

AUDIT AND CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

8 July 2020

Present: Councillor D Clements (Chair)
Councillor P Baker, Dr R Heath Davies, Mrs S Hoss, Councillor M James, Mr G Jones and Councillor M Williams.

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am-11.15am)

1. Election of Chair

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Councillor Mrs D Clements be elected Chair for the ensuing year.

2. Election of Deputy Chair

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Dr R Heath-Davies be elected Deputy Chair for the ensuing year.

3. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P Kidney and Councillor R Owens.

4. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

5. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 15 May 2020 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2020 be confirmed and authenticated.

6. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

7. Performance Report for the Period ending 31 May 2020

The report followed the structure of the Corporate and Resources Plan for 2020/21. The Plan was in two parts - the first section was based on progress against short and mid-term priorities focused on the Authority's COVID-19 response and recovery planning, while the second section outlined progress against work streams that contributed to the longer term delivery of the Authority's Well-being Objectives and impacts within the National Park Management Plan. This section going forward would provide insight into the impact of COVID-19 and recovery on long term delivery and projects across well-being objectives. Some activities within work streams might be progressed during 2020/21, however a number of



them, particularly those involving face to face contact between individuals, may not be able to progress until restrictions were partially or fully lifted. In some cases this would mean that activities under some work streams might not be carried out during 2020/21. Activities under work streams would be subject to further review during the year to assess whether they remained relevant or needed to be updated to align with recovery plans.

The report presented the performance to 31 May 2020. Due to the reporting period, statistical data for work streams was only available for data inputted into Ffynnon on a weekly and monthly basis. Quarter 1 statistics for data sets recorded quarterly on the system would be reported at the next Committee.

The report of the Performance and Compliance Co-ordinator outlined how the Authority had responded to the COVID-19 regulations and the work that had resumed since some of the restrictions had been lifted. It was noted that the majority of projects and activities had been on hold in May, either due to reprioritisation of work to deal with the COVID 19 response and recovery planning or due to the impact of the regulations on the ability of aspects of projects and services to be delivered.

It was noted at the meeting that since writing the report, the Coast Path and car parks had re-opened, and that risk assessments were being carried out to allow site visits to be undertaken. It was also noted that a Communications Recovery Plan was in place and this had been shared with Members previously.

Members thanked the officer for a comprehensive report which showed the many positive actions that had been taken, and for the inclusion of the explanation the RAG status indicators. A number of Members highlighted the importance of efforts to return the planning system to some sort of normality and asked whether creative ways could be found to undertake some of the tasks. The Chief Executive replied that the planning system continued to function, however some aspects were more difficult to do and the Director of Planning and Park Direction would shortly be writing to Members to update them on the current situation. A question was asked about the timetable for adoption of the Local Development Plan and the Chief Executive explained that the Authority was currently unable to adopt the document because Welsh Government regulations required documents to be available to the public in libraries and the Authority's offices. He added that the current situation had highlighted areas where processes, such as advertising of planning applications, needed to be updated in order to increase efficiency and reduce costs, however this was a national issue.



Another Member asked whether any additional checks had been necessary in the current circumstances to combat online fraud, and the Finance Manager reassured the Committee that having put in place some new procedures, payments continued to be made within 14 days and in accordance with Financial Standing Orders.

NOTED

8. Health and Safety Update

Following feedback at a previous meeting of the Committee, the report of the Human Resources Manager outlined incidents and accidents reported through the Authority's internal processes between April and June 2020.

The report summarised the action taken in response to each incident, however on this occasion the only incidents had been alarm call outs. It was noted that there had been no incidents that were reportable to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). The report went on to provide an update on a number of project areas, including the Corporate Health Standard, safeguarding and the Authority's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Executive advised that as the Human Resources Manager was unwell that morning, he would take their questions. With regard to the Authority's COVID-19 response, he noted that most staff had now returned to work. It was hoped that the centres would re-open in the next couple of weeks, while most staff based at Llanion would continue to work from home. Small numbers of staff were going into that building as needed, including those carrying out monitoring and maintenance tasks, and making preparations for re-opening the building to the public. Members asked a number of questions regarding adaptations that were being made and staff wellbeing, and the Chief Executive reassured them that the Authority was complying with all guidance from Welsh Government, the Health Board and the Local Authority, carrying out risk assessments to ensure the safety of both staff and members of the public.

NOTED.

9. Risk Register

Members were asked to consider the latest risk register, which had been reviewed by both the Management and Leadership Teams. It was noted that additional risks had been added to the end of the register and other updates provided.



It was noted that the spreadsheet was quite large and not very easy to read on the screen, so a request was made for a paper copy of the document to be circulated.

There was some discussion regarding the Authority's financial position as a result of Covid-19 (Risk 46) and the mitigating measures the Authority had taken. Questions were also asked regarding risks 11, 17, 18 and 22 and the Finance Manager agreed to amend the register going forward.

NOTED

10. Update on the Statement of Accounts

The Finance Manager reported that ordinarily a draft of the Authority's accounts would be completed by the end of May, however this year Audit Wales had advised that changes in legislation due to the COVID-19 pandemic would allow an extension of that deadline until 31 August. However he was pleased to report that the Authority's accounts had been completed at the end of June and were now with Audit Wales. They intended to commence their audit (remotely) during the week beginning 20 July and it was hoped that the final accounts would be presented to the National Park Authority on 30 September. He wished to thank his colleagues for their hard work in collating all the necessary information.

The Finance Manager went on to present extracts from the draft accounts, the information having been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. This showed that the revenue funding for 2019/20 was similar to that in 2018/19 at £7.7m, with the National Park Grant from the Welsh Government remaining the same at £2,954k. The Capital budget had increased due to significant expenditure at Carew Castle and through the one-off purchase of licenses for Microsoft Office.

In respect of Authority generated income, planning fees were down from £253k to £184k, a trend which had continued from 2017/18, however other income had increased due to contributions from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust (c£30k) and a legacy of £10k.

Turning to expenditure, the cost of employees had increased as a result of a 2% pay award which, due to the impact of the Living Wage had resulted in the increase being closer to 6% for those on lower pay scales. In addition 6 posts had been filled.

Within departmental budgets, Promoting Understanding, which covered the centres and communications was down by £66k against budget due to a combination of reduced Coast to Coast income and increased costs, a reduction in income at Castell Henllys and the cost of branding and website design being over budget. However this had been partially offset



by an underspend in the Rangers, Estates and Volunteers budget due to capital grant from Welsh Government which had resulted in operational savings in the Ranger budget. There was an overall end of year surplus of £2k.

In terms of 2019/20 income versus budget and prior years, merchandise sales at the centres was £23k below budget, while car park income was up against budget, despite there being no income for this budget line during the last two weeks of March.

Finally the summarised balance sheet showed that cash in hand had decreased due to payment of grants; a provision for the potential refund of Coast to Coast advertising fees as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown had been made, although no final decision had been taken as to whether this would be offered. There had also been an increase in the pension liability as a result of a reduction in pension asset values following the COVID-19 impact on the markets at the end of March.

The Chair, on behalf of all Members thanked the Finance Manager and his team for their hard work in preparing the accounts ahead of the deadline.

NOTED.

11. Presentation of the PCNPA Recovery Plan

The Chief Executive apologised that he did not have this in a form that could be presented to the Committee and he advised he would send out a copy electronically for Members to comment upon.

NOTED.

12. Delegation of any issues for consideration by the Continuous Improvement Group

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues of concern that the Committee wished to delegate to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

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The Minutes of this meeting were confirmed at the meeting of the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee held on 11/11/2020 without amendment

