

Peer Review
Report by Chief Executive

Summary: This report considers the proposal for the Authority to undertake a peer review of its governance arrangements.

Recommendation: (i) A peer review, in line with the recommendations of the Financial Scrutiny and Audit Committee, is undertaken into the governance arrangements of the Authority and that financial provision of £25,000 is made available to fund the exercise.

(ii) Given the importance of the process and the resources required the peer review is recognised as a strategic priority for 2017/18 replacing the external funding project previously identified.

1 Introduction

1.1 At the meeting of the Broads Authority on 27 January 2017 the following motion was passed:

“We ask that that the Financial Scrutiny and Audit Committee considers the need, scope and terms of reference for a peer review involving the National Park Authorities and independent experts into the governance arrangements of the Broads Authority and how they can be modernised.”

(Note: A motion advocating a Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge was rejected by the Authority.)

1.2 The Broads Authority took part in the National Park Authority Peer Assessments (NPAPA) in 2005 and 2011 which mirrored the local authority Comprehensive Performance Assessments. The latter has been replaced by the voluntary Corporate Peer Challenge but no equivalent has yet been put in place for National Park Authorities.

1.3 Peer review is voluntary in nature and is forward looking and improvement focussed. It builds on the strengths of authorities and provides recommendations for improvement. More recent processes target specific areas of an Authority’s work that have been identified as requiring attention. They are therefore designed to be supportive. However, the time and costs involved should not be underestimated.

1.4 Whilst the Authority rejected an LGA-led Peer Challenge, it is acknowledged that the LGA has substantial experience in the practicalities of establishing a peer challenge of the nature the Authority members discussed. Therefore, in advance of this meeting, some informal practical advice from the LGA has been sought on how the Broads Authority might begin to design a bespoke focused peer review process

taking account of the special role and characteristics of the Authority and its close alignment with the National Park Authorities. The advice of the other members of the National Park family has also been sought.

2. Financial Scrutiny and Audit Committee

2.1 At a meeting on the 7 February 2017 the Financial Scrutiny and Audit Committee considered the matter of a peer review and resolved to support the principle of such a process examining the Authority's governance arrangements but that it should be designed to reflect along the lines of the NPAPA process to meet the specific needs of the Broads Authority. The Committee therefore recommended that the Authority adopt the following arrangements.

2.2 *Peer Review Team*

A. Establish a **Peer Review Team** comprising representatives from external bodies that understands the Broads Authority and English National Parks comprising:

Member peers

- (i) A county or district councillor who is also a member of an English National Park Authority;
- (ii) A Member of an English National Park Authority appointed by the Secretary of State

Officer peers

- (iii) A Chief Executive of a local authority with part of his/her area within an English National Park
- (iv) A Chief Executive of an English National Park Authority who will lead the team

Independent peer

- (v) One of the Authority's independent persons

2.3 *Scope and Terms of Reference*

B. The **Scope and Terms of Reference** of the Review should be discussed and agreed with the Review Team to ensure they understand the context and can meet the agenda of the Broads Authority. The main focus of the review will be:

- (i) The Authority's current leadership, governance, policies and procedures;
- (ii) The mechanisms for the Authority's engagement with the broader economic and social agenda across the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk.

2.4 *Peer Review Approach*

C. The **Peer Review Approach** will consist of:

- (i) The production of a position statement by the Broads Authority which will act as the framework for the Review
- (ii) A review of relevant policy documentation by the Team
- (iii) A series of one to one and/or facilitated group discussions with Members of the Broads Authority and appropriate members of staff
- (iv) A series of one to one and/or facilitated group discussions with relevant partners and stakeholders.

2.5 **Output**

D. The **Output** from the Group will comprise verbal feedback and a written report with recommendations:

- (i) As to how the Authority can modernise and improve its governance, policies and procedures;
- (ii) As to how relationships between the Authority and its eight constituent local authorities might be improved to support the wider economic and social agenda;
- (iii) Any other action the Authority should take.

2.6 **Timescale**

The LGA's advice is that the normal preparation time for such an exercise would be around six months. This would suggest that the earliest the Team would be on site is October.

3. **National Park Authorities**

3.1 The principle of engaging in a further round of peer reviews has been raised with the English national park authorities. There is no appetite for peer reviews in the other parks. The combination of internal and external audit now combined with regular monitoring and feedback on the Government's 8 Point Plan for National Parks is felt to be sufficient independent review of their activities.

4. **Resource Implications**

4.1 The amount of senior staff time involved in such a review is very considerable and if the Authority decides to proceed with this project then other work will have to take a back seat. It is suggested that in recognition of its importance that the review would be identified as a strategic priority and the work on external funding be delayed. Key decisions on the Landscape Partnership Project and CANAPE will be made by the HLF and Interreg in the summer and will provide greater certainty about the resources available.

4.2 The LGA has identified its potential costs in supporting the Authority through the process as being in the order of £15,000. Since the reductions in central support staff following the reductions in National Park Grant the posts that would have managed the peer review internally have been deleted from the structure and it may prove necessary to hire in specific support if the Authority is to gain the most from

the review. It is therefore proposed to allocate £25,000 towards the review entirely funded from National Park Grant.

Background paper: NPAPA reports
Local Government Peer Challenge

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Broads Plan Objectives: None

Appendices: None