

Surrey Hills AONB Meeting 3 March 2021

Public Question from John Oliver

In respect of the 3 March 2021 AONB Board meeting, I wish to ask the following public question:

“The ‘Governance and Finance’ documents agreed at previous AGMs show that, since at least the 2014/2015 accounting year, there has been no increase in core funding by the six local authorities who are represented on the Board and that, until this financial year, the same applied to core funding from DEFRA. The level of the local authority contributions is, in particular, ridiculously small to an organisation that has county-wide responsibilities. This pattern is, in effect, a reduction in funding over the years.

I understand that DEFRA provides 75% of core funding and the local authorities 25%. However, could you please explain:

- Why the local authority core funding amounts have not changed for such a long time;
- Whether the basic DEFRA core funding has actually increased in real terms this year or the additional £45,169 reflects additional funding for distinct projects (and, if so how much in respect of each project);
- Whether the 0.5 SCC Surrey Arts resource is an entirely new resource to the county or a transfer from the Surrey County Council staff count and salary bill;
- Which organisation(s) has the final say in whether the AONB can increase its resources;
- Where one can find information about the funding arrangements agreed with the various bodies?”

Thank you.

Kind regards

John Oliver

Draft AONB Board Response

Dear John

Thank you for your question for which specific responses are listed below.

- Why the local authority core funding amounts have not changed for such a long time;

The Board Members agree the contributions at the AGM every year. There has been no request from the AONB Board to increase local authority contributions. Previous local authority Board representatives had advised that at a time when local authorities were having their budgets cut, that approaching them for more money could result in reductions.

- Whether the basic DEFRA core funding has actually increased in real terms this year or the additional £45,169 reflects additional funding for distinct projects (and, if so how much in respect of each project);

The DEFRA funding in 2020/21 increased by £2,612 compared to 2019/20 but we have changed the way we are reporting. DEFRA give us a single pot funding amount which we used to show as Core and Project which was how it was historically given to us. When DEFRA changed to single pot funding we continued to break down Core and Projects but now feel it is clearer to show it as the single grant. In this financial year DEFRA have ringfenced £11,943 of our funding to be spent against biodiversity projects.

- Whether the 0.5 SCC Surrey Arts resource is an entirely new resource to the county or a transfer from the Surrey County Council staff count and salary bill;

Surrey Arts provide a member of staff dedicated to delivering the programme. The programme is joint funded by Surrey CC and the AONB Board. Surrey CC backfills some of the officer's duties through additional resources.

- Which organisation(s) has the final say in whether the AONB can increase its resources;

Defra contributes 75% towards the core staff unit costs and the 6 Local Authority Core Members contributing a minimum of 25%. The Defra contribution is based on an historic funding formulae. The Surrey Hills AONB Board has not requested a review of this formulae or requested an increase in contributions from its local authority core members.

- Where one can find information about the funding arrangements agreed with the various bodies?"

The funding formulae for the Surrey Hills AONB Board is set out in the constitution and the budget requests are agreed at the AONB Board's AGM, the papers for which are published on the website.

Heather Kerswell

Surrey Hills AONB Board Chair