

**North York Moors National Park Authority  
Finance, Risk, Audit and Standards Committee**

**24 November 2014**

**Staffing Update**

**1. Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1 To update Members on the range of staff related issues currently being managed as a result of the voluntary/compulsory redundancy programmes and other operational changes being made following decisions taken earlier this year regarding the 2015/16 budget.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 Members were brought up to date at the May meeting of this Committee regarding the wide range of positive actions that have been taken in delivering the current People Management Strategy.
- 2.2 Decisions required to balance the budget for 2015/16 have resulted in the need to significantly reduce the numbers of staff that the Authority employs and this paper will outline the staffing related changes that have taken place during the summer and the broader issues that need resolving in the short to medium term.

**3. Voluntary Redundancy/Compulsory Redundancy**

- 3.1 Directors and the Chief Executive met in July to consider all of the applications made by staff to either leave the Authority or reduce their working hours. These were considered on the basis of the criteria previously approved by Members. A total of 12 staff had their requests for voluntary redundancy accepted with a further 1 reducing their working hours. The overall effect of these will be to reduce the Authority's staff numbers by 8.55 whole time equivalent. A number of staff have already left the Authority with the remainder scheduled to leave by 31 December 2014. The changes affect all levels of the Authority (including Directors) and all Departments
- 3.2 The revised structure within the Ranger and Field Service teams included a reduced number of posts. Competitive interviews were held to determine who should be appointed to these posts and this has resulted in 3 staff (2.4 whole time equivalent) being made compulsorily redundant.
- 3.3 The costs of the redundancy programme are expected to be £160K. This will be funded by in-year savings, together with the transfer of £35K from reserves.
- 3.4 All appointments have now been made to the new structures. 3 members of staff have been appointed to posts at lower grades (2 within Park Services and 1 within Conservation). The Authority's salary protection arrangements will apply until 30 September 2016. This has been built into future salary budgets.

- 3.5 This means that the Authority's staff levels at 31 March 2015 are expected to be 109 full time equivalents, compared with 120 as at 31 March 2014 and 142 as at 31 March 2010. It is also worth noting that included within the March 2015 numbers are 15 apprentices and 1 graduate trainee (plus 2 apprentice supervisors).
- 3.6 All staff who are leaving due to redundancy have had the opportunity to use the services of a specialist outplacement company called Renovo based in York. They provide one to one assistance on career guidance, job search and CV preparation. So far, 8 members of staff have used Renovo with a number being successful in finding alternative employment.

#### **4. Future Recruitment**

- 4.1 The long standing protocol that the Authority has had in place regarding recruitment will remain. This means that any vacancy is considered in detail by Directors and the Chief Executive to determine whether or not it should be filled. Officers recognise that a long term recruitment 'freeze' is not an effective way of controlling staff costs and ensuring that the Authority continues to function properly. Having said that, opportunities will be taken wherever sensible to do so to continue to reduce staff costs.
- 4.2 There are currently a number of vacancies due voluntary resignations and the decision has been taken to fill the Head of Policy and External Funding Officer posts by external advertisement. Two other posts, part time vacancies within the Enforcement and Customer Services teams, are being advertised internally to allow those staff being made redundant to express an interest in either post.

#### **5. Sickness Absence/Health and Safety**

- 5.1 It would normally be expected that times of significant uncertainty regarding employment within an organisation would lead to increased sickness absence rates. The Authority's absence rate in 2013/14 was 4 days per full time equivalent member of staff. This compares favourably with the National and regional figures for the same period which are;

- Public Sector 7.5 days
- Private Sector 4.6 days
- Yorkshire and Humberside 5.7 days  
(source ONS sickness absence data)

- 5.2 The sickness absence rate for the first 6 months of 2014/15 is 1.2 days. There is no evidence from the reasons for absence to suggest that stress/anxiety related absences are a significant factor in this.
- 5.3 A full report on Health and Safety will be presented to the December National Park Authority meeting. Accidents rates have remained very low in the first 6 months of 2014/15. There has, however, been one significant accident which occurred on 22 October. At the time of writing this report, Officers are conducting a thorough investigation and Members will be updated at the meeting.

#### **6. Working with Volunteers**

- 6.1 Following a recent dip in the level of volunteering, largely due to changes in Social Services ways of working, the amount of work contributed by volunteers is back at historically high levels. There is however an ambition to build further on this, extending

volunteer working through all areas of the Authority's work and to groups of people currently not engaged to any great extent.

- 6.2 This season has seen a significant increase in the use of volunteers at the Visitor Centres and this trend will continue.
- 6.3 The re-organisation of the Recreation, Rangers and Field Services teams includes an assumption of a greater input from Volunteers (from an already high starting point) in the maintenance of public rights of way.
- 6.2 While there are no issues regarding the willingness of paid staff to work alongside volunteers, Officers recognise that for some there is uncertainty about what it is reasonable to ask volunteers to do, how to ensure that health and safety, particularly on practical work tasks, will be properly managed and so on. The Authority has a good record in these areas and this best practice will be extended to staff newly expected to work with volunteers. These issues will be dealt with over the course of the winter months, with input from staff and volunteers alike.
- 6.3 Members will be presented with a paper in early 2015 outlining the future strategy and ambition for working with volunteers. A key component of this will be the steps taken to integrate volunteers and paid staff to create 'one workforce'.

## **7. Office Accommodation**

- 7.1 The reduction in staff numbers has resulted in surplus office space. Members will be aware of the medium term arrangements that are in place with Helmsley Town Council and North Yorkshire Police to rent office space at the Old Vicarage.
- 7.2 Staff reductions this year have created further space in the Authority's Helmsley based properties. The costs of running these properties are significant (approximately £121K per annum) with the majority of the costs being fixed. It does, therefore, make financial sense to ensure that our offices are utilised to their full potential – this then provides the Authority with options regarding what to do with the resulting space. The review of assets will be discussed more fully with Members early in 2015.
- 7.3 Whatever the outcome of the asset review, the costs of running the Authority's offices mean that we should explore all possibilities to ensure the most effective use of space. Discussions have commenced with staff to consider more flexible working practices, greater desk sharing, more intensive use of office space, off-site storage for paper records and so on.

## **8. Office Opening Hours**

- 8.1 As Members will be aware, office opening hours will reduce slightly to help facilitate reductions in staff numbers within the Customer Service team. It is expected that the revised 9.00am to 5.00pm opening times, Monday to Friday, will take effect from 1 April 2015. This change will be coupled with amendments to the flexible working hours scheme which will give Managers greater options in asking staff to work longer hours in times of peak workload and also give staff greater flexibility in when this time is subsequently taken off.
- 8.2 As this represents a contractual change for office based staff, UNISON are expected to ballot their members shortly.

## **UNISON**

- 9.1 The frequency of the Joint Consultative Forum (where Officers meet with UNISON representatives) has been increased this year to ensure that there has been timely formal discussion about the changes being made, and, in particular, how the staff related elements of the changes have been managed. Despite dealing with difficult issues, relationships with UNISON have remained positive. As indicated in the UNISON letter that was attached to the Final Proposals for Further Reductions in Spending/Increased Income paper presented to Members at September NPA, the trade union has recognised the efforts of managers to consult properly and interact with staff and UNISON.

### **10. Financial and Staffing Implications**

- 10.1 There are no additional financial or staffing implication to the contents of this report.

### **11. Sustainability Appraisal**

- 11.1 A Sustainability Assessment is not required because the report is an information report.

### **12. Legal Implications**

- 12.1 There are no significant legal implications to the issues outlined in this report.

### **13. Recommendation**

- 13.2 That Members note the contents of this report.

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### **Background Documents to this Report**

People Management Strategy 2013-15 – FRASC May 2014  
Policy for the Implementation of Changes to Staffing Levels – Special Authority July 2014  
Final Proposals for Further Reductions in Spending/Increased Income – NPA September 2014