

REPORT OF WALES AUDIT OFFICER

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF INVOLVEMENT

Introduction

The Well-being of Future Generations Act (the 'Act') requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act also puts in place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells those public bodies covered by the Act how to go about meeting their duty.

The Wales Audit Officer has responsibility for how organisations meet the requirements of the Act.

Review of Involvement

During 2019-20, the Performance Audit element of the Wales Audit Office plan for the Authority included a "Review of Involvement". This work was based on two case studies:

- the involvement of stakeholders in developing the Newport information hub and community centre; and
- volunteering and the new Volunteer Forum.

Annex A provides the report from the Wales Audit Office. Officers from the Audit Office will present the report and respond to any issues raised by Members.

Recommendation: Members are asked to RECIEVE this report

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WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Archwilydd Cyffredinol Cymru
Auditor General for Wales

Review of Involvement – **Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority**

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We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh.

The team who delivered the work comprised Matthew Brushett, Euros Lake and Steve Frank.

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Summary report

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations Act (the 'Act') requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act also puts in place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells those public bodies covered by the Act how to go about meeting their duty.
- 2 Public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions they consider the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales both now and in the future. There are five things that public bodies need to think about to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle. These are set out in **Exhibit 1**. Following these ways of working will help public bodies to work together better, avoid repeating past mistakes and tackle some of the long-term challenges facing Wales.

Exhibit 1 – the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working



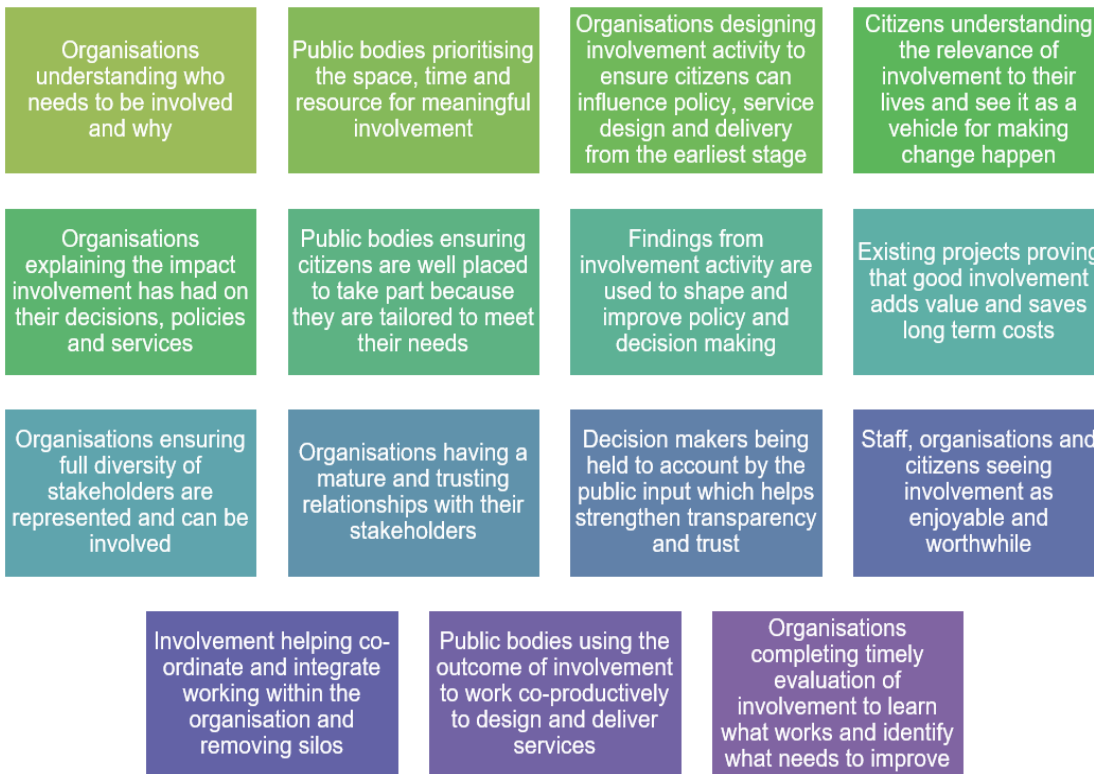
Source: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – [The Essentials](#)

Involvement

- 3 Involvement is about having rich and meaningful conversations with the people in their community, finding out what matters to them, and reflecting that in the decisions that NPAs take. Involvement requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’. In contrast to consultation, involvement approaches work with people at earlier stages, such as helping to identify issues and potential solutions, and being supported to remain involved right throughout design, implementation and evaluation processes.
- 4 Drawing on our most recent feedback presentation to Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (the ‘Authority’) issued on 11 April 2019 and presentation to the Authority on 8 May 2019, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales’ [Journey Checker](#) and the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#) developed by Participation Cymru, [Exhibit 2](#) summarises the characteristics of an organisation with an effective approach to involvement.

Exhibit 2 – the characteristics of a public body which has an effective approach to involvement

Effective involvement is embodied by....



- 5 Authorities should therefore set their agenda by listening to people, meaningfully involving them throughout the decision-making process, and being open to real change as a result. It is vital that activities and mechanisms for involving people are appropriately planned, monitored and reported, so they can be developed, challenged or championed. Ensuring that staff and organisations have the necessary skills, structures as well as time and resources to involve the public effectively is vital. This ensures that public services in Wales reflect what is important to the public and their needs, rather than what we may traditionally think works best.

Scope of our audit

- 6 Given the challenges for public bodies in embodying the sustainable development principle, we have on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales reviewed the Authority's approach and management of involving stakeholders when proposing service and policy changes, and in the design of activities. We undertook a more detailed look at two projects which are:
- involvement of stakeholders in developing the **Newport information hub and community centre**. Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority facilitated the asset transfer of one of its buildings in Newport to a community group to provide a library, community space, staff drop-in flexible workspace, and tourist information centre. This project was resourced through staff time and some initial capital investment in making utility services safe and secure.
 - **volunteering and the new Volunteer Forum**. The National Park Authority receives support from a group of around 70 National Park Authority Voluntary Wardens, and 40 other volunteers who regularly provide support for activities and events, as well as taking part in a programme of practical tasks. The Voluntary Wardens report directly to the National Park Ranger Service. The full time Volunteer Development Officer is integrating their work with the work of the Friends of the National Park. The Volunteer Forum drives the volunteering action plan which is a five-year action plan, linked to new National Park Management Plan. This gives volunteers a voice and connection to the Authority, and input into how volunteering develops. A range of prevention work is being undertaken through volunteer opportunities, activities or projects including Walking for Well-being GP referral partnership project, volunteer activity leader support, including for Walkability and volunteering activities in the outdoors, in particular through the Pathways project with particular benefits for mental and physical wellbeing.

Our findings

- 7 Overall, we have concluded that the **Authority is developing a more corporate and consistent approach to involvement, but further work is required to involve stakeholders in deciding spending priorities and to strengthen resilience.** We came to this conclusion because we found the following.

The Authority has started to identify who it needs to involve in developing individual policies and project plans but needs to ensure its recent Corporate Engagement Action Plan delivers a more consistent approach across the organisation

- 8 Defining 'people' to involve with is challenging because involvement is not just about the people who live in the Park area, the businesses which work in the Park area and key public sector partners but also the wider population. Consequently, National Park Authorities need to consider tourists/visitors to the National Park. Many of these come from outside of Wales which can make it challenging to engage with. Within Pembrokeshire National Park, we see more emphasis in engaging with these stakeholders including black and minority ethnic (BME) communities. The impact of this engagement is yet to emerge, but recent changes place the Authority in a better position to support and involve a more diverse group of stakeholders.
- 9 The Authority's Engagement Action Plan and Group is supporting and driving a much clearer and strategic approach to involvement. The Plan has three clear priorities based on the Participation Cymru criteria and includes a SMART three-year action plan. The Plan has 24 actions which focus on many of the aspects contained in our lines of enquiry for this audit.
- 10 The Authority has increased the number and variety of stakeholders it engages with. There are good examples of involving housing associations, GPs and landowners in developing the National Park Management Plan 2020-2025. The Authority has also learnt from the work it carried out on developing the new Local Development Plan and its work in supporting the establishment of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust, which has charitable status.
- 11 The Authority is making clear progress on increasing the numbers of volunteers and is involving them in deciding work priorities and how to attract volunteers from underrepresented groups. A far more strategic approach is in place through the Volunteers Forum, and the Authority now has 150 volunteers which is double the number from a year ago. We were also told about increasing the opportunities for formalising training for volunteers. However, the Authority recognises the ongoing challenge of becoming increasingly user-led whilst also diversifying its volunteering offer to widen its appeal.
- 12 The Authority recognises the importance of attracting younger volunteers and as such it can provide examples of actively involving younger people in designing

activities and shaping work programmes. This is important as traditionally most of the Authority's 150 volunteers have been older people. The Authority recognises it needs to broaden and diversify its volunteering offer to make this more sustainable. The Authority's Youth Manifesto promotes the involvement of young people in activity design and policy development and this approach has helped shape biodiversity education packages and the Authority's safeguarding policy.

- 13 The Authority is shifting its focus from more traditional activities such as maintaining footpaths to broader strategic opportunities to use volunteers to increase capacity, improve the quality of services, enable staff to focus on other tasks and make the public purse go further. There are also softer benefits in taking a more strategic approach to volunteering including building a bridge between the Authority and its communities, helping to engage with hard to reach clients, increasing diversity which can enrich the organisation by drawing on the wide range of qualities, skills and expertise that volunteers can contribute.
- 14 However, a common theme from our interviews is the need to make the National Park brand more attractive to a wider audience. Proposals for the new website highlight the need to increase the use of social media as an engagement tool, and it includes proposals to produce tailored leaflets co-designed with various stakeholders. The Authority can outline how the new website will become a community resource, not just for information-giving, but also to highlight the work of partners. This foreseen increased online engagement needs to be driven by a clear understanding of the stakeholders it is aimed at. The Authority is currently undertaking a stakeholder mapping exercise, but staff told us that further analysis is needed to ensure a complete range of interests are identified and engaged. Senior managers still think there is an opportunity to fully exploit the data they have on consultation and think there is more to do to secure proposals for a central involvement hub.
- 15 The Authority's Access Forum and Volunteer Forum have made efforts to improve access to the Park for seldom heard groups. The Authority targets disabled groups and those who may not otherwise use the Park by mapping the coastal path using Google Street View which can help people to review the suitability of the terrain and plan their visits accordingly.
- 16 People in Newport are benefiting from being involved in saving an important listed building and retaining the library, community centre, and tourist information hub. The Authority secured the right outcome after a difficult initial engagement and involvement process, learning lessons on how to improve its approach. This has resulted in the development of a formal policy and process for involving community councils in asset management considerations. Going forward, the Authority should reflect on the elements of holistic approach to community asset transfers, as highlighted in our [Community Asset Transfer Report](#).
 - a) Mapping of assets and demand for its use
 - b) A shared vision for CAT that is clearly articulated
 - c) Making assets suitable to transfer

- d) Active community capacity mapping and building
 - e) A supportive and proactive CAT process
 - f) A viable business plan agreed by all parties
 - g) Consideration of post transfer assistance, support, and learning
- 17 The Authority is involving staff and access groups in developing Welsh-language provision in each of its visitor centres, in wayfinding signage and publicity and tourist information. In developing a new policy, or revising an existing policy, the Authority considers the potential impact on its Welsh-language provision before endorsing any policy decision.
- 18 A review of customer comments at all of the Authority's visitor attractions has resulted in further developing Castell Henllys as a Welsh cultural hub. This includes a wider variety of activities and more accessible routes in and out of the buildings. This review also highlighted the opportunities to better promote health and wellbeing activities to a wider audience. A specific package of support is now available to local GPs and health commissioners, although the impact of this is currently unclear. Opening times of all visitors' centres have also been reviewed by the Authority, resulting in more accessible opening times and more visitors accessing services on weekdays.
- 19 In addition to the provision of information, the Authority recognises its responsibility to promote safe use of the Park. Guidance on walking safely has been developed with the Ramblers Association. The Authority has applied some of the lessons it has learnt following the evaluation of previous engagement and communications when developing its new National Park Management Plan.
- 20 Staff involvement skills are developing well, and the Authority is investing in face to face and virtual training packages, and in using the staff appraisal system to establish stakeholder involvement as a part of everyone's job. The cross-organisational membership of the Engagement Action Plan Group is seen as a strength that the Authority needs to maintain. The group ensures a range of staff from across the Authority have a say in shaping engagement activities and works to make engagement more accessible, identify and remove barriers to participation, particularly with seldom heard groups.
- 21 Our interviews find the most frequent issue raised by staff and Members is preparing staff for change and involving staff and stakeholders in agreeing strategic and operational priorities and identifying what are lesser priorities in the future. Despite having a Member charter and development group in place, the Authority could do more to tailor Member training on the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG), in particular to shape what involvement means for them and the Authority. Mainstreaming the sustainable development principle is an ongoing challenge that requires a thorough understanding, leadership and the right culture in place.
- 22 There is a tension between the Authority's two primary purposes – to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park; and

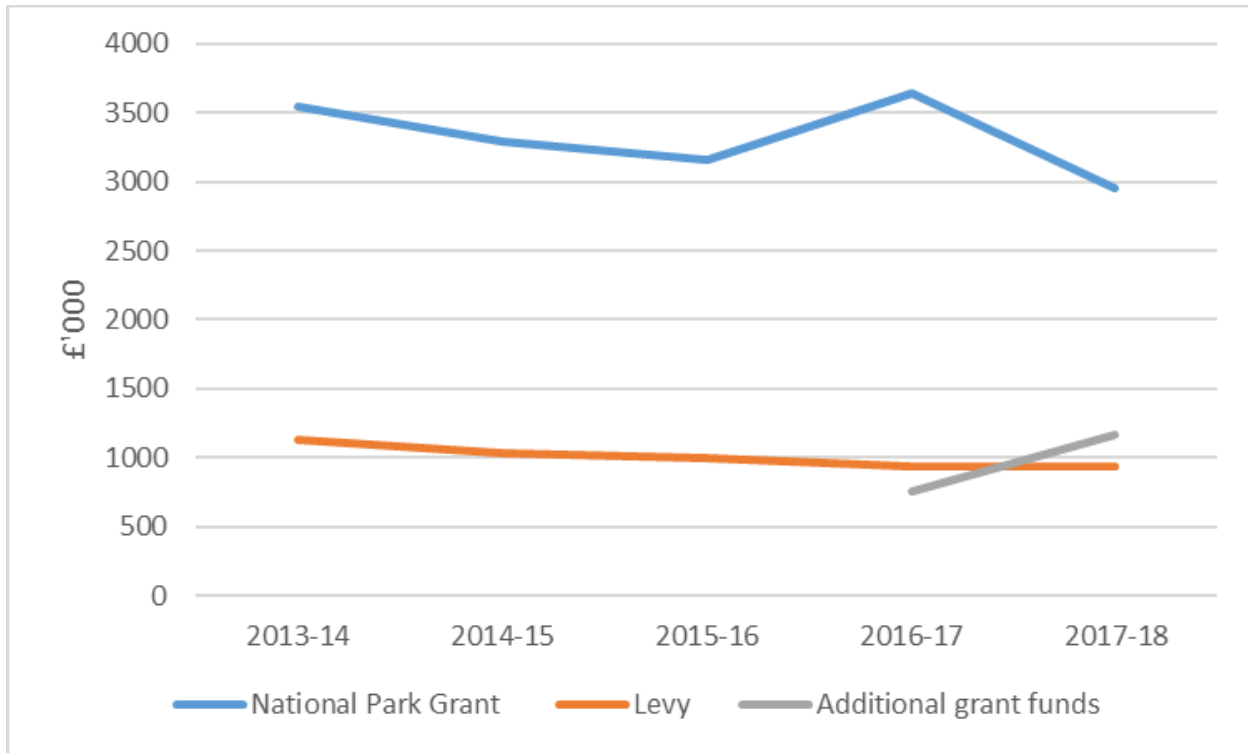
to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park by the public. Managing the potential effect of increasing visitor numbers going forward – making tourism and its impact on the Park sustainable in terms of the environment – remains a key challenge for the Authority and its partners, including the Welsh Government.

The Authority's ability to strengthen its involvement work is difficult in the challenging financial and operating environment and it must prioritise future funding to make the best use of its limited capacity

- 23 There is some scope to reduce the pressure on staff capacity through the rationalisation of policies and plans. Significant resources are currently focussed on developing statutory plans like the five-year National Park Management Plan and ten-year Local Development Plan. There are some clear successes in aligning the dates of key plans, and in integrating the Authority's Environmental policy with the new climate change action plan, but staff we spoke with recognise there is more to do in integrating various forums and operational plans, and strengthening links between the annual corporate plan and the overarching National Park Management Plan. The Pembrokeshire Coast Charitable Trust has the potential to transform prevention and collaborative activity, but this work is still in its infancy.
- 24 The impact of austerity remains the most significant challenge facing all National Park Authorities in Wales. The short-term nature of Welsh Government funding and allocation of additional capital and revenue monies close to the year-end continues to impact on the Authority's ability to plan long term. Consequently, the Authority has sought to identify alternative sources of funding to offset reductions in core grant from the Welsh Government. These financial pressures are likely to continue for the medium term. The current operating environment and challenges do mean, however, that it is questionable how sustainable its approach to involvement is, and whether the Authority can take a sufficiently long-term view.
- 25 The Authority continues to face a degree of uncertainty and instability of long-term funding and could do more to make the most of its limited resources and maximise the use of its reserves. **Exhibit 3** below identifies that the Authority's core funding of national park grant and levy has fluctuated significantly since 2013-14. The impact of the annual reductions has been offset in 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19 by additional Welsh Government grant awards received at the end of the financial year.

Exhibit 3: core funding and additional grants

Core funding by national park grant and levy has reduced since 2013-14. This has been offset by additional grant funding received at the end of 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.

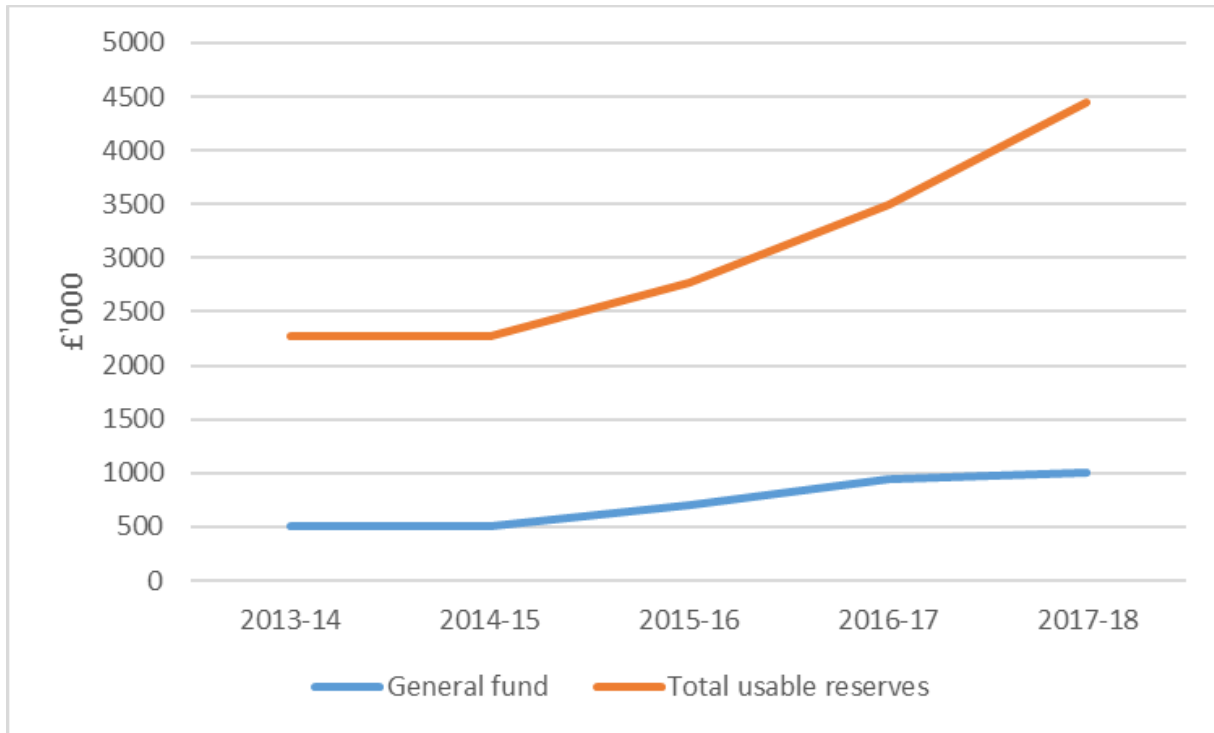


Source: Wales Audit Office, Annual Audit Letter, December 2019.

- 26 On the basis that the additional grant funds were unplanned, the Authority's reserves have increased in these years. These funds are held as earmarked reserves until they are applied to finance expenditure – **Exhibit 4** below. Careful consideration of reserves balances and how they might be used to support financial plans is particularly important as it is not sustainable to rely on reserves to support ongoing costs. Once reserves have been depleted, other sources of funds or efficiencies must be identified.
- 27 The challenge for the Authority is how to involve stakeholders in determining how to use reserves generated by unexpected grant receipts in the context of long-term reductions in its core budget.

Exhibit 4: usable reserves

Usable reserves have increased by £2.17 million between 2013-14 and 2018-19 due to additional financial pressures funding in 2016-17, 2017-18 and 2018-19.



Source: Wales Audit Office, Annual Audit Letter, December 2019.

28 Despite seeing reserves increase in recent years, the Authority has sought to identify alternative sources of funding to offset reductions in core grant from the Welsh Government. This has resulted in much of the current involvement activity being funded by grants. As a result, too much involvement activity is project led, with variations in approach and until recently there has been very little integration or consistency of approaches. Because each project is funded via different grants, operates to different award criteria, and has different timescales there is a risk each project will deliver different outcomes which are not in line with corporate priorities.

Proposals for improvement

- 30 Rather than list proposals for improvement we have produced a self-assessment for the Authority's staff and members to use in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of its current approach to involvement. This self-assessment can be used at both a corporate strategic level but also on individual projects to judge how well the Authority is doing and where change is needed to ensure involvement is mainstreamed and made sustainable. We expect the Authority to use this tool to evaluate its current performance and to identify how it can improve its work.

Exhibit 5: self-assessment

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have a strategic approach to involvement which directs all our activity			
We understand who needs to be involved and why			
We prioritise the space, time and resources for meaningful involvement			
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence our policies and plans			
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence how we design and deliver services			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement will help improve their lives			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement with us will result in change happening			
We explain the impact involvement has had on our decisions, policies and services			
We tailor our approach to involvement to ensure all citizens and partners can take part			
We use the findings from involvement activity to shape and improve policy and decision making			
We can demonstrate that our approach to involvement adds value to what we do			
We can demonstrate that our approach to involvement saves long-term costs			
We ensure the full diversity of stakeholders can be involved in what we do and how we do it			
We have mature and trusting relationships with all our stakeholders			
Our approach to involvement allows our partners to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement allows citizens to hold us to account for the decisions we make			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
Our approach to involvement is enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our partners see our work on involvement as enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our citizens see our work on involvement as enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our approach to involvement helps us to integrate our work to avoid silos			
We use the outcome of our involvement to work co-productively to design and deliver services			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to learn what works			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to identify what needs to improve			

Appendix 1

Examples of involvement approaches in UK National Park Authorities

National Parks England has produced some guidance for organisations and individuals wanting to get involved in developing National Park Management Plans. See [nationalparksengland./get-involved](https://nationalparksengland.gov.uk/get-involved), [get-involved-in-a-national-park-management-plan](#) and [National Parks England publications](#). This contrasts strongly with the lack of output from National Parks Wales despite the benefits of collaborating on common issues.

National parks elsewhere are using multi and mixed media to engage communities and prevent problems. South Downs National Park Authority asked its communities to answer the following question: **How do you bring about behavioural change among irresponsible dog walkers without demonising them?** Responses are [here](#) and demonstrate what can be achieved by taking a different approach to involving subject experts and local businesses in finding solutions.

Cairngorms National Park Authority Communications and Engagement Strategy 2018-2022 contains some key features that enable this national park authority to do involvement activity more effectively. Features include:

- including a baseline of information and data on how effectively the national park authority involves the public, a measure of people's awareness of what goes on in the national park, how they like to be involved, and what people think about services;
- a commitment to evaluate engagement work measuring outcomes where possible, to test impact and continuously learn and improve;
- involvement activity integrates with the work of nearby partners and national campaigns, for example the Scottish Nature BIG weekend; and
- a key priority is for the national park authority to inspire new generations to be park champions and take the lead of community projects in the future.

North York Moors National Park Authority Measuring Health and Well-being Impact report from November 2018 highlights the importance of involving stakeholders and the difference it makes to the work of the Authority. Examples include:

- how the Authority has included involvement activity in its Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculations, and the value people's views add. Specific changes post consultation are tracked and valued.
- people engage better when they understand the wellbeing benefits they may gain and after acquiring knowledge about the special qualities of the park. This includes telling people what the National Park Authority does and exactly how they can get involved.
- the Authority thinks that the best data is collected as a routine part of the work of the Authority or as an integral part of any intervention, initiative, programme, or activity. They find that people are less willing or able to provide feedback or views

in 'set piece' type events and need to understand the relevance of involvement to their lives and be assured the Authority will make change happen.

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