

# National Park Authority

07 February 2024

## Present (In Person)

Councillor D Clements (Chair)

Councillor SL Hancock MBE, Dr M Havard, Mrs S Hoss, Councillor R Jordan, Councillor P Morgan, Dr RM Plummer, Councillor B Price, Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall, Councillor M Wiggins and Councillor A Wilcox.

## Present (Remotely)

Dr R Heath-Davies, Mr GA Jones and Councillor M James.

## Also in attendance:

Kate Attrill (Development Management Manager), Catrin Evans (Head of Finance), Georgia Jones (Democratic Services Officer), Tegryn Jones (Chief Executive), Michael Kent (Monitoring Officer), Caroline Llewellyn (Democratic Services Manager) and Sara Morris (Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement).

[Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock and Remotely 10.00am – 12:03pm]

### 1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S Alderman, Councillor R Owens and Councillor C Williams BEM.

### 2. **Disclosures of Interest**

Dr R Plummer made a general declaration as a Board Member of Natural Resources Wales and a Trustee of Plantlife however she remained in the meeting and played a full part in the discussions.

### 3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20 December 2023 were presented for confirmation and signature.

On the proposal of Councillor D Clements, seconded by Councillor S Hancock, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 20 December 2023 be confirmed and signed.

### 4. **Action Log and Matters Arising**

#### a) Review the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) (ID: 888)

It was explained that a draft AGS would be presented to a future National Park Authority meeting for Members discussion and approval.



b) The Pay and Grading Review (ID: 914)

The Chief Executive confirmed that the review remained on schedule and would be concluded before the end of the financial year.

c) Cyber Security Training – Completion Rate (ID: 926)

It was confirmed that approximately 5 Members had completed this training. The importance of the training was reiterated.

d) Welsh Government issued Cyber Security Training (ID: 947)

It was reported that the Authority's IT department had confirmed that if Members had certificates to show they had completed Cyber Security training with another organisation in the last 12 months they would not be required to undertake the Authority's training. It was added that in future, Members would be required to complete bite-sized, refresher training on Cyber Security.

e) Welsh Language Strategy Action Plan (ID: 948)

It was confirmed that following a meeting with the Performance and Compliance Officer, an action plan had been drafted and circulated to relevant Officers for their comments. It was added that once comments had been received from Officers, the action plan would then be circulated to Members of the Welsh Language Working Group.

**Noted.**

## **5. Chair's Announcements**

The Chair reported that she had attended the following events:

- A Welsh Government led meeting with the Board Chairs of Public Sector Organisation and Authorities, related to Strategic Governance.
- The Farmers' Union of Wales Breakfast that was in aid of the Air Ambulance.
- A Corporate Joint Committee (CJC) meeting where they discussed the budget.
- The River Cleddau Project meeting that was facilitated to provide a coordinated and strategic approach to improve the Cleddau.
- A meeting with the new Chair of the Friends of the PCNP, Clare Dowe, to discuss matters such as priorities and the Management Plan.

The Deputy Chair took the opportunity to express her thanks to Mrs S Hoss for the inspirational talk that she gave as part of recent Welsh Government training for Members.

It was suggested by the Chief Executive that information related to the various CJC committees and Membership be collated and circulated.



**Noted.**

## **6. Reports of meetings of various Authority Committees**

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

- (i) Development Management Committees held on 08/01/2024 and 13/01/2023;
- (ii) Operational Review Committee held on 06/12/2023;
- (iii) Member Support & Development Committee held on 06/12/2023;
- (iv) Volunteer Forum held on 22/11/2023;

Members requested that their appreciation and gratitude for volunteers be passed on to the Volunteer Forum. Following a discussion, the Chief Executive confirmed that he would discuss the matter of volunteer events with the Volunteering Development Officer to ensure that Members consistently receive invitations to attend.

- (v) Human Resources Committee held on 04/10/2023;
- (vi) Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee held on 08/11/2023;

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

[Mr GA Jones joined the meeting before consideration of Report 01/24, the Draft Budget Planning 2024/25]

## **7. Draft Budget Planning 2024/25**

The report set out the draft Revenue and Capital budgets for 2024/25 and forecast 2025/26 to 2027/28, the draft 2024/25 Levy on Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC), the prudential indicators for the Capital Programme and an Investment Strategy, Reserves & Treasury Management Policy Statements for 2024/25.

### Draft Revenue & Capital Budgets 2024/25 and Forecasts 2025/26 to 2027/28

With regards to the budgets for 2024/25, the report set out the Authority's budget strategy and the key assumptions on which this had been based, and as previously discussed by Members in the Budget Workshop.

It was reported that the operating budget deficit for 2024/25 would be £509k and the budget would be balanced by utilising specific earmark reserves. The report detailed that it was expected that the deficit would be managed in 2024/25 by continuing with efficiency savings together with an income generation strategy.



The report stated that the Welsh Government published its draft budget 2024/25 in December 2023 which confirmed that the National Park Grant (N.P.G) would remain at the 2023/24 level. It was explained that the final budget would be published in March 2024.

The Chief Executive explained that addressing the deficit was a priority for the Authority and that the Management Team had been tasked to identify ways in which the Authority could manage a 25% budget cut over the next two years with a combination of income generation and saving costs. The Head of Finance stated that she was in the process of assessing the overall costs of the Authority to identify areas where savings could be made.

A discussion ensued regarding Members' ongoing input into the budget, and it was suggested that a series of Budget Workshops be scheduled prior to the approval of the following years budget to allow the opportunity for discussion. The Chief Executive explained that once the process was established, Members would be updated accordingly.

A Member requested confirmation of the Authority's investment properties and their return on investment. In response, the Chief Executive confirmed that the Authority owned less than 2% of land within the National Park however, the Authority's Estates Officer had been proactive to maximise the outcomes of the estate. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Internal Auditors were in the process of auditing the Authority's Estate Management and it was suggested that due to the confidential nature of the matter, a report be presented to the Income Generation Group for further consideration and discussion.

It was noted that Timber sales had seen a decline over the year and the viability of this activity was questioned. In response, the Chief Executive confirmed that Cilrhedyn had proved to be a challenge for the Authority however it served as a depot for staff and supported internal work by providing high quality materials such as furniture for the Coast Path. He explained that although the Authority had attempted to sell Cilrhedyn in the past, the offers received had not have been sufficient to purchase a suitable replacement depot.

It was reported that £150,000 was allocated for Decarbonisation/Net Zero in the draft budget and a Member requested further details of this investment and the predicted outcomes. It was confirmed that the investment was in relation to Solar Car Park Canopies for Llanion and OYP that had been suggested by the Wales Energy Service who had conducted a study of the electricity and heat used across the Authority's estate. It was predicted that these would have a significantly positive



impact on the Authority's electricity bills which had seen a dramatic increase in the last year. It was confirmed that Officers were in the design stage of the process however it was hoped that the Authority would be able to carry out the works in the next financial year.

A Member suggested that a report be presented to a future National Park Authority meeting to outline the Authority's plan on how it would address the deficit with individual targets for each area. This was noted by the Chief Executive.

On the proposal of Dr M Havard, seconded by Councillor M James, it was **RESOLVED** that the Draft Budget 2024/25 be approved, subject to noting that the National Park grant/Levy was yet to be confirmed, and that the financial forecasts for 2025/26 to 2027/28 be noted.

#### Levy on Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC)

The report highlighted that Section 71 of the Environment Act 1995, subsection 3, determined the way in which the levy that was to be raised on PCC should be issued. The report featured a full breakdown of the levy and Members were advised that PCC must be notified of the official levy requirement by 15 February 2024.

On the proposal of Councillor D Clements, seconded by Dr R Plummer, it was **RESOLVED** that Members authorise a levy of £1,083,329 (or other appropriate amount as determined on receipt of confirmation of the approved net funding from the WG) from Pembrokeshire County Council for the year 2024/25.

#### Prudential Code Indicators and Investment Strategy 2024/25

It was reported that according to The Local Authorities (Capital Finance & Accounting) (Wales) Regulations 2003, the Authority was required to have regard to the CIPFA Prudential Code in setting annual budgets. Members were asked to consider the advice of the Chief Financial Officer in determining an affordable, prudent and sustainable capital investment programme, as set out in the report.

On the proposal of Dr R Plummer, seconded by Dr M Havard, it was **RESOLVED** that Members:

- i) adopt the Prudential Indicators as presented,
- ii) approve the Financial Reserves and the Investment Strategy & Treasury Management Policies for 2024/25.

*[The meeting was adjourned from 11:25am to 11:30am]*



## 8. Discretionary Pre-application Charging

The Chair welcomed the Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement who presented a report that sought Members endorsement of the introduction of a new discretionary pre-application service, in addition to the existing statutory pre-application service. In addition, the report sought Members endorsement of the introduction of planning performance agreements that would support the planning service in responding to more complex applications. Members were informed that the proposal mirrored the same approach that many Planning Authorities had already adopted, and the proposed charges had been based on the model used by Pembrokeshire County Council in order to provide consistency across Pembrokeshire.

A Member suggested that the related Guidance Notes could be more user friendly, by including a brief summary and table of contents at the beginning of the document. The Officer responded that a brief summary for the document would be featured on the website along with hyperlinks that would take an individual directly to the sections that they required. A discussion ensued regarding the importance of marketing the scheme appropriately to ensure success.

It was highlighted that in the past, the Authority had offered a complimentary 'Planning Surgery' service, and clarification was requested on the difference between the old service and the one proposed. The Officer clarified that although the 'Planning Surgery' was popular, Officers found it very difficult to understand the sites in question and to offer substantive advice as a result of the short time spent with applicants and the inability to conduct site visits. It was added that these factors had, on occasion, resulted in miscommunication that then led to enforcement. It was confirmed that the Authority was also not in a position to offer this service free of charge due to resource constraints. The Officer explained that the new service would allow Officers the opportunity to fully understand the sites in order to provide accurate advice and information.

The Chair stated that Officers would need to ensure that individuals who did not opt to use the premium service would not be treated less favourably, and it was agreed that this would be monitored. A Member suggested that information related to the uptake of the service be reported back to Members in future and this was noted by Officers.

On the proposal of Councillor R Jordan, seconded by Mrs J James, it was **RESOLVED** that;

- i) the introduction of a discretionary pre-application service from the 1st April 2024 based on the Guidance Note in Annex A be supported.



- ii) the introduction of Planning Performance Agreements from the 1st April 2024 in appropriate circumstances based on the Guidance Note in Annex A be supported.
- iii) the National Park Authority's Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement be given delegated authority to suspend the discretionary pre-application service and Planning Performance Agreements if resources within the Department are unable to deliver the service – that this decision be undertaken in consultation with the Chair of the Development Management Committee.
- iii) the National Park Authority's Chief Executive and Director of Placemaking, Decarbonisation and Engagement be given delegated authority to agree a revised set of charges on an annual basis to apply from 1st April each year. This decision to be undertaken in consultation with the Chair of the Authority.

## 9. Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) Committee Terms of Reference

The Chair welcomed the Chief Executive who presented a report that outlined a proposed change to the SDF Committee's name and terms of reference. The paper provided background information about the Committee and the reasons for the proposed change.

On the proposal of Councillor S Hancock, seconded by Councillor P Morgan, it was **RESOLVED** that the revised Terms of Reference for the SDF Committee along with changing the name of the Committee to 'The Grants Committee' be agreed and adopted.

