

Report: 7 Future Board Membership

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to seek agreement to establish a Task and Finish group to consider and report back on proposals for future Board membership.

2. Recommendations

The Authority is recommended to:

- a. Note the content of this report.
- b. To appoint a Task and Finish Group to explore options for Authority membership and report back in September 2022.
- c. To consider and agree the Terms of Reference of the Task and Finish Group as set out at Annex 2 to this report.

3. Implications

- a. **Financial:** This report relates only to the establishment of a Task and Finish group to explore options for future membership. As such there are no financial implications arising from this report.
- b. **Equalities:** The Task and Finish Group will consider opportunities to enhance the diversity of the Authority membership in line with the Defra response to the Glover (Landscapes) Review.
- c. **Link to Business Plan:** The Board of the Authority is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Authority, agreeing the Business Plan, allocation of resources and seeking assurance as to the delivery of the Business Plan.

4. Background

- a. On 15 June 2021 members held an informal virtual meeting to discuss governance. The discussion had been called by the Chair in the context of the Glover (Landscapes) Review which reported in September 2019, and which made some clear recommendations in respect of the future governance of national park authorities.
- b. At this time, discussions with Defra involving both the Chairs and Chief Executives of the English national park authorities had made it clear that Defra were likely to agree, at least in part, with the recommendation of the Glover Review in respect of governance. On this basis the Chair and Chief Executive wished to have a steer from members on what they felt was appropriate for Northumberland National Park Authority to inform their discussion with both National Parks England and Defra.
- c. On 15 January 2022 Defra announced its response to the Glover Review, together with a linked public consultation. It is this Defra response which prompts the need for the Authority to consider options for future membership which would work for Northumberland.

5. Member discussions to date

- a. At the June 2021 meeting members agreed a broad consensus on the following points:
 - A smaller board – 12 agreed (All members on Development Management Committee).
 - Reduction to 12 members, to be achieved through natural wastage as a preferred way forward.
 - Given the small number of residents within the national park (less than 2,000 people in over 400sq m), direct elections are not considered to be an efficient way of appointing local representation.
 - Smaller board but more diverse with adequate representation of local interests. (At least 50% local interests and a locally appointed Chair).
 - Diversity and particularly young people’s involvement seen as important.
 - Consider how the operation of governance would need to adjust and the impact on member workload of a small board.
 - Consider the use of forums (non-decision making) to widen the input and ownership of the National Park and to help inform authority decisions.
- b. Members discussed whether we should appoint a small Task and Finish group to do further work on governance options and to assess the potential impacts on the operational governance of the Authority.
- c. In any case it was agreed that options for any change would be brought back to a Full Authority meeting for consideration before any approach was made to Defra.

6. Responding to Defra/Glover

- a. In the Glover report of September 2019 he concluded that Boards were too large to be effective, lacking in diversity (age , gender, ethnicity and disability), lack people who emphasise with securing nature and connecting people, and are heavily focussed on planning. We in Northumberland would not recognise all of these findings as relating to our governance. Nevertheless, the Review called for boards of 9-12 members, the Chair to be appointed by the Secretary of State and other members appointed nationally (based on skills and experience), and that Boards are advised by a partnership group of wider interests. It further proposed that the Development Management Committee be run by a sub committee and that real effort is made to achieve great diversity in the composition of Boards.
- b. The Defra response and consultation questions in respect of governance are set out in Annex 1 to this report. Whilst the response does not propose to deliver in full the Glover recommendations, there is a clear agenda for change. Now that we have the Defra response there is an opportunity for us to consider this and further explore options. The initial ideas around a ‘centralised’ National Landscape Service (NLS) have been scaled back in the current response, and a non-statutory ‘National Landscapes Partnership’ is

now proposed, however, there is little or no detail on how this will be constituted or of the extent of its role.

- c. On individual National Park Authority's membership, the Defra response seeks governance that 'creates a careful balance of democratic accountability, essential skills and diversity of experience'.
- d. The Defra response proposes a package of measures aimed at improved performance; strengthened local partnerships; skilled, diverse and representative boards; improved efficiency and strategic alignment. The response also poses a consultation question on what measures would support and improve local governance. (See Annex 1).
- e. Whilst the Defra response indicated that Government is speaking to two English national parks about revised board membership, it is my understanding that these discussions have not progressed beyond an initial approach from each of the national park authorities to Defra, and as such there are no firm proposals to draw upon.
- f. Beyond responding to the consultation questions, the opportunity for the Authority, should we wish to be pro-active, is to put forward a proposal for a revised authority board membership for Northumberland National Park Authority which recognises Government's position, whilst retaining the principles we feel are essential for Northumberland. The bullet points in 5a provide a useful starting point, and members have also asked that any future proposals consider matters such as retaining sufficient numbers to ensure a workable quorum, ensure sufficient representation on Development Management Committee, and ensure the board has the range of interests and skills needed to oversee the delivery of our purposes and duty, as set out in the Northumberland National Park Management Plan and our Business Plan.

7. Timescale

- d. The current Defra consultation on their response and proposals runs for 12 weeks until 9th April. The Authority's response to this consultation is the subject of a separate report at this meeting.
- e. Following the close of the consultation, Defra have indicated that it may take up to 12 weeks to make a statement on the consultation and resulting final recommendations. We should therefore expect to see this final statement from Defra from July onwards.
- f. It is therefore recommended that a small Task and Finish Group be established today to consider options and report back to the Authority in September 2022.

8. Conclusions

- a. The Defra response to the Glover Review clearly sets an agenda for change in national park authority governance, and particularly with respect to the membership of national park authorities.
- b. Whilst there are clearly some aspects of the Defra response the Authority does not agree with, as set out in our proposed response to the Defra consultation, the Authority has previously agreed that there is an opportunity to reduce the size and enhance the diversity of the membership of the Authority.

- c. Members are therefore recommended to appoint a small Task and Finish Group to explore options for Authority membership and report back in September 2022. A draft terms of reference for this group is set out at Annex 2 to this report.

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Background papers: Landscapes Review , September 2019
Landscapes Review: Government Response, 15th January 2022