



Governance at the National Trust



Our vision

It's our collective passion and potent determination that has enabled us to achieve our goals and further our success. We've grown from a small group of enthusiasts, to a membership of around 4 million people of all ages and from all backgrounds. We're extremely proud of our achievements but ever-ambitious for more. Our vision is that by 2020, five million people will be members of the National Trust and everyone across England, Wales and Northern Ireland will feel like a member. To realise this vision, we must reach out to everyone from every walk of life; young and old; from the cities and towns to the coasts and countryside. It is a demanding challenge but one that is hugely exciting for us and we hope it will be for you too.



Delivery of our vision can be achieved through good governance arrangements. These arrangements, which underpin our day-to-day operations, are set out in the governance handbook (opens in a new window). They aim to demonstrate how we're run – from how we make decisions to how we achieve our objectives. At the heart of our approach to governance is a deep-rooted commitment to openness, transparency and accountability. We strongly believe that the better run we are, and the more open we are to those who wish to get involved, the more successful we'll be. The handbook identifies the main bodies which constitute our governance structure. It explains how they run their affairs and how they ensure that high levels of openness, transparency and accountability are delivered. We use these governance structures and processes to demonstrate to all of those who care about us, that we're in safe hands.

Our vision

Equality and diversity

We are committed to ensuring that the principles of equality and diversity remain at the forefront of our selection, appointment and election processes.

Equality is about creating a fairer society where everyone can participate and has the opportunity to fulfil their potential. It can be summarised in terms of equal access, treatment, shares and outcomes and is backed by legislation designed to address unfair discrimination.

Diversity is about the recognition and valuing of difference in its broadest sense. It is about creating a working culture and practices that recognise, respect, value and harness difference for the benefit of the organisation and the individual.

At appropriate stages in the selection, appointment and election processes, you'll be invited to familiarise yourself with our Equality and Diversity Policy, outlined in Appendix A of the Governance Handbook.

The policy, which has been written for the purpose of internal staff processes, applies equally to all of our governance appointments.

Read more about how we encourage diversity.

Whistle-blowing policy

The Trust is keen to ensure that everyone involved with the organisation has access to a clear framework for raising concerns about issues such as governance process failures. However, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, commonly called the Whistleblower's Act, does not extend to volunteers. The Trust has therefore established a process that can be followed by all members of our governance community for raising significant concerns, particularly involving perceived failings in the Trust's governance process. Details can be found in the Governance Handbook ([opens in a new window](#)) at Appendix B.



Our vision

Encouraging diversity

For ever, for everyone – that is what we stand for. We want people of all ages and backgrounds to get involved with our extraordinary places and spaces, be inspired by them, and love them as much as we do. No one should ever feel that the National Trust is ‘not for them.’ Whatever a person’s age, background, walk of life or interests, there’s a special place for them here. But how do we reach out to people who’ve never visited a National Trust property? Or young people who have no idea who we are or what we do? By really understanding what it is that these different groups of people want from us. And, of course, by making sure that we’re reflecting the diversity of the communities around the special places and spaces in our care.

When it comes to diversity, there is much more we need to do. As an organisation, it is essential that we’re more representative of society as a whole and that, from a governance perspective, we are able to call on a variety of experience, expertise and backgrounds. We’re especially keen to hear from people with strong professional networks in under-represented communities. That could be young people, people from BME communities, disabled people or people living in urban communities. We want you to use your first-hand experience and professional insight to help us achieve our ambitious goals, to help us reach new audiences in exciting new ways. That’s the legacy we want you to help us to deliver.



Our structure

The Council

The Council is the guardian of the spirit of the National Trust and its future vision. Acting with integrity and intelligence, our Council ensures that we satisfy our promises by appointing the Chairman, the Deputy Chairman and the Board of Trustees, and holding the Board to account. The Council is responsible for overseeing the Board's current and future aims and for shaping policy development. Council members are true ambassadors for the National Trust; they define who we are and what we do as an organisation. They usually meet three to four times a year including a 2-3 day visit to a Country or Region.



The Council is made up of 52 people: 26 elected by our members and 26 appointed by organisations whose interests are similar, in some way, to our own – for a term of three years, usually serving no more than three successive terms. The depth of experience and perspective brought by this diverse group of volunteers allows us to appreciate and represent the wider interests of the nation.

Our structure

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is our governing body. It comprises a select few – between nine and fifteen members – who bring a diverse and high quality balance of skills and experience to help us achieve our vision. The Council is responsible for appointing our Trustees, who normally serve for a term of three years, usually serving no more than two successive terms.

The Board ensures that we have a clear vision and strategy, influencing the way we are run, today and in the future, while maintaining the ethos and values that we hold so dear. Trustees are the guardians of our assets. They keep us one step ahead of the political, economic and social environment we operate in. From honing approaches for senior management, ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, to proposing changes to the National Trust Acts or Bye-Laws, these people envisage our future and make it happen on the ground.

Trustees come from different walks of life but all have one thing in common: they care deeply about the National Trust and fully appreciate what we do. With a passion and enthusiasm for our work, they will typically meet six to eight times a year, including visits to many of the special places we care for and love. The focus of these meetings is to give the Director-General and Executive Team clear, strategic direction going forward. Acting solely in the best interests of the National Trust, our Trustees give their valuable time and experience to support organisational decisions. With a natural enthusiasm and intrigue for our special places, every year the Trustees make local visits to broaden their understanding of our diverse offerings and achieve greater visibility of how their decisions influence our work, while engaging with staff, volunteers and supporters.



Our structure

One of the Board's most important tasks is to appoint our Director-General and a number of senior appointments within our governance community. By ensuring we deliver strong leadership, we can continue to care for special places for ever, ultimately benefiting everyone in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The Board as a whole encompasses knowledge and expertise in the following areas:

- Cultural heritage
- Countryside and land management
- Nature conservation
- Learning, outreach and access
- Buildings, chattels and gardens
- Volunteering
- Financial management/investment
- Business acumen
- Strategy
- Change management
- Legal
- Human resources
- Procurement
- IS and business process review
- Marketing, PR and communication



Our structure

Nominations Committees

We need our experienced Nominations Committees to guide us and manage the attraction and recruitment processes for our members of the Board of Trustees, Chairman, Deputy Chairman, external members of the Nominations Committee, and elected members of the Council, as well as the review of Appointing Bodies.

As a fundamental part of the selection process, these Council volunteers need broad experience, wisdom, independence of mind and excellent judgment. Members tend to have been involved in senior non-executive recruitment in other organisations which gives them a clear understanding of the people that we need in our governance to help us achieve our strategic aims and future direction.

It's important that these members can gain credibility and confidence at all levels, and just as important that they are open-minded and can represent a range of backgrounds and perspectives.

These committees are made up of two to three members of the Council and one external member, who will all serve varying terms. Their meeting cycles will vary according to the nature and timing of the appointments or elections they oversee.



Our structure

Regional/Country Advisory Boards

Local issues. Local people. Local places. No one knows a region or country, better than the people who live there. Our Regional/Country Advisory Boards advise and offer support to help our performance in a country or region. Passionate about our aims, and representing the diverse audiences and communities that we serve, members advise each Country or Regional Director on sensitive and complex local issues, review management accounts and budgets and foster good relationships as ambassadors.

Each advisory board meets quarterly to guide on the benefits of projects and prospective acquisitions, and discuss matters relating to inalienable land. Matters which are often close to their heart. They believe in our work and understand the challenges we'll face over the next 5 – 10 years, while tackling the big, important issues of today. Each advisory board is usually made up of between eight and fifteen members, serving three year terms with possible reappointment thereafter.

Recruitment to these advisory boards (except for Country/Regional Chairmen roles) is managed locally by the committees themselves.

The Audit Committee

The Audit Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Trustees. Its members are the vital link between the Director-General, the Board of Trustees and external auditors. Committee members offer their time to oversee our financial reporting and risk management processes as a whole. They address any financial reporting, risk and internal control issues, while making sure we are getting the best from our internal and external audit functions. This committee also manages all whistle blowing arrangements.

The Audit Committee meets at least four times a year at appropriate periods in the reporting and audit cycle. Passionate about our work and determined to protect our best interests, its members are direct and honest with their opinions and decisions. The Committee is large enough to represent a diverse range of views and experience, yet small enough to work efficiently. Each member serves a varying number of years, which depends on the skills needed, and achieves the perfect balance between continuity and freshness.

Members of the Committee who are not Trustees will normally be appointed for a term of three years, with the possibility of serving a further three-year term.



Our structure

Investment Committee

The Investment Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Trustees, made up of Trustee members and external members. Using sound investment management skills, its members help us manage our extensive investment portfolio.

The committee meets four times a year, at intermittent times within the investment cycle. Members tackle an incredibly wide remit, from recommending an appropriate investment strategy and asset allocation model to overseeing our external investment managers. Their time and expertise is invaluable to effective decision. They are the people who understand the challenges we face and have the intellectual ability to help us overcome them.



Our structure

Senior Management Remuneration Committee

The Senior Management Remuneration Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Trustees, set up to help the Board in accomplishing its HR responsibilities and inspiring high standards of corporate governance in this area.

With Trustee members, plus one or two external members from the wider HR community, the committee meets once or twice a year. Exercising their valuable insight into effective recruitment, executive development and remuneration policy development, its members discuss the terms of employment of senior managers and directors within the National Trust, including the Director-General. It's their expertise, combined with their overarching passion for our organisation and how it's run, that helps them to make such fundamental decisions.

The role of the Secretariat

Put simply, the role of the Secretariat is to enable those big decisions to be made: by administering all governance-related business throughout the organisation.

When it comes to your recruitment process, this team can offer you invaluable support as its members have extensive knowledge in the whole area of governance. If you need any help with your application, or have any questions or queries, please get in touch.

From organising the advertising campaigns, to scheduling interviews and preparing all necessary correspondence, this team works tirelessly to ensure we engage the best quality non-executives.

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Application process

Senior governance appointments and elections

All of the senior governance appointment and election application processes are managed by the Secretariat. Based at Heelis, our award-winning central office in Swindon, the team works closely with the relevant Appointments Committee (for appointments made by the Board of Trustees) and various Nominations Committees (for appointments made by, and elections to, our Council). The team is led by the Deputy Secretary, a key point of contact from initial enquiry through to appointment or election.

The majority of our senior governance appointment and election terms run for three years. This allows us plenty of time for succession planning and, in turn, plenty of time to advertise opportunities. Typically, we'll start advertising six months before we know we'll have a vacancy. We always aim to advertise senior governance vacancies for several weeks before the published closing date. We'll be very clear about planned interview dates so that you're able to make any necessary arrangements.

Where the interview takes place will depend on the nature of the appointment or election vacancy. We tend to hold interviews for Council or Trustee roles at Heelis or in London. If it's a Country/Regional Chairman role, we'll hold it at a National Trust property in the area.



Application process

Elections to Council

Things work slightly different for elections to Council. While the application process itself is similar, the timeline is longer. We'll usually start advertising our election vacancies in February, with applications being reviewed and interviews held some time over April/May. The details of each candidate then go forward for publishing to our entire membership in the ballot papers which form part of our AGM booklet. Members cast their votes fairly in the ballot during September and October. The results are then formally announced at the Annual General Meeting – this is usually held some time from late October to early November each year.

Regional/Country Advisory Board and Advisory Groups Member Appointments

These appointment processes are managed locally by the relevant Advisory Board or Panel. All the appointments are supported by a member of staff who is involved in assisting the Advisory Board or Advisory Groups, and they are on hand to guide you through the appointment process.

Interviews are usually held in the relevant region for Advisory Board appointments, and in different locations for Advisory Groups appointments.

Appointments are made for a term of three years with the possibility of reappointment after that, and if you're successful you'll have a thorough induction.



Frequently asked questions

Are governance roles paid?

They're on a voluntary basis but, of course, we'll reimburse expenses.

How long am I appointed or elected for?

Normally, you're appointed or elected for a term of three years and can serve for two successive terms (in most cases, but exceptions apply).

What is the time commitment?

This depends on the type of role you're doing. For example, the time commitment for a Trustee is around 20 days a year. For a Regional/Country Chairman, it's roughly 12-15 days. You'll also have the opportunity to get involved in other areas of our work. Further details can be found in the role profile for each vacancy.

Where are meetings held?

This depends on your role. We hold Board and Council meetings in London or at Heelis, our central office in Swindon. Regional/Country Advisory Board and Advisory Panel meetings are held at some of our stunning special places.

Does it help to have a relationship with my local property?

Most definitely. While we look for people of all ages, from all backgrounds, with varied experience, they all have one thing in common: a demonstrable true passion for us an organisation and our special places and spaces. So, nothing beats first-hand experience of how we work in your region. And, as you appreciate, your regional perspective is incredibly important to everyone here.

What sort of induction will I receive?

A comprehensive, useful one, that's certain. You'll spend an induction day at Heelis, our central office in Swindon. These are held twice a year, usually in May and late November. You'll meet our Director-General and other members of our Executive Team and senior staff. There will be a series of presentations for you to enjoy, these will help you to understand our strategy, finances and conservation priorities, as well as particular current issues. You'll also have the chance to talk to other governance volunteers and have a good look around our award-winning building.

What would I be doing and who would I meet?

While it really depends on your role, you'll attend a series of meetings. This is a great opportunity to ask questions so please make sure that you've read everything and prepared your notes/comments beforehand.

As well as attending meetings, we encourage you to get to know the way that we work. We'd suggest spending time visiting, and enjoying, local properties, familiarising yourself with our people and getting involved in their on-the-ground efforts.

Beyond meetings, governance volunteers are often invited to support staff in ad-hoc projects, and to take the opportunity to represent the Trust in an ambassadorial role, for example at legacy/pledger events which are hosted by our properties.

Acknowledgements

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