

**YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

ITEM 2

Minutes of the meeting held at Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Offices, Yoredale, Bainbridge, Leyburn DL8 3EL, on Tuesday, 8 February 2022.

Members Present:

Nick Cotton, Richard Foster, Kevin Frea, Neil Heseltine, Julie Hutton, Carl Lis, Ian McPherson, Karin Sedgwick, Neil Swain and Derek Twine (in the Chair).

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

01/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from John Amsden, Stuart Parsons and Gillian Quinn.

02/22 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2021, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record, with a correction to the spelling of the word “Westmorland”.

03/22 PUBLIC QUESTIONS / STATEMENTS

No public questions or statements had been received.

04/22 DECLARATIONS OF LOBBYING

There were no declarations of lobbying.

05/22 DRAFT BUDGET 2022/23

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Head of Finance and Resources and the Director of Corporate Services / Treasurer.

Discussion included the following:

- Members welcomed the ambition in the proposed budget for 2022/23;
- Members supported the use of reserves in 2022/23 to balance what would otherwise be a significant deficit, in order to deliver the depth and breadth of programmes for the coming year, even though this would deplete the reserves available to help balance future deficits. A number of factors had reduced the need to draw as much upon the reserves during this current year;
- the likely financial challenges from 2023/24 may make delivery of longer term plans unaffordable if significant additional external income (including cover of staffing and other central costs) is not received. A number of “known unknowns” could create

both opportunities and challenges for the Authority (for example, the detail and potential impact of schemes such as Environmental Land Management (ELMs), the Landscapes Review; government priorities and spending including the level of core grant funding; the extent to which private finance initiatives will generate funds and where these will be targeted; inflation; national pay awards etc.). Receipt of DEFRA's core grant settlement letter will provide the first important piece of missing information – a flat settlement is anticipated. A clearer picture should emerge by October / November 2022, which will inform preparation of the following year's budget; and

- the Government's response to the Landscapes Review had indicated that funding for Local Nature Recovery Schemes may be paid to county councils rather than protected landscape organisations – the Authority will liaise with relevant organisations.

In response to Members' questions,

- the Director of Corporate Services confirmed that external grant funding often does not cover central costs (staffing and other overheads), hence reserves are currently used to cover some of these. A large expansion in the work of a programme (for example, Trees and Woodlands), may require additional staff to deliver the programme. Using reserves to cover these costs is unsustainable in the long term;
- the Chief Executive advised that the Authority is becoming more selective in entering into future funding agreements which do not include central costs and is pressing for these to be included where possible;
- the Director of Corporate Services agreed that the ratio of salary costs to gross income is significant (and even more so, the ratio of salary costs to core grant). The future affordability of staffing costs will be a key factor going forward;
- the Director of Park Services advised that there are no current plans to start charging to use the toilets at Grassington in 2022/23. The parking charges for the car-park are going up by 20p from April, which will cover this lost revenue; and
- the Chief Executive confirmed that the expenses budget is not expected to increase significantly as more members of staff return to the offices, given the introduction of blended working and the use of Teams.

RESOLVED – to APPROVE the draft budget for 2022/23 and indicative budgets for 2023/24 and 2024/25 and the Reserves Strategy for submission to the full Authority for final approval.

06/22 PROCUREMENT STRATEGY

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED -

- a) to APPROVE the updated Procurement Strategy; and
- b) to delegate authority to the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Procurement Strategy when new procurement legislation comes into effect.

07/22 FINANCE PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Head of Finance.

In response to Members' queries:

- the Head of Finance advised that repairs were being undertaken to a leaking roof at the Authority's offices at Yoredale, which it was hoped would avert the need for more expensive action; and
- the Director of Park Services confirmed that there is a rolling programme of refurbishment of public toilets; planned upgrades will make the toilets easier to maintain on a day to day basis; and whilst the upkeep of the surfaces of the car-parks is covered by a regular budget, there may be an additional budget requirement because of wear and tear caused by recent high volumes of visitors.

The Committee NOTED the report.

08/22 INCOME GENERATION STRATEGY – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Director of Conservation and Community, who advised the Committee that contractual negotiations were still continuing between Palladium and National Parks England.

Discussion included the following:

- Revere has a series of ethical criteria which companies have to meet (for example to demonstrate their commitment to achieving net zero outside of the initiative), to address concerns over potential "greenwashing";
- although some caution was expressed about the use of private finance to pay for environmental work, others were of the view that it will be essential if climate and nature emergencies are to be tackled at speed and scale;
- some of the 'pipeline' projects mentioned in the paper may be made possible by private finance initiatives;
- although Members highly commended the work carried out to the riverside pathway at Devil's Bridge, Kirkby Lonsdale, officers indicated that the Authority was not the best-placed organisation to lead on the restoration work to the far longer section of riverside path which would require engineering and technical experience in large projects; and
- individual Members with interest and ideas in specific projects in the pipeline were invited to liaise with officers outside of the meeting.

The Committee NOTED the report.

09/22 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION UPDATE

The Committee CONSIDERED and NOTED the report of the Head of Human Resources.

10/22 STAFFING REPORT

The Committee CONSIDERED and NOTED the report of the Head of Human Resources, who confirmed that additional advertisements and use of social media were being used to encourage applications for any posts which were proving more difficult to recruit to.

11/22 INVESTORS IN PEOPLE (IIP) ASSESSMENT

The Committee CONSIDERED and NOTED the report of the Head of Human Resources and congratulated staff for this achievement.

12/22 **SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT**

The Committee CONSIDERED and NOTED the report of the Senior Administrative Officer.

The Head of Human Resources confirmed that the Sickness Absence policy was due for review next year, and agreed that it would be useful to have a better understanding of how other National Park Authorities interpret the performance indicators which are used for comparison (see table at paragraph 9 of the report).

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 11:55am.