

AUDIT AND CORPORATE SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

12 May 2021

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

[Councillor P Harries, the Chair of the Authority, was present in an ex-officio capacity for part of the meeting (Minutes 5 – 12 refer)]

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am -12.50pm)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Mr G Jones.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 10 February 2021 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2021 be confirmed and authenticated.

4. Data Protection

Sarah Burns from Data2Action, who had recently been appointed as the Authority's Data Protection Officer, introduced herself and explained how she would be supporting the Authority. She went on to set out the key activities she would be undertaking during the coming months – these included undertaking a GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) evaluation, looking at the Authority's policies and templates that were of relevance, undertaking training and providing hands on support for such things as Data Protection Impact Assessments and Subject Access Requests.

The Chair thanked the Officer for a comprehensive presentation and Members looked forward to receiving reports from her in the future.

Councillor P Baker noted that due to connection problems he had been unable to view the presentation, although he had heard it. The Democratic and Executive Services Assistant agreed to send a copy to him after the meeting.

NOTED.



5. **Audit Wales Plan 2021**

The Chair welcomed Deryck Evans from Audit Wales to the meeting. He explained that the Audit Plan set out the programme of work for the coming year and this was appended to the report. The work was in two parts - an audit of financial statements for the financial year ended March 2021 and a performance audit which would assess performance and the proper arrangements for value for money. Further details of the performance audit would be available in due course. He noted that there was expected to be a slight reduction in the Audit fee for the coming year due to a merging of the Engagement Lead and Audit Manager roles. The report went on to outline the expected timetable for the work, and Mr Evans confirmed that the results would be reported to either this Committee or the National Park Authority later in the year.

Members were pleased to see a reduction in fees and asked if any further information was available regarding the scope or duration of the performance audit. Mr Evans anticipated that the work would take three weeks, over the course of the year, and the Chief Executive added that he understood the audit would focus on the effectiveness of the Authority in managing sustainable tourism.

In respect of the financial audit, the Finance Manager advised that while he hoped to be able to close the accounts in time for the audit to be undertaken by July, an extension had been granted until September and that deadline would certainly be met.

The report noted that other matters to be audited would include a review of preparedness for the introduction of IFRS (International Financial Reporting Standards) 16 Leases. In response to a question, Mr Evans advised that this related to a change in the way leases were classified on the Authority's balance sheet and discussions would be held with officers to ascertain the Authority's preparedness for the introduction of this standard in the 2021/22 accounts.

Mr Evans had also made reference to the fact that the Audit would be looking at estimates of accrued annual leave as increased levels had been an issue across many authorities. One Member questioned the role of Audit in the management of leave, noting that holding over leave could help to manage workload. The Auditor assured the Committee that his investigations would not be concerned with service delivery, but the impact of the financial liability of leave that was carried over on the Authority. The Finance Manager added that he did not believe the increase in the level of untaken leave over previous years would be significant for the Authority. The Human Resources Manager agreed that a report on levels of annual leave and sickness could be made to the Personnel Committee.



NOTED.

6. Progress Report on the Management of Trees with Ash Dieback Disease

It was reported that Ash Dieback was a tree disease caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, affecting the Common Ash and was now endemic within the UK and widespread in Pembrokeshire. Infected trees would eventually become unstable, shedding branches and becoming a potential risk to the public. Dead trees also posed an increased risk during felling operations.

Trees on the Authority's estate were regularly surveyed as part of the Authority's Tree Safety Policy, usually when conducting the annual site risk assessment and after adverse weather events. However in 2019 it was agreed that an additional Ash dieback survey should take place on all PCNPA owned sites due to the rapid spread of the disease and rapid deterioration of some trees. Further details were set out in the report.

As part of this process all sites were zoned according to usage, with some sites consisting of multiple zones depending on the frequency of visits by the public or staff. A survey of all Zone 1 sites took place during the summer of 2020, when the trees were in leaf and the disease most noticeable, with remedial action taken during winter 2020/21. Trees would continue to be monitored on three or six monthly basis with the surveys making use of the Arc Online software used by the Authority.

It was reported that to date 73% of trees had been inspected, and approximately 50% were significantly diseased. The removal of all 42 trees earmarked for felling had now been carried out. These would be replaced with trees of a different species. Inspections would continue in Zone 1, and trees in Zone 2 and some of Zone 3 would be inspected during the forthcoming summer.

In the absence of the Operations Manager, the Director of Countryside, Community and Visitor Services presented the report. Members considered it to be a reassuring report and they were confident that the Authority's officers were managing the situation. It was noted, however that the continued removal of ash trees by agencies across the County would have a visual impact on the special qualities of the National Park. The Chief Executive referred to the Landscape Character Assessments which underpinned the Authority's planning decisions and he advised that he would ask the Policy Planning team whether there were plans to update that work.

Members also asked about trees on private land but adjacent to a public footpath, for example. The Director replied that while the Authority



worked closely with landowners and other agencies, it was only responsible for trees on its own estate.

NOTED.

7. Performance Report for the Period ending 31 March 2021

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 had been progressed during 2020/21, however a number of them, particularly those involving face to face contact between individuals, were impacted by the lifting or re-instating of restrictions and regulations or by the Authority having to adapt or reprioritise its work to focus on COVID 19 related responses.

The report presented the performance the full financial year 20/21 (not 19/20 as stated in the report) for the majority of monthly and quarterly datasets. The Performance and Compliance Coordinator highlighted a number of measures and actions to the Committee in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and recovery, noting that in line with recovery planning and relevant risk assessments, delivery of adapted face to face services did restart as restrictions allowed during Q2 and Q3, focussing mainly on outdoor engagement, however re-entry into lockdown during Q4 meant a return to working remotely across teams. However in some areas it had been possible to continue to adapt services utilising digital opportunities for virtual or hybrid approaches.

Performance in the planning services had been affected during the year by workload backlog, issues with external IT systems and restrictions on office access and site visits. Access to the office and the undertaking of essential in-person visits to sites had now resumed, but nevertheless, the impact of these issues was reflected in quarterly planning measures, although there had been an improvement in performance between Q3 and Q4 and the % of all planning applications determined within time periods ytd had moved from a red RAG rating to an amber rating at 66.31%.

The report also provided an update on work towards longer-term objectives, however COVID 19 had had an impact on delivery of some activities contributing to these.



Members thanked the officer for an informative and easy to read report which highlighted the hard work of officers in difficult circumstances. It was noted that a number of indicators were RAG rated as red or amber, particularly relating to HR and planning enforcement and they asked whether resources in these areas were sufficient. The HR Manager explained that there had been a number of demands on his time which had meant that projects had not been progressed as he would have liked. However things were beginning to return to normal and he would be putting together a plan to ensure these activities got back on track. While acknowledging the difficult circumstances, Members said it would be helpful to understand what work had been prioritised.

The Chief Executive replied that Covid restrictions had inevitably had an impact on the work of the Authority due to the necessary closure of the office during the previous six months. In respect of enforcement officers had additionally been unable to visit sites; however the issue was being monitored. He added that he was not concerned about the lack of progress on the Corporate Health Standard, as the priority had been to look after the welfare of staff, rather than document this in order to obtain the standard; he noted that the actions that had been taken would in time provide useful evidence of the support provided to staff over the previous year.

In response to questions by Members, he went on to provide additional information about the proposed procurement project and what he hoped would be the imminent release by Welsh Government of the Carbon Calculator.

NOTED.

8. Health and Safety Update

The report provided information on incidents and accidents between January and March 2021, staff wellbeing initiatives, training and the effects on the Authority's sites, and therefore staff working practices, as a result of Coronavirus restrictions.

In terms of incidents, it was noted that there had been no near misses reported and Members asked whether staff were encouraged to report these, suggesting that they could mitigate issues that lead to injury. The HR Manager advised that the Health and Safety Group reviewed all accidents and incidents to see what lessons could be learned, and an online system for reporting would be introduced next year. However he agreed that regular reminders to staff about the importance of recording near misses were important, and these would be provided through the staff newsletter going forward.



Members were also interested in the information provided by the HR Manager on a pilot coaching programme which was being developed to help staff develop resilience skills. They asked if this could be offered to Members also. The HR Manager agreed that further details would be provided to the Personnel Committee and once piloted it would be available to all staff and Members. The Chief Executive added that identification of those who would benefit from the programme would be through annual reviews, and he encouraged Members to highlight their needs in a similar manner.

NOTED

9. Risk Register

Members were asked to consider the latest risk register, which had been reviewed by the Leadership Team. The main changes from the previous report were highlighted in a summary table as previously requested by Members of the Operational Review Committee.

Members asked about a number of risks, and suggested that Covid related risks (numbers 45 and 46) could benefit from breaking down further to reflect challenges around staff wellbeing, income generation and recovery from backlog. Officers agreed with this suggestion. The Members also asked about the situation at Cilrhedyn (Risk 38) and, explaining that it now functioned as a base for the northern Warden Team, the Chief Executive replied that on reflection the site was no longer a particular risk and the entry would be removed from the register.

NOTED.

10. Internal Audit Report 2020/21

Welcoming the Internal Auditor, Mr Jonathan Maddock, to the meeting, the Chair noted that the report was the outcome of work completed against block two of the 2020/21 Operational Audit Plan previously approved by the Committee.

Internal Audit reports were presented relating to Planning Applications and Fees, Income Generation, Summary Internal Controls Assurance (SICA) and the Annual Report. It was noted that a further report on Cyber Security would be considered later in the meeting.

From these examinations, taking into account the relative risk of the business areas the internal audit service had formed generally very positive conclusions regarding the policies, procedures and operations in place.



Mr Maddock noted that a follow-up report had also been produced, however this had not been appended to the report. The Chief Executive agreed to look into this and to circulate it to the Committee.

Thanking the Internal Auditor for his reports, one Member asked a question regarding the briefings on developments in governance, risk and control (Appendix D of the SICA report) which set out a set of suggested actions required and asked whether these had been undertaken. Mr Maddock replied that Authorities often produced a report in response to these to provide Members with assurance of the measures that were in place. Other Members agreed that it would be helpful to be provided with a response to the actions recommended by the Internal Auditor and the Chief Executive replied that this information would be included in the covering report in future.

NOTED.

11. Budget Performance

The Finance Manager reported that he hoped the accounts would be provided to Audit Wales on 21 June and that they would be presented to the National Park Authority on 28 July 2021. However it was possible that they may not be ready in time and would then be presented to the September meeting of the Authority.

In summary, he advised that income was down considerably on budget due to the Centres and car parks being closed for parts of the year. Charging had also not been implemented at four additional car parks and other losses in income had arisen from Coast to Coast advertising refunds and rental franchises. There had also been additional costs due to the need for single occupancy of Authority vehicles. However the Authority had been pleased to receive a number of supplemental grants from Welsh Government, furlough income and rate relief. Taken together, this meant that the Authority was expected to show an end of year surplus.

NOTED

12. Exclusion of the Public

It was **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded from the meeting as exempt information, as defined in Paragraphs 14 and 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, would be disclosed.

13. Cyber Resilience

It was reported that over the past year the Authority had received two reports relating to Cyber Security. The first was a general report by Audit Wales on "Cyber Resilience in the Public Sector Report" and the second



a review of the Authority's Cyber Security arrangements by its Internal Auditors TIAA. Both reports were presented to the Committee.

Members agreed that cyber security was of utmost importance and asked that they continue to receive training and reports on this matter.

NOTED.

14. 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.

