

AONB Revenue Budget 2016/17

(Appendix A refers)

Issue for consideration

- a) Revenue Budget 2016/17
- b) AONB 'Projects' provision and Sustainable Development Fund

Background

The budget provision for the Forest of Bowland AONB Joint Advisory Committee is funded by eight constituent local authority partners and grant from Defra, which is also enhanced by an additional contribution from United Utilities.

A core team is established from this budget provision, to assist in the delivery of the statutory AONB Management Plan on behalf of the Joint Advisory Committee and the local authorities. The AONB Unit continues to work to a 3-year business plan (draft to be presented for approval at JAC meeting in April 2016), on which partners are consulted to ensure it reflects local priorities for the AONB.

Due to uncertainty regarding the future Defra AONB grant when the AONB JAC met in October 2015, it was agreed to meet in January 2016 to re-consider the AONB Revenue Budget 2016/17.

a. Revenue Budget 2016/17

This section sets out in Appendix 'A' column 4, the costs associated with the Committee's Projects and management service in 2016/17, including estimated pay and price levels.

Provision reflects the new core team of 4 full-time equivalent posts, operational budgets for core activities and projects:

- Principal AONB Officer
- Development and Funding Officer
- Sustainable Tourism Officer
- Community Projects and Events Officer

Total Committee income from contributions has been included in the budget for 2016/17 based on estimated contributions from funding authorities, equivalent to maintaining the requested contribution for 2015/16[#]. In addition, it is also based on a continuation of a contribution from United Utilities, matching the level requested from district/borough councils.

Income in respect of grant support from Defra towards core costs and projects costs has now been included on the no reduction to the 2015/16 grant offer. In the Chancellor's Comprehensive Spending Review outlined that funding for National Park and AONBs would be protected up to FY2019/20. A grant offer letter for 2016/17 from Defra is expected by the end of January 2016 to formally confirming this.

[#] North Yorkshire County Council has proposed a reduction of 20% (£1350) in their core funding contribution to the AONB Partnership (made from its 'Waste and Countryside' budget). Discussions between relevant officers and members are on-going to identify other County Council funding to allow the authority to maintain its full contribution for 2016/17.

b. AONB 'Projects' provision and Sustainable Development Fund

'Projects' provision

It is assumed that the Defra grant for 2016/17 will continue to be a single grant offer to be used in ways which the AONB Joint Advisory Committee considers will deliver the best performance in terms of achieving delivery of the Management Plan, without restrictions placed on the percentage of grant to each area of supported activity.

Therefore, the level of provision for 'Projects' is based on the resources estimated to be available to the Committee after providing for the staffing of the AONB Unit at the existing office base, plus related core activities costs.

AONB Sustainable Development Fund

Since 2005, this 'Projects' provision has been able to support an AONB 'Sustainable Development Fund'; a grant scheme currently managed in partnership with Champion Bowland, which supports local projects that bring environmental, social and economic benefits to the AONB. However since 2011, the annual total pot available to SDF has had to be reduced very significantly and this appears to have affected the scope and ambition of project applications, as well as demand for grant support.

With increasing and competing demands for 'match-funding' to support the delivery of other AONB Management Plan objectives which offer significant added value, it is therefore proposed that the AONB Sustainable Development Fund is closed to new applications from April 2016. Any remaining funds for FY2015/16 will be committed before 31st March 2016.

Champion Bowland will continue to offer a small grant scheme (up to £750) to support local projects, which benefit the environment, local communities and visitors.

The attention of the Committee is drawn to the following:

1. Gross Expenditure

It is proposed that total expenditure be £359,653 in 2016/17, similar to that in 2015/16. The total expenditure results from providing for the effect of increased pay and prices, staff increments, employers national insurance and superannuation contributions, host authority support costs and reflecting a level of provision for 'Projects'.

2. Income

Defra grant towards core costs and projects costs of £208,143 reflects no reduction on 2015/16 grant funding levels.

A contribution of £6,800 from United Utilities has been included, on the basis that the company can maintain a level of contribution equivalent to that of the district/borough councils.

3. Net Expenditure

The £303,343 net cost of management services is based on maintaining the level of contributions from the funding authorities requested for 2015/16. It is essential that the funding authorities are notified of the approved expenditure and requested to make due provision in their own estimates.

4. Additional Resources

It should also be noted that, as normal, resources from other funding bodies for projects in AONB will continue to be sought during 2016/17 (e.g. Lottery Funds, European Union, Government Agencies, Lancashire Environment Fund), which are over and above the Joint Advisory Committee budget provision 2016/17.

Furthermore, the AONB Unit contributes to the generation of additional schemes and projects in liaison with organisations operating in the area e.g. local authority countryside services or rivers trusts.

Decision Required

The Committee is requested to:

- i) approve the 2016/17 Revenue Budget as set out in the report
- ii) subject to the approval of (i) above, to request the funding authorities to make appropriate provision in their revenue budgets
- iii) agree the closure of the AONB Sustainable Development Fund from April 2016 onwards