

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

ITEM 2

Minutes of the meeting held at Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Officers, Yoredale, Bainbridge, Leyburn DL8 3EL, on Tuesday, 6 December 2022.

Members Present:

John Amsden, Libby Bateman, Nick Cotton, Richard Foster, Kevin Frea, Neil Heseltine, Julie Hutton, Carl Lis, Sue Metcalfe, Karin Sedgwick, Neil Swain and Derek Twine (in the Chair).

COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK

35/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Jenny Purcell.

36/22 MINUTES

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 September 2022, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

37/22 PUBLIC QUESTIONS / STATEMENTS

No public questions or statements had been received.

38/22 DECLARATIONS OF LOBBYING

There were no declarations of lobbying.

**39/22 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) 2023/24 – 2025/26 –
SETTING THE SCENE**

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Chief Executive, which had been slightly delayed in order to take into account updated information in light of a rapidly changing context.

The Chief Executive advised the Committee of further recent developments since the publication of the report, including that it was unlikely that the Levelling Up Bill would include legislation to implement some of the statutory changes identified in the Landscapes Review (Glover) recommendations.

The Chief Executive also advised the Committee that confirmation was still awaited as to whether the core grant funding would remain the same, following the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.

Discussion and comments included:

- The Committee noted the increasing deficit projections and the uncertainties around the budget-setting exercise;
- The Committee acknowledged the organisational cultural shift which would need to be accelerated as a result of the changed financial circumstances, meaning the Authority will become a more project-based body increasingly reliant on income generation to fund its programmes;
- With these changes, Members felt that it was even more important that project grants also cover staffing and back-office costs. Where contracts and grants hadn't previously included staffing and other central costs, it was suggested that some may need to be re-negotiated if possible;
- The Committee agreed that, at least until its meeting in February, the normal process for budget setting could be followed, with the Committee considering the draft budget in February 2023, and then making a recommendation to the full Authority to approve the budget in March 2023. In the meantime, any significant developments would be discussed with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- a) To note the report, and in particular the context it provides for the budget-setting process for 2023/24; and
- b) To agree that, for now, the usual process and timetable for budget setting should be followed.

40/22 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) STRATEGY

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the IT Manager.

In response to Members' questions, the IT Manager and Head of Finance confirmed that:

- Many of the contracts for annual routine costs were on a three or five-year basis, which informed the prediction of a 2.2% increase in such costs from 2023/24;
- Developments and changes outside the control of the Authority (such as the speed of hyperfast broadband rollout across the National Park), will be considered when our current contracts expire. Any new technologies will be investigated to see if they are able to provide better or more cost-effective services;
- A range of options to increase the reliability of car-park machines would be considered, including connecting to nearby internet services, or putting in stand-alone hard-wired internet where financially viable;
- The Authority uses a third party system to reduce hacking. Microsoft 365 has these tools within it which, when fully rolled out, will replace the third party system;
- When purchasing new equipment such as servers, the energy efficiency of the equipment is taken into account;
- Approximately £100k will be required for capital expenditure in addition to the planned use of reserves – this will primarily be used to replace old desktop and "thin client" computers with laptops, and to upgrade the communications system;

- Staff receive regular training on data protection and information security. Members receive some training as part of their induction and a request for further training will be considered alongside other training requests when compiling the training programme for 2023-34; and
- As Members are not issued with Authority devices, the risk of hacking the Authority's data and systems is much reduced.

RESOLVED - to approve the IT Strategy for 2023 – 2028, as annexed to the report.

41/22 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FUND (SDF) APPLICATIONS

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Sustainable Development Officer.

Derek Twine declared an interest in the Settle Drill Hall application, namely he is a member of the National Scout Association. Mr Twine confirmed that he had not had any prior involvement with this application.

Carl Lis declared an interest in the Heart of Pennines Forest application, namely he is a trustee of the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust. Mr Lis confirmed that he had not had any prior involvement with this application.

Discussion included the following:

- It was recognised that there was a high risk that the significant funds required to complete the Hostel and St Michael's project may not be raised. The Sustainable Development Officer confirmed that, if granted, the SDF monies would not be released until all the other funds were also in place, and a deadline of March 2024 would be included in the grant conditions;
- The Director of Conservation and Community confirmed that commercial businesses could apply for SDF grants. Grants were awarded to support deserving projects and it was not a requirement that the applicant must have charitable or not-for-profit status;
- The Kingsdale Head Hydro project would not receive any "duplicate" funding should the SDF application be approved. The applicant had received funds from a Farming in Protected Landscapes grant, the terms of which specifically excluded the hydro scheme;
- Members acknowledged that, if granted, the three applications would use the remaining SDF funds for the current financial year. The Sustainable Development Officer advised there were currently three other applications pending, for a total of approximately £20k. If approved, these could be granted from April 2023.

RESOLVED - to approve the following grants from the Sustainable Development Fund:

- £50,000 towards the Hostel at St Michael's Project, requested by Hudswell House @ St Michael's Ltd (SDF reference SD0281);
- £26,575.72 towards Kingsdale Head Hydro project, requested by Kingsdale Head Farm LLP (SDF reference SD0285);
- £20,000 towards the Settle Drill Hall 2040 project, requested by 1st Castleberg Scout Group (SDF reference SD0280); and
- £20,000 towards the Heart of Pennines Forest, requested by the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (SDF reference SD0286).

42/22 UPDATE OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

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

RESOLVED - to approve the revised version of the Authority's Financial Regulations, as appended to the report.

43/22 FINANCIAL PROGRESS REPORT (1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022)

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Head of Finance.

In response to Members' questions, the Head of Finance, Director of Conservation and Community and Director of Park Services advised that:

- As the report only covers the figures up to 30 September 2022, further work and claims for payment since then would have reduced some of the underspend in areas such as Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) and Rights of Way;
- If not spent in the current financial year, any remaining FiPL monies would be returned to DEFRA, as the terms of this scheme do not permit funding to be carried over;
- Shortages of materials and contractors had delayed some of the intended project works, leading to an underspend; and
- The increased spend per visitor to the information centres reflected the new retail strategy, targeting quality goods to the audience. A recent survey had shown that only 8% of people entering the visitor centres had done so to obtain information – most had come in to browse.

The Committee NOTED the report.

44/22 INCOME GENERATION STRATEGY – PROGRESS UPDATE

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Director of Conservation and Community, who provided more detail about the Revere woodland development project.

Members commended the progress made in income generation and noted the links to the previous agenda items, in that the Authority would need to become increasingly project-driven.

The Committee NOTED the report.

45/22 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

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

46/22 STAFFING

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

In response to Members' queries about the unsuccessful recruitment of senior officers:

- The Head of Human Resources confirmed that, as it had proved difficult to recruit a FiPL Officer, two FiPL assistants had been recruited instead; and
- The Director of Conservation and Community confirmed that the work of the Woodlands team had been revised and also a temporary member of staff recruited, following unsuccessful recruitment of a Senior Trees and Woodlands officer.

47/22 SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT

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

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 12:17pm.