

**Cotswolds Conservation Board
Review of Governance Framework 2025/26**

a) Documents and Processes	b) Evaluation	c) Issues/Recommendations (Governance Action Plan)
1 Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended by the NERC Act 2006).	Sets out legal status of the Board on and since its establishment in 2004. National Review of National Parks and AONBs reported in September 2019. Government now provided full and final response.	Continue to monitor arrangements and explore opportunities as they arise.
2 Other Legislation including: Establishment Order 2004/1777; Wiltshire (Structural Change) Order 2008/490; Cotswolds AONB (Establishment of Conservation Board) (Amendment) Order 2009/1579; Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014; Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.	Sets out the legal and corporate structure of Board. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 contain provisions on internal control and detailed rules about the preparation, approval and publication of the annual statement of accounts, and about the arrangements for local electors and other interested persons to exercise their rights of inspection, objection and to question the local auditor. The Regulations are required in order to implement the local audit arrangements set out in the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014. At February Board's meeting, CEO presented paper on	Continue to monitor guidance and its effect on the structure of the Board; and on the approval and publication of the annual Accounting Statements. Chief Executive presented a paper during May 2025 Executive Committee on potential considerations with regards to the Conservation Board size and structure in the context of Local Government Reform. This is being monitored and appropriate actions will be considered when necessary.
3 Constitution including Financial Regulations.	In place since 2004. Constitution reviewed, updated and adopted by the Board in 2023/24.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •At the annual governance review meeting in December 2025, held with the Monitoring Officer and Chair, it was decided to update the governance policy and include it within the Appendices of the Constitution to mitigate a note made by the Internal Auditor that the policy wording was outdated. •We also strengthened some wording around the Board's requirement to review the Constitution, and include it as part of the annual governance review meeting. •These changes have been recommended by the Finance and Governance Committee and were subsequently brought to the Board in February 2026 for approval and were approved.Continue to periodically review and update to reflect current governance.
4 Management Plan.	Management Plan for 2025-30 was adopted by Board in February 2025.	Next Management Plan work will start in 2028/29. Prior to that an interim review of the Management Plan will be undertaken to determine if any amendments are required.
5 Business Plan including Medium Term Financial Plan.	3-Year Business Plan reviewed and adopted by the Board. Performance against the Business Plan and Budget is monitored quarterly by the Executive Committee and the Finance and Governance Committee.	Ongoing liaison with Defra to support their business case for the Comprehensive Spending Review. Additionally, Finance & Governance Committee is now working on Medium-Term Financial Strategy which will incorporate a 3 year financial plan. The first draft is due to be ready for F&G Committee's review in November 2026.
6 Policies and Position Statements.	Policy and position statements on issues affecting the AONB are adopted by the Board from time to time following consultation through Working Groups, Executive Committee and external stakeholders (where appropriate). Policies are subject to a rolling programme of review.	None.
7 Funding Agreements.	Confirmation has been received from Defra regarding the level of core (and additional) funding for the year. Natural England 2025/26 funding for the Cotswold Way has been agreed for the year. Most appropriate mechanism for securing funding at present is the Business Plan process, which is used to support bids to Defra and other external grant providers, and annual invoices to Local Authorities.	Continue to submit funding bids and secure medium to long-term funding for the Board to ensure long-term financial stability. Develop Funding Strategy as part of the wider Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
8 Annual Accounts and Financial Policies	The latest Statement of Accounts was published in June 2025 in accordance with regulatory guidance. The external auditor gave a satisfactory opinion on the accounts and on the Board's corporate governance arrangements. Financial Regulations were last amended in February 2025 (no major changes). There is a rolling programme of review of financial policies by the Finance and Governance Committee, this Committee is to be responsible for the review of these policies and governance arrangements.	Number of financial policies have been reviewed by the Finance and Governance Committee in 2025/26. The Finance has also produced a full Field Guide to Finance which incorporates step-by step guides to processes as well as Financial Policies and Regulations.
9 Annual Governance Statement.	The Board published a compliant Annual Governance Statement as part of the last Annual Return 2024/25.	None
10 Annual Review.	Proposed content reported to Board annually in June/July and distributed electronically to funding partners and other interested parties.	None
11 Communications Strategy.	2020-2023 Communications Strategy adopted December 2020.	Communications Lead to consider timings for a review/update in 2026/27.
12 Consultation Strategy.	Consultation strategies are developed for the Management Plan and other key documents, e.g. position statements and climate action.	None.

AGENDA ITEM 3 APPENDIX C

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13 Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy & Procedure.	Scheme approved by Board in March 2007. Customer Charter developed during 2020/21 and published on the website. Policy was reviewed and updated in June 2023.	None.
14 Committee Structure and Procedures.	Set out in Constitution, updated in 2023/24. Committee structure reviewed in 2023/24.	Continue operating with the agreed committee structure during 2026/27.
15 Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.	In place.	None.
16 Equality Standards.	Equalities and Diversity Policy updated in the new Employee Handbook in consult with Publica HR in December 2020. Recruitment procedures improved to be more inclusive to candidates.	Review work of number of policies has been started in FY25/26 - continue review and finalisation of the policies in FY26/27.
17 Board Website and IT arrangements.	Outsourced Managed Service Provider appointed. Enhanced Cyber Security. Fully cloud-based with no reliance on servers.	Cyber Essentials accreditation obtained in 2024/25 and renewed in 2025/26. New much improved website created in 2024/25. The Board is continuing to be supported by Orbits in regards to IT support.
18 Members Allowances Scheme.	Changes reviewed and agreed in June 2022.	Consider timings for the next review in 2026/27.
19 Officer Job Descriptions, Pay and Conditions.	Job descriptions in place for all posts. Pay and conditions determined by national agreement. Board advised under service level agreement with Publica.	None.
20 Recruitment Policies & Procedures.	Set out in Employee Handbook and guided by service level agreement with Publica. Employee Handbook reviewed in 2020/21 with support from Publica.	Employee Handbook has been reviewed in 2025/26. Joining instructions to be reviewed and further training provided to all Line Managers in 2026/27.
21 Scheme of Delegation.	Set out in Constitution, and any instances of not following the Scheme are logged and reported to the Finance and Governance Committee for review.	None.
22 Member/Officer Protocol.	Set out in Constitution.	None.
23 Member and Officer Induction and Training.	Members receive introductory letter and detailed briefing pack, and are brought together in small groups (or 1 to 1 if necessary) for detailed background briefing. Officer induction reviewed in 2022 with new starter induction pack introduced, and structured H&S training provision implemented. Volunteer Policy adopted by the Board in June 2022.	None.
24 Codes of Conduct for Members and Officers.	Codes of Conduct set out in Constitution. Members adopted a revised code in March 2020.	Consider reviewing and updating the policy in 2026/27.
25 Officer and Member Indemnity Insurance.	Policy market tested as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process. Current supplier still remaining favourable. No claims in 2024/25.	Continue to periodically market test the service.
26 Performance Management Framework.	Performance is reported against the Board's Business Plan quarterly to the Executive Committee. The Chief Executive monitors performance at team meetings and at 1 to 1 performance reviews with officers.	None.
27 Chief Executive.	Chief Executive resigned in May 2024 and the Board successfully appointed a new Chief Executive in December 2025.	None.
28 Section 151 Officer (RFO).	Qualified accountant in post since March 2023. Management Accountant appointed during 2023/24.	In February 2026, a qualified Finance and Programme Manager was recruited to strengthen the Finance Team.
29 Monitoring Officer.	Monitoring Officer appointed during 2023/24.	None.
30 Legal Advice.	Legal firm appointed for advice and guidance as appropriate.	None.
31 Decision Making and Recording Procedures.	Board, Executive Committee and Finance & Governance Committee minutes recorded internally and made available on website. Notification of agenda and papers sent to all board members, relevant officers and made publicly available on the website.	None.
32 External Audit.	External Audit provided by PKF Littlejohn with effect from 2017/18 under a national contract awarded by government agency.	None.

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33 Internal Audit.	Internal Audit completed in compliance with Smaller Authorities Proper Practices Panel (SAPPP) Guidance - formerly JPAG. Audit findings reported to Finance and Governance Committee and the Board. New Internal Auditor TIAA Ltd appointed as internal auditor in 2025/26.	During the financial year 2025/26, we underwent a rigorous internal audit tender process. The independence of the newly appointed internal auditor TIAA Ltd was scrutinised during the process and the appointment endorsed by the Finance and Governance Committee at February 2026 Committee meeting.
34 Risk Management Framework.	Framework in place and key corporate risks regularly reviewed by the Finance and Governance Committee and annually to the Board.	None.
35 Procurement Policy.	Procedures in place with regard to procuring of goods and services. Procurement Waivers reported annually.	Consider Procurement Training and updating procurement procedures in 2026/27.
36 Health & Safety Policy.	H&S Policy first adopted by the Board in Oct 2008. Reviewed annually by the Finance and Governance Committee and adopted by the Board annually.	Continue to review annually, along with the H&S processes.
37 Environmental Performance Policy.	No specific performance policy in place. Where practical, actions being taken to reduce carbon impact.	New policy to be established, taking guidance from best practice.
38 Register of Interests.	Register held by Monitoring Officer. Formal annual review alongside related party transaction declarations in March each year.	Continue to publish register on web-site.
39 Counter Fraud and Corruption Policy.	Policy reviewed 3-yearly by the Board. Last review done in 2024/25 and the updated Policy adopted by the Board.	Next review and update due in 2027/28, led by the Finance and Governance Committee.
40 Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure.	Policy reviewed 3-yearly by the Board. Last review done in 2024/25 and the updated Policy adopted by the Board.	Next review and update due in 2027/28, led by the Finance and Governance Committee.
41 Disciplinary and Capability Procedures.	Set out in employee handbook.	None.
42 General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).	Data Protection Officer (DCO) services now provided by Publica. GDPR review undertaken by DQM in 2024/25.	Consider and action the recommendations identified in the GDPR review during 2025/26.
43 Related Party Transactions.	Formal annual review alongside register of interests in March each year.	This is undertaken on annual basis by the Monitoring Officer and reported in the Statement of Accounts.