



# EXMOOR

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## NATIONAL PARK

EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY  
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This matter is being dealt with by:  
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20 April 2023

### EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**To: The Members of the STANDARDS COMMITTEE of the Exmoor National Park Authority**

A meeting of the Standards Committee will be held at Exmoor House, Dulverton on **Tuesday, 2 May 2023 at 9.30am.**

The meeting will be open to the press and public subject to the passing of any resolution under s.100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Please be aware that this is a public Authority Meeting and will be **audio and video recorded**. We will make the recordings available via our website for members of the public to listen to and/or view, within 72 hours of the meeting taking place.

Members of the public may use Facebook and Twitter or other forms of social media to report on proceedings at this meeting. Anyone wishing to film part or all of the proceedings may do so unless the press and public are excluded for that part of the meeting or there is good reason not to do so. As a matter of courtesy, anyone wishing to film proceedings is asked to advise the Chairperson so that those present may be made aware.

(The agenda and papers for this meeting can be downloaded from the National Park Authority's website [www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk](http://www.exmoor-nationalpark.gov.uk)).

Sarah Bryan  
Chief Executive

#### **A G E N D A**

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Minutes:** (1) To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8 November 2022 (Item 2).  
(2) To consider any Matters Arising from those Minutes.
3. **Annual Governance Review 2022 2023:** To consider the joint report of the Chief Finance Officer and Solicitor and Monitoring Officer (Item 3)
4. **Any Other Business of Urgency**

Details of the decisions taken at this meeting will be circulated in the formal Minutes which the Committee will be asked to approve as a correct record at its next meeting. In the meantime, details of the decisions can be obtained from Judy Coles, Corporate Support Officer, at Exmoor House. These documents can also be made available in alternative formats such as large print, on tape and on disc.

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY STANDARDS COMMITTEE

**MINUTES** of the meeting of the Standards Committee held at 9.30am on Tuesday, 8 November 2022 in the Committee Room at Exmoor House, Dulverton.

### PRESENT

Mr S J Pugsley (Deputy Chairperson) - *presiding*  
Mrs E Stacey  
Mr N Thwaites

Apologies for absence was received from Mr M Ellicott and Mr J Patrinos

### In Attendance:

Mr G Bryant (Chief Finance Officer)  
Mr C Hedger (Solicitor and Monitoring Officer) – *by video conference*  
Mrs C Reid (Head of Strategy and Performance)  
Mr M Riggulsford (Independent Person)  
Ms J Coles (Corporate Support Officer) – *notetaker*

## 7. MINUTES:

- i. **Confirmation:** The [Minutes](#) of the Standards Committee's meeting held on 19 July 2022 were agreed and signed as a correct record.
- ii. **Matters arising:** There were no matters arising from those Minutes.

## 8. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

The Standards Committee considered the [joint report](#) of the Head of Strategy and Performance and Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

### The Standards Committee's Consideration

The Standards Committee noted the proposed changes to Standing Orders and confirmed their agreement to present the amendments to the full Authority for adoption.

Given the current budgetary pressures that had led the Authority to conduct a full Business Review, it was suggested that the Standards Committee should be prepared to discuss further amendments to Standing Orders, to ensure the business of the Authority could continue in the event the shape of the organisation was required to change.

Clarification was provided that the changes made to Paragraph 2.2 would not preclude the ability to carry out a secret ballot when it came to electing the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson (Planning) at the Annual Meeting. It was noted that this had been the normal practice adopted by the Authority prior to the Covid pandemic.

<p><b>RESOLVED:</b> To agree that the proposed amendments to Standing Orders and the Scheme of Delegation should be presented to the full Authority for adoption.</p>
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8 November 2022

## 9. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Standards Committee considered the [report](#) of the Chief Finance Officer

**RESOLVED:** To agree that the proposed amendments to Financial Regulation should be presented to the full Authority for adoption.

## 10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY: There was none

(The meeting closed at 9.45 am)

Chairperson

## EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

### STANDARDS COMMITTEE

2 May 2023

### ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REVIEW 2022-2023

#### Joint Report of the Chief Finance Officer and Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

**Purpose of Report:** To report compliance with the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance and consider the Annual Governance Statement.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Standards Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Approve the Annual Governance Review.
- (2) Note the results of the Governance self-assessment in Section 9.
- (3) Approve the Annual Governance Statement as set out in the attached Appendix for inclusion with the Annual Accounts for 2022/23.

**Authority priorities:** Manage corporate finances and diversify income streams; Develop and maintain effective and efficient services; Work with communities, businesses and partners to deliver the National Park Partnership Plan and statutory purposes; Manage the Authority's Estate and operations to support delivery of National Park purposes

**Legal and equality implications:** Local Government Act 2003, Parts 1-3 (Capital Finance, Financial Administration and Grants), and Sections 1-39

Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, Sections 3 (Responsibility for Internal Control), 4 (Accounting Records and Control Systems) 5 (Internal Audit), and 6 (Review of Internal Control System).

High standards of corporate governance are essential in ensuring all business is transacted lawfully and with propriety.

The equality and human rights impact of the recommendations of this report have been assessed as having no adverse impact on any particular group or individual.

**Financial and risk implications:** The report has no financial implications but the risks to the Authority could be substantial for non-compliance with its Code of Corporate Governance.

**Climate change response:** A well governed Authority is more likely to take full account of the environmental impact of decision making.

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Sound governance arrangements and accountability are critical to the Authority to fulfil National Park purposes, deliver the intended outcomes in the National Park Partnership Plan and the Corporate Plan and operate in an effective, efficient and

ethical manner. Good governance leads to good management, good performance, good stewardship of public money, good public engagement and ultimately good outcomes for the public and service users.

- 1.2 The Authority has endorsed the “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016)” that has been produced by CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting) and SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers) which has the support of the Department for Communities and Local Government.
- 1.3 The CIPFA/SOLACE framework is based on the following seven core principles of good governance:
  - A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.
  - B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.
  - C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.
  - D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.
  - E. Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.
  - F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.
  - G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.
- 1.4 These seven principles are reflected in the Authority’s Code of Corporate Governance. The CIPFA/SOLACE Framework sets out a number of supporting principles for each of the seven core principles and these are translated into a range of governance arrangements that the Authority has in place. The first section of this report summarises the Authority’s compliance with these principles during 2022/23.

## **2. A. Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

- 2.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:
  - codes of conduct which define the standards of conduct and personal behaviour to which members, staff and agents of the Authority are required to subscribe.
  - an effective Standards Committee.
  - arrangements and mechanisms to ensure all codes of conduct continue to operate in practice, to ensure that members and staff are not influenced by prejudices, bias or conflicts of interest in dealing with the public and stakeholders.
  - arrangements for reporting concerns at work (whistleblowing) which are accessible to all staff and contractors.
  - shared values to act as a guide for decision making and as a basis for developing positive and trusting relationships within the Authority.

- member training and induction.
- a register of gifts and hospitality and comply with anti- bribery and money laundering legislation.
- partnerships underpinned by a common vision that is understood and agreed by all partners.

## 2.2 In year Commentary

- (i) Following the abolition of the Standards Board through the Localism Act 2011, new arrangements have been implemented and were approved in June 2012. The Authority has also appointed an 'Independent Person' to provide an external perspective on any investigations undertaken by the Standards Committee. The Standards Committee considered proposed amendments to the Member Code of Conduct in line with the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct in November 2021 and the Authority adopted the updated Code of Conduct in December 2021. The Standards Committee also granted dispensations to Members who are members of another authority in order to protect them from inadvertent breaches of the requirements related to Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, due to omissions and ambiguities in the legislation and to ensure that the National Park Authority can conduct its business effectively.
- (ii) An annual reminder is sent to all staff reminding them of their responsibilities and the requirement to comply with all policies, procedures, standing orders (including contract standing orders) and financial regulations.
- (iii) This is the second year that the Standards Committee have undertaken a self-assessment of the audit and governance process.

## 3. B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

### 3.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are to:

- meet on a regular basis with meetings open to the public except where reasons of commercial or individual confidentiality require the meeting to be closed.
- undertake a number of consultative committees with parishes and other interested bodies throughout the year as a forum for discussing common issues.
- engage with local councils and the Local Enterprise Partnership to ensure that National Park priorities are heard.
- produce effective consultation and communication arrangements.
- undertake regular surveys of visitors and businesses to ensure that balanced and representative opinions are available to inform decision making.
- enable a complaint or request for information regarding any aspect of the Authority's activities to be easily lodged and to ensure it is properly addressed.

### 3.2 In year Commentary

- (i) Extensive consultation arrangements are in place. The Corporate Plan continues to compare performance against the objectives set for the previous year and sets the targets for the forthcoming year.

- (ii) During 2022/23 Partnership Groups continued to meet where possible. Together with Authority representatives the Partnership Groups enable progress to be monitored and further opportunities for co-operation between these Partnership Groups in support of Partnership Plan action plans and further partner engagement to be realised. The Partnership Plan is due to be reviewed, and this was discussed at a meeting of Partnership Plan Group chairs in November 2022.
- (iii) The Authority continues to consult widely with interested parties and holds a number of meetings of the Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum at which questions relating to the activities and services of the Authority can be raised.
- (iv) We continue to respond to Freedom of Information, Environmental Information Regulation requests, complaints and compliments.

#### **4. C. Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits**

4.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are to:

- produce a National Park Partnership Plan, reviewed every five years, which contains a vision for Exmoor, key challenges and ambitions.
- publish a Corporate Plan and performance report presenting an objective and understandable account of its activities and achievements, its financial position and performance and an assessment of plans to maintain and improve service quality.
- produce a Medium-Term Financial Plan which estimates income and expenditure over a five year period to ensure that obligations can be met.
- engage with young people and a wide variety of community groups to ensure that the value of national parks is appreciated into the future.
- ensure that the forward year budget includes a risk assessment.
- assess the impact on community groups before recommendations are made.
- work positively with DEFRA to ensure the long term role and funding of national parks is secured.

4.2 In year Commentary

- (i) The Corporate Plan report for 2022/23 was issued to the Authority at the March 2022 meeting and has continued to guide the Authority's activities during the year. This had to be revised due to the impact of inflation and the disappointing National Park Grant figure for the year. A six-month progress report was presented to Members in December 2022.
- (ii) We have received an unqualified opinion for the 2021/22 Annual Statement of Accounts for 2021/22 by the Auditor, Grant Thornton LLP. The audit occurred much later than normal due to the impact of conducting an audit remotely. Complaints procedures are in place, are easily accessible and are easy to use. Requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act, 2000 are dealt with in accordance with the statutory requirements. Reports on both complaints and Freedom of Information Act requests were submitted to the National Park Authority.

- (iii) Partnership working continues to be a key feature of the Authority's working, the most significant during the past year being the Exmoor Mires Projects with Southwest Water and the Farming in Protected Landscapes scheme (FiPL). FiPL has provided new opportunities of working with farmers and land managers while investing in a range of schemes primarily around nature, ecology and agricultural developments. Generation Green funding allowed the Authority to engage with young people that are passionate about the environment. Clear understandings are agreed with Partners and where the Authority takes the lead role, all matters are conducted in accordance with the Authority's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.
- (iv) Since declaring a climate emergency in 2019/20 we have been implementing actions identified to achieve carbon neutral status for ENPA by 2030. 2022/23 was the year when the Public Sector Decarbonisation scheme was delivered. This replaced the old oil boiler at Pinkery Outdoor Education Centre with a biomass boiler, and installed additional renewable energy capacity. In Exmoor House we are continuing to replace lighting with LED lights and are continuing to install the second wave of secondary double glazing at Exmoor House. We have now received our first two electric vehicles and EV charge points have been installed at three ENPA premises. Following an internal climate change audit we strengthened our procedures for monitoring and reporting on the climate action plan including the addition of a trajectory to deliver the 2030 carbon neutral target. We continue to feed into the Somerset and Devon climate change partnerships.
- (v) In 2022/23 we received the report from consultants on the carbon footprint of the National Park. This provides a consistent methodology and allows for comparison / benchmarking across National Parks. Work is ongoing with our partners to support delivery throughout the National Park including securing funding from Somerset West and Taunton to support woodland creation on Exmoor. This complements the woodland planting that has already taken place on ENPA land at Bye Hill. The South West Peatland Partnership continues to work on peatland restoration on Exmoor.
- (vi) The task of developing a balanced medium-term financial plan is ongoing. The Authority has successfully managed the financial impact of the pandemic and now has greater certainty over the next three years of funding.

## **5. D. Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes**

5.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- considering a full range of options before recommendations are presented to members of the Authority.
- undertaking regular surveys of visitors and businesses to ensure that balanced and representative opinions are available to inform decision making.
- producing a Corporate Plan setting out objectives and targets for the period ahead.
- monitoring the achievement of these targets in year, and publicly reporting performance at the year end.



- producing a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) which estimates income and expenditure over a five year period, agreeing annual budgets which implement the Corporate Plan and are informed by the MTFP.
- the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel which will provide scrutiny over the budget setting process.
- when assessing options for capital investment the Authority, considering the life-cycle costs of the asset and the cost of capital financing.

## 5.2 In year Commentary

- (i) The Authority's decision-making processes are based on a slim line structure embracing the principle that there should be no duplication of effort. The Authority is not required to provide executive arrangements which were introduced in the Local Government Act 2000 and apply only to local authorities.
- (ii) The present Authority structure meets all the requirements of the Local Government Act. Standing Orders, Powers, Duties and Functions of the Authority Meeting, the Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations were reviewed and updated during 2022/23. The Members' Code of Conduct was last revised by the Authority in December [2021](#).
- (iii) The scheme of delegation of functions to Authority Committee and to the Chief Executive works well and is kept under review. In any public authority, decisions are being made all the time and it is important to strike the right balance between those that require Member consideration and those that can be taken by Officers. The scheme of delegation is set out fully in the Authority's standing orders. All decisions by Officers must accord with all Authority policies and must where appropriate involve consultation with Members. Whether a Member or Members should be consulted on any particular issue is a matter of judgement but it is the practice to consult committee chairmen and deputy chairmen on some issues and indeed local Members, that is to say those representing a division, ward or parish. An overriding safeguard in the delegation scheme is that the Chief Executive is required in all cases to consider whether, rather than proceed under the scheme, she should refer the matter to a committee for decision. Where any controversy is likely, it is always the policy to refer such matters to committee for decision.
- (iv) The Finance and Performance Advisory Panel establishes greater budgetary scrutiny and oversight of investment decisions. The panel reconvened in 2022/23 after Covid broke up the pattern of meetings.

## 6. **E. Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**

6.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- ensuring the Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the Authority for all aspects of operational management.
- ensuring induction programmes are arranged for new members and new staff.

- ensuring Members are provided with the necessary training to perform their roles including member review and Member briefing arrangements.
- ensuring that staff are competent to perform their roles and that arrangements are in place for all staff to have a Personal Development Review.
- ensuring mechanisms are in place to maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of staff at work.
- ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of Members and staff are documented including those of the statutory officers namely Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer.
- providing arrangements that are designed to encourage individuals from all sections of the public to engage with, contribute to and participate in the work of the Authority.
- ensuring meetings are held on a regular basis, are open to the public except where reasons of commercial or individual confidentiality require the meeting to be closed.

## 6.2 In year Commentary

- (i) Induction Programmes were carried out during 2022/23 for new Members. Members identify the subject areas for briefings/updates each year and this has been supplemented by a monthly informal Members' Forum where Members can request an updating or briefing on any topic or area of activity.
- (ii) Members have adopted a role description outlining the role and responsibility of members and an annual Member review is conducted by the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.
- (iii) All members of staff normally receive an annual performance and development review which included ensuring their job description was up to date, reviewed progress against current individual objectives and sets new objectives for the coming year. These objectives are directly linked to those contained in the Corporate Plan.
- (iv) Many organisations are committed to taking a lead role in the achievement of actions in the National Park Partnership Plan and these comprise local authorities, statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and partnerships. All contribute to the periodic updating of progress against the targets.
- (iv) Leadership Team and the Delivery Team meet regularly throughout the year. This provides the opportunity to discuss training needs and requirements.
- (v) The Authority received Employer Accreditation from CIPFA for its identification of professional development requirements for professionally qualified staff.

## 7. **F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.**

### 7.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- to produce and agree an annual risk register and risk management policy.
- to maintain an effective risk management system including systems of internal control and internal audit.

- a Health and Safety Committee and focus groups to ensure that accidents and incidents are reported and appropriate management action taken to reduce risk.
- information management, e-mail, internet and ICT policies that are communicated and understood.
- targets for performance in the delivery of services on a sustainable basis.
- ensuring the Chief Finance Officer advises on all financial matters, keeps proper financial records and accounts and maintains an effective system of internal financial control.
- to produce an annual governance statement for inclusion in the Annual Statement of Accounts.
- to operate a Final Accounts Committee and the Finance and Performance Advisory Panel to provide an additional level of oversight and challenge.
- an Internal Audit service to provide reassurance over the operation of internal control and processes.

## 7.2 In year Commentary

- (i) The Corporate Plan sets out the priorities and objectives for each financial year with periodic reports to those charged with governance on achievements/progress.
- (ii) Annual reports have been made to the National Park Authority on the Risk Management Strategy and the Internal Audit Service. The Auditor, Grant Thornton LLP presented their Annual Audit Findings Report to the Authority in March 2023 and an unqualified audit report was issued. The external auditors also undertook an enhanced Value For Money appraisal at this time also.
- (iii) The Health, Safety & Welfare policy has been reviewed to reflect the Authority's new flexible working arrangements and how reporting Health and Safety concerns is done in practice. The Health and Safety Focus Groups no longer meet, and health and safety issues are now discussed at regular Team meetings. The Health and Safety Committee has returned to in-person meetings, having met remotely during the Covid pandemic. The existing system of reporting continues. The Senior Facilities Officer is the nominated officer for facilities management in relation to health and safety.
- (iv) A new policy around Legionella Control and Water Safety has been developed. The Driving Authority Vehicles policy has been reviewed also.

## 8. **G. Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability**

8.1 The governance arrangements the Authority has in place to achieve these principles are:

- ensuring meetings are held on a regular basis, are open to the public except where reasons of commercial or individual confidentiality require the meeting to be closed.
- arrangements designed to encourage individuals and groups from all sections of the public to engage with, contribute to and participate in the work of the Authority.

- ensuring that all activities are legally correct, fully documented, appropriately authorised and carried out in a planned manner.
- ensuring the Chief Executive is responsible and accountable to the Authority for all aspects of operational management.
- ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of officers are documented including those of the statutory officers namely Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer.
- publishing an Annual Statement of Accounts each year in accordance with statutory requirements.
- arrangements to enable a complaint or request for information regarding any aspect of the Authority's activities to be easily lodged and to ensure it is properly addressed.
- ensuring the Chief Finance Officer maintains proper records to ensure the annual statement of accounts show a true and fair view and that expenditure has been properly authorised and allocated in an appropriate manner.
- commissioning an Internal Audit service to provide reassurance over the operation of internal control and processes.
- inclusion of an annual governance statement in the Statement of Accounts.
- a Corporate Plan setting out the objectives and targets for the period ahead and annual reports on performance against targets.
- an annual update on the progress of the Authority and its partners on the implementation of the National Park Partnership Plan.
- auditing of the Authority's financial position and performance every year via an External Audit of the final accounts.
- The completion of 28 Statutory returns and quarterly returns to Defra.

## 8.2 In year Commentary

- (i) Extensive consultation arrangements are in place. The Corporate Plan continues to compare performance against the objectives set for the previous year and sets the targets for the forthcoming year.
- (ii) Annual reports have been made to the National Park Authority on the Risk Management Strategy and the Internal Audit Service. The Auditor, Grant Thornton LLP presented their Annual Audit Findings Report to the Authority in March 2023 and a Value for Money report did not identify any weaknesses in arrangements.
- (iii) The Finance and Performance Advisory Panel has been established, terms and reference have been agreed and greater budgetary scrutiny and oversight has been made possible.
- (iv) The Authority now has the capability for the audio and video recording of its meetings and they can be viewed over the internet. During the Covid-19 pandemic meetings have been held virtually in accordance with the Coronavirus Regulations and we have managed the transition to hybrid committee meetings.
- (v) This year there have been reviews of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Whistleblowing and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies.

## 9. Audit Committee Self-Assessment

- 9.1 In May 2022 the External Auditors recommended that an annual self-assessment of the Audit Committee be undertaken to comply with recommended practice. This is the second year that this has been undertaken.
- 9.2 The purpose of an audit committee is to provide to those charged with governance independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance processes.
- 9.3 Exmoor National Park Authority does not have an Audit Committee, but it is the Authority that is the body charged with governance and it is the Standards Committee that undertakes the annual review of governance. In discussion with the External Auditors, they did not raise any objection to the annual self-assessment falling to the Standards Committee.
- 9.4 Included within the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's practical guidance on Audit Committees is a self-assessment of good practice. This is shown in the table below. It is suggested that where an audit committee has a high degree of performance against the good practice principles, then it is an indicator that the committee is soundly based and has in place a knowledgeable membership.
- 9.5 In the absence of an Audit Committee, the Standards Committee will endeavour to complete the self-assessment with the governance structure in operation at ENPA.

Good practice questions	Yes	Partly	No
<b>Audit committee purpose and governance</b>			
1. Does the authority have a dedicated audit committee?			x
2. Does the audit committee report directly to full council? (applicable to local government only)		na	
3. Do the terms of reference clearly set out the purpose of the committee in accordance with CIPFA's Position Statement?		na	
4. Is the role and purpose of the audit committee understood and accepted across the authority?		na	
5. Does the audit committee provide support to the authority in meeting the requirements of good governance?		na	
6. Are the arrangements to hold the committee to account for its performance operating satisfactorily?		na	
<i>Self-Assessment Commentary: It is the Authority that is the body charged with governance. The Authority fully understands its responsibility with regards to Governance.</i>			
<b>Functions of the committee</b>			
7. Do the committee's terms of reference explicitly address all the core areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement?	x		
• good governance	x		
• assurance framework, including partnerships and collaboration arrangements			
• internal audit	x		
• external audit	x		
• financial reporting	x		
• risk management	x		
• value for money or best value	x		
• counter fraud and corruption	x		
• supporting the ethical framework	x		

8. Is an annual evaluation undertaken to assess whether the committee is fulfilling its terms of reference and that adequate consideration has been given to all core areas?	x		
9. Has the audit committee considered the wider areas identified in CIPFA's Position Statement and whether it would be appropriate for the committee to undertake them?		See below	
10. Where coverage of core areas has been found to be limited, are plans in place to address this?		na	
11. Has the committee maintained its advisory role by not taking on any decision-making powers that are not in line with its core purpose?		na	
<p><i>Self-Assessment Commentary:</i>  <i>The Authority is guided and governed by the Constitution, Scheme of Delegation and Standing Orders. These documents cover the areas identified above.</i></p> <p><i>Potential wider areas concern of concern identified by CIPFA include Treasury Management, providing oversight of annual reports or considering risk or governance at the request of other committees. These wider areas of concern also go to the Authority.</i></p>			
<b>Membership and support</b>			
12. Has an effective audit committee structure and composition of the committee been selected?  This should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• separation from the executive</li> <li>• an appropriate mix of knowledge and skills among the membership</li> <li>• a size of committee that is not unwieldy</li> <li>• consideration has been given to the inclusion of at least one independent member (where it is not already a mandatory requirement)</li> </ul>	X		
	X		
	X		
	X		
13. Have independent members appointed to the committee been recruited in an open and transparent way and approved by the full council or the PCC and chief constable as appropriate for the organisation?	x		
14. Does the chair of the committee have appropriate knowledge and skills?	x		
15. Are arrangements in place to support the committee with briefings and training?	x		
16. Has the membership of the committee been assessed against the core knowledge and skills framework and found to be satisfactory?			x
17. Does the committee have good working relations with key people and organisations, including external audit, internal audit and the CFO?	x		
18. Is adequate secretariat and administrative support to the committee provided?	x		
<p><i>Self-Assessment Commentary:</i>  <i>Members of the Authority and the Standards Committee are appointed from a range of elected public bodies or have been appointed from a DEFRA led competitive process. Members have a range of skills and professional backgrounds.</i></p>			
<b>Effectiveness of the committee</b>			
19. Has the committee obtained feedback on its performance from those interacting with the committee or relying on its work?	x		
20. Are meetings effective with a good level of discussion and engagement from all the members?	x		

21. Does the committee engage with a wide range of leaders and managers, including discussion of audit findings, risks and action plans with the responsible officers?	x		
22. Does the committee make recommendations for the improvement of governance, risk and control and are these acted on?	x		
23. Has the committee evaluated whether and how it is adding value to the organisation?	x		
24. Does the committee have an action plan to improve any areas of weakness?		na	
25. Does the committee publish an annual report to account for its performance and explain its work?	x		
<p><i>Self-Assessment Commentary:</i>  <i>The Authority and the Standards Committee receive reports from internal and external audit throughout the year, and from ENPA staff on Risk Management. There is a very healthy debate and engagement with these.</i></p> <p><i>The overall governance structure is regularly debated to ensure that it is operating most effectively.</i></p>			

**Gordon Bryant**  
**Chief Finance Officer**

**Andrew Yendole**  
**Solicitor & Monitoring Officer**



## ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

### 1. Scope of responsibility

- 1.1 Exmoor National Park Authority is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Authority also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Authority is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 Exmoor National Park Authority has approved and adopted a code of corporate governance, which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*. A copy of the code can be obtained from the Chief Executive, Exmoor House, Dulverton, TA22 9HL. This statement explains how the Authority has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement.

### 2. The purpose of the governance framework

- 2.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and the culture and values, by which the Authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and the leads the community. It enables the Authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.
- 2.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Authority's policies and aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.
- 2.3 A governance framework has been in place at Exmoor National Park Authority for the year ended 31 March 2023 and up to the date of approval of the Corporate Plan and statement of accounts.

### 3. The Governance Framework

- 3.1 The key elements of the governance framework include:



- A National Park Partnership Plan that contains a vision, priorities and a corporate strategy to meet National Park purposes;
- The production of a Medium Term Financial Plan taking account of the anticipated level of National Park Grant;
- The production of a Corporate Plan that includes data on performance and objectives both achieved and planned;
- Committee papers that are linked to National Park Partnership Plan or Corporate Plan objectives and in compliance with equality and human rights legislation;
- Standing orders and financial regulations to regulate the conduct of the Authority's affairs;
- A Scheme of Delegation which sets out the functions and workings of the Authority and the powers delegated to Committees and the Chief Executive;
- Formal codes of conduct which define the standards of personal behaviour of members and staff. The code for Members was initially adopted in 2012 along with the establishment of a Standards Committee comprising 5 Authority members and the appointment of an "Independent Person" under the provisions of the 2011 Localism Act. A further process was the provision of guidance on the registration of interests. This was reviewed and refined in August 2012 with recommendations to Authority for standards arrangements and for the provision of member training on the new standards regime;
- Responsibility for audit matters are retained by the Authority;
- A Solicitor and Monitoring Officer who has a statutory responsibility supported by the Chief Finance Officer and financial regulations to ensure the legality of transactions, activities and arrangements the Authority enters;
- Financial management arrangements of the Authority which conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2010) ;
- A Complaints procedure and a whistle-blowing policy in place for members of the public, members, staff or contractors;
- An Anti Fraud, Corruption and Bribery Policy;
- An ICT Acceptable Use Policy;
- Risk Management Policy, Registers and Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery systems which are approved, in place and subject to annual regular review;
- Extensive arrangements for partnership working on a range of projects. Partnership working is crucial to the achievement of the priorities set out in the National Park Partnership Plan.
- A staff performance and development review process which identifies training and development needs;
- Training, briefing and induction programmes for members; and
- Wide consultation with interested parties and an Exmoor Consultative and Parish Forum meets to engage with the community and a Local Access Forum

considers access and rights of way issues. Numerous diverse organisations are represented on these consultative mechanisms.

#### **4. Review of Effectiveness**

- 4.1 Exmoor National Park Authority has responsibility for conducting at least annually, a review of effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Chief Executive and Heads of Section within the Authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the annual report on internal audit, and by the Annual Governance Report of the external auditors. The annual review of the effectiveness of the governance framework is undertaken by the Standards Committee and the Authority approve this Annual Governance Statement. The Standards Committee now also undertake an annual self-assessment of effectiveness.
- 4.2 The process that has been applied in maintaining and reviewing the effectiveness of the governance framework is:
- The adoption of an updated Code of Corporate Governance in March 2017 with an annual review by the National Park Authority carried out by the Authority's Solicitor and Monitoring Officer to ensure compliance with the Code and audited by the Chief Finance Officer;
  - Adoption of Standing Orders, the scheme of delegation and financial regulations which are periodically reviewed, updated and approved;
  - Reports to the Authority on performance management including sustainability and the corporate planning and performance framework;
  - Annual reports presented to the Authority in respect of internal audit which is a contracted service, and from the external auditor appointed by the Audit Commission;
  - Annual reports presented to the Authority on risk management, performance indicators and treasury management; and
  - An internal audit service is contracted from the Devon Audit Partnership and an annual work programme is agreed with the Chief Finance Officer with the internal auditors producing an annual report covering their activities for presentation to the Authority.
- 4.3 In the April meeting, the Authority was presented with a list of suggested changes to governance. These included a reduction to the number sitting on the Planning Committee, changes to the scheme of delegation and reductions to the number of formal meetings. The Leadership Team are currently consulting further on possible changes.

#### **5. Significant governance issues**

- 5.1 In general the governance and internal control systems within the Authority are working effectively and have been reviewed by the Solicitor and Monitoring Officer and the Chief Finance Officer and are independently validated by the internal and external auditors. As a consequence of certain Internal Audit findings, the Authority has undertaken a review of Safeguarding policies and practices. These changes were confirmed with Internal Audit during 2022/23.
- 5.2 During 2023/24 the Authority will be:

- Develop a new National Park Partnership Plan;
- Progressing work arising from the five year review of the Local Plan including on affordable housing delivery, climate change and a new Design Guide; also making preparations for the introduction of new statutory Biodiversity Net Gain requirements for planning;
- Working with Defra to deliver the National policy agenda on climate, nature and engagement with communities;
- Monitoring new legislation and changes in policy to ensure that account is taken of the impact on National Parks and National Park communities;
- Continuing to operate within limited resources while increasing revenue from alternative sources;
- Continuing to develop customer service standards and culture;
- Monitoring the performance of the Corporate Plan;
- Continue to engage and communicate flexibly while making best use of technology;
- Implement an Anti-Money Laundering policy;
- Ensure capital investment decisions are fully debated by FAPAP in advance of budgetary decisions being made by Authority;
- Continue to adapt the Farming in Protected Landscapes panel and model of decision making;
- Understand the implications of the new Somerset Unitary on the Authority’s decision making; and
- Support Somerset Council’s in their implementation of a new financial ledger to ensure that ENPA’s requirements are fully met.

5.3 We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our annual review.

**Signed** .....  
Mrs S Bryan, Chief Executive                      R Milton, Chairperson

**Date** .....