

APPROVAL OF FINANCIAL AND GOVERNANCE STATEMENTS AND RETURNS 2023/24

Summary: To present the financial and governance statements and returns for 2023/24.

Recommendation:

That the Board notes the Internal Audit Report 2023/24

That the Board approves the:

- Governance Framework 2023/24
- Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24 and bank reconciliation
- Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31 March 2024

Report by: Magda Glanowska – Head of Finance

Background

All of the papers presented for approval have been reviewed and recommended by the Finance and Governance Committee. Further information on each of the papers is provided below:

Internal Audit (Appendix B)

1. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Board is required to carry out an internal audit of its functions in accordance with the mandatory sections of guidance published by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance (JPAG) in March 2023.
2. For 2023/24, the work was carried out by Janet Eustace of GAPTC, who is independent of the organisation and the completed work programme and report for 2023/24 is attached at Appendix B (ii).
3. The audit feeds into and supports the annual governance review which is presented for approval at this meeting (Appendix C).
4. In addition, the Board's external audit (under the Limited Assurance Regime) requires that the internal audit opinions for the year should be summarised in a specified format within the Board's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). This part of the AGAR has been completed and is attached as Appendix B (i).
5. Officers have considered the Internal Audit Report.
6. There were no issues raised and improvements have been made in line with all previous audit recommendations.

Governance Framework Review 2023/24 (Appendix C)

1. The Board is required to carry out an annual review of the effectiveness of its systems of internal control which facilitates the effective exercise of the Board's functions and includes arrangements for the management of risk.
2. In June 2012, the Board adopted a revised Code of Corporate Governance and Framework, with further amendments in 2014. The Framework is used as the basis for this review.

3. As in previous years, officers carried out the review using their knowledge and experience, and information from documents and processes, audits and risk reports, together with observations from members, officers and partners.
4. The external auditor's report and opinion for 2022/23 were reported to the Finance and Governance Committee who have also reviewed the 2023/24 Annual Internal Audit Report and opinions as part of the agenda for the current meeting.
5. The results of this process are set out in Appendix C, which indicates that the Board has sound systems of internal control. Appropriate issues arising from the review have been identified and disclosed, and actions proposed as appropriate.

Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and bank reconciliation (Appendix D)

1. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Board to prepare its annual accounts in accordance with proper practice. From 2018/19, Conservation Boards have been specifically covered by the formal guidance issued annually by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance "Governance and Accountability for Local Councils – A Practitioners Guide". The guide sets out proper practice for the preparation of the Board's Statement of Accounts and its Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR). The Board it is required by law to:
 - approve the AGAR and submit it to the external auditor by 1 July 2024;
 - publish the unaudited AGAR on its website by 1 July 2024; and
 - publish the audited AGAR by 29 September 2024.

Section 1 of AGAR 2023/24

2. The formal Annual Governance Statement forms Section 1 of the AGAR and contains a series of statements which the Board is asked to approve. Board Officers believe that the answer to all of the points should be in the affirmative.

Section 2 of AGAR 2023/24

3. Whilst the Board chooses to prepare and publish a Statement of Accounts for its own purposes it is also required to prepare Accounting Statements for the year in the form required by proper practice (Section 2 of the AGAR).

Bank Reconciliation

4. As part of the approval process, the external auditor also requires the Board to review the organisation's year-end bank reconciliation in a specified format.

Statement of Accounts 2023/24 (Appendix E)

1. The Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 require the Board to prepare its annual accounts in accordance with proper practice. From 2018/19, Conservation Boards have been specifically covered by the formal guidance issued annually by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance "Governance and Accountability for Local Councils – A Practitioners Guide". The guide sets out proper practice for the preparation of the Board's Statement of Accounts.
2. The Board's draft Statement of Accounts for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 are attached at Appendix E. These have been prepared in accordance with the National Park model, so as to facilitate comparability between organisations.

3. The Income and Expenditure Account shows the costs of providing services across the various activities and projects that the Board has supported during the year, and how these projects were supported from grants and income.
4. The Balance Sheet summarises the Board's overall financial position as at 31 March 2024.

Supporting documents

- Appendix B. Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24
- Appendix C. Review of Governance Framework 2023/24
- Appendix D. Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24
Bank Reconciliation as at 31 March 2024
- Appendix E. Statement of Accounts 2023/24

JUNE 2024

ITEM 3 – APPENDIX B

INTERNAL AUDIT 2023/24

Summary: To present the Internal Audit Report for 2023/24.

Recommendation: That the Internal Audit Report be noted.

Report by: Magda Glanowska – Head of Finance

1. Under the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, the Board is required to arrange an Internal Audit of its functions in accordance with the mandatory sections of guidance published in March 2023 by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance.
2. The programme of work was completed by Janet Eustace of GAPTC, an independent qualified accountant and auditor, appointed by the Board – APPENDIX B.
3. A summary of the audit scope and coverage is attached at *Appendix B(ii)*, together with brief details of the audit findings and conclusions. The overall audit conclusion arising from the year's work is that, in all significant respects, the Board has adequate assurance that good systems are in place; that those systems and controls are operating as intended; and that improvements have been made in line with all previous audit recommendations.
4. The report draws attention to a few recommendations for action – (please items 3.1, 3.3, 3.8, 5.6, 7.1, 8.1, 8.2 & 8.3), which we have considered and actioned when necessary.
5. The report has been considered and accepted by members of the Board's Finance and Governance Committee at its meeting on 17th May 2024.
6. Internal Audit work feeds into and supports the Board's mandatory Annual Governance Review, which has been reported formally to the Executive Committee, and which is presented for approval at this AGM.
7. In addition, under the Limited Assurance regime, the Board's External Auditor requires that Internal Audit opinions for the year should be summarised in a specified format within the Board's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR), which is also presented for approval at this AGM.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

- Appendix B(i) – AIAR 2023-24
- Appendix B(ii) - Internal Audit Report

COTSWOLD CONSERVATION BOARD

www.cotswold-nc.org.uk

During the financial year ended 31 March 2024, this authority's internal auditor acting independently and on the basis of an assessment of risk, carried out a selective assessment of compliance with the relevant procedures and controls in operation and obtained appropriate evidence from the authority.

The internal audit for 2023/24 has been carried out in accordance with this authority's needs and planned coverage. On the basis of the findings in the areas examined, the internal audit conclusions are summarised in this table. Set out below are the objectives of internal control and alongside are the internal audit conclusions on whether, in all significant respects, the control objectives were being achieved throughout the financial year to a standard adequate to meet the needs of this authority.

Internal control objective	Yes	No*	Not covered**
A. Appropriate accounting records have been properly kept throughout the financial year.	✓		
B. This authority complied with its financial regulations, payments were supported by invoices, all expenditure was approved and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
C. This authority assessed the significant risks to achieving its objectives and reviewed the adequacy of arrangements to manage these.	✓		
D. The precept or rates requirement resulted from an adequate budgetary process; progress against the budget was regularly monitored; and reserves were appropriate.	✓		
E. Expected income was fully received, based on correct prices, properly recorded and promptly banked; and VAT was appropriately accounted for.	✓		
F. Petty cash payments were properly supported by receipts, all petty cash expenditure was approved and VAT appropriately accounted for.			✓
G. Salaries to employees and allowances to members were paid in accordance with this authority's approvals, and PAYE and NI requirements were properly applied.	✓		
H. Asset and investments registers were complete and accurate and properly maintained.	✓		
I. Periodic bank account reconciliations were properly carried out during the year.	✓		
J. Accounting statements prepared during the year were prepared on the correct accounting basis (receipts and payments or income and expenditure), agreed to the cash book, supported by an adequate audit trail from underlying records and where appropriate debtors and creditors were properly recorded.	✓		
K. If the authority certified itself as exempt from a limited assurance review in 2022/23, it met the exemption criteria and correctly declared itself exempt. (If the authority had a limited assurance review of its 2022/23 AGAR tick "not covered")			NA
L. The authority published the required information on a website/webpage up to date at the time of the internal audit in accordance with the relevant legislation.	✓		
M. In the year covered by this AGAR, the authority correctly provided for a period for the exercise of public rights as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations (during the 2023-24 AGAR period, were public rights in relation to the 2022-23 AGAR evidenced by a notice on the website and/or authority approved minutes confirming the dates set).	✓		
N. The authority has complied with the publication requirements for 2022/23 AGAR (see AGAR Page 1 Guidance Notes).	✓		
O. (For local councils only) Trust funds (including charitable) – The council met its responsibilities as a trustee.	Yes	No	Not applicable

For any other risk areas identified by this authority adequate controls existed (list any other risk areas on separate sheets if needed).

Date(s) internal audit undertaken

29/2/2024

Name of person who carried out the internal audit

JANET EUSTACE (GAPTC)

Signature of person who carried out the internal audit

Janet Eustace

Date 26/04/2024

*If the response is 'no' please state the implications and action being taken to address any weakness in control identified (add separate sheets if needed).

**Note: If the response is 'not covered' please state when the most recent internal audit work was done in this area and when it is next planned; or, if coverage is not required, the annual internal audit report must explain why not (add separate sheets if needed).



**COTSWOLD CONSERVATION BOARD
COTSWOLD NATIONAL LANDSCAPE**

Internal auditor's report for the year ended 31 March 2024

Name of Auditor: Janet Eustace

GAPTC internal audits comply with the proper practices outlined in the Governance & Accountability for Smaller Authorities – A Practitioners' Guide and the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015.

The GAPTC internal audit reviews and reports on whether the systems of financial and other internal controls over its activities and operating procedures are effective. The audit tests a variety of documents, including agendas and minutes, policies, insurance and risk management processes, to ensure Council meets the requirements set out in the Annual Internal Audit Report in the Annual Governance & Accountability Return. The internal audit does not involve the detailed inspection of all records and transactions of an authority in order to detect error or fraud.

Our auditors are independent of the Council and are competent to be able to carry out the requirements of the internal audit service.

NOTE The auditor will complete the Annual Internal Audit Report (AIAR) page on the Annual Governance & Accountability Return (AGAR). The AIAR informs the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) assertions on the AGAR, so when the Board reviews the AGS, the responses must reflect the AIAR report.

1. CNL working documents

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
1.1	Have Standing Orders been a) tailored to CCB	Yes	Standing Orders are included within the organisations Constitution. The constitution was subject to a detailed review during 2023/24	Minute reference 8.a. of Board meeting dated 17 October 2023 agreed to amend draft and circulate for retrospective agreement.

	b) minuted?		Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Confirmed at Board meeting held on 20 Feb 2024 item 2.
1.2	Have Financial Regulations been a) tailored to CCB b) minuted? (Objective B)		Financial Regulations are included in the organisations Constitution. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Minute reference 8.a. of Board meeting dated 17 October 2023 agreed to amend draft and circulate for retrospective agreement. Confirmed at Board meeting held on 20 Feb 2024 item 2.
1.3	Does the CCB a) give grants? b) have a grant-awarding policy?	Yes Yes	There is guidance on how to apply for grants which includes details of 'themes' that will be funded. Each scheme has a different set of policies. These are made available to applicants as required	Web site 'Caring for the Cotswold' grant scheme. Discussion with Head of Finance.
1.4	Have items/ services been competitively purchased in accordance with Financial and/or Procurement Regulations?	N/A	Only major purchase this year has been a new vehicle. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 2 & 3	Discussion with the head of Finance.
1.5	Code of conduct reviewed in the last 2/3 years?		The Code of Conduct is included in the organisations Constitution. The constitution was subject to a review during 2023/24 but the Code of Conduct does not appear to have been within the scope of this review. It is recommended that the Code is reviewed during 2024/25.	Item 8 of Minutes of October Board meeting.

2. Finance

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
2.1	Is there an annual Board authorisation of Direct Debit list and Standing Orders? (Objective B)		The Board is not required to approve routine Direct Debits and Standing Orders. Such payments are authorised on initial set-up, in accordance with the standard delegation limits specified in Financial Regulations, and reviewed annually when the budgets are reviewed. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Discussion with the head of finance.
2.2	Was Petty Cash expenditure approved, if any? (Objective F)	N/A	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	
2.3	Is all expenditure supported by VAT invoices, if applicable? (Objective B)	YES	But note the organisation is not registered for VAT. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Auditor saw a sample of invoices on the Zero accounting system.
2.4	VAT – a) recorded in accounts b) reclaimed? (Objective B)	NA	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	

3. Risk management

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
3.1	Insurance policy a) in place? b) cover reviewed to ensure still fit for purpose? (Objective C)	YES YES	Currently provided by Zurich. Expires end of March 2024. Policy amended during the year to include new vehicle. Head of Finance recognises that Zurich has been the insurer for a number of years and is in discussion with them. It may be too late to carry out a comparative exercise. If so, it is recommended that the existing policy be extended for 12 months, and a detailed review carried out during 2024/25. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 5	Policy seen by the Auditor. Discussion with the Head of Finance.
3.2	Copy of Risk Management policy a) adopted? b) reviewed annually by Board? (Objective C)	YES YES	The Finance and Governance Committee has a standing item on risk and receives the updated Risk Management Framework at each meeting. Full Board also receives these reports. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 5	Board meeting 20 Feb 2024 item 9.4
3.3	Asset register a) reviewed regularly? (Objective H) b) published on website?	YES NO	Main assets of value are vehicles. List of equipment also maintained. Recommended that the asset register is on the web site to ensure transparency.	Asset register seen by the Auditor.

	(Objective L)		Annual Governance Statement Assertion 5	
3.4	Evidence that assets a) have been inspected for risk? b) reported in minutes? c) any actions undertaken? (Objective C)	YES N/A YES	Head Warden is responsible for ensuring vehicles are maintained and also for smaller items of equipment. Head Warden takes action as required. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 5	
3.5	Evidence that internal controls a) take place? b) are documented? c) minuted? as per CCB Financial Regulations/Standin g Orders (Objective B)	YES YES YES	The Executive Committee meets five times a year and at each meeting reviews financial performance, quarterly reports on the business plan, fraud and corruption and other governance issues. These minutes go to the F&G Committee and on the full Board. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 2	Example: Minutes of Exec Cttee meeting dated 23 January 2024 item 5.
3.6	Bank reconciliations are on agenda to be considered by Board? (Objective I)		Head of Finance checks and approves (publishes) the monthly bank reconciliation. The year-end reconciliation is also submitted to Board. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	31 January 2024 bank reconciliation for two bank accounts seen by the auditor.
3.7	Review of a) investments?	To be undertaken	CCB will shortly be receiving a substantial amount (in excess of £500K) for a 30-year project. The Head of Finance will be reviewing investment	Discussion with Head of Finance

	b) bank mandates (signatories on bank accounts)? (Objective B/C)	during 2024/25 YES	opportunities and making recommendations to the Board. Bank signatories reviewed when new officers are appointed. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Discussion with Head of Finance.
3.8	If bank cards in use, are proper procedures in place? (Objective B)	YES	Five officers have credit cards. One has a limit of £5,000 and the others £1,000. Procedures in place were checked as part of the sampling process. It is recommended that occasional checks are carried out to ensure that items purchased are being used correctly. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Discussion with the Head of Finance and sample checking of purchases.
3.9	Are a) physical records secure? b) electronic records backed up?	YES YES	Limited number of physical records which are stored in a secure cabinet. Electronic records are backed up on the cloud. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 5	Discussion with the Head of Finance.

4. Budgetary controls

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
4.1	Was a budget properly for the year under review			Item 9b of Board meeting dated 21 February 2023.

	a) prepared? b) adopted? c) minuted? (Objective D)	YES YES YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	
4.2	a) Were the earmarked objectives of the reserves identified in the budget, if any? b) Were the general reserves reasonable? (Objective D)	YES YES	CCB has a substantial reserve expected to be in excess of £800k by the end of the year. Much of this is restricted for future projects. General reserve is kept between £70K and £75K. Three month running costs. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Para 14 of budget report agreed at item 9b of February 2023 Board meeting. Copy of reserves statement seen by Auditor.
4.3	Was the precept demand for the year under review properly minuted by Board?	N/A	Main source of funding is a three-year programme of core grant from DEFRA.	Discussion with Head of Finance and sampling of receipts.
4.4	Did the Board a) regularly compare budget vs spend (as detailed in the financial regulations) b) and evidenced in the minutes? (Objective D)	YES YES	Standing item on the agenda of the F&G Committee. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	F&G Committee meeting item 3 dated 23 June 2023. Minutes of this meeting were submitted to Board for noting.
4.5	Are any significant variances from budget reported?	YES	Quarterly reports to Executive and F&G Cttee of expenditure against budget includes explanation of variances. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 2	Item 5 of Minutes of Executive meeting held 23 May 2023 and item 3 of F&G Committee dated 23 June 2023.

5. Payroll

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
5.1	Do all staff have a contract of employment?	YES	Held by Publica at Cotswold District Council who provide HR and payroll services. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Discussion with Head of Finance.
5.2	Do salaries paid agree with those approved by Board? (Objective G)	YES	Board agrees starting salaries of senior staff. These are notified to payroll provider who draws up monthly schedule which is approved by Chief Exec. Schedule includes members allowances and expenses. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Copy of schedule and process for approving payments seen by the Auditor.
5.3	Has CBB a) registered as an employer with HMRC? b) have PAYE / NIC been properly dealt with (including year-end procedures)? (Objective G)	YES YES	Payroll is outsourced to Publica.	Details of payments to HMRC seen by Auditor
5.4	Are Board Member's allowances and expenses properly authorised & controlled, if any?	YES	Members allowances are set out in the Constitution and are agreed each year by Board. Publica make the payments in accordance with that schedule. Payments are approved by the Chief Executive before being passed to Publica for payment. Total of Members Allowances published annually in statement of accounts.	Constitution. Payment process seen by Auditor Annual statement of accounts is on the website.

			Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	
5.5	Pension provision – eligible employees a) offered pension scheme? b) outcome minuted?	YES N/A	 Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Discussion with Head of Finance
5.6	Is NCL a) registered with the Pension Regulator for auto-enrolment pensions? b) Has auto-enrolment registration with Pension Regulator been reviewed (required every 3 years)	YES YES	 Certificate expires 24 August 2021, so review needed during 2024. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Certificate seen by Auditor

6. Year-end procedures

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
6.1	Are debtors and creditors recorded properly on	Yes	Statement of Accounts 2022/23	Website.

	separate balance sheet if using Income & Expenditure reporting? (Objective J)		Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	
6.2	Does Board as a whole consider the year-end accounts in addition to 6.5? (Objective J)	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	Item 3E of AGM held 27 June 2023
6.3	Minute confirming that council is eligible for Certificate of Exemption (only for councils with a turnover of less than £25,000) (Objective K)	NA	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 1	
6.4	Annual Governance Statement, section 1 of Annual Return, approved by whole Board (with separate minute number from Section 2 below)?	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Item Di of AGM held 27 June 2023
6.5	Annual Statement of Accounts, section 2 of Annual Return, approved by whole Board (with separate minute	YES		Item Dii of AGM held 27 June 2023

	number from Section 1 above)?		Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	
6.6	Are all sections of the Annual Governance & Accountability Return published on the website? (Objective L/N)	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Website.
6.7	Did CBB correctly provide for the exercise of public rights? (Objective M)	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 4	Copy of Notice is on the web site.
6.8	Previous internal audit report reviewed by Board and action taken where recommended?	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 7	Item 3b of AGM held 27 June 2023
6.9	Previous external audit report (reviewed by Board and action taken where recommended?)	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 7	External audit report taken to 20 Feb 2024 Board meeting item 9d.

7. Other matters

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or	Internal Auditor's comments/recommendations	Evidence
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		N/A		
7.1	Policies in place for compliance with GDPR, such as Data Protection Policy for Staff & Board members and for the public?	YES	A data protection policy is on the web site. The policy is dated 2018 and it is recommended that this be reviewed. I recommend that the organisation established whether it is registered with the ICO. Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Web site.
7.2	Website Accessibility Statement on website home page?	YES	Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3	Home page of website
7.5	Did council formally appoint GAPTC as the Internal Auditor?	YES		Item 6 of F&G Committee dated 16 November 2023 and also reported to Board at meeting on 20 Feb 2024 item 9.

8. Procedures

Ref	Test	Meets reqmts? Yes, No or N/A	Internal Auditor's comments	Evidence
8.1	Minutes: a) DPIs or other interests recorded? b) published on website in draft form within one	YES YES	However, agendas and minutes of F&G Committee are not post on the web site although Minutes are available as part of the agenda for the following	Minutes of all meetings include item on Declaration of interests. Web site.

	<p>month (mandatory for councillors with a turnover of less than £25,000)? (Objective L) c) initialled on each page and final page signed?</p>	N/A	<p>Board meeting. Recommended that F&G agendas and minutes are posted on web site. Confidential reports can be withheld.</p> <p>Constitution requires that minutes of meetings should be approved and not that they should be signed. Accordingly, no hard copies exist.</p> <p>Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3</p>	Constitution.
8.2	<p>List of Board members' a) responsibilities (Objective L) and b) interests held and published on the website?</p>	<p>YES</p> <p>NO</p>	<p>Membership of Committees and working groups are on the CCB web site. District Council retains Register of Interests but it is not published on the Board's web-site. Recommend that the Board consider publishing register of interests to increase transparency.</p>	Website.
8.3	<p>Agendas signed and displayed on website/noticeboards 3 clear days' prior to meeting? (Objective L)</p>	YES	<p>Published on website but not dated. It is recommended that Agenda should include date of publication.</p> <p>Annual Governance Statement Assertion 3</p>	Website.
8.4	<p>Summons issued in proper format?</p>	YES	<p>Constitution requires the 'at least three clear working days before a meeting, the Chief Executive Officer will email every Member of the Board notifying them of the date, time and place of each meeting and specify the business to be transacted and will be accompanied by such reports as are available'. This practice is followed.</p>	Agendas on the website.

**Cotswolds Conservation Board
Review of Governance Framework 2023/24**

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.	Continue to monitor guidance and its effect on the structure of the Board; and on the approval and publication of the annual Accounting Statements.
3 Constitution including Financial Regulations.	In place since 2004. Constitution reviewed, updated and adopted by the Board in 2023/24.	Continue to periodically review and update to reflect current governance.
4 Management Plan.	Management Plan for 2023-25 was adopted by Board in February 2023.	Preliminary work has started for the next Plan covering the period 2025-30.
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.	Work with Defra to support their business case for the upcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.
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 2023/24 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.	None.
8 Annual Accounts and Financial Policies	The latest Statement of Accounts was published in June 2023 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 2024. 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.	The rolling programme of finance policies to be reviewed by the Finance and Governance Committee in 2024/25.
9 Annual Governance Statement.	The Board published a compliant Annual Governance Statement as part of the last Annual Return 2022/23.	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.
12 Consultation Strategy.	Consultation strategies are developed for the Management Plan and other key documents, e.g. position statements and climate action.	None.

a) Documents and Processes	b) Evaluation	c) Issues/Recommendations (Governance Action Plan)
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 2024/25..
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.	Continue to monitor best practice.
17 Board Website and IT arrangements.	Outsourced Managed Service Provider appointed. Enhanced Cyber Security. Fully cloud-based with no reliance on servers.	Complete the process of attaining Cyber Essentials accreditation.
18 Members Allowances Scheme.	Changes reviewed and agreed in June 2022.	None.
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.	None.
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.	None.
25 Officer and Member Indemnity Insurance.	Policy market tested as part of the 2024/25 budget setting process. Current supplier still remaining favourable. No claims in 2023/24.	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 recruitment for his successor is underway. Appointed Gatenby Sanderson and an interview panel has been selected.	Ensure the interview and selection process is thorough and that the current Chief Executive supports the process and helps with the handover.
28 Section 151 Officer (RFO).	Qualified accountant in post since March 2023. Management Accountant appointed during 2023/24.	None.
29 Monitoring Officer.	New 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.

a) Documents and Processes	b) Evaluation	c) Issues/Recommendations (Governance Action Plan)
32 External Audit.	External Audit provided by PKF Littlejohn with effect from 2017/18 under a national contract awarded by government agency.	None.
33 Internal Audit.	Internal Audit completed in compliance with JPAG Guidance. Audit findings reported to Finance and Governance Committee and the Board. Tender process currently running.	Conclude the tender process and appoint an internal auditor for 2024/25.
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.	Procedures to be reviewed as part of the updating of the Board's Constitution.
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.	Next review and update due in 2024/25, led by the Finance and Governance Committee.
40 Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Procedure.	Policy reviewed 3-yearly by the Board.	Next review and update due in 2024/25, 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.	Appoint a new DCO during 2024/25.
43 Related Party Transactions.	Formal annual review alongside register of interests in March each year.	None.

Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2023/24

We acknowledge as the members of:

COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD

our responsibility for ensuring that there is a sound system of internal control, including arrangements for the preparation of the Accounting Statements. We confirm, to the best of our knowledge and belief, with respect to the Accounting Statements for the year ended 31 March 2024, that:

	Agreed		'Yes' means that this authority:
	Yes	No*	
1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.	✓		prepared its accounting statements in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.	✓		made proper arrangements and accepted responsibility for safeguarding the public money and resources in its charge.
3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.	✓		has only done what it has the legal power to do and has complied with Proper Practices in doing so.
4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.	✓		during the year gave all persons interested the opportunity to inspect and ask questions about this authority's accounts.
5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.	✓		considered and documented the financial and other risks it faces and dealt with them properly.
6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.	✓		arranged for a competent person, independent of the financial controls and procedures, to give an objective view on whether internal controls meet the needs of this smaller authority.
7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.	✓		responded to matters brought to its attention by internal and external audit.
8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.	✓		disclosed everything it should have about its business activity during the year including events taking place after the year end if relevant.
9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination or audit.	Yes	No	N/A
			✓

***Please provide explanations to the external auditor on a separate sheet for each 'No' response and describe how the authority will address the weaknesses identified. These sheets must be published with the Annual Governance Statement.**

This Annual Governance Statement was approved at a meeting of the authority on:

28/06/2024

and recorded as minute reference:

Item 2 Appendix C

Signed by the Chair and Clerk of the meeting where approval was given:

Chair

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Clerk

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

<https://www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk/> FULLY AVAILABLE WEBSITE/WEBPAGE ADDRESS

Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24 for

COTSWOLDS CONSERVATION BOARD

	Year ending		Notes and guidance
	31 March 2023 £	31 March 2024 £	
1. Balances brought forward	642,090	660,732	Total balances and reserves at the beginning of the year as recorded in the financial records. Value must agree to Box 7 of previous year.
2. (+) Precept or Rates and Levies	0	0	Total amount of precept (or for IDBs rates and levies) received or receivable in the year. Exclude any grants received.
3. (+) Total other receipts	2,504,627	3,673,043	Total income or receipts as recorded in the cashbook less the precept or rates/levies received (line 2). Include any grants received.
4. (-) Staff costs	-833,510	-942,155	Total expenditure or payments made to and on behalf of all employees. Include gross salaries and wages, employers NI contributions, employers pension contributions, gratuities and severance payments.
5. (-) Loan interest/capital repayments	0	0	Total expenditure or payments of capital and interest made during the year on the authority's borrowings (if any).
6. (-) All other payments	-1,652,475	-2,146,834	Total expenditure or payments as recorded in the cashbook less staff costs (line 4) and loan interest/capital repayments (line 5).
7. (=) Balances carried forward	660,732	1,244,786	Total balances and reserves at the end of the year. Must equal (1+2+3) - (4+5+6).
8. Total value of cash and short term investments	907,872	1,552,356	The sum of all current and deposit bank accounts, cash holdings and short term investments held as at 31 March – To agree with bank reconciliation.
9. Total fixed assets plus long term investments and assets	77,740	101,739	The value of all the property the authority owns – it is made up of all its fixed assets and long term investments as at 31 March.
10. Total borrowings	0	0	The outstanding capital balance as at 31 March of all loans from third parties (including PWLB).

For Local Councils Only	Yes	No	N/A	
11a. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)				The Council, as a body corporate, acts as sole trustee and is responsible for managing Trust funds or assets.
11b. Disclosure note re Trust funds (including charitable)			✓	The figures in the accounting statements above exclude any Trust transactions.

I certify that for the year ended 31 March 2024 the Accounting Statements in this Annual Governance and Accountability Return have been prepared on either a receipts and payments or income and expenditure basis following the guidance in Governance and Accountability for Smaller Authorities – a Practitioners' Guide to Proper Practices and present fairly the financial position of this authority.

Signed by Responsible Financial Officer before being presented to the authority for approval

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Date

18/06/2024

I confirm that these Accounting Statements were approved by this authority on this date:

28/06/2024

as recorded in minute reference:

Item 2 Appendix C

Signed by Chair of the meeting where the Accounting Statements were approved

SIGNATURE REQUIRED

Cotswolds Conservation Board

Year End Bank Reconciliation

31/03/2024

Source	Description	Date	Total £
A. AT BANK			
Main Current Account: Lloyds Electronic Tariff Account			
	Opening Balance per Bank Statement	01 March 2024	£517,773.73
	Add: Receipts in bank this month		£760,117.78
	Less: Payments from bank this month		£698,990.17
	Closing Balance per Bank Statement	31 March 2024	£578,901.34
Main Deposit Account: Lloyds Commercial Call Account			
	Opening Balance per Bank Statement	01 March 2024	£604,497.93
	Add: Receipts in bank this month		£250,667.43
	Less: Payments from bank this month		£0.00
	Closing Balance per Bank Statement	31 March 2024	£855,165.36
B. XERO (accounting records)			
Main Current Account: Lloyds Electronic Tariff Account			
	Balance in Xero		£579,437.78
	Add: Uncleared lodgements		£667.20
	Less: Unpresented payments		£130.76
	Adjusted Balance in Xero	31 March 2024	£578,901.34
Main Deposit Account: Lloyds Commercial Call Account			
	Balance in Xero		£855,165.36
	Add: Uncleared lodgements		£0.00
	Less: Unpresented payments		£0.00
	Adjusted Balance in Xero	31 March 2024	£855,165.36
C. OTHER ACCOUNTS, CASH AND CASH EQUIVALENTS			
	Bank Account: Wardens North		£16,843.95
	Bank Account: Wardens Central		£5,329.38
	Bank Account: Wardens Avon Valley		£4,414.10
	Paypal account: Info@		£149.27
	Paypal account: Cotswoldway@		£0.00
	Short Term Investment with Lloyds Bank		£91,552.80
	Petty cash		£0.00
			£118,289.50
GRAND TOTAL			£1,552,356.20

Prepared by: Jonathan Rogers
 Role: Management Accountant
 Date: 8th May 2024

Reviewed by: Magda Glanowska
 Role: Head of Finance
 Date: 7th June 2024



Cotswolds
National
Landscape

Cotswolds Conservation Board Statement of Accounts

Financial year ending 31st March 2024

Cotswolds Conservation Board
Cotswold Business Centre
2 A P Ellis Road
Upper Rissington
Gloucestershire
GL54
www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk

BACKGROUND

The Cotswolds Conservation Board was established in 2004 under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The Board's Establishment Order (SI 1777/2004) was agreed by Parliament in July 2004. The Board's statutory purposes are to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and to increase the understanding and enjoyment by the public of the special qualities of the AONB. In fulfilling these purposes, the Board seeks to foster the economic and social well-being of people living in the AONB.

In February 2023 the Board adopted a Management Plan for 2023-25, which articulates its vision, its objectives and its policies for the management of the AONB. In February 2024 the Board unanimously approved the production schedule for the Management Plan for 2025-30.

The Board's Business Plan sets out a wide-ranging programme of activity associated with the delivery of its purposes. The Board operates to a budget based on the agreed grant aid from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Natural England and local authorities. Additionally, the Board either takes the lead role or actively participates in a range of partnership schemes to secure external funding for additional project work.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Accounting Framework

Under the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Board is classed as a smaller relevant body for financial reporting purposes. As such it is required to comply with the mandatory guidance for Conservation Boards issued in March 2023 by the Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance.

This Statement of Accounts summarises the Board's activities for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. It has been prepared in accordance with proper accounting policies and practices, and on an accruals basis.

Income and Expenditure Account

The Board has adopted the National Park Authority model for its Income and Expenditure Account to enable comparability with similar organisations.

The Account shows the costs of providing services across the various activities and projects that the Board has supported during the year, and how these projects were financed from grants and income. Gross revenue expenditure for the year was £3,089,009 (2022/23 £2,485,984) and gross income was £3,673,043 (2022/23 £2,504,627). Taken together, these items show a net surplus for the year of £584,034 (2022/23 surplus £18,642). The large net surplus is primarily due to National Highways Biodiversity project where £405k is in restricted reserve for landowners' payments over the next 30 years.

Balance Sheet

The Balance Sheet details the Board's financial position as at 31 March 2024, listing the value of its assets and liabilities. The Board's practices on financial reserves comply with the formal guidance issued in July 2014 (CIPFA LAAP Bulletin 99). The Finance Officer considers that the level of reserves, taken with their future targets, are at an acceptable level. An updated Reserves Policy was adopted by the Board in February 2024.

ANNUAL REVIEW

The Board publishes an Annual Review by the end of July each year describing its activities in the previous year, and setting out its performance against the Business Plan. This publication is available on-line at www.cotswolds-nl.org.uk.

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

2022/23		Expenditure	2023/24	
Net		£	Income	Net
£		£	£	£
767,794	Conservation of Natural Environment	1,562,411	(1,066,533)	495,878
200,092	Conservation of Cultural Heritage	463,715	(274,245)	189,470
439,653	Recreation Management and Transport	455,768	(171,925)	287,843
167,988	Promoting Understanding: Information Interpretation and Education	214,428	(33,570)	180,858
112,193	Volunteers	76,803	(15,878)	60,926
58,866	Forward Planning	103,732	(15,000)	88,732
132,663	Corporate Management and Administration	212,151	(2,383)	209,769
1,879,248	Net Cost of Services	3,089,008	(1,579,533)	1,509,475
(1,027)	Interest Receivable		(6,901)	(6,901)
1,878,220	Net Operating Total	3,089,008	(1,586,434)	1,502,574
(529,743)	DEFRA Contribution		(529,743)	(529,743)
(137,538)	Local Authority Contributions		(139,086)	(139,086)
(994,589)	DEFRA – Farming in Protected Landscapes		(1,366,236)	(1,366,236)
(234,993)	DEFRA – Removing Barriers		(51,543)	(51,543)
(1,896,863)	Total Financing		(2,086,608)	(2,086,608)
(18,642)	(Surplus) Deficit for the Year	3,089,008	(3,673,043)	(584,035)

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 MARCH 2024

31 March 2023 £		Note	31 March 2024 £
-	Fixed Assets & Long-Term Investments	1	-
438,253	Debtors and Prepayments	3	723,007
89,430	Short Term Investments		91,529
-	Stock		-
818,442	Cash and Cash Equivalents		1,461,339
1,346,125	Current Assets		2,275,875
(504,690)	Creditors and Accruals	4	(966,740)
(180,703)	Receipts in Advance		(64,348)
(685,393)	Current Liabilities		(1,031,088)
660,732	Net Current Assets		1,244,787
660,732	Total Net Assets		1,244,787
	Financed by:		
433,210	Restricted Funds		1,007,816
151,166	Earmarked Reserves		157,650
76,357	General Fund		79,321
660,732	Total Reserves		1,244,787

NOTES TO THE ACCOUNTS**1. Fixed Assets & Long-Term Investments**

The Board maintains asset and inventory registers for all of its significant assets. Board policy is that assets with an individual value in excess of £10,000 are recorded in the Fixed Assets Register but treated as any other purchase in annual income and expenditure account. The Board currently has five assets in excess of this threshold with a total value of £101,739 (2022/23 - £77,740).

2. Income

The Board derived income from the following main sources:

Source	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£
DEFRA Grant	529,743	529,743
DEFRA – FIPL	994,589	1,366,236
DEFRA – Removing Barriers	234,993	51,343
Local Authority Contributions	137,538	139,266
Natural England	106,669	102,687
Thames Water	112,878	129,564
Severn Trent	60,000	60,000
National Grid – Landscapes Initiatives	59,292	496,747
Rural Payments Agency – LEADER	4,468	-
National Highways - Biodiversity	49,793	643,943
Highways England – Dark Skies and DWS	25,900	7,480
Groundwork UK	-	26,987
Other grants and earned income	188,764	119,047
Total	2,504,627	3,673,043

3. Debtors and Prepayments

Year-end debtors and prepayments are categorised in the table below:

Source	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£
DEFRA – FiPL 4 th installment	243,582	-
National Highways - Biodiversity	60,800	590,108
Natural England – Cotswold Way	82,437	75,101

Other debtors and prepayments	51,434	57,798
Total	438,253	723,006

No debts were written off during the year, and no provisions were required.

4. Creditors and Accruals

A breakdown of the main categories of creditors and accruals is shown below:

Category	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£
Local Authorities and Other Public Bodies	46,455	50,263
Farming in Protected Landscape grants	407,449	874,739
National Trust	17,114	31,126
Other	214,375	74,960
Total	685,393	1,031,088

5. Value Added Tax

The Board was not registered for Value Added Tax in 2023/24.

6. Member Allowances

Board members are paid allowances and reimbursed expenses in accordance with a Member Allowances Scheme which is reviewed annually and published in the Board's Constitution.

Payments in 2023/24 are summarised in the table below:

Category	2022/23		2023/24	
	Allowances	Expenses	Allowances	Expenses
	£	£	£	£
Board Chair/Vice Chair	5,362	223	5,300	225
Executive/ Committee Members	6,750	449	4,263	167
Ordinary Members	7,872	340	10,488	935
Total	19,984	1,011	20,051	1,327

7. Related Party Transactions

Concept

The principal issue in determining whether a person or an organisation is a related party is the degree of control exerted by one party over the other. This can arise during a financial period where:

- one party has direct or indirect control of the other party;

- one party has influence over the financial and operational policies of the other party; or
- the parties are subject to common control or influence from the same source.

The Government

The Government has influence over the general operations of the Board. It is responsible for providing the statutory framework within which the Board operates. The Secretary of State appoints fourteen members of the Board under arrangements set out in the Board's Establishment Order. The Government provides a large proportion of the Board's funding in the form of grants channelled through the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and Natural England. Other government departments and agencies such as the Rural Payments Agency also fund the Board's activities.

Local Authorities

The fifteen local authorities covered by the Cotswolds area each appoint a Board member under the terms of the Board's Establishment Order.

Parish Councils

Parish Councils, Town Councils and Parish Meetings appoint eight members of the Board in accordance with the arrangements set out in the Establishment Order.

Friends of the Cotswolds

The Friends of the Cotswolds acted as the Board's landlord until July 2023. From April 2023, the registered office address changed to the Cotswold Business Centre 2 A P Ellis Road, Upper Rissington, GL54 2QB.

An occupancy license was issued by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) from May 2023 for the sharing of office premises at Greystones Farm in Bourton-on-the-Water and at Robinswood Hill Country Park, Gloucester. A Grant of £28,738 was provided to GWT for a Removing Barriers in the Cotswolds Project.

Members and Officers

The Board approved Codes of Conduct for members and officers as part of its Constitution. The Codes include requirements to disclose and record interests where they may have, or appear to have, an influence on the decisions of the Board and are circulated to members and officers. The Board's procedural rules impose quorums on meetings to ensure decisions are not taken in isolation and require members to disclose interests at each meeting before the matter in which they have an interest is discussed. A public register of these interests is maintained by the Board's Monitoring Officer. In addition to the above, Board members and officers sign and return related party transaction declaration forms each year. During the year the Board made the following related party transactions:

- Gloucestershire Raptor Monitoring Group (Anna Field, employee is a Trustee) – grant paid £0 (2023 £275)
- Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (Michèle Holden is a part-time employee of both organisations – rent of Premises paid £15,400 (2023 £0) grant paid £28,738 (2023 £15,727)
- Wreal Sports (Andy Parsons, employee had a family member working as a Trainee at the Company – uniforms & workwear embroidery provided for the Board £2,149 (2023, £0).

8. Employee Remuneration

The table below shows contracted employee numbers and their respective total remuneration received during the year in bandings of £5,000 at the financial year end. Total remuneration includes gross salary, employer Superannuation and National Insurance contributions.

Band (£)	2022/23 (Number of employees)	2023/24 (Number of employees)
0 – 5,000	5	2
5,000 - 10,000	2	0
10,000 - 15,000	2	6
15,000 - 20,000	-	0
20,000 - 25,000	4	3
25,000 - 30,000	4	2
30,000 - 35,000	1	4
35,000 - 40,000	-	0
40,000 - 45,000	3	2
45,000 - 50,000	2	0
50,000 - 55,000	3	3
55,000 - 60,000	1	3
60,000-65,000	-	1
100,000 - 105,000	1	1
Total	28	27

At the 31st March 2024 there were 22 whole time equivalent employees (31st March 2023: 21.7). The figures shown above are based on bandings of total actual remuneration received during the year.

9. Retirement Benefits and Pensions

The Board is a member of the Gloucestershire Pension Fund, which is a defined benefit scheme administered in accordance with the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations. Under the Regulations, the fund is subject to an independent triannual actuarial valuation to advise on each employer's contribution rate and on the funding levels of the scheme.

The last valuation was carried out as of 31 March 2022. The overall funding position remain positive and no changes to the existing contribution rates of 19.8% agreed under the 2022 valuation for the period of 3 years is proposed. The next triannual valuation will be undertaken based on the position as at 31st March 2025, and new contributions from 2026-27 onwards will be assessed and agreed with the Gloucestershire Pension Fund.