

REVIEW OF MEMBERSHIP AND CONSTITUTION OF THE JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Purpose

To establish a Task and Finish Group to review current vacancies and the constitution of the Joint Advisory Committee and propose recommendations with regard to changes of membership and terms of reference.

Recommendations

That the JAC establish a Task and Finish Group of three to five members, supported by officers, to review current vacancies and the constitution of the Joint Advisory Committee and report back with proposed recommendations.

Key Issues

- There are a number of vacancies that have emerged in the co-opted membership of the Joint Advisory Committee.
- Recent initiatives, including the Glover Review and the Diversity & Inclusion training provided through Welsh Government, have highlighted the need for increasing diversity in public sector representation.
- The Joint Agreement as to the establishment and functions of the Wye Valley AONB JAC should be reviewed from time to time.
- A review of current vacancies and the constitution of the Joint Advisory Committee can be undertaken by a small Task and Finish Group, of three to five members supported by officers, who can report back to the JAC with proposed recommendations.

Reasons

A number of vacancies have emerged recently in the co-opted membership of the Joint Advisory Committee. These include the standing down of both the Gloucestershire and Herefordshire Voluntary Conservation Sector representatives and the dissolution of the River Wye Preservation Trust that had a seat on the JAC.

The AONB Manager was in the process of reviewing the recruitment process for a new Gloucestershire Voluntary Conservation Sector Representative when these other vacancies emerged. It therefore appears opportune to take a deeper and wider review of co-opted membership.

The recent members training provided through Welsh Government on diversity and inclusion emphasised that “there is a strong moral, legislative and business case for diversity and inclusion. The moral case is based on principles of human rights, equality, social justice, and democracy: those who govern Public Bodies should be representative of the communities that they serve. Most importantly, a whole-organisation approach to improving diversity and inclusion needs to be established.”

The 2019 Glover 'Landscape Review of National Parks and AONBs in England' included *Proposal 26: Reformed governance to inspire and secure ambition in our national landscapes and better reflect society*. The report noted that "the lack of diversity among those governing the bodies looking after our national landscapes is extremely narrow.... this is not to say there aren't brilliant and committed people doing brilliant things.... [but] they suffer from the same demographic biases as most authorities in England, lacking proper representation across age, gender, ethnicity and (dis)ability.... Every effort should be made to achieve diversity – of social background, gender, age, ethnicity, (dis)ability."

Implications

Three to five members of the JAC would be needed to sit on the Membership Review Task & Finish Group. Supported by the AONB Manager and other officers as appropriate, the Task Group would review all current vacancies, terms of reference and recruitment processes, along with the need for greater representation across age, gender, ethnicity and (dis)ability. The Group would consider requirements and options, seeking advice as necessary, and form proposals to report back to the JAC with as recommendations. Initial proposals could be presented at the next JAC, in July.

The recent training on diversity and inclusion through Welsh Government also suggested that there should be a diversity and inclusion champion on each JAC.

Some proposed changes may be achievable under the existing 'Agreement As to the establishment and functions Of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Joint Advisory Committee'. This 'Agreement' is between the Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire County Council, Herefordshire Council and Monmouthshire County Council and was last reviewed in 2009. However, there may be recommendations that would require updating the Agreement. These would have to be considered in the context of the legal priorities of the four local authorities.

Background

There is no requirement for JAC members to live within the National Landscape, but an active interest in the area is expected. JAC members are nominated by respective organisations but serve on the JAC to benefit the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and represent wider interests rather than those of a particular organisation or constituency. However, members need to take particular care to avoid prejudicing both the independence of the JAC's advice and their own position on other bodies.

Co-opted seats on the JAC are not reserved for specific organisations, although relevant organisations or sectors may be invited to recommend suitable individuals or to advertise a JAC vacancy amongst their membership.

From time to time the JAC undertakes a review of its structures and membership. The JAC Constitution 'Agreement' was last reviewed in 2009. A Governance Review was undertaken in 2018 but the recommendations were not fully adopted due to the impacts of the Covid Pandemic.