

Report of:	Head of Economic Development
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Key Decision:	Yes
Report Track:	Cabinet: 21/07/16

CABINET
21 JULY 2016
CANNOCK CHASE AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY
GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To consider, note and endorse the changes to the Governance Structures for the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet notes and endorses the changes to the Governance Structures for the Cannock Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which were agreed at the AONB Joint Committee on 16 June 2016.

3 Key Issues and Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1 The governance of Cannock Chase AONB has been under review in recent months as it was felt to be complex and unwieldy and not effectively delivering the Management Plan. Following this review, the changes to the governance structures were agreed by the Joint Committee (on which Cannock Chase Council is represented by the Portfolio Leader for the Environment). The new governance structures are more streamlined which is intended to aid the more efficient and focused delivery of the management plan. The effectiveness of these changes will be monitored. Cabinet is requested to note and endorse these changes, the details of which are set out in the main body of this report.

4 Relationship to Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 This report supports the Council's Corporate Priorities as follows:
- (i) **Better Jobs and Skills:** Many of the projects in the AONB Management Plan are undertaken by volunteers who develop essential skills for the workplace.
 - (ii) **More and better housing:** While the AONB itself does not contribute to providing more and better housing, the AONB is a major asset to the area which contributes to ensuring that the District is a place where people want to live, and provides them with an attractive local environment and opportunities for healthy living.
 - (iii) **Cleaner and Safer Environments:** Projects in the AONB Management Plan ensure that the AONB is a clean and safe environment for all who use this valuable asset.
 - (iv) **Better Health Outcomes:** The AONB contributes both to physical and mental wellbeing. A well managed AONB provides opportunities for active recreation as well as mental relaxation and projects within the management plan ensure that these aspirations can be achieved.

5 Report Detail

- 5.1 Under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 local authorities have two key statutory duties in relation to AONBs.
- 5.2 Firstly, Section 85 (general duty of public bodies) states that in exercising or performing any functions in relation to or so as to affect land in an AONB a relevant authority shall have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB.
- 5.3 Secondly, Section 89 requires Local planning authorities to act jointly and prepare and publish AONB management plans which must be reviewed every five years.
- 5.4 Cannock Chase AONB partnership was established in 2003 to enable partners to work together to deliver their statutory duties and to further the positive management of the AONB.
- 5.5 Over recent years concerns have been raised by both partners and the AONB Unit regarding delivery of the management plan and changes to the requirements placed on the unit. In addition, increasing pressure upon public sector funding is a risk to the AONB and there was a desire to look at alternative or additional funding to ensure the sustainability of the partnership.
- 5.6 In Autumn 2015, the Partnership set out its aspirations for the review. These were:

- To develop a more streamlined and less complex structure that effectively and efficiently engages partners;
 - To develop a more delivery focused approach with a greater emphasis on securing funding and resources to deliver the AONB Management Plan
 - To develop a more financially sustainable model with a broader funding base recognising more limited public sector budgets.
- 5.7 In December 2015 the Committee approved in principle a new governance structure for the AONB. This would retain the Joint Committee (on which this Council is represented by the Portfolio holder for the Environment) but extend representation through co-opted members to gain wider perspective to inform decision making. This would involve bringing some of the bodies on the Advisory Partnership directly into the Joint Committee so that their influence would be immediate rather than via a separate meeting.
- 5.8 The revised structure would establish a series of Task and Finish Groups to generate a greater focus upon delivery based on specific elements of the Management Plan. These groups will include appropriate members from the former Advisory Partnership working on the Task and Finish groups appropriate to their areas of expertise, along with delivery staff from partner organisations.
- 5.9 The revised structure reinstates the Annual Conference, providing an opportunity for the Committee and wider partners / stakeholders (including Parish Councils) to get together to discuss current initiatives and issues.
- 5.10 With the redistribution of partners on to the Joint Committee, Task and Finish groups and an Annual Conference the Advisory Partnership and Parish Meeting would no longer be formally required (although parishes could choose to have their own joint meeting should they so wish).
- 5.11 These new structures for Governance were agreed at the Joint Committee on 16th June 2016 which will now enable the next steps of the review to take place which will look at options for more financially sustainable operating models.
- 5.12 A diagram of the former and new governance structures is attached at Appendix A. The papers which set out the full details of the Governance review can be viewed at www.cannockchase.co.uk/assets/downloads/FulldocumentsJC16.6.2016.pdf. These papers include a revised Partnership Agreement and Terms of Reference.

6 Implications

6.1 Financial

There are no immediate financial implications arising as a direct result of the change in governance structures; any costs being funded from existing budgets.

However it is the intention of the more streamlined governance structure to enable more efficient operation of the Partnership in fulfilling its duties in relation to the AONB. It will also enable the Partnership to move forward to the next stage of the review which is to look at more financially sustainable operating models.

6.2 Legal

The legal implications are set out in the report

6.3 Human Resources

None

6.4 Section 17 (Crime Prevention)

None

6.5 Human Rights Act

None

6.6 Data Protection

None

6.7 Risk Management

A risk assessment has been undertaken. The main element of risk from the changes to the governance structures is that these do not result in the intended improvements to the delivery of the Management Plan. This risk is minimal as the Joint Committee will keep the process under review so that measures can be put in place to address any difficulties which may be experienced.

6.8 Equality & Diversity

None

6.9 Best Value

None

7 Appendices to the Report

Appendix A

New and previous structures for AONB Governance.

Previous Consideration

The original Partnership Agreement was signed by this Council in 2003.

Background Papers

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000

AONB Management Plan 2014 – 2019

Papers for the AONB Joint Committee Annual Meeting 16th June 2016

<http://www.cannock-chase.co.uk/assets/downloads/FulldocumentsJC16.6.2016.pdf>

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