YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY **ITEM 9**

Committee: **AUDIT AND REVIEW**

Date: **18 April 2023**

Report: **REVIEW OF THE GOVERNANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS (2) – PENNINE NATIONAL TRAILS PARTNERSHIP**

Purpose of the report

1. To inform the Committee of the outcome of the detailed review of the governance arrangements for the Pennine National Trails Partnership.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Committee NOTES the review of the governance arrangements of the Pennine National Trails Partnership (PNTP).

Strategic Planning Framework

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

   Corporate Plan
   Objective 37: Operate governance arrangements that are fit for purpose as reported through the Annual Governance Statement and the Annual Governance Report.

Background

4. A report on the review of governance documentation of all YDNPA's partnerships was brought to the Committee in April 2022. To provide further assurance on the governance arrangements, it was proposed to introduce more detailed reviews of how the most significant partnerships (to be decided by the Directors) are governed in practice.

5. The first of these reviews has been undertaken, with an in-depth look at the PNTP. The purpose of this partnership is to support, maintain, manage and promote the Pennine National Trails (Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway), and in doing so, support the economic and social well-being of communities.

6. This project partnership was selected for the following reasons:
   - the Authority is the lead partner;
   - there are a number of partners involved, including over a dozen councils, three National Parks and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as well as Natural England and a couple of non-profit organisations – the governance of

partnerships involving a lot of partners is thought to be more challenging making success more difficult to achieve;
- the PNTP receives significant funding;
- a review of the governance of the PNTP would help identify lessons to be learned across to other similar partnerships.

The Review

7. The review covered the following areas:
    - Is the partnership working well (performance, decision-making, finance, risks, ethics and leadership);
    - Transparency and communication;
    - Reporting and oversight;
    - How problems are resolved (dispute resolution, complaints, exit strategy);
    - Review and evaluation; and
    - Future challenges.

8. The review concluded that:

    a) PNTP is an effective and well governed partnership with which the partners continue to engage constructively - a significant accomplishment given that there are 18 partner organisations involved who deal with over 470 miles of trail which cross some of the most inhospitable terrain in the country;

    b) Being the lead partner fits well with the Authority's purposes and objectives and it receives at least £15k a year hosting fee in remuneration;

    c) The governance structure of the PNTP is fit for purpose, with clarity over roles and clear lines of accountability;

    d) The wider group of stakeholders has not yet been established as originally envisaged. There is a northern group and work is continuing to develop a southern group. The PNTP should continue to consider how it can engage in various ways with a wider group of people (including considering whether other organisations should be invited to meetings), to increase the diversity of views and input into its decision making. This will be particularly valuable when working on increasing accessibility to the trails;

    e) Partners take collective decisions which make the most of the Natural England grant and other funding available in prioritising and then carrying out work on maintaining standards on the Pennine Way and Pennine Bridleway as a whole. Decisions proceed by way of consensus in an open and fair manner and there have been no disputes;

    f) The employment of an experienced and well-respected paid project manager hosted by the Authority, whose role it is to manage the partnership, is seen as one of the key foundations for the good governance and success of the PNTP. The project manager helps "steer the ship", ensures effective communication and continued engagement with partners and wider stakeholders, ensures fair distribution of funding and identification of additional funding streams, supports partners in delivery (particularly those organisations who have limited staff or resources themselves), spots and addresses risks and issues, and overall keeps everything going as it should. In addition, the "lengthspersons" and

volunteers are also invaluable in conducting routine maintenance of the trail and carrying out condition surveys;

g) The PNTP regularly monitors and scrutinises its own performance and works collaboratively to resolve issues where performance could be improved, setting up working groups as appropriate;

h) YDNPA retains good oversight of the PNTP, including budget monitoring, as the Natural England grant, and its distribution go through its finance system;

i) Although the partnership does generate a small amount of additional income and grants to the central grant from NE, should there be significant cuts to the central grant, this could place the PNTP at risk;

j) Future opportunities for the PNTP include extending its work on improving accessibility (for which it has now secured a three year Defra grant), improving the promotional side of the trails, and developing a good working relationship with the newly formed National Trails UK charity (an umbrella body similar to National Parks Partnership);

k) With the recent designation of the Coast to Coast (C2C) route as a national trail, the PNTP provides a model of how a similar C2C partnership could be run.

9. In terms of governance, the review identified some recommendations for the PNTP to consider for the future to further strengthen the existing arrangements:

a) Make further attempts to engage a wider group(s) of stakeholders (including considering whether to invite other organisations to relevant meetings, particularly those which could increase diversity), to provide input to the writing of the next Development Framework for 2024 onwards. Such wider range of voices would be particularly useful when considering how to reduce barriers to encourage a wider range of users to experience the trails;

b) Ensure there's biennial (re-)election of the Partnership Chair in the Spring, as per the Partnership Agreement;

c) Be clearer, for example in the minutes, about which attendees at partnership meetings are eligible to vote, and which are attending as an invitee / co-optee only;

d) Consider how the PNTP's work and decisions could be made more transparent for members of the public, for example by encouraging Natural England to publish the PNTP's annual reports on its website, as used to happen previously;

e) Continue the discussion with partners in deciding how the PNTP will engage, work with and benefit from the new National Trails UK charity and share good practice and innovative ideas with other national trails partnerships.

Conclusion

10. The review has provided assurance that the governance arrangements of the PNTP are currently fit for purpose and working well. In terms of governance, it provides a model for future similar partnerships.

Clare Tamea, Committees Officer; Clare Burrows, Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

12 December 2022