedback to the process.

14. In order to achieve a good balance and knowledge of the Authority's work, it is proposed that membership comprises:

    - Chair and Deputy of the Authority;
    - Chairs of Finance and Resources, Audit and Review and Planning Committees;

- The former recent Chair of the Authority and Chair of National Parks England, Neil Heseltine, who also still has roles with National Parks Partnerships

Recruitment Timetable

15. A timeline for the recruitment process had not been finalised at the time of Authority papers going to print and will be shared with Members at the meeting. This will include advertising the role in early January, a longlist meeting, preliminary interviews by Gatenby Sanderson, a shortlist meeting with the Recruitment Committee, assessments, final interviews and appointment.

16. The interview process will be undertaken in stages and should enable Members and staff to assess potential candidates and pass their comments to the Recruitment Committee. We are also considering how to allow partners an opportunity to usefully take part in the process.

17. The desired outcome of a multi layered selection process is to assess the candidates ability to adapt to different audiences in various settings. All parties involved will have the opportunity to comment ensuring the Recruitment Committee receive wide feedback from all involved.

18. The Recruitment Committee will meet to discuss the interviews and comments made by those involved. They will assess the shortlisted candidates and select the best candidate for appointment.

19. The Chief Executive (NPO) post is one of three statutory posts that the Authority must have in place (the others being the Monitoring Officer and s151 Officer). It is anticipated that there may be a gap between Mr Butterworth leaving and a new Chief Executive (NPO) starting in role. The Deputy Chief Executive will ‘act up’ during this period, and that may well require additional support for him to carry out this function.

Financial Implications

20. It is recommended that a budget provision of up to £30,000 be allocated to this process. This should cover Gatenby Sanderson’s core fee, advertising costs, candidate assessments and expenses. This can be funded from savings on staff vacancies in the current year.

Legal Implications

21. The legal considerations associated with the recruitment and appointment of a Chief Executive are set out in the body of the report.

22. In addition, when appointing a suitable candidate, the Authority must have regard to the provisions of section 116 of the Local Government Act 1972 which states that: “A person shall, so long as he is, and for twelve months after he ceases to be, a member of a local

authority in England, be disqualified for being appointed … by that authority to any paid office."

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Implications

23. The recruitment process for the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) will promote equality, diversity and inclusion and will be aligned with the Authority's values and behaviours.

24. This will include ensuring all recruitment materials and platforms are fully accessible and actively targeting underrepresented groups through advertising channels and partnerships.

Consultation

25. The Act also states that before making or adopting an appointment, a National Park Authority shall consult with Natural England. Discussions with Natural England have already taken place on their role in the recruitment process.

Risk Management

26. The following risks in the recruitment process have been identified:

	Risk description	**Consequence**	**Counter measures planned**	**Risk level: Likelihood x Impact**
1	Non appointment	Deputy CEO would continue to 'act up' or an interim appointment may be made	Appointment of specialist executive search agency	Low x Low = Manageable
2	Chosen candidate rejects employment offer	The Authority would reselect from other shortlisted candidates	Attractive package benchmarked against the current market to ensure the Authority's offer is competitive	Low x Low = Manageable

Conclusion

27. As well as being a statutory requirement, the successful appointment of a Chief Executive is essential to provide leadership for officers, manage the effective delivery

of services and ensure that the Authority achieves its strategic, policy and management objectives.

28. The recruitment process outlined in this report aims to provide a thorough and transparent approach that balances effective engagement with Members, officers and partners against the need to make a successful appointment within a reasonable timeframe.

Clare Burrows
Director of Corporate Services

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