

Operational Review Committee

23 June 2021

Present: Councillor S Yelland (Deputy Chair in the Chair for item 1)
Councillor K Doolin, Councillor P Harries, Dr M Havard, Mrs J James, Councillor PJ Morgan, Dr R Plummer and Councillor A Wilcox.

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am – 12.25pm)

1. Election of Chair

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Councillor K Doolin be elected Chair for the ensuing year.

[Councillor K Doolin took the Chair and presided over the remainder of the meeting.]

2. Election of Deputy Chair

It was **UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED** that Councillor S Yelland be elected Deputy Chair for the ensuing year.

3. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor ML Evans.

4. Disclosures

Councillor P Harries, Dr R Plummer and Dr M Havard each disclosed a personal but not prejudicial interest in Report 04/21 Marine Protected Areas.

5. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 17 March 2021 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

It was noted that the Latin reference to *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* referred to in Minute 6 should have been italicised or underlined.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2021 be confirmed and authenticated subject to the above amendment.

6. Matters Arising from the Minutes

a) Risk Register (Minute 4)

It was noted that at the previous meeting the problem of the Register being considered by both this, and the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee was discussed and it was suggested that a Workshop be held for all Members to consider risk appetite and



improvements to the Register. The Chief Executive replied that the Register was being looked at by the Authority's Internal Auditors as part of their programme of work for 2022/23 and a Workshop would either be arranged once their report on this had been received or it would be the subject of a report to the National Park Authority.

b) Kick-Start Scheme (Minute 5)

It was noted that a report on the Scheme would be considered by the Personnel Committee later that day.

NOTED.

7. Marine Protected Areas around the Pembrokeshire Coast

The Conservation Policy Officer said that he was pleased to be joined by Sue Burton the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation Officer who would be happy to answer any questions.

The report summarised the types of Marine Protected Areas in Wales, and identified the sites lying within or adjacent to the National Park. It went on to outline management arrangements for these, and highlighted the various marine groups on which the Authority was represented, together with its financial contributions. Also appended for information was the Marine Protected Area Network Management Action Plan for Wales 2020-21.

At the meeting, the Officer summarised the main policy and legislative changes that had affected the local marine environment since his previous report to the Committee in December 2018. It was also noted that the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation Relevant Authority Group had produced a Progress Report 2018 to 2020 and that this would be circulated to the Committee.

Members thanked the officer for a helpful paper which provided a context for the vital work of the Authority as a coastal National Park. There followed a wide ranging discussion in which it was suggested that the Authority could take a greater lead, possibly arranging a meeting with those charged with responsibility for the marine environment to see if greater support could be provided. Sue Burton advised that she would be organising an open meeting in October which she hoped Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and Welsh Government would attend, and was happy to invite the Authority's officers and Members. It was also suggested that an organogram could be produced showing how the various bodies related to each other; it was noted that NRW officers had recently agreed to try and source such a diagram however a collaborative effort with the Authority could be beneficial.



There was also some discussion on the potential for designation of a Marine National Park, or extension of the existing National Park to include the marine environment, and the Chair of the Authority advised that he and the Chief Executive would be meeting representatives of Blue Marine Foundation, who had recently published a report on Marine National Parks, in the coming months. It was suggested that the Authority could commission some work on the benefits and opportunities of a Marine National Park in Pembrokeshire.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Operational Review Committee recommend that a study be commissioned to investigate the benefits and opportunities of a Marine National Park in Pembrokeshire and the practical steps necessary for this to be achieved.

8. Tree Wardens Pembrokeshire

The Tree and Landscape Officer reported that the Tree Council's Tree Warden Scheme had been established in 1990 and had been operating in Pembrokeshire since 2004. He provided an overview of tasks undertaken by the Pembrokeshire wardens, such as orchard management and traditional hedgelaying as well as surveying juniper on the cliffs of Ramsey Island and attendance at other locally organised events. Community involvement was also encouraged, and the training provided resulted in the sharing of valuable knowledge. One of the main aims of the Scheme was the establishment of community orchards in every Community Council in the National Park and beyond; 42 apple varieties had been identified and these had been planted as a heritage orchard at the National Botanical Gardens.

The Officer went on to explain that in 2019 the scheme had been relaunched with support from the Authority's Volunteer Coordinator to create a task description, providing a focus for the role to the benefit of both the volunteers and the Authority. Prior to lockdown, an ash dieback toolkit had been developed, and an outdoor training session on this had recently taken place, although contact with Wardens had been maintained through online sessions in the interim. Planned future events included training on veteran and ancient trees and the planting of disease resistant Elm trees. A bilingual leaflet to advertise the Tree Warden Scheme had also been produced and this together with articles in Coast to Coast and on the Authority's website, had resulted in the recruitment of 6-8 new volunteers.

Thanking the officer for his presentation, the Committee asked if any statistics were available regarding the number, location, age, etc of current tree wardens, and the plans to broaden the current base, and encouraged greater communication of their achievements. It was also suggested that links with recent tree planting projects funded through the Sustainable Development Fund should be explored.



Welcoming the planting of disease resistant Elm trees, Members went on to ask about disease resistant Ash. The officer advised that at present, testing of potential varieties was ongoing and anticipated that this would continue for some time. He added that he would circulate information regarding the number, etc of current volunteers.

NOTED

9. Performance Report for the Period Ending 31st 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 provided 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 for the full financial year 20/21 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 service 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 (Red Amber Green) rating to an amber rating at 66.31%.



The report also provided an update on work that had been achieved in delivering longer-term objectives, including funding of the Roots to Recovery project, however COVID 19 had had an impact on delivery of some activities contributing to these. Activities and priorities had been reviewed as part of the development of the Corporate and Resources Plan 2021/22 and some activities had not been carried forward, or had been amended to reflect changes in how they would be delivered.

Congratulating staff across the Authority for what had been achieved, officers were encouraged to look at their achievements in a positive light as the commentary often suggested a greater level of work and activity than was reflected in the trend and RAG rating. Thanks were also given to the Performance and Compliance Coordinator for producing the report.

Members also noted that it was vital to look at what could be learned from the impact of COVID-19, and from the changes, such as an increase in digital confidence and competence, that had taken place and how this could be harnessed going forward to reduce carbon footprint; the release of the Welsh Government's Public sector net zero reporting guide was welcomed. In particular further information was sought on the impact of the pre-booking system introduced at the Authority's sites. Updates were also requested in relation to the project addressing light pollution and the Llwybr Pwllcornel footpath and the officer agreed to speak to the relevant officers and provide these after the meeting.

The downward trend in the number of days lost to staff sickness was noted, however this was as an area to watch, as staff welfare was a top priority. Finally, while being pleased to see the improvements to the planning performance figures, some concern was expressed regarding the fall in enforcement cases investigated. The Director of Planning and Park Direction advised that lockdown had meant that officers were unable to carry out site visits and this had led to the reduction in the figures. However the situation would continue to be monitored.

NOTED

10. 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.

Members noted that updates were needed to a number of the risks (Numbers 8, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25 and 27 were highlighted), and considered that some of these could be removed from the register. They looked forward to the Workshop on risk management, and hoped that as a result the document could become more proactive in tone. The Finance



Manager thanked Members for their comments and advised that the register would be updated accordingly.

NOTED

11. Work Programme for the Ensuing Year

The Chair advised that this item provided an opportunity for the Committee to put forward suggestions for items they would like to consider at future meetings of the Committee. Suggestions included the potential for a Marine National Park, volunteering across the whole of the Authority's activities, COP26, the protocol that was currently being prepared for Local Authorities on the selection of Councillors and tourism pressures including solutions to the challenges posed.

The Director of Countryside, Community and Visitor Services advised that the Authority had commissioned an independent review of its approach to volunteering and the interim report could be reported to the Committee when it became available. In respect of tourism pressures, he suggested that as this was such a broad topic it could usefully be covered by a series of reports which could focus on both the reactive activity and the proactive approach being taken at UK level.

NOTED.

12. 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.

