

OPERATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

7 December 2016

Present: Councillor R Kilmister (Chair)
Councillor ML Evans, Ms C Gwyther, Councillor P Harries, Councillor PJ Morgan, Mr AE Sangster and Councillor A Wilcox

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.00am – 12.25pm)

1. Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Hudson.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 21 September 2016 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2016 be confirmed and signed.

4. Review of Evaluation Undertaken with Service Users of Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority's Walkability Initiative

Members were reminded that Walkability was a health and wellbeing initiative launched by the Authority in 2011, offering supported walking opportunities in and around the National Park. The majority of participants had a higher risk of poor health due to their circumstances or existing health conditions, with many referred to the project via their clinicians through the National Exercise Referral Scheme.

Initial funding for Walkability had been provided through a Sport Wales project grant, subsequently funding had been drawn from Let's Walk Cymru and from a range of small grant sources in order to develop and expand the Authority's work in this area. Walkability was also in receipt of core funding from the Authority.

Examples of groups who participated were set out in the report, however the Chairman was pleased to welcome to the meeting service users Jenny Mathieson, an Occupational Therapist, as well as Isabelle and Helen.

Jenny Mathieson explained that as an Occupational Therapist she tried to enable people to do the things that mattered to them. She organised two groups – a palliative group based at Shalom House in St Davids and a group of ladies who had completed treatment following breast cancer. Exercise was proven to be good for both groups, and outdoor exercise brought more significant benefits. Walkability provided transport, appropriate wheelchairs/aids as well as knowledge in finding a path appropriate to the



needs of the group and Mrs Mathieson also thanked the Walkability Officer for his help and 'can do' attitude. She said that the groups enabled patients to take a hand in their own recovery, where this was possible, and to provide a fullness of living to all participants.

Helen and Isabelle were part of the Tuesday morning walking group which met weekly in Haverfordwest. They agreed that the greatest benefit of getting outdoors was to keep well and healthy – for both physical and mental wellbeing. The group usually met whatever the weather and members enjoyed making new friends, learning about the history, fauna and flora of Pembrokeshire and visiting new places, which they often shared afterwards with family and friends. They also noted that they felt safer and more confident walking as part of a group. Both ladies gave testimony to the benefits it had brought them and how the group had opened up new areas of the county to them.

Members thanked all three ladies for coming to the meeting to share their experiences of the project through what had been though provoking and passionate presentations. These had helped Members improve their understanding of the impact of the work being undertaken. They went on to ask the Walkability Officer how he saw the project develop in the future and whether more work could be done as part of the Public Service Board's developing Well-being Plan. The Officer replied that capacity was a big issue and walk leader courses were run to enable groups to be self-sustaining. However groups from, for example, care homes and doctors surgeries had run in the past and had been successful and it was hoped that support from staff in those places would enable more work to be done in those settings in future.

With regard to working with other agencies within the County to promote the benefits of the project, the Chief Executive added that he felt it would be useful for members of the Health Board and Pembrokeshire County Council to receive similar presentations to those heard by the Committee, and he hoped that the benefits of walking would be highlighted in the Well-being Plan when it was developed. Work was also being done through the Authority's involvement with the West Wales Natural Health Services Network which emphasised the use of experiences in nature and the outdoors to improve physical and mental health.

NOTED.

5. An Update on the Activity of Youth Rangers in and around Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

It was reported that the Youth Ranger scheme was conceived as a way to give further opportunities to young people from organisations involved in the Lottery funded Your Park project, allowing them to return to their own and other organisations equipped to sustain motivation and momentum in using the outdoors. They took part in full day or overnight sessions every month, gaining a unique experience of the special qualities of the National Park and undertaking diverse activities from practical conservation to supporting the Authority's presence at numerous events. They were therefore able to act as 'young ambassadors' for the Authority, providing a young person's perspective,



sharing their experiences and raising the profile of the National Park as a valuable asset for young people.

Daniel Jones, one of the Youth Rangers, then gave a presentation to the Committee, in which he explained that the Youth Rangers were a group of 16-25 year olds who were picked up by minibus typically on one Saturday each month and who undertook a variety of activities such as pulling Himalayan balsam, working on a project to improve accessibility at a site at Portfield Gate, conservation work on Skomer and also represented the Authority at the County Show, Really Wild Food Festival, Fish Week, etc. For him, the benefits of being a Youth Ranger had been the opportunity to get out and experience the natural beauty of Pembrokeshire, gaining a new perspective on the conservation of the countryside, meeting new people and learning about new career possibilities. His thoughts were echoed by Arianne in a video recorded interview which had been made on one of the recent Youth Ranger sessions.

Considering him to be a wonderful advocate for the Youth Ranger scheme, Members thanked both Dan and the Discovery Ranger Tom Moses, who led the project, for an interesting presentation.

NOTED.

6. Connectivity and the Land Management Programme

The Biodiversity Officer explained that landscape connectivity referred to the degree to which the landscape permitted the movement of species, and that this meant different things to different species, depending on, for example, their ability to range and their life-cycle requirements. For some species, habitat areas did not have to be physically joined to be 'connected'. Greater connectivity provided greater resilience for a species. However even the National Park was a highly fragmented landscape and management therefore focussed on improving the quality of the habitat, buffering them to make them bigger and linking them with corridors and 'stepping stones' that helped species move from one area to another.

In order to visualise connectivity, an online mapping tool for a range of species/species groups was commissioned by the Pembrokeshire Biodiversity Partnership on the Castlemartin Peninsular in 2015. The mapping was later extended to the whole of Pembrokeshire and was available as an online resource. The maps could be used to assess the wider potential benefit of conservation land management at a site and to suggest areas in which to seek opportunities. As much of the information was sensitive it was not publicly available.

The Authority's land management programme sought to consolidate, extend, link and create sites of conservation value, taking into account international, national and local conservation priorities, and connectivity was a consideration when assessing new conservation sites. The approach was supportive of the 'resilience' goal in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and helped to fulfil the Authority's duties under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It was hoped that the statutory basis for taking account of connectivity would



lead to greater adoption of the principles by relevant authorities, more scope for collaboration, with improved conservation outcomes as a result.

Members' questions focussed largely on how the Authority worked with other agencies and whether changes to the Welsh Government's Glastir scheme could help improve connectivity. The officer replied that working with other agencies was essential and the Gwaun Valley was a good example of that. As land management agreements were voluntary, the opportunity to identify land owned by others who were sympathetic to such management regimes was key to improving connectivity. With regard to Glastir, it was noted that Welsh Government recognised the need to improve the scheme and it was hoped that there would be opportunities to influence future changes positively.

NOTED.

7. Coast Path User Survey 2015-16

With the agreement of the Chairman this item, which had been referred to the Committee by the recent National Park Authority meeting, was brought forward on the agenda to ensure there was sufficient time for Members to ask questions on the presentation.

The Access and Rights of Way Manager reminded the Committee that, in addition to the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, there was a network of public rights of way in the National Park which was maintained by the Authority. This network was the prime means by which visitors could explore and enjoy the coast and countryside of the National Park and accounted for a significant annual expenditure in terms of its upkeep. Periodically therefore there was a need to determine the views of the many residents and visitors who walked public rights of way in the National Park, who were effectively the service users. The main purpose of the 2015-16 survey was therefore to determine who walked in the National Park and how often; why they used public rights of way; how they rated the general condition of the path network and what could be done to improve the walking experience and encourage more people to gain access to the coast and countryside.

The survey had run continuously from August 2015 to July 2016 with a self-completion survey conducted at twelve locations – seven of these on the Coast Path and five on the inland network of public rights of way. The survey stations were selected to ensure that they were close to a concealed digital path user counter which enabled a sample of respondents relative to total footfall to be recorded. 2,959 completed questionnaires were returned.

A summary of the results was set out in the report with the headlines that unsurprisingly 72% of walkers used the paths between May and September with the average distance walked being 7.3 miles. With regard to the condition of the paths, there were very high levels of satisfaction in terms of surface, verges, signage, gates and stiles with 95% of respondents rating the condition as excellent and good. Motivation for walking was to enjoy the natural landscape and in terms of what could be done to encourage people to walk more often, the majority of respondents felt that more distance and destination



signage should be provided, as well as more printed walks guides and more publicity of the existing access opportunities. Officers therefore felt that the feedback had been good and a credit to the Wardens who maintained the paths.

One Member, as a regular user of the Authority's Web Walks, asked whether it was possible to include more information regarding what the user was likely to encounter on the walk, its level of difficulty and whether its condition was prone to deterioration in poor weather. It was also noted American visitors referred to the Coast Path as a trail as their expectations of a path were of one more urban in nature. With regard to urbanisation of the countryside, Members also stressed that they would not be happy with a proliferation of signs, but were happy with better signage being provided.

The Officer went on to inform Members that earlier in the year the Authority had been fortunate to have on loan the 'Google Trekker' camera to film the Coast Path in the same way the Google Maps 'Street view' worked. The entire Path had been filmed during May and June and Members were shown a preview of the imagery that would be available in early 2017.

NOTED.

8. Performance Report for the Period ending 31 October 2016

The Performance and Compliance Coordinator reported that the performance report had been modified to follow the structure of the Corporate Plan for 2016-17, which itself followed the approach of the Well-being of Future Generations Act with seven well-being objectives and an additional section providing general governance information.

The report presented the performance to 31 October, however some datasets related only to the first two quarters of the financial year i.e. April to September.

It was noted that a number of data sets had been disaggregated to provide a more accurate reflection in those areas, for example website hits data with information now provided on performance across the three separate sites. Also data on Sustainable Development Fund projects had been amended from approved projects to live projects to enable better analysis of contribution to the different well-being objectives within the Corporate Plan.

Only one Measure was highlighted as red and this related to a reduction in website hits on the Enjoy website. Officers noted that this was separate to the Authority's main website and a review of the future direction/approach needed in terms of the site was now being carried out.

NOTED.

9. Risk Register

The Chief Executive reported that the risk register had been reviewed by both the Management and Leadership Teams and recent progress and changes noted. The only amendment had been the inclusion of the risks associated with



the reaction to the consultation on the Provision of Information and the public consultation associated with it. Public meetings were arranged in both Newport and Tenby to provide details on the proposal. No other risks had changed.

With regard to the progress update for Risk 17 Risk of major incident affecting or involving NPA staff and resources, one Member questioned whether contingency plans were being prepared or were being updated. The Chief Executive confirmed that plans were being reviewed in response to questions raised by the Authority's Internal Auditors.

NOTED.

10. Continuous Improvement Group: delegation of issues

It was **RESOLVED** that there were no issues that needed to be delegated to the Continuous Improvement group for consideration.

