

**Agenda Item 6**  
**Report NPA24/25-12**

Report to **National Park Authority**  
Date **22 August 2024**  
By **HR Manager and Head of Governance**  
Title of Report **Appointment of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer)**  
Decision

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**Recommendation: The Authority is recommended to:**

- 1. Agree that, subject to satisfactory references, the person named at Appendix I is appointed as SDNPA’s Chief Executive, Head of Paid Service and National Park Officer, with effect from a date to be agreed and that the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee is delegated authority to confirm this appointment if satisfied with the references obtained and to agree the effective date of the appointment;**
  - 2. Note that the determination of the terms and conditions, including remuneration, and all other contractual arrangements relating to the employment of the Chief Executive are delegated to the Appointments, Management and Standards Committee as set out in the Authority’s Standing Orders; and,**
  - 3. Note that the Interim Chief Executive arrangements, agreed by the Authority on 12 December 2023, will cease at the beginning of the first working day of the permanent Chief Executive.**
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**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the South Downs National Park Authority (the Authority) meeting on 28 March 2024, the Authority considered the recruitment of a new permanent Chief Executive following the retirement of the previous permanent Chief Executive on 1 January 2024. At that meeting the Authority agreed that the appointment of the Chief Executive (National Park Officer) should not be made exclusively from among the existing Officers of the Authority. Meaning that the search for suitably qualified candidates for the role would take place both within and outside of the Authority.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is for the Authority to consider the recommendation from the Appointments, Management and Standards (AMS) Committee for the appointment of the Chief Executive following a rigorous recruitment process having been undertaken. Whilst the AMS Committee has been delegated the authority to make the appointment itself, given this is the first time since 2012 that the Authority has recruited a Chief Executive, the Committee has decided to recommend the final decision on the appointment to the Authority.

**2. Policy context**

- 2.1 Under the Environment Act 1995 the Authority is required to secure that “at all times an officer appointed by that authority to be responsible to the authority for the manner in which the carrying out of its different functions is co-ordinated.” This officer is the Chief

Executive (National Park Officer). The Authority is also required, under the same Act, to consult with Natural England before making such an appointment.

### **3. Issues for consideration**

- 3.1 Following the Authority's decision on 28 March 2024 in relation to the recruitment of the new permanent Chief Executive, the AMS Committee proceeded with the recruitment process, complying with the requirements of paragraphs 1.1-1.2 of Appendix 6 of the Authority's Standing Orders.
- 3.2 The services of a specialist recruitment consultant with experience of recruiting at this level of seniority and within this sector were sought and Gatenby Sanderson were appointed to work with the Authority on the recruitment. The services of an external HR advisor were also engaged to provide an independent view on the integrity, inclusivity and best practice of the recruitment process.
- 3.3 Gatenby Sanderson assisted the AMS Committee in drawing up a role profile specifying the duties of the role and the qualifications and qualities sought in the person to be appointed. A thorough search for suitable applicants was undertaken by Gatenby Sanderson both through direct contact and discussions with potential applicants and through the role being advertised publicly in a variety of appropriate locations between 20 May 2024 to 17 June 2024. A total of 66 applications were received for the role.
- 3.4 A thorough assessment, longlisting and shortlisting process was then undertaken by the AMS Committee, assisted by Officers and Gatenby Sanderson which included engagement with stakeholders. Six very high quality applicants were shortlisted and undertook further testing prior to interview. Interviews for the role were held on 8 and 9 August 2024 and included a presentation and formal interview with the interview panel and an engagement session with a group of staff members from the Authority. The interview panel consisted of the members of the AMS Committee and also included the Chief Executive of another National Park Authority and a representative from Natural England who provided valuable input into the decision making process. The inclusion of a representative from Natural England also satisfied the requirement on the Authority to consult Natural England before making the appointment of the Chief Executive and Natural England has confirmed its support of the recommended appointment.
- 3.5 The AMS Committee met on 9 August 2024, following the interviews, to agree its recommendation to the Authority. The members of the AMS Committee unanimously agreed their recommendation and, therefore, the AMS Committee recommends the Authority appoint the person named at Appendix 1 as Chief Executive, Head of Paid Service, and National Park Officer, subject to the receipt of satisfactory references. Relevant information regarding the recommended candidate is contained in Appendix 1.

### **4. Options and cost implications**

- 4.1 The Authority could decide not to make the appointment, however, it would need to carefully consider the reasons for not making the appointment, given the thorough recruitment process undertaken by the AMS Committee, and the financial and operational implications for the Authority. It would also need to consider what value would be added in undertaking a further recruitment process.
- 4.2 The remuneration of the Chief Executive is provided for in the Authority's budget.
- 4.3 All matters relating the employment of the Chief Executive, including the terms and conditions of employment, including remuneration, and the ongoing assessment of the Chief Executive's performance are delegated to the AMS Committee.

### **5. Next steps**

- 5.1 Should the Authority make the appointment, Officers and the AMS Committee will undertake the necessary actions to finalise the contractual arrangements and agree a start date with the new permanent Chief Executive, likely to be towards the end of 2024.

5.2 There will also be a press release once these matters have been finalised which will include the start date of the new permanent Chief Executive.

## 6. Other implications

<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
Will further decisions be required by another committee/full authority?	Yes, to agree that the references are satisfactory.
Does the proposal raise any Resource implications?	No. The remuneration of the Chief Executive is provided for as part of the Authority's budget.
How does the proposal represent Value for Money?	The Authority is required by statute to have a Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) in place and this role is vital to the effective and efficient running of the Authority and the delivery of its purposes and duty and other statutory responsibilities.
Which PMP Outcomes/ Corporate plan objectives does this deliver against	The Chief Executive leads the Authority on the delivery of both the PMP and Corporate Plan.
Links to other projects or partner organisations	The Chief Executive liaises with a wide variety of organisations representing the interests of the Authority and the wider National Park.
How does this decision contribute to the Authority's climate change objectives	Effective leadership is key to the Authority delivering its Climate Change Action Plan.
Are there any Social Value implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report.
Have you taken regard of the South Downs National Park Authority's equality duty as contained within the Equality Act 2010?	Yes. An equality and diversity impact assessment has been undertaken to inform the recruitment process to ensure the Authority not only complied with its duties under the Equality Act 2010 but also to ensure that best practice was considered throughout the recruitment process.  The operation of the AMS Committee throughout this process met the obligations of the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments were made to support Members to participate.
Are there any Human Rights implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report.
Are there any Crime & Disorder implications arising from the proposal?	None directly arising from this report.
Are there any Health & Safety implications arising from the proposal?	The Chief Executive has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of Health and Safety at the Authority.

<b>Implication</b>	<b>Yes*/No</b>
Are there any Data Protection implications?	Personal data relating to this decision has been and will continue to be managed in accordance with the Authority's information security policy and in compliance with Data Protection legislation.

## **7. Risks Associated with the Proposed Decision**

- 7.1 The role of Chief Executive is key to the effective operation of the Authority and its ability to meet its objectives. In order to ensure the best candidate for the role was proposed for appointment a thorough search was undertaken as part of the recruitment process to ensure the highest quality candidates were able to apply and be considered.

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Appendices

I. Details of the proposed Chief Executive (to follow)

This appendix is not for publication as it contains information within Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, being information relating to any individual, and that in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exempt information outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. This conclusion is reached on the basis that whilst there is a public interest in maintaining the transparency of Authority proceedings, the individual's right to privacy in being considered for appointment as Chief Executive Officer outweighs any public interest in releasing this information at this time.

SDNPA Consultees

Director of Planning; Chief Finance Officer; Monitoring Officer.

External Consultees

None

Background Documents

None