

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

18 JULY 2006

AUTHORITY GOVERNANCE AND MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Report of the National Park Officer/Chief Executive

Purpose of Report:

To take forward ideas emerging from the recent workshop on member governance provided by the Audit Commission

Legal Implications including Human Rights Act 1998:

Environment Act 1995.

Financial Implications:

No significant implications arising directly from this report.

National Park Purposes:

Good governance underpins the effectiveness of the Authority in delivering National Park purposes.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Authority:

1. CONSIDERS the proposed actions set out in paragraph 2.1
2. CONVENES a short (one hour) follow up workshop to enable a more complete consideration of governance and member engagement issues and actions.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Authority's 'Improvement Plan' adopted in April 2006 includes a specific project entitled 'Member Engagement' aimed at achieving the following outcomes:

- All Authority members are encouraged to participate fully in the work of the Authority and are able to contribute effectively.
- Authority members take an interest in the performance of the Authority and there is a planned programme of performance monitoring, evaluation and review.
- All Authority members have a good knowledge of the work of the Authority and are able to communicate this accurately and enthusiastically to people outside the organisation.
- Authority members take a strategic view of the Authority's work and all members contribute towards the identification of Authority priorities and shaping Authority strategies and policies.
- Members take a proactive approach to developing their knowledge and understanding of the work of the Authority.

1.2 The improvement plan sets out five actions to help achieve these outcomes:

1. Commission Audit Commission to work with members to increase level of engagement, taking advantage of members' strengths, and develop an approach to monitoring and evaluating member performance
2. Authority to consider extending terms of reference for Resources Committee to include performance monitoring
3. Hold an annual priorities workshop for all members
4. Monitor attendance and effectiveness of member training/briefing programme
5. Issue member job descriptions when made available by Defra

1.3 Action 2 is completed following a resolution at Authority meeting held in June 2006 and actions 3-5 are planned or ongoing. Action 1 took place on 4 July, when the Audit Commission presented an interactive workshop attended by 16 Authority members. A copy of the Audit Commission presentation is attached at appendix 1. The content is based on good practice governance in local authorities and there is much that is relevant to members of this Authority.

1.4 However, an essential distinction between this Authority and other parts of local government is the primary duty of the NPA to achieve National Park purposes. This extends the accountability of Authority members to represent and further 'national' as well as 'local' interests and means that the NPA member role has important differences from the usual role of parish, district and county councillors. For example, this distinction is emphasised by the schedule set out in appendix 2 that sets out Defra's expectations of NPAs and is issued annually and reflects the wider national accountability of the Authority.

2. **PROPOSED ACTIONS ARISING FROM THE AUDIT COMMISSION WORKSHOP**

2.1 The workshop succeeded in provoking a wide ranging discussion on Authority governance issues and member engagement. Whilst no specific actions were agreed during the workshop, the following list sets out some suggestions that arose during the discussions and can be considered by the Authority:

1. The Defra model 'job description' for NPA members should be considered for adoption by the Authority (see appendix 3)
2. Better information should be provided to all members setting out their individual roles and responsibilities in addition to the general ones applying to all members
3. A higher profile is accorded by the Authority to 'risk management' and the standard Authority report template replaces 'financial implications' with 'financial implications and risks'
4. A member skills and knowledge framework is developed to assist in establishing training needs
5. A more complete record of member training is maintained including relevant training received outside this Authority.

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6 July 2006