

Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee

13 November 2024

Present

Councillor M James (Deputy Chair in the Chair as Dr Heath-Davies was unwell and might have had to leave the meeting)

Councillor D Clements, Dr R Heath Davies, Dr M Havard, Dr R Plummer (substitute for Mrs J James), Councillor B Price, Councillor S Skyrme-Blackhall and Mrs V Thomas

Officers in attendance

Chief Executive, Head of Finance and Fundraising, Performance and Compliance Officer, Head of People Services, Director of Place and Engagement, Director of Nature and Tourism, Head of Decarbonisation and Democratic Services Manager.

(Virtual Meeting: 10.00am -11.45pm; 12.00pm – 1.10pm)

1. **Apologies**

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs J James and Councillor A Tinley.

2. **Disclosures**

A general declaration of interest was received from Dr R Plummer.

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 31 July 2024 were presented for confirmation and authentication.

On the proposal of Dr Havard, seconded by Councillor Clements, it was **resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2024 be confirmed and authenticated.

[As the Chair had lost his connection, the Chair of the Authority, Councillor Clements, took the Chair during the following item.]

4. **Matters Arising/Action Log**

The updates provided in the Action Log were noted. It was requested that follow up emails be sent to those Members who had not signed the ICT User Policy (ID 1009). The Chief Executive reported that work on sub-risk registers (ID 995) had commenced with Management Team due to undertake a Deep Dive of Objective 5, “The reputation of the Authority is protected”, during December. It was noted that the Coast Path Management Strategy (ID 1007) had been circulated and that work to



update the document had commenced. It was agreed that a Workshop on the new Strategy take place in the spring prior to a report to the National Park Authority seeking its agreement.

Noted.

5. Health and Safety Group

The report of the Health and Safety Group held on 23 July 2024 was received. One Member commented that due to the subject matter, she felt the minutes should be more robust in terms of attendees and actions to be taken. This was noted by the Chief Executive. The importance of completion of mandatory training was also noted.

Noted.

6. Action Log for External Performance Audit and Internal Audit (Ending 30 September 2024)

Members were reminded that following a request from the Committee, an Action Log for External Performance Audit and Internal Audit had been created to assist with monitoring of actions agreed from Audit reviews. The report provided an update on each of the actions, and had been amended since the last meeting in response to comments.

It was noted that a Coast Path working group had been set up to progress actions arising from the Internal Audit review of the Coast Path. This had identified that many of the actions were interrelated and had requested that the due date for all of the actions be amended to 31/3/2025. Progress was also provided in respect of a number of high and medium priority actions, as well as low priority actions in amber; several of these had been completed, while progress was being made on others.

An update was sought regarding the sourcing of tier 2 child protection/adult protection refresher training, and the Chief Executive advised that officers were monitoring course availability through the Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Board and he would find out what progress had been made at the next meeting of the Group.

On the proposal of Councillor Clements, seconded by Dr Heath-Davies it was **agreed** that all the due dates for Countryside Management Coast Path Audit recommendations be amended to 31/3/25. The remainder of the report was **noted**.

[Having confirmed that she would now be able to attend the remainder of the meeting, Dr Heath-Davies took the Chair. Councillor Skyrme-Blackhall tendered her apologies and left the meeting during discussion on the following item.]



7. Well-being Objectives Performance Report for the Period ending 30 September 2024

It was reported that this report set out the Authority's performance against its four Well-being Objectives (Conservation, Climate, Connection and Communities) set out in its Corporate and Resources Plan 2023/24 – 2026/27. It outlined progress against priority indicators, projects, work programmes and internal development activities linked to activities identified in the Authority's Delivery Plans. The report presented the performance to date up to 30 September 2024 and included Quarter 2 statistics for some measures.

There was some discussion regarding the importance of measuring impacts/outcomes, rather than metrics/outputs and the difficulties of doing so. Further explanation was also provided in respect of some of the progress updates. One Member sought further information regarding implementation of the Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) exercise. The Chief Executive replied that work had been delayed by the Audit, however the priority was to set a budget for the next year by using reserves, with the intention of setting a more balanced budget during 2025/26 using ZBB and additional income generation. The issue would be discussed with the Chair and Deputy Chair in advance of the meeting with the Deputy First Minister due to take place in early December.

Noted.

8. Assurance Monitoring Report – Compliance, Public and Statutory Duties and Corporate Improvement

The Performance and Compliance Officer noted that the aim of this report was to review the Authority's current performance in respect of its compliance, public and statutory duties and corporate improvement areas. It would act as one element of the risk management approach and support officers and Members in monitoring, assessing and responding to compliance and corporate improvement areas of work. The report also outlined progress against corporate improvement areas identified within the Annual Governance Statement and the Authority's Delivery Plans.

The report provided resilience scores in respect of each area, and where tolerance levels or triggers had been reached resulting in scores considered 'Vulnerable' or 'Of concern' additional information and a management response had been provided.

Concern was expressed regarding the inability to provide quarterly performance figures following an upgrade to the planning system, particularly as this had impacted reporting over several quarters. The Director reported that the Authority was one of three affected by this issue



and officers had met with the company to impress upon them the importance of resolving the matter and was confident that this would happen in the near future. In the meantime, the Authority was setting up its own systems to cross check the information when the issue was resolved.

Noted.

[The meeting was adjourned between 12.15pm and 12.25pm]

9. Health, Safety and Wellbeing Quarterly Report

Due to his departure from the Authority, the report of the Health and Safety Project Manager was presented by the Head of People Services, and this updated the Committee on accidents and incidents for the period April to October 2024, including lessons learned, and other work being undertaken. A dashboard of staff sickness statistics was also reported.

In response to a question regarding plans for replacement of the Officer, the Chief Executive replied that the Authority had a robust system in place through which managers were responsible for Health and Safety, rather than a single individual. Advice would be provided by the Head of People Services or could be sought from specialists. However he noted that the ongoing review of the Countryside Team might include some dedicated resource for that team.

Noted.

10. Finance Budget report for the 6 months to September 2024

The report detailed the net revenue budget which showed a net surplus of £63k against an expected budget deficit of £117k (£180k better than budget). However recently announced pay awards had not been incorporated into the actual figures and would likely reduce the surplus to a small deficit of £6k. Nevertheless income overall was higher than budget by £275k, although costs were also £34k over budget. A summary of retail performance showed a positive out-turn to date with higher turnover for the half year against budget.

At the end of the financial year, the forecast revenue position for the 2024/25 year end was an operating surplus of £257k despite a budgeted net deficit of £509k as per the original budget. This was due to additional revenue funding of £660k allocated by Welsh Government and increased investment income. No deficit was therefore expected for 24-25.

The capital programme for the year had increased from the original budget of £972k to a revised budget of £1,604k. The budget had increased principally due to the inclusion of items on order at the year-



end but not delivered, an increased budget for the proposed Green Room build, additional H&S equipment and emergency replacement of a woodchip boiler.

Figures for reserves, both general and earmarked, were also provided; the balance on the general reserves was forecast to be £1,516K which should maintain the fund balance within the reserves policy, while the Capital Receipts reserve and Capital Grants Unapplied were expected to be partly utilised during the year. There was also an expectation that earmarked reserves would reduce during 24-25 as projects were delivered.

Members expressed concern regarding increased costs for capital projects such as the Green Room replacement and Traeth Mawr. Officers reassured them that contingency had been included within the budget and contracts had been set.

The report was **noted** and the movement in earmarked reserves to date was approved.

11. Exclusion of the Public

On the proposal of Councillor Clements, seconded by Dr Havard, it was **RESOLVED** that the public be excluded from the meeting as exempt information, as defined in Paragraph 14 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, would be disclosed.

12. Risk Management Policy – Risk Register and Risk Management Statement

Members were reminded that a new format Risk Register and Risk Appetite Statement had been presented previously to the Committee. Minimal changes had been made to the Risk Register since the last meeting and these were highlighted and other suggestions by Members discussed. It was noted that certain issues would be identified through sub-risk registers and could therefore be escalated to the main register as necessary. Consideration would be given to identification of future issues/horizon scanning before the next meeting.

Noted.

13. Business Continuity Plan Test and Review

The Head of Decarbonisation reported that following approval of the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) by the Committee in November 2023, and the ICT Disaster Recovery Plan in February 2024, a group had been established to test and review the documents on an annual basis to ensure that the Authority was able to continue its essential operations in



the event of a major incident. In September 2024 the Emergency Response Team had met to undertake a desk top exercise to assess its response to a cyber incident. Following the exercise the group had reflected on the findings and had implemented actions as well as updating the BCP and ICT Plans.

Noted.

14. Delegation of any issues for consideration by the Continuous Improvement Group

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues of concern that the Committee wished to delegate to the Continuous Improvement Group for consideration.

