

NFNPA/RACP 385/19

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE MEETING – 4 FEBRUARY 2019

National Park Authority Grants

Report by: Paul Walton, Head of Environment and Rural Economy

Summary:

This paper sets out how the Authority issues grants and financial contributions to third parties.

Recommendation:

- i) To approve the preparation of a formal Service Level Agreement between the NPA and New Forest Produce Limited to replace the current annual grant
- ii) To maintain the Sustainable Communities Fund as the principal means by which the New Forest NPA provides grants to community projects

INTRODUCTION

As reported at RACP in November 2018 (min 22 Oral Update on Grants Scheme), officers have been considering the process by which the Authority gives grants or financial contributions to third parties. It is essential that this process is transparent and leads to effective outcomes. It also needs to be proportionate to the amount of money that is available to the Authority to disburse as grants or financial contributions.

This report sets out how the NPA achieves this.

1. NPA Capital Grants

The NFNPA has provided capital grants and financial contributions to third parties to help achieve its broad objectives and outcomes identified in the Partnership Plan and current 3-year Business Plan. These capital grants, such as the recent contribution to the purchase of Franchises Lodge by the RSPB are financed from Capital/ Major Projects Reserve. In the case of the RSPB the delivery of outcomes is guided by a Memorandum of Understanding. Drawing on these reserves are subject to Authority approval on a case-by-case basis and will usually be in response to opportunities as they arise.

2. NPA Revenue Grants

Smaller, revenue grants and contributions are drawn from the Programme Fund. This is revised annually and agreed by the Authority as part of the annual budget setting process. In 2018/19 the Programme Fund was £286,000. The Programme Fund is the primary area from which the NPA can provide financial support either to external third parties or to provide resources for projects that the NPA delivers. This discretionary spend takes place across three main areas, each accounting for approximately 1/3 of the budget: Supplies and Services, Service Level Agreements and Grants.

2.1 Supplies and Services

The NPA supports a variety of work which helps to enable and deliver our broad objectives and annual Business Plan outcomes. This work takes place within or across teams and is delivered by officers as part of their day-to-day activities, often in partnership with a range of other organisations.

2.2 Service Level Agreements

Service Level Agreements enable the NPA to acquire information and expertise that would otherwise require the deployment of a specialist team or particular knowledge that is not available in-house. In the current financial year this includes, for example, working with the Freshwater Habitats Trust on water quality projects and access to environmental data from the Hampshire Biodiversity Centre

2.3 Small Grants

Approximately 1/3 of the Programme Fund can be regarded as grant funding, used to support projects that deliver key Authority objectives but are provided largely, or entirely by third parties. This is currently divided between the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF) and, the New Forest Marque.

2.4 Sustainable Communities Fund

Since 2016 the NPA has agreed an annual budget of £50,000 towards the Sustainable Communities Fund (SCF), including the £30,000 contribution to Our Past, Our Future for the delivery of a programme of environmental improvements, which runs until 2020. The remaining funds are available to individuals and communities through a long-established approval process with member scrutiny (the SCF Panel). The SCF is promoted through the NPA website and applicants complete a simple application form providing details of the project and the amount of funding needed. The upper limit on each grant is currently £2,000.

2.5 New Forest Marque

The NPA support for the New Forest Marque, which has been ongoing for over 10 years was last reviewed by the RAPC in September 2016 when it was agreed to continue to provide a grant in the 2017/18 budget. A further grant was provided in the current financial year.

The Marque is an effective means by which the NPA discharges its duty to foster the economic well-being of local communities. If, as is likely, the NPA wishes to continue to support the Marque consideration should be given to moving from an annual grant to a more formal Service Level Agreement or similar. This would be welcomed by New Forest Produce Limited and enable greater certainty in business planning. This type of agreement also helps to reinforce our role in directing the work programme of the Marque.

3. Conclusion

The New Forest NPA currently has a very limited budget available to offer as grants and financial contributions to third parties. The majority of the “discretionary” spending available on an annual basis is through the Programme Fund, of which around two thirds is governed by the purchase of supplies and services or formal agreements with third

parties that help us deliver our objectives. The remaining third is divided between the New Forest Marque and Sustainable Communities Fund. It would be beneficial to move the long-standing support for the New Forest Marque into a formal SLA type arrangement. This would leave around £25,000 a year available for a grant programme, currently administered as the Sustainable Communities Fund.

RECOMMENDATION

1. To approve the preparation of a formal Service Level Agreement between the NPA and New Forest Produce Limited to replace the current annual grant
2. To maintain the Sustainable Communities Fund as the principal means by which the New Forest NPA provides grants to community projects

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