

Minutes of the meeting held at Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Officers, Yoredale, Bainbridge, Leyburn DL8 3EL, on Tuesday, 7 February 2023.

**Members Present:**

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

***COPIES OF ALL DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED ARE IN THE MINUTE BOOK***

**01/23      APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Libby Bateman and Julie Hutton.

**02/23      MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022, having been printed and circulated, be taken as read and be confirmed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

**03/23      PUBLIC QUESTIONS / STATEMENTS**

No public questions or statements had been received.

**04/23      DECLARATIONS OF LOBBYING**

All Members had been lobbied in relation to the Authority's presence at Hudson House, Reeth (item 5 – budget). There were no other declarations of lobbying.

**05/23      DRAFT BUDGET 2023 - 24**

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Head of Finance and a presentation from the Chief Executive on the wider context for the report.

Discussion included the following:

- Members noted the predicted deficits on the budget forecasts and the consequent need to generate additional income, particularly from 2024/25 onwards, to avoid the need for programme cuts and staff redundancies;
- In answer to a Member's question, the Chief Executive confirmed that the funds from income generation were generally used to deliver projects which contribute to the

statutory purposes, priorities and objectives of the Authority. It was easier to secure additional income for some work programmes (for example land management, climate change and woodlands) than others;

- It would be increasingly important to ensure, as far as possible, that additional grants cover staffing and some central costs that support the delivery of those projects;
- The Chief Executive confirmed that the proposed cut to the wildlife conservation programme of £20k in 2023/24 was a one-off, resulting in a decision not to conduct a habitat survey (staff time would be spent on developing the new Local Nature Recovery plans instead);
- Members supported the commencement of discussions with the new unitary authorities to ask them if they were prepared to provide financial support towards maintaining the rights of way network within the National Park – a statutory function of the Authorities. As other National Park Authorities are facing similar issues, it was suggested that National Parks England could also raise this with Natural England / DEFRA to see if a national solution could be found;
- The Director of Park Services advised that the forecasted increase in costs for plant and equipment, included in the future rights of way programme, was to enable old machinery to be replaced. It was agreed that the option of leasing plant and equipment, rather than purchasing it, should be explored;
- Regarding the suggested discussions about the potential withdrawal from Hudson House, the Director of Park Services advised Members that the financial cost to the Authority of Hudson House was far higher than that of the other three “partnership centres”. Following any discussion with representatives from Hudson House, a paper would then be brought to the Authority for a decision; and
- In response to a Member question about whether the Authority was correct to set such a high contingency reserve (at 10% of the total gross budgeted expenditure) the CEO said this would be kept under review. It was useful to hold such a sum in reserve because the Authority’s success in generating additional income to supplement DEFRA’s core grant exposed us to a higher degree of risk. The contingency reserve provided financial “insurance”, reflecting the increased risks relating to income generation, the associated partnerships and project working, and inflation volatility.

## **RESOLVED:**

To recommend the draft budget for 2023/24, the indicative budgets for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and the associated Reserves Strategy (all as appended to the report), to the full Authority for approval.

## **06/23      INCOME GENERATION STRATEGY**

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Chief Executive, noting the links between this item and the previous one.

In response to Members’ questions:

- The Chief Executive advised that acceleration of the organisational culture shift to a new way of working was required. It was intended that staff would predominantly have permanent contracts but their work programmes would be more flexible. As part of their role staff would be expected to identify and apply for funding for future projects, to start when the current projects came to an end.

Greater flexibility in terms of replacing existing corporate actions with new ones would be required in the future; and

- The Director of Conservation and Community confirmed that members of the public that would like to leave a financial legacy to the Authority are signposted to the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (YDMT), a charity with which the Authority has a close partnership. This allows gift aid to be claimed. The funds received are spent on delivering the objectives for the National Park.

**RESOLVED** - to approve the Income Generation Strategy for 2023 – 2026, as annexed to the report.

### **07/23      FINANCIAL PROGRESS REPORT (1 April 2022 to 31 December 2022)**

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Head of Finance.

In response to a Member's question about quotations received for the resurfacing of a car-park, the Director of Park Services advised that the contract was advertised on "Contracts Finder"; that on occasion, the Authority has experienced difficulties in finding people willing to take on work and provide a quote given our rural area; and that quantitative surveyors are sometimes used to provide estimates for larger jobs, but not routinely.

The Committee NOTED the report.

### **08/23      STAFFING**

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Head of Human Resources, who confirmed that job descriptions are likely to become broader to reflect the new ways of working discussed earlier with the need to provide more flexibility.

The Committee NOTED the report.

### **09/23      SICKNESS ABSENCE REPORT**

The Committee CONSIDERED the report of the Senior Administrative Officer. The Head of Human Resources confirmed that long term sickness was analysed and managed closely – the reasons for current long term sickness were very different and mostly unrelated to work.

The Committee NOTED the report.

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