

Budget Update 2011/12 & Staff Changes

Issue for consideration

This report presents the revised and updated Budget and sets out the arrangements for dealing with changes in the AONB staff unit resulting from staff leaving on Voluntary Redundancy and the need to ensure a strong, sustainable and effective AONB service in the coming years.

a) Budget Update 2011/12

Information

Revised Budget

The revised and updated Budget at Appendix 'A' below takes account of the more generous settlement from Defra than had been previously been anticipated, AONB grant having suffered a slightly less severe cut than the Defra budget overall. This has resulted in an additional £14,000 grant offer from Defra over and above that anticipated in the JAC Budget presented to the Committee in October.

The additional grant has been used to increase the budget provision for Projects.

The updated budget figures are shown in column 3 in the table below. The grant for 2011/12 from Defra allows £213,000 against core costs and £41,000 to fund the Forest of Bowland AONB Sustainable Development Fund. This allows £78,000 for the annual programme of projects to conserve and enhance landscape, biodiversity, heritage; access, enjoyment and healthy outdoor activity; community schemes and economic regeneration. Projects funding will also be used as match to attract additional income to better deliver the AONB Management Plan.

Defra have written to all AONBs confirming that they will continue with the existing Memorandum of Agreement template as a condition of payment of grant and all funding partners will be invited to continue their existing commitment to an updated MOA for the Forest of Bowland AONB. A letter/email will be sent by the AONB Manager to all councils enclosing the blank MOA template suitably updated with revised dates and requesting reaffirmation of their support by signing and returning the same.

b) Staff Changes

In October 2010 the LCC Environment Directorate restructure was implemented and the AONB Manager became AONB-Rural Manager in the Environmental Projects Section.

However, in seeking to achieve necessary budgetary cuts without compulsory redundancy LCC invited staff to consider Voluntary Redundancy.

Both the AONB Manager and the Community Projects Officer applied for VR and their applications were approved. Both leave employment this April under the voluntary redundancy terms offered and funded by LCC. More recently the Communications Officer has also applied for VR and her request is currently being considered by LCC.

Approval was sought from LCC to ensure no loss of continuity of AONB Management. This had to be achieved within the restrictions agreed for staff leaving on VR. Continuity of proper AONB management has been achieved through bringing the Environment Directorate's AONB-Rural team and Site Access team under one Manager and further integrating the work of the AONB-Rural Team. The proposals were agreed by Natural England as being within their requirements for AONB grant. The changes were approved by the County Council and agreed by the JAC Chairman under Chairman's action.

The existing Site Access Manager, Nick Osborne therefore takes over the higher level management responsibilities of the current AONB-Rural Manager Don McKay on his retirement (for the sake of calculating eligible grant from Defra, it has been calculated that one day a week equivalent would be spent on higher level AONB duties). In addition the existing senior officer in AONB-Rural, Elliott Lorimer (lead officer in West Pennine Moors Area Management Committee) takes over the lower level management responsibilities and tasks (4 days a week equivalent). Elliott also represents LCC on Arnside & Silverdale committees and is lead officer to Pennine Prospects. (Details of the reapportionment of management responsibilities are set out at the end of the item following 'Decision to be taken').

The two officers taking on AONB Management responsibilities have extensive experience as lead officers of both councillor and officer countryside area joint committees with NGO and private sector involvement, have experience of managing budgets and in the case of the Site Access Manager responsibility for sizeable budgets for assets and staff including the County Ranger Service and volunteer rangers, access areas and facilities such as Beacon Fell Country Park and other countryside picnic, parking and information facilities throughout Lancashire including Bowland.

The savings made by the two existing AONB officers going on VR mean the AONB Unit is able to fund the AONB Sustainable Tourism & Website Development Officer wholly within AONB core funding as opposed to being partly dependent on temporary external funding as in recent years. The post will take up the additional role of communications officer at the end of September when the Lancashire Green Tourism project ceases.

As resources are reduced the AONB Unit posts need to become more generic and multi tasking and the former HLF project officer has shown aptitude and a range of skills and abilities in particular in budget management, working

with communities, schools, and voluntary groups and in successfully organising a two year programme of participatory events and training.

The officer has shown the ability to play a key role in the AONB team delivering the AONB Management Plan and contributing positively to the wider work of the AONB Unit. The recent application by the Communications Officer to go on VR means that if approved the budget would be sufficient to allow the former HLF Projects officer to be retained giving continuity of expertise in working with communities, schools, heritage and the arts that would otherwise be lost.

Decision to be taken

The committee is asked to note and agree:-

1. The voluntary retirement of the AONB Manager and the Community Projects Officers and the application for VR by the Communications Officer.
2. The transfer of higher level AONB Manager responsibilities for the AONB to the LCC Site Access Manager and the transfer of lower level management responsibilities and tasks to the principal officer in the current AONB–Rural Team.
3. The AONB Sustainable Tourism & Website Development Officer post being brought wholly within AONB core funding and taking over the communications tasks of the former Communication officer.
4. To request LCC as the AONB Unit staff employer to agree that the former HLF Project Officer be slotted into the vacated post of former Communications Officer as and when vacated and that the post be made a generic AONB officer post within the AONB Unit.
5. To request the funding authorities to reaffirm their commitment to the AONB Partnership by signing the updated Memorandum of Agreement to be circulated by the AONB Manager.