



For discussion

Title: Cairngorms National Park Authority Workforce Management Strategy

Prepared by: Kate Christie, Head of Organisational Development

Purpose:

This Workforce Management Strategy refreshes the strategy approved in December 2018. The guiding strategic policy direction from the Board at that time was that the Authority's Executive team should seek to manage the staff group within the organisation in a manner balancing operational needs against delivering the maximum potential flexibility in making budget prioritisation decisions for the 2017/2022 National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) cycle. The 2017/2022 NPPP cycle has been successfully concluded, with a new National Park Partnership Plan 2023/27 approved by Ministers in August 2022. The Authority's Corporate Plan covering our contribution and intended resource deployment to delivery of the NPPP was agreed by Board in March 2023.

Recommendations

The Board Is asked to:

- a) Note the strategy

Strategic context

1. The strategic policy for workforce management remains that established previously.
The Executive Team should seek to manage the staff group within the organisation in a manner balancing operational needs against delivering the maximum potential flexibility in making budget prioritisation decisions.
Our agreed Corporate Plan highlights the intended management of the staff group within the context of total anticipated resources and expenditure.



2. These 2023 - 2027 Corporate Plan objectives come within the wider strategic context of:
 - a) A phased reduction in the working work from 37.5 hours/week to 36 hours/week from 1st April 2023, and 35 hours from 1st April 2024 to be implemented on the basis of efficiencies in operations and deployment of staff time and without creating a need for additional staffing.
 - b) An agreed increase in staff numbers from the previously adopted 2018 Strategy, in order to deliver the increased investment in peatland restoration, the Heritage Horizons Cairngorms 2030 National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) project, and Nature Restoration funding, as well as the ongoing requirement for an active and engaged park-employed Ranger Service.
 - c) A hybrid working environment as a result of permanent changes to the working culture following two years of lockdown and compulsory home working due to the Covid-19 pandemic
 - d) National policy of No Compulsory Redundancy (NCR) established through Scottish Government Public Sector Pay Policy, which is expected to continue for foreseeable future.
 - e) Potential longer term impact of the new National Park legislation
 - f) Our continued aspiration to be "the best small public body In Scotland", and to be innovative, quick to act and empower staff to deliver the strategies that are put in place by the Board.
 - g) Continued joint working with LLTNPA, across HR, IT and GIS services, and collaboration with the EELG People Group, and the inclusion of some EELG partners in our internal recruitment pool
 - h) Our ongoing commitment to retain an office in Ballater, and provide office space in both the Ballater and Grantown offices for partner organisations, as appropriate

Workforce Projections

3. Whilst staff numbers have increased since the previous Workforce Strategy of 2018, the Corporate Plan 2023 -2027 projects a mainly static resource demand for staff funded by "core" recurrent grant and other income resources over the first year of the four year period, with an increase in the following three years should the bid for the Heritage Horizons Cairngorms 2030 Delivery Phase be approved by December 2023. Staffing costs are projected to move from £4.43 million in 2022/23 to £4.84 million in 2023/24. The increases in staff payroll levels for 2023/24 represent to some extent



the full year consequence of recruitment undertaken over the course of 2022/23 in staffing our increased scale of delivery: Heritage Horizons Cairngorms 2030, and Peatland Restoration Programmes each increased in scale over the course of the year. Longer term staffing projections to 2026/27 are set out in the "Forward Financial Projections" included in the Cairngorms NPA Corporate Plan for 2023 to 2027.

4. The Authority acts as an employing "host" for key projects within the National Park, willing to take on the various risks of either acting as employer, or providing "in-kind" support, e.g. to partner "embedded" posts where we provide only part-funding, or the use of the office and its facilities, in order to facilitate the development and implementation of multi-partner project delivery on key activities delivering NPPP priorities. This role is not impacted by the strategic direction around budget and workforce management. Project staff are accounted for separately in the Authority's accounts and also within our management accounting processes, and are only included in the figures quoted at paragraph 3 to the extent that proportions of their salary costs are funded by the Authority as an element of our contribution to project delivery.
5. The Authority's role as a key 'host' organisation for significant project delivery across the National Park does impact significantly on our total staffing numbers and on our consequent Workforce Management Strategy and consequent actions.

Workforce Intelligence and Action Points

6. Within the strategic context and our associated workforce projections, the Authority's Workforce Management Strategy is informed by assumptions that have been made through the analysis of workforce data and intelligence (as well as the equalities data we gather annually and which can be found in: [April-2023-Update-on-Equality-Outcomes-2021.2024V1.0.pdf \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](#), as below:
 - a) The majority of our staff are aged 45 – 54 (35%), with equal numbers (26%) aged at the opposite ends of the spectrum, 54 – 75+, and 16 – 24. Whilst this shows that the Park Authority has an aging workforce, there are no key risk areas in terms of impact of potential retirements at this stage in the organisational cycle given that largest staff group still have a minimum of six years service prior to accessing elements of their pension benefits without reduction; none of the staff who could draw down their Civil Service pension have indicated an intention to



do so; and the fact the Park Authority operates a "Open Retirement" Policy and can therefore have some reasonable expectation of staff working into their 60s. In addition, the staff aged 45 and above are generally across all directorates and well integrated with younger staff who are also represented across all directorates. Nevertheless, we recognise that our Workforce Management going forward will need to focus on the Youth Employment Strategy, and creating more opportunities around apprenticeships, internships and graduate placements. This will be supported by a mentoring scheme, whereby senior staff will mentor junior staff as part of the process of upskilling junior staff and increasing their skills and confidence, so that they are well placed to apply for more senior posts. Our workforce demographic is however a key metric that we will continue to monitor at least annually recognising the enhanced risk management associated with this particular workforce management consideration.

- b) An analysis of the statistics of all "leavers" over the last 5 years indicated that the majority of "leavers" were those with 1 – 3 years' service. Most of these staff were on short term contracts, so this statistic is expected and does not cause concern, and reflects the benefits of flexibility that short term fixed term contracts afford. Our Turnover KPI target is not more than 10% in a 12 month period and turnover is generally sitting at about 8% (excluding short-term and seasonal posts). This represents a good balance between retention of existing skills and experience, and opportunities for new staff to join the organisation with new talents and ideas. The one area that does require consideration is within the planning team – see below and appendix 1.
- c) 50% of our existing staff complement have worked for the Park Authority for 1 – 2 years. The majority of these posts are either short term seasonal posts, or new posts that have been developed to support the Heritage Horizons project, and therefore this is not unexpected. We will continue to recruit Trainee Rangers each year, as this has been the career pipeline for succession to Seasonal Ranger posts. We will also monitor our project-led fixed term contracts to ensure a balance between retention of key skills and flexibility around funding timelines. The Senior Management Team (SMT) will review the register of fixed term posts regularly, and at least twice each year, to ensure that within the core parameters of maintaining effective budget management and managing staff establishment, that action is taken to secure required skills and experience held by staff on fixed term roles.
- d) 19% of our current workforce have worked for the Park Authority for over 10 years, and 16% for 5 – 10 years. Turnover at SMT levels has been high over the



last 5 years (36%), such that we currently have a fairly “new” SMT, although this is balanced in terms of corporate knowledge and experience by 5 of the 12 SMT members who have been in their roles for longer than 10 years. 7 of the current SMT have been in post for less than 5 years. Given that senior officers stay with the Authority for a longer period of time, with SMT leavers averaging 13 years of service each, we consider a relatively low risk of turnover at this level in the short to medium term. Nevertheless, this is a good time to invest resource in training and development to upskill staff as one of the actions to support our succession planning

- e) Absence levels across the organisation are low, with statistics on the downward trajectory. Sickness absence is currently 3.31 days/person. Whilst these absence levels do not suggest any risks with regards workforce management, there have been two cases of recurring long term absences that require monitoring and potential recruitment to provide support.

7. Our actions arising from the analysis of these workforce management statistics are therefore to:

- a) Monitor at least annually our workforce demographic statistics to assess the developing risk of losing a cohort of key staff and associated corporate knowledge and expertise to retirement.
- b) Review our register of fixed term staff contracts with SMT regularly and at least twice each year to support achieving our workforce and budget management objectives while seeking to maintain and develop organisational skills and experience.
- c) Develop a mentorship scheme for staff that allows mentoring both within and outwith the organisation, and which is available to staff as part of their Continuous Professional Development
- d) Revisit the organisations values, and if required, change them to reflect the changing staff demographic and organisational priorities

Workforce Management

- 8. To meet expected budget constraints moving forward, and also deliver on the Board’s and Management Team’s longer term strategy of moving toward budget and resource allocation flexibility, the Authority’s Management Team will manage all staff investment decisions collectively during the Corporate Plan cycle, taking the above intelligence and actions into account. While there is capacity to redirect staff across differing priorities to a degree, maximum flexibility comes in the form of free



financial resource capable of investment into either new, refocused staff posts filled through open, competitive recruitment or direct financial investment into project activities.

9. In the case of our role as a host for project staff, as the legal employer, we have responsibility to ensure all required and desirable management and support systems are in place, including Health and Safety practice and management and all appraisal, care and support services. We are also responsible ultimately for all employment law implications flowing from recruitment, in particular as projects and the requirement for associated delivery staff come towards their conclusion. We must therefore exercise particular focus and attention on staff contract management across the organisation and including all project activities within this overview.
10. In the expectation of the NCR policy continuing throughout the period, the Management Team will:
 - a) Review all vacancies arising with a view to determining what course of action may be required in the strategic resource and workforce management context. Consideration will include:
 - i. Redeployment of existing staff where appropriate from roles coming to an end, for example due to end of funding support or completion of project activities.
 - ii. No replacement of post - retaining and reallocating associated budget to non-staff areas;
 - iii. Reduction in level of FTE associated with the post and associated reduction in objectives to be delivered through staff input, delivering associated saving in staff budget; and/or
 - iv. Reduction in levels of responsibilities to be allocated to replacement post, with consequential reduction in grading of post delivering associated saving in staff budget; and/or
 - v. Alteration between permanent and fixed term contract position for future recruitment, with fixed term recruitment offering potential future flexibilities in workforce.
 - b) Review the adequacy of staff levels through high level allocation of staff resource against annual Operational Plan activities.
 - c) Consider the implementation, potentially on a targeted basis, of time recording systems to monitor deployment of staff against key activities.
 - d) Scenario plan for future budget settlements.



11. The Authority has made use of voluntary severance schemes in previous years, which has helped secure budget savings and also allow the redirection of staff resources to new and emerging priority areas of work. Such schemes remain an option as a strategic management tool for workforce management, particularly in the context of the assumption of the NCR policies continuing for a number of years.
12. The Authority will continue to look flexibly, on a case by case basis, at any one-off requests received from staff to enter into contract termination negotiations. The Authority prides itself in treating all staff as individuals, and dealing with any requests they may have on a discrete and case by case basis. The Authority also has to seize on any and all opportunities to consider the potential for medium to long term savings in its staffing within the context of the NCR policy.

Human Resource Management Policy and Procedures

13. While some of our workforce management strategy must be driven by financial consideration, the Authority is also mindful of both its desire to be seen as an excellent employer by its staff and also an employer seeking to recruit and retain staff within a difficult, rural and economically challenging marketplace.
14. We have had a few recruitment challenges over the last few years, due to:-
 - a) The type of contract (fixed term versus permanent). Whilst we will monitor this, there are significant benefits of fixed term contracts that cannot be discounted, particularly with regards the flexibility they provide the organisation in an uncertain budgetary climate. However, we recognise that longer fixed term contracts (2 – 3 years) are more likely to secure reasonable candidate shortlists and be appointed than ones of up to 18 months. Vacancy management will take account of this consideration in determining contract duration.
 - b) Work location. Increasingly following the 2 – 3 years of home working as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, applicants expect flexibility around the work:life and home:office base balance. The national climate in this regard is of increased flexibility, and we cannot risk losing potential appointees to more flexible organisations. Whilst the current “offer” is a hybrid approach of 50% home:50% office based, we will scrutinise all offers and retain flexibility to ensure they best suit both the needs of the business, as well as those of the prospective appointee.
 - c) The difficulty in securing long term housing in the area. As a result, some applicants have had to turn down offers of employment or have moved to outlying areas, including Inverness, Forres and Elgin. Added to this is the fact that



public transport services in the national park are poor, which further restricts where staff might live, and limits opportunities for people who may not wish to relocate

- d) Contractual hours. The Park Authority's contractual hours. have until recently been 37.5/week, where many comparator organisations offer a shorter working week. This is in the process of being addressed through a phased reduction to 36 hours initially in 2023 and to a contractual 35 hour week from April 2024.
 - e) Specialist/niche roles. There are a few roles that require particular, niche specialisms that are more difficult to appoint to – e.g. data management roles. We will be innovative in our approach to such roles, considering upskilling relevant staff where possible; and also considering outsourced contracts to secure the skill sets required as an alternate option to staff employment.
 - f) In the last 5 years, we have lost 8 planning staff, on variable fixed term and permanent contracts. we have identified two issues:
 - i. Salary. Whilst the Park Authority planning team's roles are better paid than the equivalent roles across the English National Parks, there is a shortage of planners in Scotland and we have noticed recently that our salaries are no longer comparable to those offered by the Scottish Local Authorities. We risk losing staff and potential job applicants to the Local Authorities. This is another area to benchmark fully and monitor.
 - g) The CNPA is considered to be a good career-path placement for planners who join the Park Authority to gain key skills to enable them to progress into more senior roles elsewhere. This is partly due to its unique call-in arrangements through which planning staff within Cairngorms NPA handle more complex and significant applications. Whilst a “churn” in staff teams can be healthy, we are mindful of the organisational risk of such a churn to delivering one of our statutory responsibilities. As such, we have started to address this issue by creating several “career-graded” posts in this team, such that appointees may be graduates or experienced officers. This flexibility seems to have addressed the churn and turnover in this area has plateaued at the current time. The challenges facing resourcing the planning service is an area to be closely monitored
15. The Authority will continue to work with its staff group and Board, through the Board's Resources Committee, to develop appropriate Human Resource (HR) Management policies and wider Organisational Development activity that support staff in achieving a good work-life balance, and also support flexible, efficient working practices for the organisation. Through these policies we aim to contribute



to delivery of an effective, performing organisation as will be measures through our corporate Key Performance Indicators, and to maintain and support a satisfied, motivated workforce, as measured by periodic staff surveys.

16. In terms of our planning for Public Sector Pay Policy, our assumed response to those policies is that the Authority will continue to offer pay settlements established within the allowed parameters.

Succession Planning

17. Our HR approaches will focus on the need for risk management and proportionate succession planning around the Authority's workforce. While end-to-end succession planning is extremely limited by requirements for open recruitment in the public sector, and for transparency around equal opportunities for all staff, we will continue to work with our Executive to monitor the key intelligence and risks around our workforce management on an organisation-wide and team specific basis, and deliver appropriate mitigations of those risks.
18. A detailed analysis of all posts, teams and directorates across the Park Authority, as well as any specific risk areas and succession plan requirements (where appropriate) will be carried out annually by the collective Senior Management Team.
19. The following interventions are/will be developed around the succession principles of supporting existing staff moving into promoted roles within the organisation:-
- a) Internal Recruitment Policy. All vacant posts below director level are recruited internally in the first instance, providing existing staff with the initial opportunities to apply for posts. The internal recruitment pool includes staff of some public sector partners, including SEPA and Nature.Scot.
 - b) Career graded posts. Posts in the more technical areas that can be more challenging to recruit will be advertised as "career graded" when appropriate, meaning that their grade will be dependent on the skills/experience the appointee brings to the post, on the basis that if they start the post as an entry level grade, they will move to the next grade up upon the attainment either of key skills, training or levels of performance without the need to re-open recruitment of the post or re-write job descriptions.
 - c) Mentorship scheme. This will be developed over the coming year, matching senior staff as mentors for junior staff, to guide them on their professional journeys.



- d) SMT have a quarterly Policy Day. There will be a standing agenda item to identify cross organisational talent/skills with a view to nurturing and supporting that talent. In addition all fixed term contracts as well as redeployment cases will be monitored at these times.

David Cameron

Kate Christie