

NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

1 February 2017

Present: Councillor M James (Chair)

Mr A Archer, Councillor P Harries, Mrs G Hayward, Councillor S Hudson, Councillor R Kilmister, Councillor RM Lewis, Councillor PJ Morgan, Councillor R Owens, Councillor D Rees, Mr AE Sangster and Councillor M Williams.

[Ms C Gwyther arrived during consideration of report 01/17 Draft Budget Planning]

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.00am – 12.30pm)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor ML Evans, Councillor L Jenkins and Councillor A Wilcox.

2. Disclosures of Interest

Councillors P Harries and M Williams disclosed an interest in report 02/17 Newport Visitor Centre, however they remained in the meeting while it was discussed. Councillor Harries explained that he had received a dispensation from the Standards Committee to allow him to speak and vote on matters relating to Newport Visitor Centre.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30 November 2016 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2016 be confirmed and signed.

4. Matters arising from the minutes:

Corporate Plan 2017/18 (Minute 8)

The Chief Executive advised that an overview of the Plans produced by the Authority which Members had asked for at the last meeting would be presented to the next meeting of each of the Review Committees.

NOTED

5. Reports of meetings of various of the Authority's Committees

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

- (i) Development Management Committee held on 19 October 2016
- (ii) Operational Review Committee held on 7 December 2016



6. Appointment of Members

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) Mr AE Sangster be appointed to the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee and Mrs G Hayward to the Operational Review Committee.
- b) Mrs G Hayward be appointed as the Authority's representative on the Alliance for National Parks Cymru.

7. Date of the Annual General Meeting

It was **RESOLVED** that the date of the Authority's AGM be moved from 7 June to 14 June 2017. This would allow sufficient time for the agenda to be circulated to Members appointed to the National Park Authority by Pembrokeshire County Council at their AGM on 25 May.

[Ms C Gwyther arrived during consideration of the following item]

8. Draft Budget Planning 2017/18

The report of the Chief Executive and Chief Financial Officer set out the draft Revenue and Capital budgets for 2017/18 and forecast 2018/19 to 2021/22, the draft 2017/18 levy on Pembrokeshire County Council, Prudential Indicators for the capital programme and an Investment Strategy & Treasury Management Policy Statement for 2017/18.

The development of the Authority's draft revenue and capital budgets for 2017/18 had taken place during a sustained challenging period for the public sector with yearly reductions in the National Park Grant (NPG) and ensuing Levy on Pembrokeshire County Council. While the settlement is flatlined for 2017/18, meeting the financial pressures required a rigorous approach to identifying efficiencies, maximising non-core funding stream opportunities and the reprioritisation of spending within services.

The report set out the Authority's budget strategy and the key assumptions on which this had been based, as previously discussed by Members in budget workshops. It was reported that, as anticipated, confirmation had been received from Welsh Government on 23 January that there would be no increase or decrease in the core NPA Grant and Levy from that received in 2016/17.

While the reprieve in NPG funding decreases for 2017/18 was most welcomed, the UK Government target on public spending over the course of this parliament meant it was likely that there would be further reductions in the NPG in the medium term, although the actual size of these reductions was unknown. Figures showing the impact of 5% and 10% reductions over the four year period to 2021/22 were provided and even the lower of these two options would represent significant challenges for the Authority to overcome if it was to balance its budget,



even given anticipated increases in other grant and locally generated income. It is anticipated that continuation of budget workshops will prove helpful in identifying areas for rationalisation and successful management of the anticipated budgetary challenges and an outline of the savings and efficiencies made to date were provided. Members asked some questions regarding locally generated income. In respect of Newport Visitor Centre and Cilrhedyn, in which there was some uncertainty regarding the nature of the Authority's future involvement, the Finance Manager clarified that full operating costs for the financial year had been budgeted for. Funding for other items to be considered by Members later in the meeting, such as purchase of a Document Management System and webcasting had also been included.

The report set out details of the capital budget which would total £425,000 in 2017/18, and consisted of IT equipment replacement, Carew walled garden interpretation, Castell Henllys round houses, centre refurbishment, energy saving projects, fleet replacement, car park repairs and electronic planning/document management systems.

Details of the Authority's anticipated cash based reserves at the end of 2016/17, together with the projected balances as at the end of 2017/18 were set out in the report. This showed that the expected surplus in 2016/17 would give a year-end balance for the general reserves of £793,000, and then fall, largely due to funding some of the capital program, to £728,000 by the end of 2017/18. Similarly, and for the same reason, the Capital Receipts Reserve was expected to fall to £182,000 by the end of 2017/18. Earmarked Reserves, set aside for specific projects, were set out and were considered to be appropriate at the current time, although unexpected changes in the financial position might require these to be further reviewed.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- the draft budget 2017/18 be approved.
- the financial projections for 2018/19 to 2021/22 be noted

(a) Levy on Pembrokeshire County Council

The Chief Finance Officer reminded Members that Section 71 of the Environment Act 1995, sub-section 3, determined the way in which the levy which was to be raised on Pembrokeshire County Council, should be issued. The following statement complied with this requirement.



Levy on Pembrokeshire County Council



The Authority must authorise the making of a levy of £984,885 from Pembrokeshire County Council, in accordance with Section 71 of the Environment Act 1995 and the National Park Authorities (Levies)(Wales)(Regulations) 1995 SI 1995 No.3019 as amended by the National Park Authorities (Levies)(Wales)(Amendment) Regulations 1996:

•	the sum required to meet expenditure for the Authority which will fall to be charged for that year in the Revenue account is		£5,522,249
•	making such provision as is appropriate for meeting contingencies, the expenditure on which would fall to be charged in the Revenue Account		£Nil
•	the sum required to secure the availability to the authority of adequate working balances on its Revenue Account		£Nil
•	the sum required to provide the Authority with other requirements for covering any deficit brought forward from the previous financial year		£Nil
	Sub-total		£5,522,249
	LESS		
•	Section 72, Grant (NPG)	£2,954,655	
•	Income credited to the Revenue Account	£1,582,772	
•	other sums not covered above which are likely to be available in the year	-63	£4,537,364
	Levy requirement		<u>£984,885</u>

Members are advised that the official levy requirement must be notified to Pembrokeshire County Council by 15th February. It is recommended that the National Park Authority continue with the current arrangement of 12 equal monthly instalments receivable on or before the 12th of each calendar month, such payments to be received by bank transfer.

It was **RESOLVED** that a levy of £984,885 from Pembrokeshire County Council for the year 2017/18 be authorised.



(b) Prudential Code Indicators

The Local Authorities (Capital Finance & Accounting)(Wales) Regulations 2003 required the National Park Authority to have regard to the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy's (CIPFA) Prudential Code in setting annual budgets. The Prudential Code required the Authority to consider Prudential Indicators encompassing estimated and actual expenditure and financing, and limits on both.

These indicators were intended to support and record local decision making, and were not designed to be comparative indicators across local authorities. However, as the Authority was debt free and there were no proposals at this time to undertake further borrowing, due to the capital expenditure plans being financed either by revenue funds, external grant aid or capital receipts, then many of the indicators were not relevant. The report therefore set out only those indicators that were relevant at the current time, and Members were asked to adopt the Prudential Indicators as presented.

The Chief Finance Officer also presented an Investment Strategy for 2017/18 in compliance with statutory guidance and in support of the prudential borrowing system. The Strategy also supported CIPFA's "Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice and Cross-Sectoral Guidance Notes".

It was **RESOLVED** that Members

- a) Adopt the Prudential Indicators as presented.
- b) Approve the Investment Strategy & Treasury Management Policy Statement for 2017/18.

[Councillor M Williams disclosed an interest in the following item but remained in the meeting while it was discussed. Councillor P Harries also disclosed an interest, but advised that he had been granted a dispensation by the Authority's Standards Committee to allow him to speak and vote on matters relating to Newport Visitor Centre until 31/03/18.]

9. Newport Visitor Centre

Members were reminded that at the meeting of the Authority held in September 2016, they had resolved to consult on proposals to change the way visitor information services were delivered in Tenby and Newport in the future. Members were unanimous in their desire to see the Authority change the nature of its current delivery in order to invest in a package of new initiatives aimed at supporting the growth of the wider visitor economy in Pembrokeshire by delivering a more equitable service across the National Park.



The Authority subsequently launched a formal public consultation on the proposed changes to visitor services and a number of formal and informal meetings with stakeholder groups took place. At the last meeting of the Authority, Members agreed to the closure of Tenby National Park Visitor Centre while granting more time for officers of the Authority to work with the community of Newport to explore alternative delivery options for the future.

Meetings had been held with the community, and had been very positive and pointed to a willingness to explore new models of securing the future of the Newport Visitor Centre building. As a result they had been working closely with officers to see if the building could be acquired by the community to manage and run in future. Discussions were at an early stage, but the community, led by Newport Town Council, was keen to explore if through community management, the Newport Visitor Centre could bring a number of local services together, ensuring the continuation of a building dedicated to serving visitors to Newport whilst also housing a number of important community services too.

However developing a business case for acquisition of the Centre would take time, and it was proposed to give the Town Council and the local community six months to develop a workable long-term solution. To facilitate this, it was proposed to keep the Newport Visitor Centre open until the end of October 2017.

It was reported at the meeting that since writing the report an email had been received from Newport Town Council suggesting that they would like to acquire the building. However the Chief Executive added that this did not change the recommendation that the Centre remain open for the 2017 season, and any firm proposals regarding the future of the building would be brought back to the Authority for a decision.

Members agreed that this was a pragmatic response that would allow active discussions to take place, and hoped that, following a difficult start, a good working relationship could be developed with representatives of the community.

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) the period of community engagement regarding potential changes to the future provision of visitor services in Newport be extended until 1st August 2017; and
- b) the Newport Visitor Centre be kept open for the entirety of the 2017 season (end of October 2017) with no changes to the present levels of service and/or opening hours.

[Councillors P Harries and M Williams abstained from voting]



10. Document Management System – Public Access to Information

It was reported that the Authority did not currently have a document management system (DMS) and was one of only three Welsh Local Planning Authorities which did not provide this service. A DMS would allow details and plans of all planning applications to be electronically available via the website resulting in an improved level of customer service; enable officers to work remotely and produce efficiencies in procedure such as a reduction in printing./ postage costs, file storage, etc.

The report set out the costs for the DMS provided by Agile, the Authority's existing 'back office' system provider which was considered to be the most appropriate and cost-effective system for the Authority. It was also proposed that while the DMS was being installed, the opportunity was taken to introduce additional equipment which would allow officers to undertake remote working.

The cost of the DMS, at £63,200 for implementation and £12,132 annual maintenance was in excess of £25,000, which meant it was subject to the Authority's financial regulations relating to Major Contracts, and the awarding of this contract would require a suspension of this regulation.

It was **RESOLVED** that approval be given to vary the financial standards and approve the request to purchase a document management system and ancillary items/equipment for the Development Management service as set out in the report.

11. Webcasting

Members were reminded that they had previously asked officers to investigate the possibility of webcasting the Authority's meetings, although it was noted that there was no requirement for the Authority to do so at present. However in the interests of being open, accountable and making the Authority's business more accessible to the wider public, consideration was being given to the matter.

The report set out the options available and in summary these were the installation of the necessary equipment in the Authority's meeting room at Llanion Park or the use of facilities at an alternative location such as the Committee Room at County Hall, Haverfordwest. Webcasting from the meeting room at Llanion Park was further complicated by the fact that the building was a Portacabin and therefore insulation/sound-proofing would probably be necessary. The approximate costs for each option were provided and although webcasting from County Hall was less expensive, there were implications for officer travelling and time spent waiting to present their reports as well as the increased public perception that the Authority was part of Pembrokeshire County Council.



Several Members spoke in support of webcasting, citing benefits including the increased accessibility of the Authority to the public with the Development Management Committee being highlighted as the one most likely to be viewed, although some Authority items would generate some interest. Webcasting would also allow a member of the public to watch a single debate lasting ten minutes without having had to travel miles to the meeting to do so. However there were concerns that this was a large amount of money for a small Authority and there was no evidence of demand for such a facility. Officers replied that initially viewing figures for webcasts of other authorities' meetings were high, but these did reduce significantly over time.

It was also noted that the biggest argument in favour of webcasting was that there could be no debate about what had been said at a meeting as a transcript could be provided. However some Members felt that the costs of webcasting from the meeting room at Llanion Park were too great. Taking a long term view others pointed out that adapting the meeting room would be more cost effective. The suggestion was made that a twelve month trial to webcast Development Management Committee and possibly also National Park Authority meetings be undertaken from the Committee Room at County Hall, although it was suggested that some negotiation take place with the County Council regarding costs.

One Member observed that the Councillors who sat on the Authority were in the final months of their terms of office and proposed that a decision on webcasting be deferred until after the Local Government Elections in May, and this was seconded, however when put to the vote this motion was lost.

It was then pointed out that the recommendation in the report before Members first sought agreement in principle to webcast meetings with effect from the 2017 Municipal Year before considering a way forward to enable webcasting to happen. The principle of whether to webcast meetings was therefore proposed and seconded. A vote was subsequently taken on this motion and this was lost.

It was **RESOLVED** that the principle of webcasting meetings be not adopted.

12. Electronic Agendas

It was reported that under the Local Government Act 1972 it was a legal requirement for Members to be formally summoned to attend meetings of the Authority. However much had changed since then and many Authorities today provided their agendas and papers electronically. The report outlined several methods which could be used to distribute papers electronically, although the cheapest involved conversion of papers to .PDF format which could then be emailed to Members or downloaded



from an Authority website/extranet. The financial savings of such a move would amount to a real cost saving of some £4,500 per annum based on 2015/16 figures.

Several Members felt there would be a benefit in being sent a paper copy of the summons to a meeting, as Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) did, as this served as a useful aide memoire. However there was general agreement that conversion to paperless meetings, while difficult for some to adjust to, was worthwhile.

It was acknowledged in the report that some Members might wish to continue to receive a hard copy of all papers and it was noted that PCC made a charge for this. One Member felt that such a charge would be unfair and would disadvantage his ability to be an effective Member. It was therefore proposed that Members adopt the option of receiving electronic agendas and papers with effect from the Authority's AGM in June, with individual Members able to give notice in writing at the start of the municipal year of whether they wished to receive a paper copy of the summons, agenda and/or full papers, or to receive papers only in electronic form. It was also proposed that if Members wished to receive paper copies there would be no charge for this.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) Members adopt the option of receiving electronic agendas and papers with effect from the Authority's AGM in June, with individual Members able to give notice in writing at the start of the municipal year of whether they wished to receive a paper copy of the summons, agenda and/or full papers, or to receive papers only in electronic form; and
- b) no charge be made for provision of paper copies.

13. Review of the Authority's Committee Structure

The report outlined the Authority's current Committee Structure and explained that this had last been fully reviewed in 2010. As there would be some changes to the Authority's Membership in 2017 as a result of the Local Government Elections, review of the existing structure by the current Membership was felt to be appropriate, and its views were sought.

Members generally felt that the existing structure was fit for purpose, however several commented that the Operational Review Committee on which they sat, while it was very interesting and informative, contributed little. It was felt that it focussed more on providing an overview of the operational work of the Authority, which undoubtedly made Members better informed and therefore able to make better decisions, rather than drilling down to scrutinise it. It was suggested that there should be more task and finish groups to fulfil this role. The Chief Executive suggested that the terms of reference of the review committees could be placed on



the agenda of their forthcoming meetings so that further discussion and any recommendations for their amendment could be made to the Authority.

The need to maintain a one third-two thirds balance between Welsh Government appointees and County Councillors was also raised, but the Chief Executive explained that this was a requirement of the Environment Act. However he surmised that the Future Landscapes Wales review to be published on 15th March could recommend changes to membership of Authorities.

It was **RESOLVED** that no change be made to the current Committee structure, but that the Terms of Reference of the Review Committees be looked at at their forthcoming meetings.

14. Public Service Board

It was reported that the Authority had been invited to become Members of the Public Service Board (PSB), on its formation. The PSB had four functions; to prepare and publish an assessment of the state of the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Pembrokeshire; to prepare and publish a local Well –being Plan for Pembrokeshire, setting local objectives and the actions it proposes to take to meet them; to take all reasonable steps to meet the local objectives it had set; and to prepare and publish an annual report that set out the Board’s progress in meeting the local objectives.

The first Well-being Assessment had to be agreed by March 2017, while the first Well-being Plan had to be agreed by May 2018. This latter was likely to be a significant document in influencing the work of the Authority, and its public sector partners from 2018 onwards.

As a member of the PSB, the Authority would be required to agree the Pembrokeshire Well-being Assessment and Well-being Plan, and a decision to agree the Assessment was expected to take place at a meeting scheduled for 21st March 2017. While consultation versions of the documents would be shared with Members, there was a very tight deadline for approving the Well-being Assessment in particular and Members were asked to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to approve the Well-being assessment and Well-being Plan.

A financial contribution was also being sought by the PSB as there was no specific budget allocated to it. A financial contribution of up to £5,000 was being sought towards creating a central resource to be used to support the delivery of its work, and Members were asked to agree this.

Some Members were concerned that the PSB had not yet been effective in delivering anything, but the Chief Executive replied that work was in



progress. Other Members were concerned that it would be overtaken by the Swansea City Region and asked that the Authority make representations to be part of that organisation, to try to ensure its focus was wider than only the City and County of Swansea. The Chief Executive agreed to write a letter to that effect.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) Responsibility for agreeing the local Well-being Assessment and local Well-being Plan be delegated to the Chief Executive.
- b) A sum of £5,000 be contributed to support the work of the Pembrokeshire Local Services Board.

15. Wales – Ireland Interreg Bid (Celtic Trails 2017-2019)

It was reported that the Ireland Wales 2014-2020 European Territorial Co-operation (ETC) programme was a maritime programme connecting organisations, businesses and communities on the West coast of Wales with the South East coast of Ireland. The above-mentioned bid was one of a family of ETC programmes (known as Interreg programmes for short) which provided opportunities for regions in the EU to work together to address common economic, environmental and social challenges..

Historically the National Park Authority had had limited involvement with Interreg projects, but through improved regional working on tourism initiatives, a strong partnership had been formed with Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire County Councils which had allowed the West Wales region to bid to the Interreg programme in 2016.. The bid was under Priority 3 of the Interreg Programme which focussed on ‘realising the potential of natural and cultural assets to increase visitor numbers to coastal communities in Wales and Ireland’.

The aim of the Celtic Trails project was to convert the sizable ‘footfall’ of potential visitors driving through the identified destinations with another final location in mind, into staying and paying visitors as well as attracting new visitors to cross the Irish/Celtic Sea and further details of how this would be achieved was set out in the report.

The total project bid was for €2.2m, with the Authority’s in-kind contribution of staff time totalling approximately €60k as set out in the report. It was reported that although the number of staff involved in the programme might increase as the Stage 2 bid developed, the total Authority in-kind contribution would not increase above the figure stated above (ie £42,827.18) over the course of the three year programme.

It was noted that the in-kind contribution stated above was very precise down to the last penny, and it was suggested that an in-kind contribution of up to £50k be agreed. The Finance Officer reassured Members that accurate records to record the Authority’s contribution would be kept.



It was **RESOLVED** that the National Park Authority's in-kind contribution to the Celtic Trails Interreg project of up to £50k be agreed.

