

# OPERATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

23 September 2020

Present: Councillor K Doolin (Chair)  
Councillor ML Evans, Councillor P Harries, Dr M Havard, Mrs J James, Councillor PJ Morgan, Dr R Plummer, and Councillor S Yelland

[Councillor A Wilcox joined the meeting during the report on Progress of the Digital Transformation of the Countryside Management Team (Minute 4 refers)]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am – 12.00pm)

## 1. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

## 2. Disclosures

Dr R Plummer advised that she was a Trustee of Plantlife and Board Member of Natural Resources Wales; both organisations were mentioned in the Conservation Report [Minute 5 refers].

## 3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17 June 2020 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2020 be confirmed and authenticated.

## 4. Progress of the Digital Transformation of the Countryside Management Team

Members were reminded that at the Authority meeting in October 2018, authorisation had been given to purchase the ESRI ArcGIS software, which would enable the Countryside Management Team to deliver its work more efficiently and to improve the flow of work, from inspection through to delivery. A presentation on the benefits of transforming existing systems had also been made to this Committee in September 2018 and the report detailed the progress the Warden Team had made in adopting the new approach to planning and delivering commissioned tasks during the normal course of its work.

The presentation focused on the benefits of using the system, particularly the apps for Rights of Way and bridge inspections and fault reporting, and how the information collected could be used by managers. The Operations Manager noted that the software had also been used to manage projects such as the Pollinator Project, which aimed to improve



habitat management for pollinators primarily along the coast path, as well as the Authority's ongoing work to record ash dieback. It was anticipated that a separate report on the latter would be made to a future meeting. Finally the report outlined plans for development of the system to build on what had been achieved.

Congratulating both the manager, and the Warden Team for their adoption of what had been a new way of working, Members agreed that the introduction of the digital system had been transformational. They also believed that development of the project could provide some exciting possibilities both for other aspects of the Authority's work and in partnership with other organisations, as well as to improve public engagement.

**NOTED.**

[Due to connection problems, Mrs J James left the meeting at this juncture.]

**5. Conservation Report 2019-2020**

The report set out the outcomes achieved through the Authority's conservation work during the previous financial year and included the results of monitoring from sites in the active work programme; achievements under the 'Conserving the Park' scheme; progress on the management of the Authority's own sites; progress on the 'Stitch in Time' project; collaboration work and joint projects; species monitoring results and interpretation and changes in agricultural support.

In her presentation to the Committee, the Conservation Officer focused on the Southern Damselfly Project which had been funded by a grant from Natural Resources Wales. This species was endangered and restricted to the Preseli Hills and the New Forest. A survey of the sites restored over the previous eight years had been undertaken and a management plan developed to identify sites for restoration over the next 30 years. Fencing work had been undertaken to make common land stock-proof again, and habitats had been enhanced through the creation of sunlit pools and improved access to the watercourses to encourage grazing by ponies. The survey, which had been undertaken in the summer of 2020, showed that at seven of the eleven sites, adult southern damselflies were present, giving confidence to continue the work outlined in the management plan.

Members were impressed by the range of work that had been undertaken by what was a small team. They noted that working in partnership, both with other stakeholders and landowners through the Conserving the Park scheme, was critical and asked whether there were opportunities to expand this work. The officer replied that there was an endless supply of



landowners wanting advice on how to improve the habitats on their land and the Authority had been successful in obtaining capital funding for new infrastructure such as fencing, however the management agreement budget for 2019/20 had been fully allocated. The resources provided by an additional Conservation Officer had also helped as had funding from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust's Make More Meadows Appeal.

Turning to the Southern Damselfly project, the Committee was pleased to note its success and the difference the Authority was making to rare species across the National Park. They asked whether the habitat improvements carried out had benefitted other species as well, and the officer replied that this had indeed happened as a result of facilitating grazing and creating and enhancing watercourses, with benefits to species such as the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly.

## **NOTED**

*[Due to technical problems experienced by the Community Archaeologist, the Chair, with the agreement of the Committee, agreed to take the Risk Register report before the Annual Archaeology Report.]*

### **6. Risk Register**

Members were asked to consider the latest Risk Register. The Finance Manager advised that it had been reviewed by both Management and Leadership Teams and changes since the previous report were highlighted. However he apologised that Risk 45 had not been updated as requested at the previous meeting.

In relation to Risk 20 (Risk of Major IT failure or virus attach, etc) Members asked whether the risk rating remained appropriate, given the problems recently experienced at Brecon Beacons NPA. The Chief Executive replied that the Authority had measures in place to protect the system and was doing everything it could to protect itself, however officers would continue to learn whatever lessons it could.

Another Member noted that the progress updates for a number of risks did not appear to have been updated, eg Risks 9 and 24 with regard to the progress of the Local Development Plan. It was also considered that updates were needed to Risks 20 and 47.

Finally, with regard to Risk 42 (Risk of failing to recover outstanding debts) one Member asked whether this was likely to be a problem due to the Covid situation. The Finance Manager advised that arrangements were being reviewed and discussions with the Authority's tenants was ongoing.



Members asked whether a wider narrative could be provide for the Risk Register at the next meeting, to highlight the main changes, identify what were considered to be the highest risks and outline the actions being taken to mitigate them.

**NOTED**

**7. Annual Archaeology Report 2019-2020**

The Annual Archaeology report outlined the current state of scheduled monuments in the National Park and the role that Archaeology played in delivering the Authority's objectives in relation to the National Park Management Plan and Corporate and Resources Plan. The report went on to outline the work that had been undertaken during the previous financial year which included a variety of community engagement projects, events and activities and partnerships with other organisations. A number of archaeological surveys had been undertaken and interpretation work had been commissioned. The report concluded with an outline of the priorities and plans for 2020-21. The report noted the impact that COVID-19 had had on the activities and priorities relating to archaeology and heritage with a number of work areas having been suspended. However greater progress had been made in other areas as a result and the use of digital platforms for training events and conferences had broadened engagement to those who would not otherwise have been able to attend.

Members congratulated the officer on the breadth of work that had been undertaken, particularly the engagement with children, the use that had been made of digital media and work through the medium of Welsh. They were also pleased to see the use that had been made of the ArcGIS software and the links with other organisations.

**NOTED.**

[Councillor M Evans left the meeting following the officer presentation on the following item.]

**8. Performance Report for the Period Ending 31<sup>st</sup> July 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.



It was reported that 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, might 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 July 2020 for monthly data and quarter 1 (April – June) statistics for some data sets. An explanation of the RAG (Red Amber Green) status had been appended to the report following a request at the previous meeting of the Committee.

The report highlighted a number of areas of work which had been particularly impacted by the COVID 19 Regulations and restrictions. Updates were provided on the Coast Path, the Authority's sites and centres, activities and events programme, the planning service and partnership working.

It was noted that one RIDDOR incident (under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013) had occurred in quarter 1 where a staff member working on the coast path had slipped, sustaining damage to cartilage.

With regard to planning, it was reported that although substantial progress had been made in the handling of applications, the constraints in quarter 1 were reflected in the planning performance statistics, with the percentage of all planning applications determined within time periods required year to date being significantly below target at 47.27%. In the meeting the Director of Planning and Park Direction explained that the Authority had received a significant influx in applications due to a fee increase by Welsh Government and the imminent adoption of the Local Development Plan. A plan of action had been developed to address the current situation, which included bringing in consultants in the short term to help address the backlog. This would be reviewed at the end of September to see if further steps were needed. In response to a question, it was noted that the previous enforcement backlog had now been dealt with, however officers would continue to monitor the situation.

Updated figures were also provided for the Authority's centres. In August Carew had 7,088 visitors, compared to 11,007 in 2019/20, while Castell Henllys had 2,249 visitors in August compared to 4,818 in August 2019/20. Both sites were restricted in the numbers that they could accommodate at any one time. It was noted that the gallery had recently re-opened at Oriel y Parc, however no visitor numbers were yet available.



Thanking the officer for the report, Members were concerned to note that there was a red RAG status against the action to digitise Health and Safety reporting and questioned whether this was a temporary problem or a problem that needed to be addressed. Officers replied that effective records were currently kept using a paper based system. A new general HR system was being procured however digitised health and safety recording was not offered as part of this new system. Work would still be carried out to develop a digital approach to reporting to make the process more efficient.

One Member asked whether the Authority would be able to report on the Authority's contribution to carbon reduction as a result of holding virtual meetings. The Chief Executive replied that he believed there would be an impact on the Authority's carbon footprint, however he doubted that could be sustained in the longer term.

Finally a question was asked about progress on the project to work with Community Councils to address light pollution which had a red RAG rating. The officer agreed to contact the relevant officer and provide an update to the Committee in due course.

## **NOTED**

### **9. Continuous Improvement Group: delegation of issues**

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues that needed to be delegated to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

The Minutes of this meeting were confirmed at the meeting of the Operational Review Committee on 16 December 2020 subject to the following amendments:

A typographical error was noted in the second paragraph of Minute 6 – the first sentence should have referred to the risk of virus attack not attach. Also in the penultimate paragraph on page 5 of the minutes (Minute 8 Performance Report) the reference to an influx of planning applications due to a fee increase should have read in advance of a fee increase. However the Member went on to say that these were minor corrections and, on the whole, she wished to record her compliments to the officers concerned on the quality of the Authority's minutes.

