

**REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF PARK DIRECTION AND PLANNING**

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**SUBJECT: AUDIT OF PLANNING**

Purpose of Report

To advise members of the current Audit into the National Parks Planning Service

Introduction

In June 2014 the Wales Audit Office provided a project brief entitled: **Local Government Improvement Study: Delivering with less – are National Park Authorities providing efficient Planning services aimed at high performance, even in the face of increasing budget constraints?**

The Audit will consider all 3 Welsh National Parks.

The full project brief is contained in Appendix 1.

The Performance Auditor – a planning consultant – Mr Rob Hathaway has already met with officers of the Park at a 3 Parks Planning meeting at Aberystwyth on 23 September 2014. He has also provided the 3 Parks with a set of questions he requires answers to, to inform his study.

At present we are also making arrangements for him to attend Pembroke Dock week - commencing Monday 24 November to undertake 2 days of interviewing of National Park staff, statutory consultees and other stakeholders.

The final report is expected to be available March 2015.

Recommendation

To note the brief.

Background Documents

*(For further information, please contact Jane Gibson)*

*Author: Jane Gibson*

*Appendix 1 – Project brief*



Project Brief: Local Government Improvement  
Study: Delivering with less – are National Park  
Authorities providing efficient Planning  
services aimed at high performance, even in  
the face of increasing budget constraints?

## **Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority**

**Audit year:** 2014-15

**Issued:** June 2014

**Document reference:** 403A2014

# Status of report

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This document was produced by John Roberts.

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# Project brief

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## Background to the study

1. In a letter to the Chief Executives of National Park Authorities, dated 16 May 2014, the Auditor General set out his programme of all-Wales national studies for 2014-15. Following consultation the Auditor General decided that one of his studies would focus on delivering with less, part of a series of national studies of specific service areas to examine whether authorities are making the best use of resources. This project brief sets out why we are undertaking the study and outlines its focus and the methodology, outputs and timing.

## The purpose of the study

2. All Welsh local authorities play an important role in shaping and supporting communities and providing community leadership and democratic representation. National Park Authorities have a particular focus on protecting the landscapes for which they have responsibility, while, at the same time, ensuring that people can enjoy that landscape. An important part of that duty is the National Park Authorities' statutory planning function. Planning services represent a significant proportion of the time and resources that a National Park Authority spends in delivering its overall responsibilities.
3. The Welsh Government has imposed significant budgetary cuts on all three National Park Authorities. These came into effect during 2014-15, with further cuts required in 2015-16 and possibly beyond. All National Park Authorities in Wales have to make difficult decisions on how they deal with reductions in funding, which are impacting directly on local services and people. This is particularly the case in terms of National Park Authorities' capacity to appropriately regulate the built environment within its area of responsibility, but to do so balancing the needs of local communities, the landscape, wildlife and economic prosperity.

## Focus of the study

4. The study will seek to answer the question: **Are National Park Authorities providing efficient Planning services aimed at delivering high performance, even in the face of increasing budget constraints?**

## Methodology

5. An initial desktop analysis of performance data and of relevant reports and documents will help to inform the fieldwork. Fieldwork will be carried out during the period September 2014 to December 2014. The exact dates will be agreed with the Authority. The scope of performance data analysis may extend to organisations other

than the three National Park Authorities in Wales. Fieldwork will be undertaken at all three National Park Authorities in Wales. Fieldwork will consist of a series of interviews and focus groups with selected officers and members. We may take the opportunity to gather the views of stakeholders on the effectiveness of each Authority's planning service.

6. We will also use this work to examine governance, performance management and sustainability in relation to the discharge of planning responsibilities. These were areas set out in our letter to National Park Authorities in relation to 2014-15 Performance Audit Work and Fees, either in relation to our audit and assessment work under the Local Government Measure or as part of our programme of Local Government Studies. Incorporating these aspects into our methodology is consistent with our proportionate approach to delivering performance audit work at National Park Authorities.
7. An important aspect of the work will be the identification, and sharing, of best practice.

## Outputs

8. The output for this work has not yet been agreed but is likely to include, as a minimum, a report to each National Park Authority outlining our findings in relation to that Authority's approach to delivering its planning service. Consideration will also be given to issuing a national report that brings together the key findings from each of the individual reports.

## Timing

9. A timetable for undertaking the work and producing the relevant outputs is set out below.

Activity	Timescale
Request for updated performance and financial information	July 2014
Desktop analysis of performance and financial information	August 2014
Fieldwork – interviews with relevant individuals and organisations	September to December 2014
Drafting report	January 2015
Agreeing, finalising and publishing report	February 2015
Drafting National Report (if appropriate)	February 2015
Agreeing, finalising and publishing national report (where relevant)	March 2015

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## Interviewees

10. The scope and content of the interviews to be carried out as part of this work will be partly influenced by the outcome of the initial desktop analysis of performance data and other relevant documents.
11. However, an indication of potential interviewees is set out below:
  - Chief Executive
  - Chief Planning Officer
  - Chair of Planning Committee
  - Finance Officer
  - Two or more members of the Planning Committee
  - Focus Group of staff
  - Chair of the relevant Scrutiny committee
  - Section 151 Officer
  - Two or more members of staff within the planning department
  - Local Government Partners and consultees to the planning system

## Study team

12. The Study team listed below are the auditors who will be undertaking the work at each of the Authorities. They will contact each Authority to request relevant documents and to arrange the on-site stage of the work.

Authority	Audit Lead	Study Team Contact
Brecon Beacons	John Roberts	Performance Auditor – Rob Hathaway Rob.Hathaway@wao.gov.uk Tel: 07532 088577
Pembrokeshire Coast		
Snowdonia		

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## Document request

13. The following is a list of suggested documents that we would wish to review. The list is indicative of the type of documents we would wish to request copies of, and we will be informed by discussions with the Regulatory teams and individual Authorities as to which available documents would be the most relevant.

Document
Development Plans and Supporting Strategies eg, SPG
Organisational Charts
Corporate Plan or equivalent
Governance arrangements and planning decision making
Partnership Arrangements
Consultation and Communication Plans
Organisational and Service Budget Plans
Service Plan, Improvement Plans and Performance Standards
Performance and Financial Reports



Wales Audit Office  
24 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff CF11 9LJ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Fax: 029 2032 0600

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@wao.gov.uk](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk)

Website: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)

Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru  
24 Heol y Gadeiriau  
Caerdydd CF11 9LJ

Ffôn: 029 2032 0500

Ffacs: 029 2032 0600

Ffôn Testun: 029 2032 0660

E-bost: [info@wao.gov.uk](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk)

Gwefan: [www.wao.gov.uk](http://www.wao.gov.uk)