

**REPORT OF BUSINESS & PERFORMANCE MANAGER**

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**SUBJECT:**  
**WALES AUDIT OFFICE - IMPROVEMENT ASSESSMENT LETTER**

The Auditor General for Wales is required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to report the audit and assessment work in relation to whether Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (the Authority) has discharged its duties and met the requirements of the Measure.

Mr John Roberts from the Wales Audit Office will present the report to members at the Authority meeting and answer any questions from Members.

The Improvement Assessment letter from the Auditor General is attached.

**Recommendation:**

**Members are requested to receive and comment on the Improvement Assessment Letter.**

*(For further information, please contact Alan Hare, Business & Performance Manager on extension 4810)*



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Reference 579A2012  
Date 26 November 2012  
Pages 1 of 5

Dear Tegryn

## Improvement Assessment Letter

This letter summarises the key conclusions arising from my work in respect of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure).

I am required to report my audit and assessment work in relation to whether Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (the Authority) has discharged its duties and met the requirements of the Measure.

Further to my Improvement Assessment letter of 10 September 2012, this letter summarises:

- my views on whether the Authority has discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement reporting;
- my views on the reliability of the Authority's self-evaluation; and
- my further proposals for improvement and/or recommendations.

Further to this I will undertake more detailed work on the arrangements that support the Authority's performance management and reporting over the following months.

I shall summarise all of my work during 2012-13 and publish an Annual Improvement Report for the Authority by the end of March 2013.

### **The Authority has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance**

I have reached this conclusion because:

- the Authority published its Improvement Plan – Part 2 2011/12 (Improvement Plan) in advance of the statutory deadline of 31 October 2012;
- the Improvement Plan includes summary evaluations on progress against the Authority's improvement objectives; and

- the Improvement Plan includes performance indicators for a number of areas together with, where available, comparisons with its own performance in the previous year.

**The Authority has published a useful and readable Improvement Plan that incorporates wide ranging comparisons but omissions and inaccuracies in some of the data weaken the Improvement Plan and make it more difficult for the Authority to set suitable targets for the future.**

**The Authority has published a readable and concise self evaluation of its performance that tries to take a balanced view of progress and that includes comparisons with its past performance and with other national park authorities.**

The Authority's self assessment publication for this year maintains the improvements it made last year in that it remains easy to read, concise and accessible to a wide range of readers. The Authority adopted eight priority outcomes and, to support delivery of these, it agreed four annual improvement objectives under the Measure for 2011-12. The Authority's Improvement Plan sets out its assessment of progress against each of these improvement objectives, with references to the information that supports those assessments. The Authority has a greater focus on providing a balanced view of its achievements in these areas, setting out where it feels it has only been partially successful.

The Authority responded positively to my earlier proposal for improvement to include comparative performance information in its self assessment. Where available, the Authority's Annual Report compares its performance to the other two national park authorities in Wales. Although not directly relevant to its improvement objectives for 2011-12, the Authority also compares its performance, in several instances, to the average performance of the national park authorities in England<sup>1</sup>. This has the potential, not only to give a more useful self assessment of performance, but also to help identify organisations outside Wales where the Authority might be able to identify good practice.

**The absence of information within the Improvement Plan on performance in relation to many of the Authority's agreed measures of success, together with some under assessment of performance, suggest that there is more to do before the Authority's approach to self assessment is effectively embedded within the organisation.**

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<sup>1</sup> These are in relation to its priority outcomes

The Authority has developed its own performance indicators (local indicators), with a view to collecting information which can better inform a self assessment of progress towards achieving its improvement priorities. Some of that information was collected for the first time during 2011-12 and, as such, has the potential to act as baseline measures against which further progress can be measured.

The Authority's summaries of progress in its Improvement Plan, referred to earlier, are partly based on these local indicators. The accuracy and validity of the local indicators are therefore important. We looked at a small sample of indicators in more detail. We felt it was important to do so since, unlike the more 'standard' indicators the Authority uses, local indicators are relatively new and have been designed by the Authority itself.

In total, we looked at three indicators in some detail, each of which had been given targets by the Authority for 2011-12. Two of the three indicators we looked at had not been reported in the Authority's Improvement Plan. In fact, in total, six of the 11 'measures of success' in relation to its improvement objectives for the Measure and set out in the Authority's forward looking Improvement Plan for 2011-12 are not specifically reported in its Improvement Plan. This oversight, together with some of the issues identified below in terms of collecting accurate data, might be considered to be an indication of the extent to which the Authority's processes for monitoring and reporting on progress against achievement of its improvement objectives have been fully embedded within the organisation.

I have summarised below our findings in relation to each of the three indicators we looked at.

**“The current lengths of Coast Path suitable for a variety of less able access is maintained at 130 km”**

Performance in relation to this local indicator is not included in the Authority's Improvement Plan. The figure is calculated by analysing the Authority's data on the length of stile free sections, of paths designated as 'gentle walk' and of paths which are accessible by wheelchair. Initial discussions and analysis suggested that the actual figure for 2011-12 was 133.9 km. However, further analysis of the information by the Authority, designed to ensure that there was no double counting, gives a figure of 180.83km. This additional analysis suggests that the figure of 130km for 2010-11, implied by the wording of the local indicator, may be incorrect.

The Authority recognises that there are problems with agreeing a definition for 'less able' and is aware of the risks involved in describing sections of coastal path as being 'suitable', as opposed to 'likely to be suitable'

**“At least 75 per cent of school groups feedback an inspiration score of 10 or higher”**

Performance in relation to this indicator is not included in the Authority’s Improvement Plan<sup>2</sup>. Teachers are asked to complete a questionnaire after their pupils have attended an education activity run by the Authority. One of the questions asks whether the teacher felt that involvement in that activity had inspired the pupils. Responses can range from ‘not at all’ to ‘very much’ on a scale of one to 11. Of the 66 teachers who responded to this question, 78.8 per cent gave a score of 10 or more, demonstrating that the Authority had reached its target for this indicator. However, when taken as a percentage of all those who completed a questionnaire (71), this percentage drops down below the Authority’s target, to 73.2.

**“We increase the number of ‘hard to reach’ participants taking part in our events and activities from 1,800 a year to 2,000”**

The figure of 2,332 is reported in the Authority’s Improvement Plan. This was the figure reported to members on 28 March 2012. However, information sometimes takes time to collect and to enter into the database that is interrogated to provide this figure. A subsequent check on the up to date database revealed that the correct figure for 2011-12 is 2,601.

Although, in the case of each of the above, the Authority’s performance had reached or exceeded the relevant target<sup>3</sup>, incorrect information undermines the validity of any targets set in relation to these indicators for the following year.

**Further proposals for improvement/recommendations**

One new proposal for improvement is being suggested in this letter. I will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Authority in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters.

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<sup>2</sup> A level of inspiration of 10 of learners/pupils, as reported by teachers, was reported.

<sup>3</sup> See the section on inspiration score for an alternative view on whether one of the targets was met.

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**Proposals for improvement**

P1 Ensure that information relating to its measures of success is accurate, regularly reported to members and is included in its Improvement Plan.

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Yours sincerely



HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS

AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES

CC: Carl Sargeant, Minister for Local Government and Communities

John Griffiths, Minister for Environment and Sustainable Development