

# AUDIT AND CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

7<sup>th</sup> November 2012

Present: Councillor M Williams (Chairman)  
Mr A Archer, Councillor JA Brinsden, Councillor RM Lewis and  
Councillor DWM Rees

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 11.00am – 1.10pm)

## 1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs G Hayward.

## 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012 be confirmed and signed.

## 3. Performance Report for the Period to September 2012

The report of the Business and Performance Manager presented performance in respect of the relevant actions and measures in Corporate Outcomes 8 and parts of Outcomes 3 and 5 for the period to the end of September 2012. Each of the actions reported on were shown as red, amber or green depending on the level of progress that had been made.

One action was marked as red, under Outcome 3c, “To use all available Sustainable Development Fund”. The Business and Performance Manager informed Members that applications to the Fund were slow. The SDF Administrator would be attending a funding surgery with Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) in the new year and it was hoped that this would generate some further applications. Members enquired whether funding not used in the current financial year could be carried over to the following year and it was confirmed that this was possible.

It was reported that under Outcome 8 there were a few areas highlighted in red however Item a “Improve the response times for both pre-application enquiries and planning applications” had changed from red to amber as in four of the previous five months 60% of applications had been determined in eight weeks. Members queried whether it was felt that the pre-app system was working and whether or not this could be measured in any way. They requested an update from the Head of Development Management on the current position and this was to be arranged.



The Business and Performance Manager then displayed information regarding such indicators as customer satisfaction levels, media coverage levels etc. He confirmed that the Staff Survey was now underway and also that the Authority had retained the Investors in People Award for 2012. He informed Members that 9 complaints had been received, 6 of which were planning related.

With regard to the Risk Register several items were showing a red indicator including number 41 "Failure to provide affordable housing opportunities in accord with target". It was explained that the Authority was not meeting the targets set out in the Local Development Plan but this was currently the subject of a scrutiny review.

It was **RESOLVED** that Members receive the report.

#### **4. Joint Working**

The Business and Performance Manager reported on the current joint working arrangement with other National Park Authorities, Local Authorities and other organisations.

He reported that the Authority was involved in many joint working or procurement projects and exchanges of ideas and working practices and this was demonstrated in a list attached to the report before Members.

Members queried the fact that the Authority was not involved with the Local Service Board (LSB). The Pembrokeshire LSB is restricted to the statutory members as outlines in the guidance for LSBs. Members asked if a letter could be sent by the Chairman of the Authority to the Leader of Pembrokeshire County Council asking them to reconsider the Authority's membership of the Local Service Board.

Members were impressed by the amount of joint working taking place and the overall financial benefit to the Authority as a result of this.

It was **RESOLVED** that Members receive the report.

#### **5. Review of PNPA Strategies and Policies**

This report was presented by the Conservation Policy Officer. He advised Members that the report had been produced as a response to the request by the Wales Audit Offices to provide the results of a mapping exercise of all existing strategies and policies so as to identify any further requirements for updating or addressing inconsistencies. He told Members that an initial review of policies had been carried out by the Authority's Business and Performance Manager and no inconsistencies had been recorded. Following on from this a series of reports to the Leadership Team were prepared and it was agreed to categorise plans, policies and guidance as Key Plans, Subject Plans and Procedural



Documentation. Officers throughout the Authority had provided input on Review Requirements, Internal/External Consultation/Approval Requirements, Internal/External Publicity Requirements and any inconsistencies, gaps or omissions. The Index would be monitored for Members by the Authority's Leadership Group.

It was **RESOLVED** that Members receive the report.

## **6. Standards and the Welsh Language**

The Chief Executive presented this report to Members. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of impending changes to the way in which the National Park Authority was required to report on how it conducted its business in relation to the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

The Authority had adopted the principle that, in the conduct of public business in Wales it would treat the English and Welsh languages on a basis of equality. In accordance with the Welsh Language Act 1993 the Authority adopted a Welsh Language Scheme which set out how the Authority would give effect to that principle when providing services to the public in Wales. The original scheme was approved by the then Welsh Language Board in 1997 and a revised version was approved by the same body in 2008.

Since then, the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 had set in place a legal framework whereby organisations were required to comply with statutory standards relating to the Welsh language. These standards, which had not yet been finalised, would specify how organisations were expected to treat and use the Welsh language and were intended to provide more clarity as to the Welsh language services people should expect to receive, as well as consistent service provision throughout the public sector.

It was also reported that an Office of Welsh Language Commissioner had also been created whose role would be to ensure that organisations complied with the relevant Standards and to investigate those who failed to do so.

The results of the informal consultation were still awaited but in the meantime, organisations were required to continue to comply with their approved Welsh Language Schemes.

**NOTED**



## 7. **Overview of the Authority's Estates Officer**

The Estates Officer provided a summary review of his role within the Authority which he illustrated by two site specific case studies – Pantmaenog Forest and Marloes Sands Car Park.

He informed Members that the work of the Estates Officer was most recently audited by Pembrokeshire County Council Internal Audit Service during the financial year 2010/11. Their findings made no recommendations for change and they were happy that a satisfactory framework of controls was in place.

Members enquired whether there were any plans to update the Asset Management Strategy and the Estates Officer confirmed that this was last produced in 2003 with a supplementary update in 2004 with no significant changes. Work was now underway to update it and it was expected that the core thrust of the policy would continue apart from some operational changes.

It was **RESOLVED** that the positive and cost effective contribution made by the Estates Officer towards the delivery of Park Purposes be endorsed, and that an objective and challenging attitude should continue to be encouraged at all times when reviewing the contemporary contribution that the in-house portfolio made to the delivery of Park purposes.

## 8. **Procurement of Replacement Finance System**

The Finance Manager reported that the Authority's current Financial Software (QLX) had been used since 1996. The owners of QLX, Unit 4, were now ceasing to develop the system or to market it to new users and to move existing customers over to its flagship product which was a much larger and more complex system.

Initial discussions had been held with Brecons Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) and Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) with a view to either sharing the cost of moving to the Unit 4 flagship package or continuing to use the current system at a reduced cost on a shared basis. It became apparent that even together the three Park Authorities were too small as a unit to afford the newer system and also logistical difficulties would hamper shared use of a single system.

Although joint procurement between the three Park Authorities would be desirable each Authority faced different replacement demands and system specification needs. Consequently BBNPA chose to work with Carmarthen County Council whereas PCNPA and SNPA decided to continue to work together in a joint procurement exercise to find more bespoke software fitting both Authorities operational needs.



The complexity of Local Government accounting requirements necessitated the use of specialist financial software and the Authority in conjunction with SNPA sought recommendations from the Finance Managers of the UK's other National Park Authorities for a replacement system. The result of that enquiry identified five possible replacement systems and these software houses were in the process of making presentations to the Finance and IT teams of both Authorities.

Follow up presentations, security checks, customer endorsements and potential client user site visits would be sought from these companies in the forthcoming weeks. It was anticipated that a decision would be made on the preferred replacement software by the end of the calendar year and provision had been made in the 2012/13 capital program to cover the cost of the replacement system.

It was **RESOLVED** that the procurement procedure be endorsed.

#### **9. Engagement Letter for 2012/13 Internal Audit Service**

The Finance Manager outlined the details contained in the Engagement Letter for 2012/13 Internal Audit Service from Pembrokeshire County Council. The letter summarised the key elements of the engagement including the timing of the audit, the members of the audit team and what it would cover. It was reported that although the engagement letter stated that Carew Castle would be one of the subjects covered it had been decided to change this to Oriel Y Parc as Carew were in the middle of building works and staff were moving offices to Llanion until March 2013.

A draft report on the Audit findings would be provided 14 days of completion of the audit fieldwork and in return Internal Audit could expect to receive a report from the Authority on the factual accuracy of the draft report together with management comments in respect of any recommendation made within 14 days.

A report would be provided to the Business and Performance Manager and the Finance Manager within 14 days of completion of the audit fieldwork and they could expect to receive a report from the Authority on the factual accuracy of the draft report together with management comments in respect of any recommendation made within 14 days.

A final internal audit report would then be issued to the Finance Manager and Business and Performance Manager within 14 days of receipt of the response to the draft report. Once this final report was issued, the Authority was responsible for its circulation, internally and externally and for responding to any Freedom of Information Act requests to see the report.



It was also reported that the fees for audit had not increased since 2007 and would stay the same for this year with a percentage increase for the 2013/14 audit.

It was **RESOLVED** that the contents of the Engagement Letter be noted.

#### **10. Budget Performance Report 9 months to September 2012**

The Finance Manager explained to Members that the title of this report should read "Budget Performance report 6 months to September 2012".

The Finance Manager provided the Committee with the detailed net revenue budget for the 6 months to September 2012. This showed that the Authority's net revenue expenditure at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2012 was £2,294k, £223k under the profiled budget of £2,537k. The details for each service department were set out in the report. Members' attention was also drawn to the section of the report which detailed income and forecasts for the National Park centres and car park incomes respectively. The report went on to set out the forecasted revenue position for the end of the financial year, which anticipated a surplus of £75k which would be relocated in the forthcoming months to ensure that the Authority ended the financial year close to the original budget surplus.

It was reported that the capital programme remained as previously reported which reflected the additional allocation for the Poppit Sands Car Park Project.

Finally the report set out the Authority's usable reserves. Capital receipts and Earmarked reserves.

Members queried whether the Townscheme Grant had been allocated for the current year. The Chief Executive advised that this had been discussed at the Conservation and Planning Review Committee after it was delegated by the National Park Authority and all grants had been allocated.

Members thanked the Finance Manager for his report and for managing the budget so effectively. The Chief Executive added that an unqualified report had been received on the 2011/12 Accounts approved by the Authority at its meeting in September. Such a report was by no means typical of all Authorities and staff were to be congratulated.

It was **RESOLVED** that the budgetary report for the 6 months to September 2012 be endorsed.



## **11. Continuous Improvement Group**

The Chief Executive reminded Members that any issues of concern which arose should be automatically reported to the Continuous Improvement Group.

