

Report of the Discovery Team Leader and Volunteering Development Officer

Subject:

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority Volunteering Review and Volunteering Policy

Purpose of Report / Recommendation

This report presents two documents relating to PCNPA's work with volunteers and asks Members:

1. To note the report produced by Sarah Hughes and associates, 'A Strategic Review of Volunteering', with the consultants undertaking a wide-ranging review of the Authority's work with volunteers and providing a series of recommendations based on their findings. These recommendations will be used to develop an action plan for the development of volunteering at PCNPA going forward.
2. To seek approval for the PCNPA Volunteering Policy, which provides a framework for the Authority to meet its legal responsibility and duty of care in its volunteering activities and establish a set of clear principles and good practice for those involved in volunteering activity.

Background

Volunteers have been contributing to the work of the National Park Authority and helping the Authority to achieve its purposes for at least fifty years. We currently have around 200 volunteers registered. They do a variety of tasks, including practical conservation work and support funded projects such as Pathways, Stitch in Time, the Pollinator Project and Walkability. Volunteers are also part of the team at National Park Centres, invigilating in the gallery at Oriel y Parc and assisting with site management and visitor welcome at Castell Henllys and Carew Castle. We have recently integrated the tree wardens into our volunteer family and we are currently working on opportunities for archaeology monitoring and footpath and site monitors.

In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering. This combined with the fact that people are living longer has increased the demand for volunteering opportunities. The National Park Authority is at a crucial stage in the 'volunteering journey'. In order to develop volunteering in a sustainable way we need to build stronger foundations by establishing good practice, putting policies and procedures in to place that strengthen the relationship between staff and volunteers and increase, improve and diversify our offer to potential volunteers.

1. **The Review of Volunteering** makes use of consultation (of both our own workforce/volunteers and other stakeholders in and around the National Park) combined with a review of good practice to identify the strengths and weaknesses of our existing work with volunteers and opportunities to improve work in this area.
2. **The PCNPA Volunteering Policy** document provides a framework for the continued development of volunteering within the National Park Authority in order to:
 - Ensure Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority meets its legal responsibility and duty of care in its volunteering activities;
 - Provide direction and support to volunteer line managers;
 - Ensure consistency in the management of volunteers and voluntary activities across the work of the National Park Authority;
 - Establish clear principles for the involvement of volunteers and for good practice to be enshrined in the delivery of this work;
 - Confirm Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's commitment to involving volunteers.

Comparisons

The majority of National Parks in the UK where the volunteering offer is well developed have similar policies to the PCNPA proposed here. We have been able to use examples of these as the basis for the policy presented here together with support and advice from PAVS (Pembrokeshire Association of Volunteer Services).

The policy is aligned to the PCNPA Volunteer Handbook, which was produced in 2019, with copies provided to all of the Authority's Volunteers

Financial Considerations

The Review of Volunteering includes recommendations that will have additional costs associated with them. This expenditure has yet to be agreed, however, an Action Plan based on the review will include prioritised and costed proposals.

There are few direct financial costs associated with the Volunteering Policy, although there may be an additional investment in training for volunteer managers required as part of the policy's implementation going forward.

The policy's implementation may also require more time to be spent on volunteer management by those involved or planning to be involved in PCNPA volunteering. However, the additional demands are likely to be relatively small for those managers and teams already involved.

Risk & Compliance Considerations

Adoption of the policy by the Authority ensures that PCNPA is better able to evidence compliance with legislation and good practice as it relates to volunteering. In addition,

the policy includes sections which address risk and risk management in relation to activity in this area.

The policy and volunteering in general is a strong demonstration of the Authority's work towards WG directives such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

Human Rights/Equality Issues

Volunteering supports PCNPA Equality plan. The policy reflects the Authority's commitment to equality and diversity in enabling a high quality volunteering offer for local people.

Welsh Language Statement

Volunteers can choose to volunteer using either English or Welsh, or may choose a volunteering activity to practice or enhance their Welsh language skills, or to help others benefit from Welsh. Supporting documents such as the Volunteer Handbook are available bilingually.

Recommendation

1. To note and comment on the report produced by Sarah Hughes and associates, 'A Strategic Review of Volunteering' and to ask officers to develop an Action Plan to take forward the appropriate recommendations;
2. That the PCNPA Volunteering Policy is adopted by the National Park Authority.

Author: Graham Peake (Discovery Team Leader)

Strategic Review of Volunteering



Final report 16 November 2021
Sarah Hughes, Karen Scott, Catrin Bradley





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4 Executive Summary

In May 2021, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA), commissioned external consultants to undertake a strategic review of volunteering, having identified that it was at a crucial stage in the 'volunteering journey'. 'Taking stock' of the progress made to date and improving understanding, would inform the development of a 'strategy for volunteering' for the Authority, aligned to strategic priorities and organisational plans and 'fit for the future'.

Volunteers have been contributing to the work of the National Park Authority and helping the Authority to achieve its purposes for at least fifty years. Over 200 volunteers are currently registered undertaking 19 different roles, including practical conservation work, support for (and benefitting from) funded projects such as Pathways and 'front facing' roles such as activity leaders and a presence at National Park centres.

There has also been increased demand for volunteering opportunities in the Park, partly due to a growing population of retired people, interested in this kind of activity, and also indicating recognition of the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering. The COVID-19 pandemic may also have been an influence, with more people seeking opportunities to get out of their homes and meet with others in safe (outdoor) settings.

PCNPA staff also identified a need to strengthen volunteering by: putting policies and procedures into place, building the relationship between staff and volunteers and increasing, improving and diversifying the offer to potential volunteers.

In conducting the review, the approach taken looked at what was working well, where things might be improved or where there were gaps and barriers to volunteering for PCNPA, as well as drawing on good practice from elsewhere. To move forward, and in light of learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, good practice examples and opportunities that met the needs of 'volunteers of the future' and used technology and innovation to help recruit, support and develop PCNPA volunteers were sought.

The review gathered information and evidence from online surveys and through a series of one to one and focus group conversations with a range of stakeholders, including:

- Existing volunteers
- PCNPA staff
- Pembrokeshire voluntary and environmental organisations
- Representatives from other National Parks.



Evidence was analysed, and common themes identified. Findings were grouped into four areas: organisational strategy and culture; volunteer demographics, roles and opportunities; volunteer management, training and supervision; and working in partnership. Additional conversations drilled down into the research findings and explored some of the key ideas for the future that had emerged, providing additional rich data on innovation and good practice.

The review has clearly provided evidence that PCNPA has strengths in its volunteering management and delivery that can be further built upon to develop its volunteering offer. Recommendations for what should continue, what can be improved and how new opportunities could be developed are suggested in the next section.

In addition, common themes that cut across all areas of recommendations included:

- Making more efficient use of resources
- Building in more flexibility
- Communication (includes corporate buy in / realignment with priorities, as well as communicating with and about volunteering)

The strategic importance of recognising the value and contribution that volunteering makes to the Authority's delivery of its purposes and public duties (including strategic priorities and wellbeing objectives) is essential. Simply put, the volunteer workforce adds significant capacity to what can be achieved by paid staff, but this is not yet widely understood or communicated. We hope that work will be done to measure and demonstrate the value and contribution of this voluntary effort to members, staff, volunteers, local communities and visitors alike.

In conclusion, we hope that PCNPA will take this opportunity to make some relatively simple, swift and affordable changes to further support volunteering, at corporate, departmental and operational levels, that will serve both the Authority and local communities well over the coming years.



Recommendations

The following are recommendations that suggest practical ways to develop and improve PCNPA's volunteering strategy, management and offer, specifically addressing the following areas: value and impact of volunteering; expanding volunteering across the authority; effecting a transition from traditional to more inclusive, flexible, micro volunteering opportunities; supported volunteering opportunities; attitudes and perceptions among PCNPA staff and members; digitising / developing volunteering management processes and; improving and developing partnership working.

	Corporate/strategic level
	Directorate/managerial level
	Operational level

Recommendation	Page	Timeframe
Organisational strategy and culture		
Recommendation 1 PCNPA should agree a clear, high-level statement regarding its commitment to volunteering to underpin the Vision, and the four core strategic priorities, and promote a consistent message across the organisation.	20	<12 months
Recommendation 2 PCNPA should broaden its definition of volunteering to encompass a wider spectrum of ways of getting involved.	21	<12 months
Recommendation 3 PCNPA should undertake an impact evaluation to include qualitative case studies, and a Social Return on Investment calculation to improve understanding and communication of the value and contribution volunteering makes to the Authority's purposes, duties and delivery.	22	1-3 years
Recommendation 4 PCNPA should ensure that media and communications reflect the outcomes of volunteer activity, as well as the diversity of volunteers, and a variety of roles. Internal and external communications should focus more on the outcomes and impact of volunteering, than on inputs and outputs.	23	<12 months
Recommendation 5 PCNPA should make the consideration of volunteering opportunities an integral part of project planning and budgeting and increase resources if appropriate.	24	<12 months

Recommendation 6 PCNPA should coordinate and centralise existing resources that support volunteering, as well as increasing resources where appropriate by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● considering an increase in hours for the Volunteering Development Officer role; ● looking at flexibilities in Volunteering Development Officer/ Volunteer Line Manager roles to facilitate support for volunteering at weekends; ● reviewing opportunities for new staff job descriptions/induction to reflect supporting volunteers as part of a role; ● reviewing their employee volunteering offer. 	Page 24	Timeframe <12 months
Recommendation 7 PCNPA should establish opportunities for staff learning and development to support them in actual/potential Volunteer Line Manager roles including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● widening their understanding of inclusion and diversity; ● training and support for working with vulnerable participants. 	25	<12 months
Recommendation 8 PCNPA should facilitate a range of opportunities for staff and volunteers to 'mix' and build an integrated approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● treating all as one 'workforce'; ● through communications such as highlighting different volunteer roles in each staff newsletter. 	26	<12 months
Recommendation 9 PCNPA should consider the skills they need for the future, ensure they record and utilise the skills that volunteers have, and offer new opportunities in different departments.	26	<12 months
Volunteer demographics, roles and opportunities		
Recommendation 10 PCNPA should continue to provide 'traditional' volunteer roles, as well as new ones, utilising external funding to increase the offer.	29	<12 months
Recommendation 11 PCNPA should continue and expand provision of Welsh Language engagement and volunteering opportunities, such as the Welsh language walks and volunteer training. It should continue to promote bilingualism, encouraging volunteers to use, practice and/or learn pronunciation and basic greetings in Welsh, as ambassadors of the Authority.	30	<12 months

Recommendation 12 PCNPA should further develop and promote 'arms-reach' flexible micro-volunteering opportunities through its website, social media channels and via partner networks, based on identified best practice.	Page 30	Timeframe <12 months
Recommendation 13 PCNPA should trial new volunteer roles, such as peer-led walk leaders, pop-up talks and tours, volunteer buddies and ambassadors. These should take account of how best to add value, based on volunteers' skills and facilitate shared learning from the experiences, including through 'skill-swap' opportunities.	33	1-3 years
Recommendation 14 Building on the Experiences for All project and this volunteering review, PCNPA should undertake further work to identify potential volunteers, the barriers they might face and how best to involve and include them.	33	<12 months
Recommendation 15 PCNPA should build on the success and legacy of Pathways and continue to offer supported volunteering opportunities through programmes like Roots to Recovery, working with specialist support organisations to provide for those with additional support needs. New opportunities should be developed in a person-centred way, taking into account volunteers' abilities, skills and interests.	35	<12 months
Volunteer management, training & supervision		
Recommendation 16 PCNPA should invest in a central volunteer management system to ease demand on staff capacity and set up an internal working group to ensure that the system is compatible with the Authority's existing databases and meets future needs.	38	<12 months
Recommendation 17 PCNPA should continue and extend its volunteer training programme, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● online and blended learning modules, ensuring training is widely accessible to volunteers; ● developing some new Parkwise modules linked to the four strategic priorities; ● developing specific new modules for micro-volunteering roles; ● facilitating more opportunities for 'networking' and sharing of experience between volunteers; ● improving communications to volunteers and potential volunteers about the above. 	39	<12 months

Recommendation 18 PCNPA should consult all existing volunteers, through a variety of methods, to review the purpose and functions of the Volunteer Forum and identify any additional effective means of giving volunteers a voice in decisions that affect them.	Page 39	Timeframe <12 months
Working in partnership		
Recommendation 19 PCNPA should seek further opportunities to work in partnership with others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • via PSB and the wider environmental sector to contribute to the 'bigger picture' in Pembrokeshire, support Pembrokeshire's Wellbeing goals and help deliver the Authority's four core strategic priorities; • initiatives, developing the 'Pembrokeshire' and local element; • by collaborating in a more structured way with voluntary organisations such as the National Trust and Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales, who are significant landowners within the National Park, as well as with community-based groups. 	45	1-3 years
Recommendation 20 PCNPA should continue to play an active role in the Coordination of Volunteering for the Environment (COVE) Network and consider whether they would be prepared to be an 'anchor' organisation to support other smaller voluntary groups to deliver a coordinated approach to environmental volunteering for the benefit of Pembrokeshire.	46	<12 months
Recommendation 21 PCNPA should ensure that when working with partners, there is a clear offer of the PCNPA contribution and seek further engagement with organisations that, with their expertise, can support volunteers to participate in National Park tasks e.g. Plantlife, Mind, Dementia Support, Hywel Dda's Community Team Learning Disability Service.	47	1-3 years
Recommendation 22 PCNPA should continue to work with Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) to broaden its volunteer offer, make use of volunteer recognition schemes, promote opportunities to local communities and contribute to the development of a volunteer passport.	48	1-3 years

1 Introduction

In May 2021, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA), commissioned external consultants to undertake a strategic review of volunteering, with a view to improving understanding and informing the development of a 'strategy for volunteering' for the Authority, aligned to strategic priorities and organisational plans.

To move forward, and in light of learning from the COVID-19 pandemic, PCNPA identified that an approach was required that meets the needs of 'volunteers of the future' and makes use of technology and innovation to help recruit, support and develop PCNPA volunteers.

This review gathered information and evidence from online surveys and through a series of one to one and focus group conversations with a range of stakeholders, including:

- Existing volunteers
- PCNPA staff
- Pembrokeshire voluntary and environmental organisations
- Representatives from other National Parks.

Data was then analysed, and the findings have shaped the recommendations that appear in this report.



2 Background and context

2.1 Internal Drivers

PCNPA's [draft] Volunteer Policy and Action Plan set the vision for volunteering, thus:

The National Park benefits from a positive, involved and enthusiastic volunteer service that can support us and our partners in caring for heritage, landscape and biodiversity and which engages with local people and communities.

Beneath this vision, sit six strategic objectives:

- Objective 1:** To offer volunteering opportunities to a wide cross-section of local people, including those most likely to derive benefits from this activity.
- Objective 2:** To be able to offer more volunteering opportunities across a wider range of National Park work.
- Objective 3:** To develop, support and work with 'like-minded' voluntary and community sector organisations across the National Park, strengthening partnerships to enhance the role of volunteers.
- Objective 4:** To develop an appropriate infrastructure for volunteer management that reflects good practice and maximises the value of our work in this area.
- Objective 5:** To develop and maintain a volunteer centred approach, whereby the needs of volunteers are identified and met, and volunteers are encouraged to contribute to communications and engage with the National Park Authority.
- Objective 6:** To ensure that volunteer work supports the delivery of the National Park Management Plan.

Separate to this review, but a key driver for future activity, in August 2021, Members approved the Authority's vision for the future: '*a National Park where nature, culture and communities thrive*'. This is underpinned by four strategic priority areas, namely:

- **Conservation** - boosting biodiversity and halting its decline
- **Climate** - Destination Net Zero
- **Connection** - Natural Health Service
- **Communities** - Vibrant communities

In addition, PCNPA's Health and Well-being, Community and Culture objectives identify their intentions to encourage volunteering and engage volunteers in activities that will have positive benefits for the Park's ecosystems and heritage, as well as people's physical and mental well-being. These activities are expected to support volunteers themselves by improving skills, while making the most of being outdoors in the Park's environment, enjoying the heritage. It will also help to strengthen communities and address issues such as social isolation.

The points below, taken from a review of the PCNPA Corporate and Resources Plan 2021/22, indicate the Authority's strategic intentions around involvement of volunteers in service delivery, in the following ways:

- Volunteering to support ecosystem conservation- removal of invasive non-native species (INNS), protection and cleaning of marine, coastal and river environments and tree planting
- Volunteering to promote and protect heritage, culture and Welsh language
- Volunteering to support health and promote wellbeing through leading walks
- Volunteering to support the Parks' management plan for climate emergency and biodiversity loss.

2.2 External Drivers

Legislation and policy in Wales inform how local authorities and other public sector bodies should approach their strategic planning. Two key Acts shaping this approach are:

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and A More Equal Wales: The Socio-economic Duty Equality Act 2010. In addition, there are a number of other Acts and Senedd/Welsh Government policies to which the National Park Authority's direction must align (see Members' paper 18/21, May 2021)).

Responding to *The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, Pembrokeshire Public Services Board (PSB) has identified two overarching well-being objectives as the framework for Pembrokeshire's Well-being Plan:

- Who we are: We want to help our people, communities and organisations so that we can support ourselves and each other.
- Where we live: We want to protect and enhance our natural assets whilst optimising economic prospects, accessibility, and health for all.

Volunteering is integral to both strategic objectives, and PCNPA, as a key stakeholder in the PSB, has an ongoing duty to deliver this for Pembrokeshire, alongside other public sector and voluntary bodies.

Work is now underway to gather information for the next Pembrokeshire Well-being Assessment 2022 (consultation closes October 2021) and as before, this will be informed by engagement with citizens and stakeholders, together with consideration of other information such as data, evidence, and research.



2.3 Wider Volunteering Context

Pembrokeshire has a long-standing and rich tradition of volunteering and community action. The recent (March 2021) cross-sector development of a Volunteering for Pembrokeshire strategy sets out a vision to develop volunteering across the county, supported by partnerships between voluntary, public and private sectors.

Volunteering can be defined as *“an activity, which is undertaken freely, by choice, for public/ community/environmental benefit, and not undertaken for financial gain.”*

Volunteers commit their time and energy for the benefit of their local community, society as a whole and the natural world in which we live. During the COVID-19 pandemic, volunteers have underpinned a statutory response to an even greater extent than seen before. In addition to benefits for volunteers themselves, communities benefit from volunteering through the creation of social cohesion and community spirit.

Volunteering and community participation includes a wide spectrum of activity, with informal, community-led, or neighbourly mutual aid at one end, traditional volunteering in the middle and the more formal duties of charity trustees, town and community councillors and school governors at the other end.

Volunteering in National Parks and other outdoor settings similarly encompasses a spectrum, ranging from ‘arms-length’ often solitary activities, such as species recording, or litter picking, to the more formalised roles undertaken by Voluntary Wardens and Walk Leaders, for example. Activity at the more informal, ad-hoc end of the spectrum is as important but less quantifiable and we’ll explore this in sections 4.1.2 & 4.2.1 of this report.

In a 2020 study, Third Sector Support Wales (TSSW) reported that volunteering is changing. Extracts from the study refer to:

- a growth in informal, spontaneous (micro) volunteering. There was also a decrease in formal volunteering opportunities [during the COVID-19 pandemic];
- volunteering is recognised as key to reducing inequalities and developing community resilience. This requires volunteering opportunities that are accessible and inclusive, and can foster community connections and cohesion;
- an expected increase in volunteers with additional support needs, including those experiencing mental health difficulties, that will need addressing, as organisational capacity to support volunteers is often limited;
- emerging trends in areas like employer supported volunteering, digital volunteering, skills development and placements, youth engagement and flexible opportunities;
- the importance of support for good practice in involving and managing volunteers, including approaches to recruitment, induction and training, often linked to a quality standard, such as Investing in Volunteers.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) carried out research in 2020 that provides insights into volunteering in general, but also with feedback from those who volunteer in the public sector. There are some key messages from the research. These include opportunities to make better use of volunteers’ skills, encourage greater understanding among paid staff of the value volunteers can bring, facilitate the engagement of a more diverse group of volunteers, and seek to avoid the feeling that regular commitment equates to obligation.

A Mobilising UK Voluntary Action briefing in July 2021, reflected on learning and recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic, and while focussed on England, we would suggest the four themes are also relevant in Wales, to PCNPA and to this report:

- Bringing back volunteers
- Sustaining the involvement of new volunteers
- Volunteer diversity and inclusion
- Collaboration and the importance of 'local' [action]

2.4 Volunteering for Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority

Volunteers have been involved in the work of PCNPA, making a significant contribution to the Authority's capacity to achieve its purposes for over fifty years. PCNPA currently has over 200 volunteers registered in 19 different volunteer roles. They undertake a wide variety of tasks including:

- practical wildlife and heritage conservation work
- practical site maintenance
- visitor welcome
- supporting events and activities
- leading and back-stopping walks

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of volunteer roles available, and the creation of a part-time Volunteering Development Officer post to support them, alongside 16 staff whose role includes volunteer line management. Volunteers complete a formal registration process, and their details are held on PCNPA databases. A formal Volunteer Handbook outlines roles and responsibilities of both the volunteer and PCNPA. A Volunteer Forum exists, and induction and training are provided according to the volunteer role. Monthly electronic Volunteer updates are provided, as well as quarterly newsletters.



There has also been increased demand for volunteering opportunities in the Park, partly due to a growing population of retired people, interested in this kind of activity, and also indicating recognition of the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering. COVID-19 may also be an influence, with more people seeking opportunities to get out of their homes and meet with others in safe (outdoor) settings.

PCNPA now wishes to develop volunteering in a sustainable way, 'fit for the future'. They have identified a need to strengthen volunteering by: putting policies and procedures into place, building the relationship between staff and volunteers and increasing, improving and diversifying the offer to potential volunteers.

The points below highlight some perceived benefits of volunteering activities for people who volunteer for PCNPA, including benefits for local communities:

- Volunteering outdoors benefits physical and mental well-being and contributes to quality of life;
- Widening volunteering opportunities are linked with skills development;
- Supported volunteering includes training and learning opportunities, with progression and developmental pathways;
- Support for disadvantaged groups and individuals to access the outdoors, in and around the Park, provide health and wellbeing benefits;
- Young people and volunteers are engaged and have opportunities to voice their views and contribute to the development of volunteering through PCNPA's Youth Committee and Volunteer Forum;
- Community resilience is built through engagement with communities and volunteers in the Park.



3 Methodology

As detailed in our tender submission, our methodology used a range of action research and engagement methods to:

- determine what PCNPA volunteers, staff and other stakeholders thought worked well and identified any challenges and/or constraints they have faced;
- gathered volunteers' and other stakeholders' ideas about how PCNPA could overcome barriers and develop potential solutions going forward;
- identified best practice and innovative approaches to develop volunteering 'fit for the future'.

In the first instance, we held a series of one-to-one and group conversations with PCNPA staff, in particular those who manage volunteers, as well as volunteers, youth rangers and others. As well as the areas mentioned above, we asked them to suggest ways in which volunteering could happen differently.

Conversations were held with the following people:

- 17 PCNPA staff, including the CEO and senior managers as well as Rangers, a sample of other volunteer line managers, Countryside Managers and staff who don't currently involve volunteers in their work;
- 10 Youth Rangers and the Engagement & Discovery Ranger, at a bespoke workshop, held as part of Skrinkle Haven Meadows Day;
- 8 members of the Youth Committee, at Portfield Gate Community Woodland, along with PCNPA link member Sarah Hoss, Experiences for All project lead Dilys Burrell, Suzanne Moses (PCC) and Abi Marriott (PLANED);
- 7 members of COVE (with representatives from Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS), Cwm Arian Renewable Energy (CARE) x2, Tir Coed, Llais y Goedwig, PCNPA x2);
- 4 PCNPA volunteers as part of an online Volunteer Forum meeting, to present to them initial findings and seek their responses.

The information gathered during the initial consultation period was analysed and coded to a number of emerging themes, prior to survey questions being developed. English language and Welsh language online surveys were sent to five groups of stakeholders at the end of July, for completion by August 20th.

There were 52 respondents to the English medium surveys in total and 0 to the Welsh medium surveys.

These were:

- PCNPA Volunteers: 31 responses
- PCNPA Volunteer Line Managers: 7 responses
- PCNPA Staff (non VLMs): 4 responses
- COVE/PVON members (local partners): 6 responses
- Other NPAs in the UK: 4 responses

The response to surveys from PCNPA staff was lower than expected. The surveys were mostly in the form of open questions, to avoid leading respondents, or narrowing the scope of their views, so that we could find out what was most important to them in relation to volunteering. Again, the key focus was on what was working well, issues/barriers to address, examples of best practice and suggestions for innovation.

The comments were coded and analysed to draw out the most common themes mentioned, which were:

- Supervision & management / staff capacity
- Volunteer roles, responsibilities, succession
- Recognition of volunteering
- Communications (internal, external and promotion)
- Administration (processes, databases, digitising systems & reporting)
- Variety of opportunities
- Diversity of volunteers/ accessibility
- USP (unique selling point) /Park core work/ PCNPA duties, strategic planning
- Skills development/ work experience, training
- Innovation/ good practice
- Partnership
- Post-COVID-19 learning
- Welsh language

Following the surveys, we held five separate focus group meetings, for:

- PCNPA staff (4 attendees)
- Volunteers (1 attendee)
- COVE (3 attendees)
- Other NPAs (5 attendees)
- National Trust/Wildlife Trust South & West Wales (2 attendees)

The response to our invitation to attend focus group meetings was also lower than we had anticipated. Although not well supported, these conversations allowed us to drill down into our research findings and along with a couple more targeted one-to-one conversations, further explore some of the key ideas for the future that had emerged, providing additional rich data on innovation and good practice.



4 Findings and discussion

4.1 Organisational strategy and culture

Review discussions reflected on the current PCNPA strategy and culture around volunteering. This included how volunteers are perceived amongst staff teams and the Authority's Members; understanding of the real value and impact of volunteering activity; and the contribution volunteering makes to the organisation's public duties.

4.1.1 Strategic commitment to volunteering

The existence of a draft Volunteering Policy, alongside a Volunteering Action Plan and 'Volunteering' managed by a part-time Volunteering Development Officer, suggests that on a practical level, volunteering has broadly secured its role within the Authority.

Several staff members commented positively on the strategic impact of volunteering, for example:

"From collating the data I am able to see the massive contribution volunteers contribute already to the work of the Park and in terms of a cross section of activities and the positive impact of these activities - from conservation, access, site and community archaeology activities, leading events and activities (a large part of our events and activities programme wouldn't be possible without volunteers), leading supported walks, providing gallery invigilator support, through to participating in Youth Committee etc." ~ staff member

Northumberland NPA identified that: *'Volunteering is an excellent form of engagement in its own right (second purpose) and can be extremely valuable to the individuals involved'*.



However, individual staff indicated a wide range of opinion about the extent to which volunteering should be part of the Authority's direction, from it not being important, to the view that the organisation could not carry out all of its functions without the support of volunteers:

"some colleagues still don't recognise the value and see working with vols as difficult- lot of hassle- hand-holding, or fear they might do something you don't want them to do, lack of confidence about the quality of their work" ~ staff member

"[I] Don't think we get it - what volunteering can bring to the Authority, but also don't get it in terms of what we need to do for our communities" ~ staff member

Another staff member reflected that although volunteering should be an important part of their planning, 'thinking up volunteer roles' was a luxury that came after the day to day management they were required to undertake. They also wanted any role to be meaningful, and beneficial for both parties, and that required planning and thinking time.

Two respondents (senior staff members) reflected on whether 'volunteering' as a function should report directly to the Leadership team, and by implication attain a more strategic and tactical function. The link between this review and that of a new HR strategy in 2022 was also alluded to.

One suggestion made was that if there was a more coordinated model across the whole organisation it might support a more consistent and professional approach and ensure that all volunteers are properly equipped for the role they are being asked to do.

"If we do it [volunteering], do it properly" ~ staff member

The concern about varying availability of equipment/ 'kit' and support was raised by several members of staff, but interestingly no volunteers who contributed, reported feeling 'under-resourced'.

At a day-to-day level, existing good practice such as encouragement, leadership and helpfulness of volunteer line managers (VLMs), was commented on by volunteers. Several volunteers reported feeling valued, but this was usually in relation to the support and 'thanks' from their VLM.

However, less positive comments were received about the value of volunteering being publicly recognised by more senior staff, or in terms of strategic development, suggesting that a 'culture shift' would be needed in order to raise the profile and broaden volunteering opportunities within the Authority.

[in justification of broadening volunteering] *"we have focused on the 'national' and that our work is paid for by everyone in the country."* ~ South Downs NPA

Furthermore, opportunities for volunteers to contribute to the development of strategic direction need to be identified and communicated (see for example discussion on Volunteer Forum, Page 39).

"There are people within the Park [staff/members] who perhaps do not recognise or value the contribution volunteers make" ~ staff member

“Changes in Park policies don't always involve volunteers in the decision-making process” ~ volunteer

This leads us to suggest that since the Authority is committed to broadening and extending volunteer opportunities and acknowledges that volunteering helps to deliver its purposes and duties, a clear and consistent message needs to **‘come from the top’**. A clear statement on volunteering that sits alongside the Vision, where voluntary activities are shown to be integral to delivering impact in each of the four strategic priorities, would demonstrate the strategic weight given to volunteering. This commitment then needs to be reflected in enabling staff to have time and capacity to implement change. We suggest that a ‘golden thread’ framework can align this strategic intent through every part of the organisation, leading to trialling and developing not only new volunteer roles, but new ways of thinking about volunteering and the skills and value that volunteers can bring.

Recommendation 1

PCNPA should agree a clear, high-level statement regarding its commitment to volunteering to underpin the Vision, and the four core strategic priorities, and promote a consistent message across the organisation.

4.1.2 Capturing and communicating strategic impact

Stakeholders referred positively to their particular part in a range of volunteering opportunities that were happening, such as enabling activities and events, and carrying out access and conservation activities. Volunteer commitment is often captured in hours given to a particular role by PCNPA, and used to calculate ‘days’ of contribution as below:

In 2019 volunteers
made a huge
difference to the
National Park

239 days
for activities and
events and Walkability

908 conservation
days (invasive species,
hedgelaying, beach
cleans, wildlife
monitoring)

52 days on
archaeology

214.5 volunteer
days related to site
work (Carew Castle)

546 days
for access work on the
Coast Path or inland
rights of way

9.5 days on
Changing Coasts, plus
796 photos sent in
from the public

11, 247.5
volunteer hours =
2,237 volunteer days

Thank you!

Several stakeholders suggested that the Authority was not currently capturing all of the volunteering happening across the organisation - partly because the means of reporting make it difficult (e.g. drop down menus of databases are restrictive). In addition, some responses reflected different aspects along the spectrum of volunteering, from 'hands-off' activity within the Park that is less easy to quantify (for instance litter picking while walking) through to regular days completing practical tasks to a professional standard, such as stile construction. The need to translate hours into impact was also identified.

"I think the hours and effort that volunteers put in needs to be clearly recognised, with feedback given on how their effort is contributing to the bigger picture and what the future plans are" ~ volunteer

"The Authority has identified four priority areas within its high-level strategy that was approved by NPA this week, as a result I think the priority areas for volunteering will need to link in with this strategy and work that will be ongoing in terms of it (including review of the Authority's well-being objectives.)" ~ staff member

Clarifying the spectrum of all volunteer activity, and its impact on the Authority's duties is important to ensuring that volunteering (however much time is volunteered) is understood and appreciated more widely.

"I think volunteering needs to be considered in a wider strategic context in terms of where it can add value for the work of the Authority, be beneficial to volunteers but also the wider organisational structure of the Authority in terms of staff and how it relates to different roles (to ensure staff have the time to help support the people management, coordination, data capture side of things.)" ~ staff member

Consensus needs to be reached about the differing degrees of commitment without inferring that some roles are more important than others, and the level of support that those individuals are entitled to (e.g. annual newsletter, discount cards, free car parking, full uniform). This could be achieved by ensuring that volunteer role descriptions identify clearly what will/won't be provided alongside an expectation of commitment by the volunteer.

Clarification around terms like 'volunteering', 'engagement', 'involvement', 'experience' is needed, all of which could come under the wider umbrella term of 'getting involved'. In addition, agreement is needed on whether all voluntary activity can or should be recorded - for instance South Downs NPA acknowledge that lots of micro-volunteering is not recorded, but accept that it's good that it is happening i.e. the NPA don't need to claim it, but encourage it, for the benefit of the wider community/environment.

Recommendation 2

PCNPA should broaden its definition of volunteering to encompass a wider spectrum of ways of getting involved.

Northumberland NPA carried out a piece of social return on investment (SROI) work that was able to quantify that volunteers provided *'approximately 30% additional capacity on top of our staff team'* and that there was *'in the region of £8-10 return on £1 invested (central volunteering staff and budget)'*.

Further work also needs to be carried out by PCNPA to capture and communicate the impact of volunteering as well as the SROI to reflect outcomes and impact rather than just outputs, for example *'X volunteer walk leaders enabled us to deliver X walks at weekends that extend our reach and contribute to our two priorities of connection and communities'*. This could be used internally to support efforts to develop more opportunities and have them spread more widely across the organisation.

Recommendation 3

PCNPA should undertake an impact evaluation to include qualitative case studies, and a SROI calculation to improve understanding and communication of the value and contribution volunteering makes to the Authority's purposes, duties and delivery (as opposed to simply capturing hours or quantitative data).

Joined up and better communication was an area that was identified in a number of survey responses and in one-to-ones, which would contribute to increased awareness and understanding:

"Promotion should be a future priority - what does the volunteer experience look like?" ~ staff member

Staff identified that volunteer activity may lead to conservation benefits months and years after and that then needs to be reported and the connection made, for instance clearance in wet and dirty environments in the winter months allowed spring flowers to come through the following year:

"Communicating the context of things [vol tasks] - the whole story, the conservation - keeping things going and finishing the circle is really important, and we should be communicating this better so that there is a better understanding of conservation" ~ staff member



Recommendation 4

PCNPA should ensure that media and communications reflect the outcomes of volunteer activity, as well as the diversity of volunteers, and a variety of roles (indoors as well as outdoors). Internal and external communications should focus more on the outcomes and impact of volunteering, than on inputs and outputs.

4.1.3 Changing perceptions and practice

We have already touched upon the range of perceptions amongst staff, and how volunteering is valued. The evidence suggests that there is a need to support staff to better understand the role of volunteering in delivering the Authority's statutory purposes and duty to its communities by enabling people's engagement, (as opposed to 'fringe activity') and that the messaging around this needs to be consistent.

"All new projects across all teams are encouraged to think of ways in which they could involve volunteers when developing projects" ~ Exmoor NPA

At an operational level, a cultural shift in staff perceptions could be encouraged by ensuring that all project planning and budgeting processes require consideration of whether there is any opportunity to involve volunteers, while ensuring that activities are properly resourced. Other aspects to consider include ensuring that resources are directed at more staff being available and willing to support volunteers at times when people want to volunteer. This may require management and supervision considerations so that staff are not also expected to then participate in the traditional 'Monday-Friday', '9-5' patterns. If volunteering were more 'mainstream' it could also help to address the issues of short-term funding identified:

"Short term funding of volunteering - creates stop : start projects which cannot maintain momentum - people and communities then are let down and hard to re-engage" ~ staff member

A commitment to volunteering would also be reinforced by an increase in budget that would enable development of more volunteer opportunities, coordination and support in line with PCNPA's strategic intent (see section 4.2).

This should also include consideration of how in practice, more flexible hours are managed to enable support cover at weekends, when volunteers are delivering activities (and releasing staff from weekday hours) for example. Changes to volunteering management and administration, to ease the pressures on VLMs and make volunteer management a more attractive prospect to other staff in the Authority should also be considered.

Centralising some of the aspects of volunteer management and administration would require a centralised budget, and the mechanism by which budget is assigned to such costs would also need further consideration.

Recommendation 5

PCNPA should make the consideration of volunteering opportunities an integral part of project planning and budgeting and increase resources if appropriate.

At an operational level, the most common issue raised by staff was lack of capacity to manage volunteers, and a concern that if more volunteering was to be supported, who would take on that additional 'burden' (see also 4.3). During our investigations we found that the six other NPAs we heard from all had at least 1 FTE VDO (and in the case of Exmoor 1.6 FTE). It is remarkable then that the VDO at PCNPA has achieved so much in a part-time role. We heard plenty of positive comments from PCNPA staff on what a great job was being done by their colleague and also some suggestions that the role should be increased, to ease some of the pressures on VLMs and enable the Authority to effectively broaden its volunteering offer.

It was felt by some that there needs to be more appreciation at senior management level of how demanding being a VLM could be (particularly when it may only be a small part of a role). This suggests that in developing new job descriptions, if the inclusion of volunteer support is to be presumed, training and support should be given as part of staff induction processes. Opportunities to experience what it is like to be a volunteer could also be provided through employee volunteering, for example.

“Low level of promotion, awareness or take-up of corporate volunteering within our own and other organisations - a fantastic tool for staff wellbeing and increasing effectiveness through better communication, team working, cross-departmental collaboration and a shared understanding of our work and the themes volunteering encompasses” ~ staff member

Recommendation 6

PCNPA should coordinate and centralise existing resources that support volunteering, as well as increasing resources where appropriate by:

- considering an increase in hours for the Volunteering Development Officer role;
- looking at flexibilities in Volunteering Development Officer/ Volunteer Line Manager roles to facilitate support for volunteering at weekends;
- reviewing opportunities for new staff job descriptions/induction to reflect supporting volunteers as part of a role;
- reviewing their employee volunteering offer.

Moreover, if VLMs are working with vulnerable individuals, training and mentoring needs to be built in to ensure they are equipped for their role. This may be through peer-to-peer training opportunities between staff / volunteers who already have the skills and those who need to develop them (see also 4.4, where partner organisations may provide this support). However, this needs to be supported in a strategic way to ensure that there is time to accommodate this within roles i.e. it is not in addition to a role ('something has to give').

Recommendation 7

PCNPA should establish opportunities for staff learning and development to support them in actual/potential Volunteer Line Manager roles including:

- widening their understanding of inclusion and diversity (e.g. through peer-led learning, ambassadorial roles, staff forums, training);
- training and support for working with vulnerable participants (e.g. mental health first aid, 'offloading' procedure where appropriate as part of staff supervision).

Several discussions also highlighted that more opportunities for staff and volunteers to do things together would be welcomed e.g. Parkwise training and visits to see what has been achieved. Opportunities to learn from other's good practice within the Authority was identified as a way of understanding how particular roles might support a Centre for instance, where they did not currently have such a role. This could include sharing training sessions e.g. Parkwise, a joint annual forum, linking employee volunteering activities with volunteers.

As well as building positive relationships across teams and raising the profile of volunteer accomplishments, this could also help with consistency of the Authority's messaging and improved understanding of PCNPA decision making.

"Raise profile of volunteers within park, it might be nice to actually see the Chief Exec, or Chairperson at a volunteer event" ~ volunteer

"The first principle of our strategy is for a "one team approach" with staff and volunteers comfortable working alongside each other in an integrated way. The profile and value of volunteers has improved markedly and there is real progress in the integrated working model. Volunteers report feeling more involved and valued for their work". ~ Northumberland NPA



Recommendation 8

PCNPA should facilitate a range of opportunities for staff and volunteers to 'mix' and build an integrated approach:

- treating all as one 'workforce' (some paid, some unpaid);
- through communications such as highlighting different volunteer roles in each staff newsletter.

It was identified that some volunteers may have skills that are not utilised in their current roles (e.g. they may be a carer, or user of certain technology), and we suggest it may be beneficial if these skills and experience are captured for future peer-led opportunities.

"I would like to contribute - but told no activities at present. I could help with marketing as that's my past, and walking but all guided walks have long standing leaders" ~ volunteer

Development of new projects and offers can be informed by people's experience – for instance 'Wild and Wobbly' involves people with specific requirements to act in an ambassadorial role and broaden access to new and diverse audiences.

There is also scope for new roles to be introduced that support the Authority's purposes, while benefiting the individual through skills and experience. However, legal advice should be sought with regard to roles that could potentially be paid, or where there are already paid employees undertaking the role (e.g. administration). In addition, some of the suggestions from consultees link to scope outside of this review, for instance work placements, apprenticeships and internships, that could be included in a wider spectrum of 'engagement'.

Most of the Youth Rangers at the workshop we attended requested more opportunities for progression and developing career pathways. This included gaining practical experience, evidence of volunteer hours for CVs and securing 'tickets' [professional certificates], for example, for those who wished to pursue a career in countryside and woodland management. Voluntary work placements could provide time-bound opportunities for career development, and support 'growing skills of a future workforce' but this needs to be considered carefully, as those not able to commit because of financial circumstance should not be excluded. This might also involve partners in the future such as Pembrokeshire College and Careers Wales and require investment to support young people to stay in the county, if they wish.

To illustrate, a positive example given was a NPA that had been approached by a qualified planner who volunteered with their planning team for a time-bound period. The volunteer identified that they needed to gain work experience in a particular aspect of planning and gave their time in return for experience and knowledge.

Recommendation 9

PCNPA should consider the skills they need for the future, ensure they record and utilise the skills that volunteers have, and offer new opportunities in different departments.

4.2 Volunteering demographics, roles and opportunities

PCNPA already has a pool of over 200 volunteers engaged in carrying out a variety of roles. However, some staff and volunteers mentioned that people who currently volunteer are mainly retired white people, mostly men in the case of Voluntary Wardens, and often people who have moved into the county. This is typically the case in other NPAs too, and in volunteering elsewhere in Pembrokeshire.

“Most volunteers I have worked with are retirees like myself, although as a retiree under pension age I am one of the younger ones I believe!” ~ volunteer

In the NPA focus group discussion, the point was made that ‘diversity’ is relative to the population profile. So to diversify its pool of volunteers, PCNPA might look to include, for example: more young people, working age people and families, people with disabilities, those who were born and raised in the county, Welsh speakers, people from lower income households and others from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are currently ‘under-served’ by the Authority.

PCNPA has a well-established formal volunteering structure in place, offering a variety of roles and requiring volunteers to undergo an application process. These existing ‘more traditional’ volunteering roles, such as Voluntary Wardens (VWs) are appreciated by volunteers, as indicated in the following quotes:

“The old working groups were with the same group of people so the social aspect was strong and this seems to have been lost” ~ volunteer

“I enjoy being out of doors and I really like the group of people I volunteer with” ~ volunteer

We also found evidence and support for the idea of new, more flexible and accessible volunteering roles, from volunteers, staff and partner organisations. This includes both micro-volunteering opportunities and more formal roles within the Authority, such as: digital volunteers who can support archiving or heritage



interpretation; fundraising volunteers to support the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust; 'pop-up talks and tours' at Centres; reception or administration support roles and Community Ambassadors - who can 'spread the word', telling friends, family, local people about the Park and volunteering, for example.

Some existing (and new) kinds of micro-volunteering include: litter picks, beach cleaning, recording species (sometimes via apps, such as iNaturalist, and/or as part of national big counts), reporting INNS, footpath and tree wardens, heritage and site guardians.

It is evident that PCNPA has already begun to make a shift towards developing additional flexible 'micro-volunteering' opportunities, with some examples given on its website.

While these kinds of opportunities can reduce the need for formal recruitment processes and the pull on staff capacity, they require a broader definition of the term 'volunteer' that includes self-directed community, social or environmental action. Micro-volunteering enables people to give time as and when it suits them, as often or infrequently as they choose. Although some of these activities may happen at times and in ways that PCNPA staff have organised and know about, others can occur in more of an 'arms-length' way, making them difficult, if not impossible, to 'capture'.

We would however caution that it's important to strike the right balance, when broadening the volunteer base, to consider the possible impact on existing volunteers. VW roles may provide a significant opportunity for older retired males in particular to feel valued and purposeful, while helping to prevent their social isolation.



On the other hand, the remarkable retention rates that PCNPA has with its volunteers also means that opportunities for new people to get involved (in VW roles at least) are quite rare.

Most of the VLM staff we spoke with said they had little or no capacity to take on additional volunteers, which also raises the question of what might happen if, for example, a group of VWs starts to become too elderly to carry out heavy practical work, whilst the small work party they belong to has become an established and supportive social group of friends?

“Volunteers never leave, until they’re too elderly, they love it. It creates a capacity issue with taking on new volunteers...we get lots of requests from potential volunteers but don’t have space for them and can’t ask existing volunteers to move on, because they are friends with the rest of their team.” ~ staff member

Related to this is the question of how to ensure that volunteering continues to be purposeful, not only for volunteers but for PCNPA and its strategic priorities:

“Underpinning all of this is the need to fix how we allocate work/jobs for volunteers, especially the work that needs supervision. Volunteers aren’t just doing something for the sake of it, it needs to be meaningful, purposeful, lasting and authentic- on Park land preferably...” ~ staff member

Recommendation 10

PCNPA should continue to provide ‘traditional’ volunteer roles, as well as new ones, utilising external funding to increase the offer e.g. Roots to Recovery, ‘Wild & Wobbly’.

It is also important to mention Welsh language being used as part of volunteering and a reflection of local culture and heritage. We found that some volunteers use Welsh language whilst they volunteer, for instance by conversing with Welsh speaking visitors (for example those involved in leading / back marking walks) and/or having conversations with other volunteers. Our research highlighted that the opportunities for Welsh learners to hear and practice conversational Welsh in an informal setting, whether with volunteers or staff, were highly valued as the following quotes suggest:

“I’m learning Welsh. Welsh is spoken within the group at times and I find it a good way to learn, there’s no pressure and I can listen and join in in English if necessary. A useful way to pick up local words!”.

“I am learning Welsh but lack confidence in speaking the language and find it difficult to understand Welsh speakers. It would be good to be able to practise speaking and understanding the language more while volunteering.”

A suggestion was also made that Centre tea rooms could provide venues (particularly in the quieter months) for ‘coffee and chat’, and that Welsh speaking volunteers could maybe help support that, providing social opportunities and community conversation.

Recommendation 11

PCNPA should continue and expand provision of Welsh Language engagement and volunteering opportunities, such as the Welsh language walks and volunteer training. It should continue to promote bilingualism, encouraging volunteers to use, practice and/or learn pronunciation and basic greetings in Welsh, as ambassadors of the Authority.

4.2.1. Developing ‘micro-volunteering’ opportunities and new volunteer roles

In our focus group discussion with the NPAs, we heard some interesting views on their approaches to informal volunteering, some of which have already been touched upon elsewhere in this report.

The nationwide NPAs ‘Look Wild’ project and use of iNaturalist was suggested by several VDOs as the best way to capture data about recording activities that volunteers might carry out in their own time. We understand that PCNPA is part of this project and although there’s a news item on the website, we couldn’t locate a link from the volunteering pages. This may be a missed opportunity to engage new people in micro-volunteering activities and we suggest PCNPA considers how best to promote micro-volunteering to engage a wider audience. Some suggestions here include: posting them on the volunteering pages of the website (with links to any national initiatives); social media campaigns; the Volunteering Wales database (via PAVS) and working with partners to share each other’s micro-opportunities to reach wider networks (including existing volunteers). This could be a ‘quick-win’ and low-cost way of engaging more people.

South Downs NPA have a particularly well-developed micro-volunteering offer, exemplified by their website and we suggest that PCNPA refers to this as a model of good practice :

Another useful idea from South Downs is a mailing list for members of the public who engage in micro-volunteering with an invitation to *‘sign up for tips and ideas on how you can care for your National Park while on the go, either from your phone or when you’re out and about.’* They also plan to do an annual survey of mailing list members (currently over 100 people) to capture some sample case stories that may inspire others to get involved in similar ways.

We have identified the potential for micro-volunteering to become a stepping stone to more regular formalised roles for some volunteers. For instance, someone might begin with a one-off butterfly count then find out about other ‘arms-length’ recording opportunities (e.g. via the website), perhaps attend an online training module and then go on to take part in regular activities organised by PCNPA. This raises a question: at what point are volunteers giving enough time to merit being issued with uniform, ‘kit’ and other rewards?

Recommendation 12

PCNPA should further develop and promote ‘arms-reach’ flexible micro-volunteering opportunities through its website, social media channels and via partner networks, based on identified best practice.

Turning to the operational practicalities of how to involve volunteers more widely across the Authority and in a wider range of tasks: one staff member suggested that when it comes to Volunteer Wardens, they would like to see them integrated with the Warden team. They recognised that Wardens may not have the right skills or qualities needed to take on such a role and suggested it could be addressed through changes in job descriptions, as part of succession planning as some staff approach retirement, thereby recruiting for volunteer management or supervision in their replacement role.

One stakeholder identified that if some of the ‘thinking had been done’ i.e. about volunteer roles that could help support the strategic vision, and by sharing examples of that in operation elsewhere in the Authority, it could be easier to adapt to a site specific role. The example was given of the Visitor Welcome role that had been developed centrally, and then different locations had adapted the role to suit their needs. For instance, Oriel y Parc could potentially offer volunteer-led ‘pop-up’ tours of the sustainable building to highlight positive action towards climate adaptation, and other locations could reflect other priorities.

Other stakeholders suggested that volunteers could be involved in office-based tasks, such as digitising archives, social media marketing, or other administrative functions.

“Not for me - but some volunteers may prefer admin/indoor opportunities. Many people would consider the Park to be all about digging holes and mending walls/fences etc and would therefore not consider volunteering for the Park.” ~ volunteer

The impact of COVID-19, which has resulted in staff working largely from home, is of course a consideration here, along with the fact that the Authority has its



office in Llanion Park, meaning that opportunities of this nature may not suit people from other parts of the county. However, there are also opportunities to look at additional ways in which volunteers could support the visitor centres, with one visitor centre staff member suggesting that:

“...volunteers are a lifeline and that currently works well. Having an extra pair of hands for events really helps take pressure off staffing issues for us...having a larger pool of volunteers would be beneficial to us.”

In 4.1 we discussed the need for some flexibility in VDO/VLM roles to make ‘out of hours’ volunteering activities more available (beyond micro-volunteering). We suggest that the demographics of volunteers engaging in weekend activities be monitored to see whether this attracts more young people, families and those of working age. In addition, the Youth Rangers requested that their monthly weekend activities be increased to fortnightly.

Without being too prescriptive about the extent of roles that could be created, we suggest that work be done across the organisation to see where there may be strategic value in creating new volunteer roles, and finding ways to share this thinking in practice, highlighting the positive benefits for both the individual sites and the volunteers, as well as PCNPA overall such as:

- Extending the visitor welcome to a more locally focused welcome, with ambassadors in local communities of place/interest;
- Intergenerational event days where skills and knowledge can be exchanged between volunteers;
- Exploration of a ‘hub model’ where volunteers have new opportunities to meet with one another and staff, share skills and prepare for tasks;
- Centrally created ‘off the shelf’ roles that can be adapted by Managers for particular sites and activities.



“Carew is a ‘honey pot’ site and could attract larger number of volunteers to assist with facilities, pathways, shop, cafe, activities, guided walks/talks- lots of possibilities” ~ staff member

Recommendation 13

PCNPA should trial new volunteer roles, such as peer-led walk leaders, pop-up talks and tours, volunteer buddies and ambassadors (in-person and digital). These should take account of how best to add value, based on volunteers’ skills (beyond the requirements of their roles), and facilitate shared learning from the experiences, including through ‘skill-swap’ opportunities.

4.2.2 Identifying and addressing barriers to engagement

The Experiences for All project identified several groups of people who may wish to take up volunteering but who are not currently. To shift towards more inclusivity and flexibility in roles, the following key points, raised in stakeholder interviews, will also need to be considered and addressed going forward, since they were beyond the scope or resource of this current review:

Engagement and involvement of the ‘under-served’ groups by PCNPA (a ‘gap analysis’) to increase understanding of those who aren’t currently volunteering and what needs to happen for them to become involved.

Further work is also required to fully understand the nature and extent of barriers to engagement and involvement, including geographical distribution of volunteering opportunities; access and communications barriers.

- **Access and transport availability** - suggested solutions included: volunteers being provided with a PCNPA volunteer bus pass; better integrated journeys between home and bus, minibus or car sharing; and increasing awareness of solutions such as ‘flexibus’ and other community transport schemes.
- **Communications** - tailored to particular audiences e.g. easy read, total communication, young people (link to Youth Committee work). Also identifying where volunteers and staff may have skill sets to address these e.g. British Sign Language trained, Total Communication trained.
- **Welsh language requirement** - one issue raised was that of non-Welsh speaking staff being unable to communicate ‘last minute’ volunteering opportunities on the main PCNPA pages, as they were unable to create bilingual messages at short notice (and instead putting them on an historic ‘Facebook page’ to existing volunteers). This means that a number of volunteer opportunities are not reaching a wider audience, who may not volunteer yet, and a quick translation service for short messages could resolve this. ‘Helo Blod’ recommend having some standard bilingual messages on standby that can be ‘rolled out’ when the need arises.

Recommendation 14

Building on the Experiences for All project and this volunteering review, PCNPA should undertake further work to identify potential volunteers, the barriers they might face and how best to involve and include them.

4.2.3 Supported volunteering opportunities

We found evidence of the success, value and legacy of the Pathways project. While widening engagement and creating meaningful roles for volunteers with additional support needs, this also led to skills development, social inclusion and progression opportunities to more 'mainstream' volunteering roles. Several respondents referred to the success of the minibus in addressing issues of transport and access. One volunteer felt that pre-COVID-19, being able to have known pick-up points in Haverfordwest for instance, had meant that some individuals had been able to access the Park, who may not have otherwise.

Stakeholders also offered suggestions about how to engage more effectively and deliver benefits for 'vulnerable' people and those with additional support needs.

As previously mentioned, several staff members expressed concern about the level of support and staff capacity required when involving more vulnerable people in volunteering activities. While practical tasks still need completing, VLMs themselves also need adequate training (e.g. mental health awareness, Mental Health First Aid) and planned support and supervision (for 'offloading' how they've been affected) when working alongside people who may be vulnerable or 'fragile', whose life stories or situations may deeply affect staff.

We suggest that PCNPA continues to work closely with partners, through for example the COVE network, and directly with Mind, who can support and supervise groups of volunteers with additional support needs. Alongside this, it is important that Rangers and other VLMs working with these groups are properly supported and resourced to respond to sometimes challenging situations.

When it comes to developing new supported roles and opportunities, there's a strong link with identifying and making best use of volunteers' skills and interests, (as well as abilities) and taking a 'volunteer-centred' approach to finding the right role.

One example given was that of an autistic adult who loves to 'snip'. A staff member had been liaising with the Community Archaeologist about potential to clear brambles from scheduled monuments. It was thought that this individual would be in their element (especially if given a 'high-viz' jacket and feeling like they were part of the workforce). Organised in partnership with the Community Team Learning disability service, their support worker would support and supervise them (and need their expenses covered).

In addition to creating opportunities for those who are 'task-orientated', other ideas raised were:

- 'Wild and wobbly' - A pilot at Canaston Woods, providing new opportunities for volunteers to trial new walkability routes and create video content to show others with similar levels of disability about the accessibility of routes;
- Digital technology as a means of involving people with disabilities or who are less physically active but may have digital skills to offer such as digital archiving, or photographing changes/erosion for the Changing Coasts project.

A view was also expressed that opportunities could be further opened up for disabled people with robust risk assessment, and support agencies/partners also being clear about individuals' abilities (cognitive and/or physical). The point was made that disabled individuals have as much right to have adventures and/or an

accident, as able-bodied people and any required shift in thinking, or mindset, amongst existing staff and volunteers, might be fostered with appropriate training in inclusivity and diversity (see section 4.1.3).

Recommendation 15

PCNPA should build on the success and legacy of Pathways and continue to offer supported volunteering opportunities through programmes like Roots to Recovery, working with specialist support organisations to provide for those with additional support needs. New opportunities should be developed in a person-centred way, taking into account volunteers' abilities, skills and interests.

4.3 Volunteer Management, Training & Supervision

We found good relationships between VLMs and volunteers, including positive comments from volunteers about their training and the knowledge and skills they gain and develop in their roles. VLMs reflected positively on the support they get from the VDO also. Other staff also reflected on the good work being done across the Discovery team to support the wider involvement of a range of people.

11 volunteers responding to the survey commented on the encouragement, leadership skills, or helpfulness of PCNPA staff. Rangers were mentioned most frequently in response to the question 'what's working well?'



"I think all the Rangers I have worked with showed excellent leadership skills and patience. They are kind and considerate and know how to deal with folk at every level, they are good people." ~ volunteer

On the whole, PCNPA's training and skills development programme for volunteers is highly valued and online training received during the pandemic had worked well. However, it was identified that in some circumstances a practical offer would be needed to complement the online delivery.

Turning to staff capacity, most staff we heard from mentioned the need for improved volunteer management systems. Specific examples were given of existing cumbersome systems for handling tasks such as: purchase of uniform and kit, processing volunteer travel claims, and records being held on different databases and monitoring systems. A common suggestion was to centralise budgets and administration for purchase of uniform and any other 'kit' necessary for roles, as well as centralising and simplifying volunteer expense claims, to free up VLM capacity for managing and supervising volunteers. Although we haven't made a specific recommendation around this, we suggest it is looked at alongside recommendations 5 and 6, discussed in section 4.1.3.

"It is one of the few links directly with the community. It is an important part of the role, but contributes about 6-7% of my work." ~ staff member

"More time to offer volunteers. Better IT systems from our side and volunteers' side. There's so much time wasted doing things, that could be done far easier. A centralised budget for uniforms and expenses, long term this might become a bigger issue and prevent more volunteering." ~ staff member

Four of the other NPAs also mentioned staff capacity as being one of the key challenges to address, for example:

"Whilst integration has improved - it still relies on the Volunteer Development Officer (VDO) continuously pushing and advocating and in many cases directly organising this. Without this intervention, staff tend to fall into old habits and communication and involvement with volunteers drops (programmes start to collapse and volunteer complaints rise). The catch 22 is that with VDO



involvement to keep things going in the right direction, staff then rely on the VDO "safety net" and don't take overall responsibility for volunteering in their areas." ~ NPA VDO

Regarding volunteer management systems, several examples used elsewhere were suggested (Better Impact, Blackbaud, Cervis). Some of the comments about systems included:

"Updating of databases needed, not fit for purpose now e.g. cannot currently email all 200+ volunteers in one go, but somehow all databases need to talk to one another"

"At present no 'holding place' for volunteers if not matched to an opportunity immediately, enquiry form but goes where if not assigned?"

"Each VLM has to sign the expenses for their specific task/project so can end up going to 3 or 4 members of staff to authorise!"

"Better Impact (standard edition) was fundamental to allow us to increase and develop our programmes. Streamlined applications, communications, managing rotas, holding training records, recording/reporting hours, etc. All in a GDPR environment. We had to bespoke develop (fudge) an expenses process as the system doesn't have this functionality. Better Impact is not perfect and there are some annoyances, but it would have been impossible to implement our volunteering strategy without a database of this nature" ~ Northumberland VDO

4.3.1 Improving volunteer management, supervision and training

We suggest the following changes are made to further ease VLM capacity issues and improve volunteer management, supervision and training:

A. In our opinion, PCNPA needs a robust volunteer management system, to include the following functions and we recommend that a task and finish group be set up to explore this in more detail :

- Input upcoming events/activities to share on the website/other platforms, to which existing volunteers (and potential volunteers) can register directly
- Include a volunteer portal for volunteers to record their own self-led and micro-opportunity activities
- CRM function for centralising contact and other information about volunteers, including potential volunteers, who enquire and haven't been placed yet
- Flag requests for kit, travel expenses etc to central admin budget holder
- Record and report data on individual volunteers' activity
- Record and report data on volunteer groups' activity
- Record and report data on volunteer activity per event
- Record and report data on volunteer activity per centre
- Flag when a volunteer reaches given milestones, for reward/award purposes
- Dovetailing with apps where volunteers can record activity and send a copy in to PCNPA
- Dovetailing with existing performance monitoring requirements and systems

Our understanding from the five other NPAs we spoke with is that they all use Better Impact (BI), which was described by one of them as the 'industry

standard', having undertaken a market review a few years ago. However, we advise that PCNPA make their own assessment of which system will work best and the link in footnote 10 may be helpful.

The following advantages and disadvantages of Better Impact were highlighted in the NPA focus group discussion:

- Pros: BI is cheap (a few hundred pounds per annum and no up-front costs), training and support are good, other NPAs can share how they've incorporated a fix for expense claims and how they got volunteers on board with self-reporting, the system frees up staff capacity.
- Cons: Each NPA has its own data capture and performance monitoring systems, and we don't know how well this would work with PCNPA existing systems. The older cohort of volunteers are used to paper forms, such as reporting and expense claims, and we expect that some may be resistant to digital reporting.

We also suggest that PCNPA follows the example of other NPAs and considers a transitional period of paper recording, with the VDO or central administrative personnel entering volunteer data onto the system in the interim, with roll-out to volunteers being a gradual process. Another interim (or longer-term) possibility might be developing new roles for admin volunteers and/or 'digi-buddies' who could assist older volunteers in logging-in and uploading data (possibly as part of a 'skill swap' event or project).

Recommendation 16

PCNPA should invest in a central volunteer management system to ease demand on staff capacity and set up an internal working group to ensure that the system is compatible with the Authority's existing databases and meets future needs.

B. As new tiers of volunteering are developed, with micro-volunteering and new more formal roles opening up, we recommend that new training modules be developed to suit. Online training modules may be a good avenue for encouraging more regular commitment, encouraging informal volunteers towards more formal roles and opportunities.



Public facing volunteers can also help share messages around the four new strategic priorities, and awareness raising / training sessions should be provided so that volunteers feel able to share practical examples of what projects and activities the Authority is undertaking, and in turn they can encourage people to 'get involved'. New Parkwise online modules could include information on climate change impacts in Pembrokeshire, with concrete examples such as what haymaking/ sea grass planting has to do with sequestering carbon; how a walk on the beach links to the 'natural health service' etc.

Recommendation 17

PCNPA should continue with and extend its volunteer training programme, including:

- online and blended learning modules, ensuring training is widely accessible to volunteers;
- developing some new Parkwise modules linked to the four strategic priorities;
- developing specific new modules for micro-volunteering roles;
- facilitating more opportunities for 'networking' and sharing of experience between volunteers;
- improving communications to volunteers and potential volunteers about the above.

C. The purpose of the Volunteer Forum was also raised, with a senior staff member suggesting that it needed to become more representative of the breadth of volunteers. On the other hand, some volunteers expressed the view that many volunteers aren't interested in meetings and that the Volunteer Forum (VF) might be viewed as a 'talking shop'.

Another view was that feedback could be gathered from volunteers by VLMs during their activities, or via a more integrated approach that tacked VF meetings onto other events. Some felt that volunteers would value more informal, social opportunities to get together, with a cup of tea and discussion in a relaxed, social atmosphere, or perhaps with an activity element, such as a volunteers' walk.

So, we found there are different potential purposes for the VF - one to deal with practical issues for volunteers and another being more of a consultative role for PCNPA strategy and policy. We recommend that further consultative work be done with volunteers to clarify the purposes and future direction of the forum. At the same time, this piece of work could seek volunteers' views on other ways in which they can have a say on any matters that may affect their volunteering with the Authority or may be of interest to them as users of the National Park.

Recommendation 18

PCNPA should consult all existing volunteers, through a variety of methods, to review the purpose and functions of the Volunteer Forum and identify any additional effective means of giving volunteers a voice in decisions that affect them.

The following key points were also raised by stakeholders in relation to volunteer management, for ease of reference, we have placed these issues in a table alongside possible solutions for further consideration:

Issue raised	Suggested solution
How promptly and effectively PCNPA staff can respond to enquiries from potential volunteers and what happens when there is no immediate role or opportunity available to them?	A better volunteer management system, together with effective partnership working should reduce wait times. Micro-opportunities may also be helpful in this regard.
How best to identify, utilise and develop volunteers' skills , beyond those required by their roles?	One option could be that volunteers list their additional skills as part of the application form and/or a skills audit is carried out periodically e.g. once a year. Value could be added by bringing volunteers together to exchange skills and knowledge through, for example, intergenerational exchange, or 'skill swap' days. For example, a young person could share digital skills, showing an older person how to use a species-recording app while older volunteers might share their knowledge of local Park heritage, or practical skills*
How to develop clear progression routes , along which the volunteer journey might progress: from one-off involvement (e.g. in a butterfly count) to regular volunteering and eventual team leadership?	Further work could be done to identify which volunteers could 'step-up' into group leadership roles. Does this happen in a planned or opportunistic way, for example?
How best to improve communications with existing volunteers via email, newsletter, Volunteer Forum and other methods	A balance to be struck between the capacity of VLMs and different ways in which volunteers like to receive information. e.g. digital vs paper/phone for older volunteers; bilingual communications; different terminology and use of social media channels for young people; and other formats, including easy-read for those learning disabilities, or visual impairments.

*Other skill swaps could be based around Welsh language, local cultural knowledge, or whatever skill or interest a particular volunteer may have to offer. This kind of event could also include elements of volunteer reward or award ceremony, showing volunteers and the wider community how much their contributions are recognised and valued.

4.4 Working in Partnership

At all levels, working in partnership to support voluntary activity contributes to the Authority's purposes and duty, whether it be delivering for the environment and/or for local communities in Pembrokeshire.

Where PCNPA staff and volunteers had worked in partnership with other organisations, the relationships were reported to be positive and beneficial for all involved.

Examples of this included:

- Links to national initiatives and campaigns such as Heritage Watch, iNaturalist
- Working with MOD Castlemartin Range to provide access (volunteer- led guided walks) to restricted areas
- Working with Dyfed Archaeological Trust to support volunteers at archaeological digs e.g. St Patrick's Chapel, Whitesands
- Working with Pembrokeshire's Biodiversity Implementation Officer on identified sites (in and outside of Park boundaries) e.g. Plant! Pembrokeshire
- Bringing 'expertise' of Pembrokeshire Mind to broaden reach and support volunteers participating in 'Roots to Recovery' project
- Providing opportunities for young people to gain credits for Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) and John Muir Awards
- Your Park project - working with over 30 local and community-based groups e.g. disability team, Youth Service, Scouts, Pembrokeshire College to build confidence of people to get out into Park
- West Wales Walking for Wellbeing project (across Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion and Pembrokeshire)
- Visitor Welcome initiative supporting tourism in the county (Pembrokeshire County Council, Visit Pembrokeshire, PCNPA and PLANED staff and volunteers).

As a National Park Authority, and key public sector organisation in Pembrokeshire, actions taken by PCNPA can help to influence other stakeholders, when leading by example. This is particularly important when considering climate change and biodiversity loss, and the role volunteers can play to raise wider public awareness and address these.

"There is great potential for the NPA to influence other organisations (like PCC) to give greater thought to the role that volunteers can play in ways of working that provide much better outcomes for people, budgets, communities and planet - for example in laying hedges rather than flail mowing, in weeding rather than applying pesticides, in providing intergenerational opportunities to bring communities together, in adoption of local green spaces, in creating paths from natural materials that will need more regular maintenance but have a much lower cost and carbon content than concrete and tarmac." ~ staff member

PCNPA's role (as current Chair) in the Public Services Board (PSB) provides opportunities to engage with others, and demonstrates innovative practice where PCNPA are working with partner organisations to support volunteers, as well as delivering against Pembrokeshire's Health and Well-being Goals. In addition, senior management have called for the implementation of the Draft Volunteering Strategy for Pembrokeshire (to which PCNPA contributed) through action, and while challenging for PSB members who deliver statutory services in the main, proposed changes need to be demonstrated in practice.

Providing forums for sharing good practice around a particular topic was identified as one way to achieve this: an historic example in the county was given of volunteers and staff from Pembrokeshire Tourism, PCNPA and PCC who had all come together to share good practice and as a result were more aware of others' activity, their particular contribution and therefore felt part of the bigger Pembrokeshire picture.

Bringing people together can also build positive relationships in the community.

"Good to have a mix of vols - everyone 'learning, building community connections' between retired professionals, vulnerable adults, young people and so on" ~ staff member

Working with community groups in their communities also provides positive benefit for both parties:

"Volunteering can assist us in building close connections with community and support groups, we have a number of external community groups such as Newport Paths Group who do volunteering with us on regular basis or we facilitate opportunities for people who are supported by MIND etc" ~ staff member

"Volunteering is key part of engaging in communities - local people can make the links that the staff may not have" ~ staff member

Exmoor NPA is a particularly good example of partnership working, where the NPA acts as a coordinating hub for volunteering activity within the National Park: *"Through supporting local groups and other organisations on Exmoor we improve our working relationship with the local community. - Having volunteers out and about undertaking practical tasks means the Authority is seen regularly making positive changes on the ground".*

A positive example was given of PCNPA having purchased 32 acres of organic land in Trefin with an active community on the doorstep. Having already established community allotments, a staff member referred to lots more opportunities to engage with people while ensuring a biodiverse habitat is maintained and improved: for instance, volunteer surveying opportunities, growing native wildflowers, linking to the local school, DofE, Scouts, and thereby 'unlocking local resources'. The same staff member felt that PCNPA should consider purchasing more such sites, close to communities.

A note of caution was provided by one staff member, and reflects voluntary groups that rely on the commitment of individuals (and are unlikely to have paid staff):

“Working with groups tends to vary and there is often a need to ‘ride the wave’ as far as possible as the groups have their own ups and downs in terms of numbers and capacity to do activities - makes it hard to plan over the longer term and hard to establish the structure” ~ staff member

Current collaboration with other significant landowners in the National Park such as the National Trust (NT) and Wildlife Trust of South & West Wales (WTSWW), was reported positively, although it was acknowledged that this was often responsive and ‘one-off’ activity led e.g. a call for volunteers to undertake a specific on-site task. Both organisations reported similar volunteer demographics to PCNPA, and that they received more enquiries from potential volunteers than they had capacity to provide for (they referred individuals to PCNPA and each other, sometimes Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) but not to a central point). This would suggest that there continues to be a demand for environmental volunteering and an ‘untapped’ volunteer resource that could be better coordinated.

A couple of respondents referenced particular activities where working with other partners, for instance on private or other landowners land, was felt to be less beneficial to the PCNPA, or had led to volunteers being ‘poached’. However, if for instance the role is about accessing the Park, or positive habitat management, then this could be seen as more of a communication issue (understanding wider benefit to the 4 strategic priorities), than actual negative experiences of partnership working.

Others saw partnerships as imperative to PCNPA's future:

“Need to develop partnerships to bring ‘expert’ support for broadening our reach, otherwise [PCNPA] is not going to be successful e.g. Mind in Roots to Recovery will support capacity ~ staff member



Finally, the negative impact on people's mental health of the looming climate crisis and biodiversity loss has begun to be recognised more widely, and volunteering opportunities can help individuals to make a positive contribution and improve their mental health. PCNPA could provide a mechanism for individuals and pressure groups to 'channel' their efforts into a 'bigger picture' for positive change in Pembrokeshire, thereby improving health and wellbeing.

4.4.1 Improving and developing partnership working

Through discussions it became clear that there was more scope to develop volunteering opportunities by:

- seeking partnerships with new and more diverse organisations;
- supporting individuals and groups to implement practical changes (small differences) and alleviate 'Climate Anxiety' ;
- building on connections developed through other PCNPA projects to introduce and enable micro-volunteering;
- adopting innovative approaches to address staff concerns raised about additional workload, and/or moving away from 'core purposes' of the National Park.

"I think the full potential for volunteering in relation to the national park has yet to be realized across the majority of communities. Possibly more to be done to set up standalone community volunteering groups that support park purposes. Some communities of interest are now showing a greater interest in volunteering relating to the NP. I hope that volunteers are more engaged in our work than



before, with a wider range of opportunities to get involved providing options for more local people.” ~ staff member

Our NPA focus group discussion highlighted the difficulties of capturing all the micro-volunteering they enable, although the impact on the wider National Park is still positive. With this in mind, PCNPA should consider ways in which it can take a more enabling role (as opposed to leading which needs staff capacity) and partnership provides ways in which to do this. Links could also be strengthened with the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Trust supporters and donors, who may wish to participate in micro-opportunities, for example a pollinator count in a meadow funded by the Trust.

Developing stronger and more strategic collaborative working with other organisations such as the NT and WTSWW to coordinate volunteer effort should lead to wider impacts for PCNPA, beyond specific activities being completed. While it may take time to establish an integrated and planned approach, the impact should be a positive one including more efficient use of resources, and more joined up activity within the National Park, for the benefit of the Park (not just PCNPA).

Representatives from organisations such as the NT and WTSWW were also unaware of how to refer potential volunteers (if they had reached capacity) to other smaller and community groups, suggesting a role for COVE and/or PAVS to coordinate wider volunteer effort for the benefit of the Pembrokeshire environment. As a member of COVE, PCNPA can suggest ways in which this could happen.

Partnering with other organisations may provide additional resources in volunteer management, training and support, for instance PAVS already has a volunteer recognition scheme (certificates of hours) and the Youth Rangers were interested in accessing this to be able to add evidence to their CVs. Expertise held by other organisations can support volunteers in a variety of ways, from providing species identification knowledge, to support for additional needs, to accessing specific technology, all of which can be ‘harnessed’ by PCNPA for the benefit of volunteers and the National Park.

Recommendation 19

PCNPA should seek further opportunities to work in partnership with others:

- via PSB and the wider environmental sector to contribute to the ‘bigger picture’ in Pembrokeshire, support Pembrokeshire’s Wellbeing goals and deliver the Authority’s four core strategic priorities;
- linking with relevant national campaigns and initiatives, developing the ‘Pembrokeshire’ and local element (links to micro-opportunities, engagement, communication, events);
- by collaborating in a more structured way with voluntary organisations such as the National Trust and the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales who are significant landowners within the National Park, as well as with community-based groups.

4.4.2 Delivering partnership working

Collaborating with others to deliver more volunteering opportunities in Pembrokeshire's environment (not just through the National Park Authority) was referred to by volunteers, staff and potential partner organisations. A more structured/coordinated programme may be one way of achieving this. As previously referred to, PCNPA could play a greater role in enabling and facilitating volunteer action that benefits the wider National Park.

“Could connect better with Wildlife Trust/National Trust to work more collaboratively - ‘more joined up with volunteering offer’” ~ volunteer

“I think networking and working together across groups is important as we live in an area with a relatively scattered and small population. I have done this already helping out on behalf of PCNPA for the NT.” ~ volunteer

The Youth Rangers identified that a Festival of volunteering opportunities where different organisations came together would be a useful event for them to understand what else was available in the county (links to recruitment). PAVS (pre-COVID-19) has held various annual ‘fairs’ and PCNPA could ensure that it participates in these, as well as promoting such activities to its existing volunteers.

COVE partners were keen to develop more volunteer-centred opportunities with member organisations sharing training and resources, and spreading staff capacity, particularly to enable weekend opportunities in a more joined up way.

Recommendation 20

PCNPA should continue to play an active role in the COVE network and consider whether they would be prepared to be an ‘anchor’ organisation to support other smaller voluntary groups to deliver a coordinated approach to environmental volunteering for the benefit of Pembrokeshire.

A programme of ‘Volunteer Action Days’ such as a call to plant trees on a certain day, or to remove invasive species could be coordinated between organisations (for the benefit of the Park as a whole) as in an example given by the Norfolk Broads NPA (they use Eventbrite as the mechanism for people to sign up). This would require volunteer management, and particularly if held at the weekend (link to section 4.2), would need capacity to be found, but ‘event volunteers/supervisors’ could be from several organisations, of which the Authority could be one.

Exmoor NPA also gave the example of ‘Big Adventure Days’ particularly targeting families where, linked to education and learning, engagement through looking for patterns in nature, taking photographs for example, leads families into some micro-opportunities and volunteering within the Park (not just for the Authority).

Groups should also continue to be engaged and supported through projects like ‘Your Park’ and staff should continue to ensure that volunteer roles are part of any new initiatives such as those within West Wales Walking for Wellbeing. Learning and good practice from these projects, as well as others such as Pathways, should inform any future activity, particularly when working with partner organisations.

Recommendation 21

PCNPA should ensure that when working with partners, there is a clear offer of the PCNPA contribution and seek further engagement with organisations that, with their expertise, can support volunteers to participate in National Park tasks e.g. Plantlife, Mind, Dementia Support, Hywel Dda's Community Team Learning Disability Service.

The Review also explored interest in volunteer effort being more joined up across the Park. 22 out of 26 volunteers who answered the survey question showed clear interest in the idea of a shared pool of volunteers between different environmental organisations and community groups:

"good idea especially in a local area working on a particular local environmental issue eg balsam bashing, beach cleans"- volunteer

One individual however raised concerns, and suggested an alternative:

"Not interested personally. Too much potential conflict with the needs, and ways of using volunteers, being different in individual organisations. My own view is that PCNP should concentrate on training/developing of it's own volunteer resource, but on request loan that resource to other groups as a PCNP contribution" ~ volunteer

Clearly the mechanism by which 'pooling' could happen (and be manageable) needs to be explored further. Development of the recent Volunteering Strategy for Pembrokeshire had explored a 'Volunteer passport' option to enable volunteers to 'move between organisations.

"We have the documents from the 'passport' research completed in March 2021, this was done with members of COVE (and others), this has not yet been formatted into a report for circulation. We always recommend the sharing of resources where possible to avoid duplication but there needs to be a number of protocols in place for the sharing of volunteers and the volunteer recruitment processes" ~ COVE member

Recommendation 22

PCNPA should continue to work with Pembrokeshire Association of Voluntary Services (PAVS) to broaden its volunteer offer, make use of volunteer recognition schemes, promote opportunities to local communities and contribute to the development of a volunteer passport.



5 Delivering Volunteering Fit for the Future

This report provides guidance and recommendations for PCNPA to update its Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan and develop volunteering that supports the Authority's strategic priorities for the future.

It is evident that PCNPA has strengths in its volunteering management and delivery that can be built upon to develop volunteering that benefits volunteers and communities, as well as the Authority.

The table of recommendations at the beginning of this document (pp 5-9) provides a summary of practical actions for the Authority to consider and implement.

In particular, we wish to highlight the strategic importance of recognising the value and contribution that volunteering makes to the Authority's delivery of its purposes and public duties (including strategic priorities and wellbeing objectives). Simply put, the volunteer workforce adds significant capacity to what can be achieved by paid staff, but this is not yet widely understood or communicated. We hope that work will be done to measure and demonstrate the value and contribution of this voluntary effort to members, staff, volunteers, local communities, and visitors alike.

In conclusion, we hope that PCNPA will take this opportunity to make some relatively simple, swift and affordable changes to further support volunteering, at corporate, departmental and operational levels, which will serve both the Authority and local communities well over the coming years.



Annex 1 Sample survey questionnaire

Volunteer Policy



Parc Cenedlaethol
Arfordir Penfro
Pembrokeshire Coast
National Park

External and Internal Policy

Review

Version	Active Policy	Document Owner	Review Date Trigger

Target Audience

All managers and volunteer line managers or partners of the Authority who engage with volunteers.

Consultations

Group	Date
Line Managers	06 September 2021
Volunteer Forum	06 September 2021
Leadership Team	19 October 2021

Approvals

This document requires the following approvals.

Approved by	Name	Date	Signature
National Park Authority			

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1. Introduction

People have a right to participate in the life of their communities through volunteering and can contribute in many ways and the National Park Authority has a duty to support the wellbeing of these local communities.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority has benefitted greatly from a committed group of volunteers for more than 50 years. During that time the Authority has sought to develop work in this area, following good practice and encompassing ways of working with volunteers that aim to provide a safe and positive experience for all those involved. As volunteer activity continues to evolve and diversify, this policy aims to provide consistency in our approach to volunteering.

We will strive to organise volunteering efficiently and sensitively so that the valuable gift of the volunteer's time is best used to the mutual advantage of all concerned. The involvement of volunteers should complement and supplement the work of paid staff, and should not be used to displace paid staff or undercut their pay and conditions of service. The added value of volunteers will be highlighted in grant applications but their involvement will not be used to reduce contract costs.

We recognise that there are costs associated with volunteer involvement and will seek to ensure adequate financial and staffing resources are available for the development and support of volunteering

The policy should be read in conjunction with the Volunteer Handbook, which is the volunteer's guide to volunteering with Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority.

1.1 Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority meets its legal responsibility and duty of care in its volunteering activities
- Provide direction and support to volunteer line managers
- Ensure consistency in the management of volunteers and voluntary activities across the work of the National Park Authority
- Establish clear principles for the involvement of volunteers and for good practice to be enshrined in the delivery of this work
- Confirm Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's commitment to involving volunteers

1.2 Vision for Volunteering

The National Park benefits from a positive, involved and enthusiastic volunteer service that can support the National Park Authority and our partners in caring for our heritage, landscape and biodiversity and which engages local people and communities.

1.3 Strategic Objectives

The following objectives are at the heart of our work with volunteers.

- Objective 1:** To offer volunteering opportunities to a wide cross-section of local people, including those most likely to derive benefits from this activity.
- Objective 2:** To be able to offer more volunteering opportunities across a wider range of National Park work.
- Objective 3:** To develop, support and work with 'like-minded' voluntary and community sector organisations across the National Park, strengthening partnerships to enhance the role of volunteers.
- Objective 4:** To develop an appropriate infrastructure for volunteer management that reflects good practice and maximises the value of our work in this area.
- Objective 5:** To develop and maintain a volunteer centred approach, whereby the needs of volunteers are identified and met, and volunteers are encouraged to contribute to communications and engage with the National Park Authority.
- Objective 6:** To ensure that volunteer work supports the delivery of the National Park Management Plan.

1.4 Scope

This policy covers the main policy areas relevant to engaging and managing volunteers. It should also be applied to partnership projects where volunteers are engaged. It does not cover work experience, student placements or internships.

2. Organisation and Structure

2.1 Definitions

Volunteers

A volunteer is someone who gives their time freely to undertake voluntary activity for or on behalf of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority. The activity is carried out by choice and is unpaid. A volunteer can be a person registered as a volunteer with the National Park Authority or a related project or who is undertaking work voluntarily as part of an agreement between the Authority and a third party organisation. Elements of this policy will also be applicable to volunteers from third party organisations or in informal volunteering situations.

Volunteer Line Manager

This is a member of staff who has responsibility for defining a task and managing the volunteers who carry out that task.

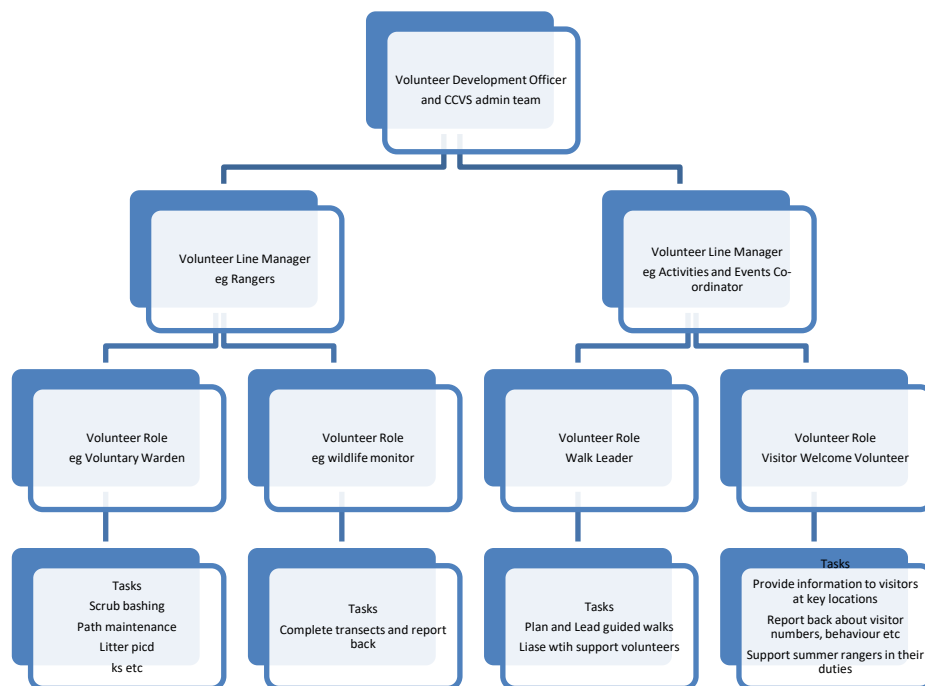
Volunteer Activities

These are defined in the task description and managed and co-ordinated by the volunteer line manager.

2.2 Structure

Volunteering takes place across the Authority, but the central support is provided by the Volunteer Development Officer, within the Discovery Team, and the CCVS (Countryside, Community and Visitor Services) administration team.

Volunteer line managers have ownership of volunteer roles. Within each role a number of activities or tasks can be carried out. Volunteers may have more than one role, and therefore more than one line manager. Volunteer line managers may also have ownership of multiple roles as the diagram below illustrates.



2.3 Roles and Responsibilities

All staff working with volunteers have the responsibility to read, understand and comply with this policy, in addition to the specific roles and responsibilities listed below.

Discovery Team Leader	
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To manage and provide strategic guidance to all volunteering activity
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To have oversight of the Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan and responsibility for ensuring relevant policy and identified good practice is followed To support work aimed at improving the 'volunteering experience' for all involved To oversee monitoring of volunteers
Volunteer Development Officer	
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To support and develop volunteering across the National Park Authority
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deliver the strategy and action plan Facilitate a consistent and co-ordinated approach to volunteering Maintain and disseminate up-to-date information relating to legal requirements and good practice relevant to volunteering Co-ordinate recruitment, induction, management and training of volunteers Communicate matters relevant to all volunteers Approve all task descriptions
CCVS Admin Team	
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide central administration for the Volunteer Development Officer, Volunteer Line Managers and Volunteers
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and update relevant records associated with volunteers and volunteer activities Provide administrative support in terms of answering volunteering queries, processing expenses claims, assisting in communications etc Support volunteer recruitment, induction and training Manage the issue of documents and uniform

Volunteer Line Managers	
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To co-ordinate volunteer activities and to manage their group of volunteers so they can fulfil their role safely and effectively
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage and develop volunteering activities in line with PCNPA policies and procedures Co-ordinate and facilitate regular volunteering activity Supervise activities and participation with a level proportionate to the type of activity, risks involved and experience and competence of the volunteers Ensure that duty of care is met in terms of health and safety and welfare of volunteers, both internally and with external groups Identify and implement specific training needs Update and create new task descriptions when necessary Communicate clearly and effectively with volunteers Ensure good practice is adhered to in terms of managing volunteers Ensure volunteer activity is recorded and reported to admin support Be familiar with the content of the volunteer handbook
Volunteer Forum	
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide National Park Authority volunteers with a voice, recognising that they are important stakeholders in the National Park and the work of the Authority.
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend quarterly meetings Represent the views of volunteers and enhance communication between volunteers, staff and Members of the National Park Authority Provide a 'volunteer perspective' with respect to a range of National Park issues, policies and developments.
Volunteers	
Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To carry out voluntary activities in support of the aims of the National Park Authority
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake all required training Comply with all policies and procedures, including health and safety, equal opportunities, reporting of near misses Act as an ambassador and protect the reputation of the National Park Authority Be reliable Inform us of any relevant changes Talk to your volunteer line manager if a problem arises

2.4 Supporting Documentation

The following documents relate to volunteering and are connected to this policy:

Volunteer Handbook

This is a reference document for volunteers and sets out:

- Information about the National Park Authority
- The volunteer charter – expectations for volunteers and the Authority
- Information relating to the support and management of volunteers
- Relevant policies
- Legal details
- Complaints procedures

Task Descriptions

Every regular volunteer should have a task description. The task description should include:

- Purpose of the role
- Duties / activities
- Timescale
- Supervision
- Personal qualities
- Training
- Benefits

Information for line managers

This document sets out in more detail the procedures in place for recruitment, induction, and management of volunteers, along with top tips for managing volunteers.

3. Volunteer Management

3.1 Recruitment

Who can volunteer?

In order to achieve our aims for volunteering, we strive to make our opportunities as accessible as practically possible to as wide an audience as possible.

3.1.1 Young people

The lower age limit for registered volunteering is 14. Young people between the ages of 14 and 17 years of age will need parental permission and in some instances will need to be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Young people under the age of 14 cannot be registered volunteers, but can participate in family volunteering activities with a guardian present.

All volunteer roles, other than youth specific roles, will have a minimum age of 18 by default.

New youth specific roles can be created for groups of young people, but not for an individual.

All young people aged 14–17 should have a capability statement based on an interview with the volunteer line manager and/or information included in the consent form. All activities will be risk assessed taking account of the ability and age of the participants.

Employment law generally does not apply to volunteers, however in the case of young volunteers we will adhere to the following regulations:

Young people can only volunteer between 7am and 7pm

They must have a 30 minute break after 4.5 hours

3.1.2 Selection process

Recruitment will be based on ability to undertake the role, and according to principles of equal opportunity, objectivity and fairness. All volunteer applicants will be treated consistently, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic origin, marital status, age, disability, religion and beliefs. Where roles are oversubscribed the potential benefits to the volunteer will be taken in to consideration.

Recruitment will involve an informal interview / conversation with the Volunteer Development Officer and/or the relevant volunteer line manager, as well as completion of a registration form. Where appropriate the volunteer may also undertake a short trial period to assess whether they are suited to the role and would like to commit to it.

References will be taken up for volunteer roles which require volunteering alongside young people or vulnerable adults, or volunteer roles with a degree of responsibility for fellow volunteers. For roles which involve sustained and direct contact with young people or adults at risk, volunteers will be required to have a full DBS disclosure check which will be arranged by PCNPA.

Many of our volunteers approach the Authority directly to enquire about volunteering opportunities and where this occurs, we aim to match their skill set and interests to available opportunities at any given time or place them on a waiting list. Where there is a need to recruit volunteers for a specific role or project, this will be advertised bilingually on our website, on the Volunteering Wales website and using other methods relevant to the volunteer role or project.

Where there are no suitable roles for a prospective volunteer, they can elect to have their details held on a waiting list and/or be referred to PAVS and the Volunteering Wales website for other opportunities.

A volunteer must not be line managed by a parent, guardian or other relative, in order to ensure that safe working practices can be followed at all times.

3.2 Induction and Training

Once volunteers are registered they will have an induction. Role specific training must take place before the volunteer commences their voluntary tasks.

Role specific training (health and safety, risk assessments, procedures)

- Volunteer handbook and welcome letter (policies relevant to volunteer)
- Parkwise training (introduction to volunteering with PCNPA, special qualities of PCNP)

All volunteers will receive the training they need to fulfil their roles safely and competently. Compulsory training and optional training are identified on the role description.

Training can include:

- Induction training – initial orientation to volunteering with PCNPA and the role
- Accredited training – recognised qualifications, such as first aid, MIDAS, brushcutter
- General training – skills and knowledge training relating to the role and personal development of the volunteer
- On the job training – A process of continual development related to the role. It can be linked to competencies.
- Refresher training

Responsibilities for role specific training sit with the relevant volunteer line manager.

Training will be recorded by a member of the CCVS admin team on the individual volunteer record.

3.3 Supervision

All volunteer tasks are managed by a volunteer line manager. The ultimate responsibility for the organisation of and carrying out the task sits with the volunteer line manager. This will include such things as:

- Organising and planning the job to be done, including arranging necessary permissions, access and transport arrangements, materials or equipment. Arranging tools and PPE
- Having an appropriate risk assessment in place, communicating hazards and control measures and ensuring they are followed
- Ensuring competencies of volunteers are suitable for the task
- Monitoring performance where appropriate
- Recording and reporting near misses, accidents, volunteer participation

3.4 Dealing with problems

The Authority aims to treat all volunteers fairly, objectively and consistently. We seek to ensure that volunteers' views are heard, noted and acted upon promptly. We will attempt to deal with any problems informally and at the earliest opportunity.

- Where informal resolution is not possible The Volunteer Development Officer will meet with the volunteer or line manager to establish the facts and agree a way forward. Other members of staff can be involved if appropriate
- If the matter is not resolved at this stage it can be referred to a more senior member of staff. A meeting will be arranged, notes taken and any decisions will be communicated in writing to all parties
- If a volunteer has to leave as a result of these proceedings, we will let them know as soon as possible, during a face to face meeting if practical, and followed up in writing
- Complaints and outcomes will be recorded on individual records

See the handbook for the complete volunteer charter and examples of serious breach of the Volunteers' Charter.

3.5 Contact and Support

All volunteers will be provided with the contact details of a Volunteer Line Manager and the Volunteer Development Officer.

We will maintain regular contact with all volunteers, both centrally and as required for each role.

Contact from the Volunteer Development Officer or CCVS admin team will include regular updates and biannual newsletters. Volunteer Line Managers will contact their group of volunteers with information specific to that group, such as dates of training sessions, volunteer sessions. There will also be opportunities for informal annual reviews. Some volunteers will also carry out mentor roles and will be able to support fellow volunteers in a technical and / or emotional capacity.

3.6 Equality and Diversity

The Authority will apply the Strategic Equality Plan and Dignity at Work standards in our volunteering activities. This includes a commitment to tackle discrimination and promote equality and diversity and an aim to be an inclusive organisation, where diversity is respected, valued and promoted. In doing so, the Authority will not tolerate processes, attitudes and behaviour that amount to discrimination, harassment, victimisation and bullying through prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping. This message should be communicated to volunteers during the induction process and reinforced by the most appropriate method.

The Authority will regularly evaluate and monitor our progress in respect of promoting diversity.

To accomplish this, all volunteers should be requested to complete an Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form. This form should remain anonymous and the data recorded by the Volunteer Support Officer.

4. Health and Safety

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority fully supports the aims of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, and all other relevant health and safety law. As a minimum standard, the Authority will achieve full compliance with all appropriate legislation.

More than this, the Authority is committed to achieve on-going, continuous improvement in its health and safety performance and the elimination, or reduction, of risk, so far as is reasonably practicable.

4.1 Responsibilities

The National Park Authority has the following responsibilities to volunteers:

- Production and maintenance of suitable risk assessments for all volunteer activities. For activities involving young people or vulnerable adults separate or adapted risk assessments will need to be produced.
- Provide adequate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)
- Deliver Health and Safety training relevant to the volunteer role and a briefing relevant for specific tasks
- Ensure there is a procedure in place for dealing with incidents and emergencies and communicate this to volunteers
- Record and report all accidents and near misses, including safety related incidents such as abuse, aggression, violence

The above responsibilities are delegated to Volunteer line managers and Team Leaders.

Volunteers have the following responsibilities to the Authority:

- Comply with all safety measures and procedures
- Record and report all accidents or near misses to the line manager

4.2 Risk Assessments

There must be a current risk assessment for all volunteer roles, activities and tasks. They need to be centrally maintained and applied consistently across the authority. It is the responsibility of Volunteer line managers to ensure risk assessments are in place and are communicated and delivered in the most appropriate way. For example, a health and safety tool talk prior to a task being undertaken, or a written risk assessment with updates to be provided to individual volunteers, who then undertake dynamic risk assessments relating to specific tasks at specific times.

4.3 Safeguarding

The Authority will treat volunteers in the same way that it treats employees with regard to safeguarding. Volunteers whose role will bring them into regular contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults will be subject to similar checks to those put in place for recruitment of staff. This will include an interview, taking up references and such background checks as are appropriate to the role.

The majority of volunteers do not work alone with children, young people or vulnerable adults and so DBS checks will not be appropriate.

All volunteers should be recruited and managed in a way that takes account of safeguarding risks. Managers should familiarise themselves with the National Park Authority's Safeguarding Policy and Statement in order to ensure compliance and adherence to good practice.

4.4 Lone working

If a volunteer is carrying out a task alone in a remote or vulnerable location, it is the responsibility of the volunteer line manager to ensure that a lone working procedure is in place.

4.5 Driving

Volunteers may drive a minibus as part of their volunteer role provided they have a D1 category on their driving licence and have completed and passed the MiDAS training. The driving licence must be checked annually and the check and training recorded against the individual volunteer record. Volunteers may drive Authority pool cars, subject to annual driving licence checks and the Fleet Management Policy and Procedure.

4.6 Medical Needs

Volunteers must disclose any relevant medical needs on their registration form and line managers must be made aware.

5. Volunteer Administration

5.1 Data Protection

All data that we process will be managed in line with the Authority's GDPR compliance policy. Volunteer details will be held on the Authority's contact database (ThankQ). Details are only accessible to designated staff members. We will only use the information we hold in order to deliver, operate and manage the volunteer activity of the National Park Authority. A volunteer can request to see the data we hold about them at any time and will receive an information leaflet entitled 'Keeping Your Information Safe' to explain how and why data is collected and stored.

Data will only be held for as long as it is needed. Volunteer line managers will periodically check with those who have ceased regular volunteering to confirm whether they wish to remain on the database. Where volunteers or volunteer line managers hold personal data for the safe delivery of an event, this must be destroyed once the event is over.

5.2 Insurance

Volunteers have the protection of the Authority's public liability insurance, both if they are the victim of injury and if they cause injury to others. Personal property can only be covered by National Park Authority insurance if the damage or loss occurs directly as a consequence of taking part in a volunteering activity. It is the responsibility of the volunteer line manager to ensure the task they are undertaking is covered by the insurance policy, and to clarify insurance cover when working with third parties.

5.3 Expenses

Volunteers should not be out of pocket as a result of their volunteering.

Volunteers can claim back all reasonable expenses incurred when volunteering for the Authority such as travel expenses, parking fees, tolls etc.

Where possible volunteers are encouraged to volunteer locally to reduce our impact on the environment, and when travel is necessary, car sharing is encouraged.

Volunteers should be actively encouraged to claim expenses as this enables us to build up a more accurate picture of costs associated with different volunteering activities and to ensure accurate budget allocations.

Expense claims must be made on the official claim form and submitted together with any receipts. Claims must be certified by the volunteer line manager, and authorised accordingly.

5.4 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and uniform

The need for PPE and uniform will be determined by the volunteer role, and will be recorded as part of the volunteer role description. It is the line manager's responsibility to supply the relevant PPE and uniform to the volunteer and to cover this from their budget. For trial roles or start up roles there is a central budget to cover initial costs for volunteers.

If uniform is essential to the volunteer role, such as walk leader, or front of house, it will be issued prior to the role starting. If not, it will be issued at the line managers' discretion.

Reference		
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Version History		
Version	Effective Date	Summary of Changes