

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

24 March 2021

Present: Councillor P Harries (Chair)

Councillor Mrs D Clements, Councillor K Doolin, Councillor M Evans, Dr M Havard, Dr R Heath-Davies, Mrs J James, Councillor M James, Mr G Jones, Councillor P Kidney, Councillor PJ Morgan, Councillor R Owens, Councillor A Wilcox, Councillor M Williams and Councillor S Yelland

[Councillor P Baker BEM arrived during the Chair's announcements (*Minute 4 refers*); Mrs S Hoss arrived prior to consideration of the report on Committee Meeting Format Options (*Minute 10 refers*)]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am – 12.20pm; 12.30pm - 1.25pm)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Dr R Plummer.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 3 February 2021 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2021 be confirmed and authenticated.

3. Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Chair's Announcement

The Chair began with congratulations to Dr Rachel Heath-Davies and Mrs Julie James on their re-appointment to the Authority by Welsh Government and he said that he looked forward to continuing to work with them. He noted that he had not attended any public functions due to the lockdown restrictions, however he had chaired a meeting of National Parks Wales and attended two meetings of the Welsh Local Government Association Rural Forum which had discussed matters such as rural housing, the rural vision and manifesto, the Agriculture Bill, replacement EU funding, Brexit trade deal, the impact of phosphates on planning and the rural youth research project. He had also attended a meeting of the Partnership Council at which the Minister for Housing and Local Government, Julie James MS was present, and this had considered reports on EU transition, Wales Climate Week 2020, the Hardship Fund and the Local Government Decarbonisation Strategy Panel. The Chair



had also attended several events run by the Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum, eg Protecting Welsh Seas, Industrial Heritage and Changing coastlines and Welsh Marine Wildlife. He noted that officers of the National Park had spoken at some of these and it was pleasing to see the joint working between the organisations. He also hoped that it would be possible for the officers to give their presentations to Members in future.

NOTED.

5. Reports of meetings of various of the Authority's Committees

The following reports of meetings of a number of the Authority's Committees were presented to Members for consideration/information:

- (i) Development Management Committees held on 9 December 2020 and 27 January 2021.
- (ii) Sustainable Development Fund Committee held on 20 January 2021.
- (iii) Youth Committee held on 2 February 2021.
- (iv) Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee held on 10 February 2021.
- (v) Member Support and Development Committee held on 10 February 2021.
- (vi) Standards Committee held on 24 February 2021.
- (vii) Personnel Committee held on 3 March 2021.

With regard to the Personnel Committee meeting, a question was asked regarding progress with the proposed 'listening service', and the Chief Executive replied that the scheme would be launched in the Authority's April staff newsletter. One Member expressed concern that the remit of the service and the range of options available to staff should be clear to both Members and staff and reassurance was given that such matters had been discussed by the Personnel Committee and incorporated in the scheme.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the above mentioned Committees be noted/adopted/received.

6. Welsh Government Remit Letter

It was reported that the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs provided an Annual Remit letter which set out the Welsh Government's strategic remit for the work of the Authority in 2021-22 and also outlined the funding settlement. The main priorities outlined in the Remit letter had been incorporated in the Corporate Plan. The Chair advised that he had replied to the Minister thanking her for the strong vote of confidence that the letter provided and the increase in funding.

Members agreed that it was an excellent letter which reflected well on the work undertaken by officers over the last twelve months, and indeed in recent years, and set out a positive programme for the year ahead. The



reference to management of the pressures on local communities created by tourism and outdoor recreation was welcomed, as these had been particularly challenging last summer, however it was also acknowledged that visitors were essential to the local economy. It was agreed that continued joint working both within Pembrokeshire and with wider stakeholders across Wales was essential to achieving longer term objectives.

With regard to the funding settlement, while this was welcomed by Members, some concern was expressed regarding the short term nature of the settlement and it was hoped that 3-5 year budgets could be provided in the future to facilitate delivery of longer term strategies.

NOTED.

7. Corporate and Resources Plan 2021/22

It was reported that the Corporate and Resources Plan set out the Authority's Corporate Well-being Objectives, a requirement of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and its aligned work programme for 2021/22 that would support delivery of these objectives.

Officers across the Authority had been involved in the development of the Plan through engagement meetings, and the draft Corporate and Resources Plan had been presented to the February meeting of the Authority for Members' comments and was subsequently issued for consultation. A session with representatives from the Youth Committee had also been carried out.

Members thanked the officer for producing such a comprehensive document, which pulled together the many strands of the Authority's work. It was suggested that more detail could have been included regarding the Authority's approach in supporting the local economy and also on opportunities to support the Welsh Language through for example increasing skills or employability, given the Authority's published target to increase the number of Welsh speakers by 1%. In order to support this target, it was also requested that measurement of the numbers of impact assessments for planning applications in Welsh Language Sensitive Areas be undertaken going forward.

The officer agreed that baseline data regarding planning impact assessments could be monitored via the Authority's performance framework, and further work would be undertaken during the year regarding the Welsh Language and green recovery. In response to a further question, the officer explained that the Plan would now be circulated to staff and its contents would be reflected in Team Plans and in the performance framework reported to the quarterly Audit and Corporate Services and Operational Review Committees.



Members also highlighted that the Welsh Government's Race Equality Action Plan had been published in the previous week and asked whether reference to it should be included in the Corporate Plan. The officer replied that research was currently being undertaken on Experiences for All and that would be used, alongside the Race Equality Action Plan, to review the Authority's Plans to reflect the changes in a more localised manner.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Corporate and Resources Plan 2021/22 be approved, with officers agreeing to undertake additional work in the areas identified at the meeting.

8. Action Plans in support of the National Park Management Plan 2020-2024

Members were reminded that the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Management Plan 2020-2024 had been adopted on 11th December 2019 and would be supported by a series of action plans. The action plans would set out the Authority's current and proposed responses to key policy challenges identified in the Management Plan and thereby provide a bridge between the five-year Management Plan and the annual Corporate and Resources Plan. The action plan "Responding to the Climate Change Emergency" had been approved by the Authority on the 3rd June 2020; following consultation with Authority staff and with partner organisations, two further action plans – "Celebrating Heritage" and "Restoring Nature" were now presented for Members' comment and approval. It was noted that a fourth action plan, covering recreation and tourism, would be presented to a future meeting.

Officers were thanked for their work in producing the action plans, which provided a better understanding of how the objectives identified in the Management Plan were being delivered. Members were also pleased to see the commitment to work with partners and the local community in doing so, acknowledging that it was necessary to work together in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Members asked whether it was possible to include more information on timescales and lead officers which officers agreed. They also asked about resourcing the actions as these were not identified in a number of cases. The Conservation Policy Officer advised that the Action Plans contained both actions for which funding had previously been approved as well as those for which funding would be sought through the Authority's normal channels, ultimately being approved or otherwise by Members at the appropriate time. He reassured Members that by approving the Action Plans, they would not be committing the Authority to resourcing projects, however he agreed to make the distinction between these projects clearer.



It was **RESOLVED** that the Action Plans “Celebrating Heritage” and “Restoring Nature” be approved subject to the comments set out above.

9. Appointment of a Data Protection Officer

Members were reminded that in December 2020, they had authorised officers to undertake a tender exercise to secure the services of a Data Protection Officer (DPO) following the departure of the previous officer. The report set out the actions that had been undertaken to date, and recommended that Sarah Burns from the company Data2Action be appointed to the role for a three year period commencing on 1st April 2021. It was clarified that although a joint appointment with Brecon Beacons NPA had initially been proposed, they had ultimately decided to work with Powys County Council in the appointment of their officer.

Members praised the Performance and Compliance Coordinator for her work as the Interim DPO, however the Chief Executive clarified that she had not wished to take the role on a permanent basis due to her other work responsibilities.

Members also questioned whether it was proposed to offer a contract to Data2Action or to the individual concerned, and the Chief Executive confirmed that the role of DPO had to be undertaken by a named person, so although the contract would be with Data2Action, it was proposed to offer the position to Sarah Burns. He confirmed that should there be any significant change to the details of the appointment in future, a report would be made to the Authority.

It was **RESOLVED** that Sarah Burns be appointed as Data Protection Officer for a three year period commencing on 1st April 2021.

10. Committee Meeting Format Options Post Covid-19 Restrictions

It was reported that as a result of the Pandemic, the shift to personal video conferencing via computer desktop had delivered a number of benefits, such as savings in time and carbon output, and it was estimated that the Authority had saved 5841kg of carbon as a result of Members not travelling to Pembroke Dock for meetings. However, it was anticipated that in future there might be a desire by some Members to return to face to face meetings, whilst others attended remotely – a hybrid scenario. The report set out some considerations in relation to such meetings which would require planning and investment.

It was noted at the meeting that Dr Plummer, who could not be present, had suggested that certain meetings be held in person, whilst others were held virtually, rather than the mixed hybrid model, however Members’ views were sought.



One Member asked that the possibility of using Pembrokeshire County Council's facilities for hybrid meetings be explored, while others believed that all meetings should take place in person at the Authority's offices. There was general agreement that the Development Management Committee needed to meet in person, however other meetings could follow the hybrid route or be held virtually to take advantage of the monetary and carbon savings that would result. It was suggested that individual connectivity issues needed to be resolved to improve the latter option. It was also noted that one of the benefits of virtual meetings had been the ability of the Authority to livestream its meetings, thus allowing greater engagement with the public, and Members expressed a desire for this to continue.

The Chief Executive concluded that, taking account of all the views expressed, there was a clear desire for Development Management Committee meetings to be held in person, but that flexibility be maintained in holding other meetings remotely or allowing remote attendance at them. Officers would continue to explore the options and would bring a set of proposals to a future meeting.

NOTED.

The meeting was adjourned between 12.20 and 12.30pm.

Councillor P Kidney tendered his apologies and left the meeting at this juncture.

11. Calendar of Meetings 2021/22

Members were reminded that the current calendar of meetings came to an end in June 2021 following the Annual General Meeting, and therefore a calendar for the forthcoming year was presented. It was highlighted that a number of Workshop dates were identified, and Members would be notified in due course of the topics to be covered on each date.

In light of the fact that virtual meetings were still being held under current COVID restrictions, it was suggested that where a second meeting took place on a particular day, this meeting was held at 2pm, rather than immediately following the morning meeting as had previously been the case.

Members agreed that having a clear start time for a second meeting was helpful, however they felt that holding a Workshop after a long Development Management Committee or Authority meeting was both difficult to time and taxing for Members, and suggested that holding one or two Workshops together on other days would be more effective. The possibility of holding meetings in the evenings was also raised.



NOTED.

12. The Wales Charter for Member Support and Development: Application for Advanced Charter Level Status

Members were reminded that following the Authority's resolution to apply for Advanced Charter status, the Member Support and Development Committee had reviewed the criteria requirements and progressed matters where necessary. Consequently at the last meeting of the Committee it had been considered that the Authority was now in a position to make an application.

The Chair of the Member Support and Development Committee thanked officers for their work and Members for all their help and support on the journey so far. She added that the Charter sought to reward the Authority for the support provided to Members, and she therefore asked any Member who could provide evidence of such support to put this in an email so that it could be referred to in the evidence document.

A number of Members expressed their gratitude for the support they had received from officers and welcomed the culture of learning and support that existed within the Authority.

Members also thanked officers, as well as the Committee Chair. They asked how long the Charter was awarded for, noting that it would be important for the Authority to maintain its standards in this regard and were advised that the criteria were re-assessed every three years but that the role of the Member Support and Development Committee was to ensure Members' continuous development.

It was **RESOLVED** that officers be authorised to submit an application to the Welsh Local Government Association for the Advanced Charter level status of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development.

13. Member Remuneration 2021/22

Members were reminded that the remit of the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales was to prescribe the salaries and allowances payable to Members by local authorities, including National Park Authorities, in Wales. Its final Annual Report for 2021/22 had now been published, and the main recommendations relevant to this Authority were set out; the new salary framework would come into effect on 1st April 2021.

It was noted that the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales had prescribed the levels of Basic and Senior Salaries referred to in the report; the Authority could not vary these levels. However, Members were requested to determine which posts would be eligible to receive a Senior Salary for 2021/22, the previous restriction of four Senior Salaries that could be paid having been removed. Three posts were currently



remunerated; the posts of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, together with the Chair of the Development Management Committee. Significant changes had also been made to the contributions to costs of care and personal assistance.

The Monitoring Officer advised that if a decision was taken to attribute a senior salary to the Chair of additional Committees, those Members who could potentially benefit from this change may wish to declare an interest. He clarified that such a declaration would not apply to those Members currently in receipt of a Senior Salary.

Given that the limit on the number of posts that could be remunerated had been removed, it was suggested that Chairs of the Audit and Corporate Services and Operational Review Committees should receive a Senior Salary, in order that they could develop to act more like Scrutiny Committees. However the Chair of one of those Committees said that they did not believe the amount of work was comparable to those who were currently remunerated and that the role of Chair of those two Committees should continue to be unremunerated.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report be noted and that the current arrangements remain, whereby the posts of Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority, together with the Chair of the Development Management Committee be remunerated with a Senior Salary.

14. Approval of Additional Capital Expenditure for the Purchase of Five Electric Vehicles

It was reported that the Authority currently had thirteen fossil-fuel light commercial vans within its fleet. In line with Welsh Government targets for the public sector fleet to be ultra-low emission by 2025, and to fulfil the Authority's commitment to cut carbon emissions through effective management of its vehicle fleet and responsible business travel practices, the Authority was seeking to replace all current fossil-fuel light goods vehicles with electric vans.

A Welsh Government capital grant in 2020/21 had enabled the Authority to replace three diesel fuelled pool cars with petrol hybrid vehicles and orders had been placed for two electric vans. The Authority wished to purchase a further five electric vans within the 2020/21 financial year.

The 2020/21 capital grant funding had a remaining balance of £20,000, which had to be committed before the end of the grant period. The cost of each electric van was approximately £26,200. The Welsh Government Energy Service had offered part funding of £13,000 per electric van which, when combined with the £20,000 balance from other Welsh Government capital funding, left a short fall of £46,000. It was expected



that the £46,000 would be funded from the Authority's Capital Receipts Reserve which currently stood at circa £310,000.

Members agreed that this was an important step from the perspective of the Authority's plans for carbon reduction and set a positive example to other organisations and businesses. It was hoped that the fact that they were powered by electricity could be advertised on the vans. However it was also noted that the future development of hydrogen powered vehicles should be monitored closely.

It was **RESOLVED** that £46,000 be allocated from the Capital Receipts Reserve to part fund the purchase of five electric vans.

The Minutes of this meeting were confirmed at the meeting of the National Park Authority on 5 May 2021 subject to the following amendments:

In respect of Minute 10 relating to Committee Meeting Format Options Post Covid-19 Restrictions, the Chair of the Member Support and Development Committee had stated that attendance at meetings of the Authority and its Committees had increased from c 75% to 94% since they had been taking place virtually, rather than in person, and that this was another important consideration in the format of meetings going forward.

