

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

16th June 2006

Report of the Corporate Governance Working Group

The Corporate Governance Working Group met on 15th May 2006 (Meeting 3)

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

Apologies: John Blackie and Shelagh Marshall

Officers present: David Butterworth and Richard Daly

Report of last meeting

The Working Group reviewed the notes of its previous meeting held on 17th March 2006, and agreed them as a correct record.

Taking the Group's work forward

Issues raised by the Group at each meeting are then referred to the Senior Management Team for consideration of how the issues should be taken forward; this is then reported back to the next meeting of the Group, for Members' approval. After CGWG has completed its work, progress should continue to be monitored by the relevant member "Champion", and by six monthly reports to Audit & Review Committee.

In terms of taking forward the issues raised in relation to Principle 3, SMT's suggestions were agreed. David Butterworth, Peter Watson and Richard Daly to discuss the introduction of a questionnaire for persons attending Authority and Planning Committee meetings, with a view to this being introduced as soon as possible.

Corporate Governance on the Authority's website

The Group noted that the issue of corporate governance is now addressed on the Authority's website. The content of it was regarded as good, though the description of the roles of the various Committees will need to be revised following a review of Committee terms of reference which is currently under way at officer level and will be reported to Members in the summer.

Principles of Good Decision Making

The Group noted the paper prepared by Richard Daly as Monitoring Officer and felt that (apart from defects in translations from Latin!) this would be helpful. It should be included in the Members' Handbook, and should be sent out to all Members with a covering letter at a "quiet" time – ie when there were no major agendas going out. Richard Daly to action.

Principle 2

Principle 2 is that good governance means performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles.

It was agreed that the roles of officers were well defined by the officer structure and individual job descriptions. The roles of National Park Authority members were much less well defined, and this was an area which had been highlighted in the NPAPA report and was now receiving attention corporately. A number of strands of work were in progress:

- Member Champions: discussed at PDF and report being presented to Authority meeting on 30th May 2006;
- Role of the Audit & Review Committee: to be developed as part of the work of CGWG, and also through the current review of all Committees' terms of reference.
- Members' role in Partnership working is to be re-examined to see if the balance between officer and member involvement is appropriate;
- The advocacy and representational role of Members: Richard Daly is working on a paper exploring this, which will hopefully form the basis for a better understanding of this area by officers and members.

The Group looked at the specific questions relevant to Principle 2:

Question 1: *Do we all know what we are supposed to be doing?*

It is clear from the above that the answer to this is yes for officers, and "not yet" in relation to Members. Work needs to be done in a number of areas, not least in relation to Member Champions, where the role needs to be carefully defined, for example to clarify that the role is to promote and support relevant Authority policy and help in policy development; but *not* to make policy. With regard to the Audit & Review Committee, it needs to focus on issues of review and scrutiny, and to move towards a way of working which involves officers and members working together to investigate and examine specific issues, and then report back to the Committee. In this context, the relevant "Champion" can be asked to come forward and explain what is happening and why.

Question 2: *Is our approach to each of the governing body's main functions clearly set out and understood by all in the governing body and the senior executive? What does the size and complexity of our organisation mean for the ways in which we approach each of the main functions of governance?*

The main functions of the member body have been set out in the Guidance Note on Members' Roles and Responsibilities, which is in the Members' Handbook. However, this document needs to be revised in the light of decisions to be taken by the Authority shortly; and as part of that revision, it can also be made simpler and sharper. This should be addressed in August / September 2006. The Job Description for Authority Members can also be revisited at that time – but bearing in mind that the Authority is at liberty to add elements to the basic Defra document, but not to remove things from it.

Question 3: *How clearly have we defined the respective roles and responsibilities of the non-executives and the executive, and of the Chair and the Chief Executive? Do all members of the governing body take collective responsibility for the governing body's decisions?*

The role of the Chair is described in the Defra job description for Authority Chairs. The role and responsibilities of the Chief Executive are described in law (Head of Paid Service) and in the job description for the post.

Past audit reports have expressed concern at the lack of collective responsibility for decisions, and although this has improved, further development is necessary. The Champions can be leaders in this area, and the Authority Chair has a vital role in holding developments together and reminding all Members of their responsibilities to the organisation.

Question 4: How well does the organisation understand the views of the public and service users? Do we receive comprehensive and reliable information about these views, and do we use it in decision making?

The Authority has plenty of mechanisms for obtaining information about the views of the public and service users, including feedback on this from Members; the surveys of residents and of visitors; feedback from the Dales newspaper; processes such as NPAPA, IIP and audit; and work to analyse trends from wider information, for example census data. Like many public bodies, however, the Authority is much better at collecting information than it is at using it. The information collected is fed back to members, and some of it is included in the State of the Park report. There is still work to do to collate information which is available, and then to discuss between members and officers how this can best be disseminated and made part of decision making in a more structured way.

The Group also supported the idea of further open evenings like the one held recently at Yoredale; these should be held also at Grassington. It was noted that this could perhaps help to address the Auditors' recommendation about meetings with the public in relation to planning issues.

Date of Next Meeting

1.30pm on 16th June 2006, at Yoredale, Bainbridge.

Yvonne Peacock
15th May 2006