

**YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**Report of the Corporate Governance Working Group**

The Corporate Governance Working Group met on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2006 (Meeting 5)

Members present: Yvonne Peacock (in the Chair), Shelagh Marshall, and Yvonne Rose.  
Apologies: John Blackie and Malcolm Petyt  
Officers present: David Butterworth and Richard Daly

**Report of last meeting**

The Working Group reviewed the notes of its previous meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> June 2006, and agreed them as a correct record.

**Action List**

It was noted that six of the Group's recommendations on Principle 1 had been included in the Authority's Best Value Performance Plan for 2006/07; of those, one had been achieved, four were on course, and one had been rescheduled from September to December 2006. Any recommendations from the Group that remained outstanding at the end of the current financial year would be considered for inclusion in next year's BVPP.

By the end of October, the Group would have looked at all six governance principles. A report would then be presented to the Senior Management Team in November 2006 in order to check progress on implementing all the Group's recommendations, and the outcome would be fed back to CGWG at its last meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> December. CGWG can then consider how the product of its deliberations can most appropriately be put before the wider membership of the Authority.

With reference to the Consultation Group convened by Annie Galloway, which is referred to in the Action List, CGWG was informed that this Group has now started work, and has conducted an audit of all consultations the Authority is involved in. This had identified several opportunities to eliminate duplication and, hopefully, to make efficiency savings. It was agreed that the consultation work being undertaken in connection with the Local Development Framework should be drawn to the attention of this Group.

**Principle 5**

Principle 5 is that good governance means developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective.

The Group looked at the specific questions relevant to Principle 5:

Question 1: *What skills have we decided that governors must have to do their jobs effectively? How well does our recruitment process identify people with the necessary skills, and reach people from a wide cross-section of society? What more could we do to make sure that becoming a governor is practical for as many people as possible?*

Thought has been given to the skills and knowledge required by Authority Members in terms of the induction training processes for new Authority Members and for Member Champions. It was noted that the Member Champion for Corporate Affairs intended to give attention to the issue of Member training, including undertaking a survey of Members, with a view to putting together a Member training programme. The Group agreed that this would be helpful, and suggested that updates in terms of developments in the law; ongoing planning training; and training on IT skills and systems should be part of that programme. In addition, it could be beneficial for every new member to have a designated mentor, being an experienced member of the Authority who could work with the new member to help them to become effective as quickly as possible.

The Authority does not “recruit” new members, but it does produce a document (which is contained in the Members’ Handbook) which is intended as a brief to those bodies which do appoint members to the Authority. This document summarises the Authority’s purposes, and the roles of members, together with the commitment typically required of members. This document should continue to be used, but it does need some updating.

In terms of seeking to ensure that being a member of the Authority is as practical as possible, officers were asked to bring forward proposals for the possible introduction of a Carer’s Allowance as part of the Members’ Allowances Scheme.

In general, it was agreed that the support that members received from officers was satisfactory. It was noted that the levels of support to Member Champions was to be reviewed in July 2007.

*Question 2: How effective are we at developing our skills and updating our knowledge? How effective are our arrangements for reviewing the performance of individual governors? Do we put into practice action plans for improving our performance as a governing body?*

At present, the performance of the Secretary of State (national interest) members is appraised annually by the Chairman of the Authority. There are no arrangements for appraisal of the other 19 members. However, Defra have recently produced a draft report, suggesting that formal processes be established for setting targets for, and appraising the performance of, all National Park Authority members. The proposal is that the appraisals should be carried out by the Authority Chair, with an appeals process built in, and provision also for feedback to the body/ies which appointed the member to the Authority.

CGWG members supported the idea of a formal appraisal process for all Authority members, and asked that officers develop proposals for members’ consideration. It was considered that any appraisal process for YDNPA members should be introduced from May 2007, in advance of a Defra scheme if that had not been completed by that time.

The Authority has recently given detailed consideration to improving its’ performance, which was an issue arising from the National Park Authority Performance Assessment process. Changes to the Planning Committee, an enhanced role for the Audit & Review Committee, the establishment of Member Champions, and work on the advocacy and

representational roles of members were all products of this, as indeed was the work of CGWG itself.

Question 3: *What is our approach to finding a balance between continuity of knowledge and renewal of thinking in the governing body? What are our reasons for this approach? Do we need to review it?*

This is beyond the Authority's control. However, it was noted that Defra are currently working on a draft National Parks circular, to replace Circular 12/96, and the Authority might wish, when this draft circular is issued for consultation, to suggest that it should direct those bodies which appoint members to National Park Authorities to consider the desirability of a balance between continuity and renewal.

#### Dates of Next Meetings

2pm on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006, at Yoredale, Bainbridge, to consider Principle 6.

1.30pm on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at Yoredale, Bainbridge, to consider the way forward, and the development of a corporate governance policy for the Authority.

Yvonne Peacock  
18<sup>th</sup> September 2006



**YORKSHIRE DALES NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE**

**Report of the Corporate Governance Working Group**

The Corporate Governance Working Group met on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006 (Meeting 6)

Members present: Yvonne Peacock (in the Chair), John Blackie, Shelagh Marshall, Malcolm Petyt, and Yvonne Rose.

Officers present: Jon Avison, Richard Burnett, Annie Galloway and Richard Daly

**Report of last meeting**

The Working Group reviewed the notes of its previous meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2006, and agreed them as a correct record.

**Action List**

It was agreed that Richard Daly should write to Defra to highlight the anomaly in relation to the payment of Carers' Allowance to National Park Authority members.

Members felt that the appraisal scheme for Authority members should include the right for all members to see the conclusions about their performance. CGWG would welcome an update on progress on the development of an appraisal scheme for members.

**Website Survey Report**

CGWG received a report on an evaluation of the Authority website which had recently been carried out by the External Affairs Department, involving a survey of the public and also of Authority staff. It was noted that there had been a very small public response, and almost half of the public respondents were from outside the UK and did not have English as their first language. Accordingly, it was felt that limited credence should be given to those comments. Members felt that, once beyond the initial choice of options from the homepage, the website worked well. Annie Galloway outlined work that was in hand to upgrade the website with Livelink, and that this would mean a temporary inability to update the website sometime within the next two months.

**Principle 6**

Principle 6 is that good governance means engaging stakeholders and making accountability real.

The Group looked at the specific questions relevant to Principle 6:

Question 1: *Who are we accountable to and for what? How well does each of these accountability relationships work? Do we need to take steps to clarify or strengthen any relationships? Do we need to negotiate a shift in the balance between different accountability relationships?*

The Group agreed that the primary accountability of the Authority is to central Government, via Defra. Central Government dictates the rules in terms of reporting responsibilities and the financial settlement. However, the Authority also needs to be able to give account of its stewardship of the National Park to other stakeholders, in particular the local authorities, local people, visitors to the Park, and users of services the Authority provides. It is understood that the very recent White Paper on local government proposes the extension of local authorities' scrutiny function to extend to the work of National Park Authorities, and if enacted this will give a new dimension to accountability. Finally, there is also a sense in which the Authority is responsible to the nation for custody of the *National* Park.

The corporate role of members, acting as a team for the good of the Authority, is to be distinguished from Members' individual accountabilities to the local electorate, parishes, or the Secretary of State. It is hoped that the proposed new National Parks circular may deal with these issues, and if there is an opportunity to comment on a draft, this point should be borne in mind. Meanwhile, it was noted that some documents published by the Authority itself refer to Members as "representing" the bodies that appoint them: this is wrong, and should be corrected.

Accountability is expressed through the BVPP, Performance Assessment, and the section on the Yorkshire Dales in the annual report on all English National Parks. The text of this latter is to be put on the Authority's website.

*Question 2: What is our policy on how the organisation should consult the public and service users? Does it explain clearly the sorts of issues on which it will consult and how it will use the information it receives? Do we need to review this policy and its implementation?*

One of the Authority's six core values is Involvement: "We are open and approachable, and are proactive in encouraging wider and diverse participation in achieving our statutory purposes". There is a consultation strategy, but it is of some vintage, and work is underway on a new version, which will be presented to SMT in November 2006 and the Authority in January 2007. It was agreed that this should also be brought to the next meeting of CGWG for comment.

Annie Galloway explained that work was also underway to produce a strategic communications strategy by March 2007, this having been one of the recommendations from the NPAPA report. Members gave strong encouragement to this work.

It was noted also that Peter Stockton is working on a statement of community involvement for the Authority. Members felt that it would be worth working over time to develop a community engagement strategy.

*Question 3: What is our policy on consulting and involving staff and their representatives in decision making? Is this communicated clearly to the staff? How well do we follow this in practice? How effective are systems within the organisation for protecting the rights of staff?*

The Group was informed that there is a good working relationship with the trade union (Unison), but felt that further thought should be given by officers to whether the rights of non Union members were properly secured.

Staff of the Authority are involved in its' work in a number of ways, for example by a "climate survey" of staff opinion which is undertaken every two years, the latest one to be launched imminently. CGWG noted that the results of this would only be available after it had been disbanded, but it was agreed that the results from the previous survey would be brought to the next meeting of the Group.

Other ways in which staff are involved include staff meetings, which are held every 6 months for all staff and more frequently within Departments and teams; access by all staff to SMT papers, and the opportunity to attend SMT meetings; the opportunity to have input at the outset of the priority-setting process; the involvement of staff at all levels in preparing draft budgets; clear expectations on line managers to involve staff, to be reinforced through a programme of training for line managers; and the staff appraisals process, through which BVPP targets were cascaded down and relevant parts of them agreed with staff as personal targets.

It was noted that the Authority holds IIP status, with re-accreditation due in 2007.

*Question 4: Who are the institutional stakeholders that we need to have good relationships with? How do we organise ourselves to take the lead in developing relationships with other organisations at the most senior level?*

Defra and the four local authorities are seen as the key institutional stakeholders, and DCLG is also important in relation to the Authority's position as a "local authority" in much legislation. However, it would be worthwhile for SMT to draw up a more comprehensive list, perhaps based on work done by ENPAA to identify the key national organisations and types of local body that National Park Authorities need to relate to. The advantage of having such a list would be to focus attention on relationships with these bodies and to act as a checklist in relation to consultation and informing key stakeholders about developments. SMT could also look at the issue of how to get the most out of these relationships.

Some members expressed the view that the Authority sometimes overlooked the need for liaison with local authorities, when dealing with issues affecting them.

Reference was made to the Authority's network of "Partnerships". The work which was done to maintain focus on the purpose of these relationships, with ones which were no longer purposeful being relinquished, had been recognised as an example of good practice.

In relation to the suggested questions that the public might ask, the increasing value of the website as a means of making information available, communicating, and consulting the public was noted. CGWG suggested that in future years the BVPP itself could be principally published via the website, though some hard copies would still be necessary for those who preferred that medium or did not have internet access.

The Group gave some thought to how people, having been consulted by the Authority, get feedback about resulting decisions, and how their views have been taken into account. This issue will be covered in the new consultation strategy. Meanwhile, it was noted that the Authority was taking steps in this direction, for example by the “You said, we did” feature in “Dales” newspaper.

On the issue of whether the public have an opportunity to question “the people in charge” of the Authority, there is public question time at Authority and Committee meetings; a contact form on the website; and a great deal of effort undertaken by members and officers liaising with and attending meetings of other bodies. There is a readily accessible complaints procedure, with results being reported annually to the Audit & Review Committee. The view had been taken in the past that general public meetings did not serve a useful purpose, and CGWG supported this, feeling that existing measures were sufficient.

#### Date of Next Meeting

1.30pm on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2006 at Yoredale, Bainbridge, to consider the way forward, and the development of a corporate governance policy for the Authority.

Yvonne Peacock  
1<sup>st</sup> November 2006