

OPERATIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

12 December 2018

Present: Councillor S Yelland (Deputy Chair in the Chair)
Councillor ML Evans, Councillor P Harries, Councillor PJ Morgan
and Mrs J James.

(NPA Offices, Llanion Park, Pembroke Dock: 10.00am – 11.50am)

1. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor K Doolin, Dr R Plummer, Mr A E Sangster & Councillor A Wilcox.

2. Disclosures

There were no disclosures of interest.

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26 September 2018 were presented for confirmation and signature.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2018 be confirmed and signed.

4. European Marine Sites around the Pembrokeshire Coast

The report written by the Conservation Policy Officer set out the National Park Authority's contribution to management of European Marine Sites around the Pembrokeshire Coast. At the meeting, this overview was supplemented by a presentation from Sue Burton, Pembrokeshire Special Area of Conservation Officer, focussing on the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

She explained that the site, designated in 2004, was large, approximately twice the size of the NPA and had been designated for both habitats and species. Her work focussed on the management of recreation and she had played a key role in the development of the Pembrokeshire Marine Code. In recent years, unregulated bait collection had been a particular issue and had caused degradation of the habitat and a code of conduct was currently being developed into a bylaw; it was hoped that securing Welsh Government funding would take this forward. Members commented that seaweed collection had become more popular with groups taking large amounts. Sue Burton explained that because it leased the foreshore the Authority issued some permits for gathering seaweed but some people slipped through the net and collect in the dark. The Ranger Services Manager added that 3 commercial licences had been issued with applicants having to demonstrate that no harm would be



caused, with permission needing to be gained from Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

Other projects with which the Pembrokeshire Marine Special Area of Conservation Relevant Authorities Group was involved included the Pembrokeshire Sustainable Shellfish Pilot Initiative, Native Oyster Regeneration and Surveying the Waterway for Environmental Pollution Threats (SWEPT), a citizen science project which measured nitrates and phosphates in freshwater sources entering the waterway.

Thanking Sue Burton for her presentation, Members were interested to know why all of Pembrokeshire wasn't a Special Area of Conservation and whether enough was being done to protect the marine environment. The officer informed Members that boundaries of the SAC had been chosen to encompass the main features but that they were arbitrary to a degree. She believed that there was always room for improvement in routine conservation work and that stronger links could be developed with regards to partnership working and publicity.

Members also wanted to know what would happen to European Union directives after Brexit and were advised that the directives would remain with no lessening in protection however there was less clarity about how the directives would be enforced. The CEO added that there was a difference in perception between the terrestrial and marine designated landscapes because you can't easily see the marine environment. Also the Welsh Government (WG) Marine and Fisheries department was dominated by fisheries, as fishing was worth £20m to the Welsh economy. However an unwillingness to invest in marine management did not make economic sense as wildlife tourism was also vitally important and it was hoped that WG and NRW would strengthen their commitment to marine conservation. Members hoped that pressure could be brought to bear on both organisations to raise this priority. They also asked about marine litter/pollution, and officers replied that several projects had been developed, building on the awareness raised by the Blue Planet documentary and it was hoped that more collaborative work to coordinate these could be done in future.

NOTED.

[With the agreement of the Chair, the following item was brought forward on the agenda as Councillor M Evans had to leave the meeting early.]

5. Review of Summer Ranger Provision North & South

The Ranger Services Manager provided Members with a review of the 2018 season. There had been positive feedback to the provision of two bilingual rangers – one in the North and the other in the South – from both visitors and local businesses and organisations. The aim had been



twofold, to engage with visitors, of which there had been 2600 such engagements, part of which included finding out what people knew about the National Park so that their needs could be met. It was noted that, having tried a variety of activities, different ones had proved successful in different places as the profile of the visitors in the north and south of the county had proved to be quite distinct.

The Rangers had also worked with businesses, providing them with leaflets for guests and 130 information packs had been distributed by email. The Ranger Service Manager confirmed that the posts dovetailed well with the Parkwise project and that training had been provided for Tourist Information Centre staff and businesses, including Bluestone and Café Mor. It was helpful that all people in visitor fronting roles be given as much knowledge as possible which could then be passed on to the public with the Rangers having a useful role in this.

Members felt that it was positive that the Rangers could work in Welsh and that fostering the language was very helpful. The CEO confirmed that recruitment would continue on that basis each year as, due to the seasonal nature of the posts, the Rangers were unlikely to return the following year. Members congratulated Officers on the appointments and commented that the enthusiasm and expertise of the Summer Rangers had been matched by enthusiasm from both locals and tourists.

Members suggested that the Authority needed its own 'brand', distinct from that of towns such as Tenby or Newport, to get the Authority's message across. They also noted that formerly visitors would plan their stay in advance, however the trend was now for people to make a decision on the day and the Rangers capitalised on this by targeting people with activities suitable for the particular location.

NOTED.

[Councillor M Evans tendered his apologies and left the meeting at this juncture.]

6. Public Path Orders and Public Path Creation Agreements

A report for information to update Members on the Public Path Orders and Public Path Creation Agreements was given by the Access & Rights of Way Manager, who confirmed that since writing the report a closure notice and a 3 week closure notice had also been issued, the latter relating to a planning permission. Work was in progress on a creation agreement and several diversion orders, however the procedure for the orders was frustratingly laborious which led to a large backlog and Access Officers from around the country were pressing Welsh Government for a streamlining of procedures.



Members felt that it was an interesting report and wanted to know whether there was an action plan for the future. The officer confirmed that as creation orders were a power open to the Authority rather than a duty, there was no formal action plan, however the processing of orders related to planning applications and paths that had to be diverted due to flood/storm damage took priority. Members thanked the Officer for the tremendous job working with landowners on the paths in the Newport and Nevern areas as well as Little Haven and Haroldston Woods. The Officer confirmed that he would pass these comments onto the Warden Managers and their teams.

NOTED

7. Performance Report for the Period Ending 31 October 2018

The report given by the Performance and Compliance Co-ordinator followed the structure of the Corporate and Resources Plan for 2018/19 following the approach of the Well-being of Future Generations Act with seven well-being objectives, with an additional section providing general governance information.

The report highlighted certain data sets of particular interest including Member made decisions against Officer recommendation; Members questioned why this was red, rather than amber and the Officer explained that it was a Welsh Government target and a few decisions could cause this to be exceeded. With regard to the number of planning applications approved, this continued to be below the target, and although this was not a Welsh Government indicator, files would be reviewed at the year end to see if there was a trend. It was also confirmed that Enforcement was in a better position going forward with work to remove the backlog expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Some Members reported that they had received negative feedback due to the fact that a local website developer had not been chosen to develop the new site. The CEO confirmed that the Authority had used the Sell2Wales procurement process and due process had been followed with an external person used to validate this. It was noted that the branding contract had been awarded locally.

The report noted that there had been a fall in the number of Voluntary Wardens who were actively engaged, about which Members expressed concern. However the officer noted that the recruitment of new volunteers would be pursued with the Pathways project providing more opportunities.

Members were reminded that the Sustainable Development Fund was now being administered by Planed and Members sought clarification on how this would operate. The CEO confirmed that decisions would



continue to be made by the SDF Committee and the new arrangements would be carefully monitored.

Finally one Member asked for an update on the adverse weather plan on which work had not started, and Officers explained that while planning for adverse weather had taken place, this had not yet been formalised into a plan and that this work would link in with the 'digital park' work recently approved by the Authority. Further information would be provided.

NOTED.

8. Risk Register

The latest Risk Register was appended for Members consideration and was presented by the Chief Executive in the absence of the Finance Manager who was on sick leave. Members sent him their best wishes. The report showed little change, however in future the register would be presented in a different format following a presentation by the Internal Auditors to the Audit and Corporate Services Review Committee.

The Chief Executive drew attention to the sickness absence of some senior staff which, while it could be managed in the short term, might require alternative arrangements to be made if these continued in the longer term. It was suggested that the progress update in relation to Risk 17 should be expanded to reflect this.

Finally one Member felt that as not all Members sat on every Committee, they did not receive all the papers and could therefore miss certain information. It was suggested that receiving electronic copies of agendas would help with those for Audit and Corporate Services and Operational Review Committee being distributed to all. The Chief Executive agreed.

NOTED

9. 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.

