

**MINUTES OF BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY AUDIT AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT VIRTUAL MEETING ON FRIDAY, 7TH MAY,
2021**

PRESENT:

Blaenau Gwent

Cllr J Hill

Carmarthenshire

Cllr A James (Chair)

Monmouthshire

Cllr A Webb (Deputy Chair)

Merthyr Tydfil

Cllr M Colbran

Torfaen

Cllr S Evans

Members appointed by the Welsh Government

Mr James Marsden, Mr Christopher Coppock and Canon Aled Edwards

In Attendance

Stephanie Evans, Transition Director
Elaine Standen, Finance Manager
Julia Gruffydd, Democratic Services Manager

Apologies

Cllr G Thomas

Sean O'Connor, Monitoring Officer

13/21 Correspondence

Apologies were noted and the Chair welcomed Nick Selwyn, Mark Jones and Philippa Dixon from Audit Wales and Sean Gourlay from TIAA. He also welcomed Transition

Director, Stephanie Evans, to her first meeting of the committee, and the Chair of the Authority, who was in attendance.

Two items of correspondence from Audit Wales were noted: the Audit Certificate for 2019-20 and the Annual Audit Summary for 2020-21.

I4/21 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

I5/21 Minutes

An omission in attendance and a spelling mistake were noted and would be corrected before publication.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 January 2021 be approved and the Chair authorised to sign them as a correct record.

I6/21 Public Speaking Scheme

There were no requests to speak.

I7/21 Audit Wales Annual Audit Plan 2021/22 and Audit Summary 2020/21

The Chair brought the audit items up the agenda to enable financial performance to be assessed in conjunction with the performance reports.

Audit Wales officers presented the Annual Audit Plan for 2021-22. In response to a query they confirmed that they would be looking at how public sponsored bodies were addressing climate change and the collective contribution of the three Park Authorities to delivering the changes Wales needs through the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Members made the point that without common metrics across the Parks in relation to the Strategic Remit Letter from the Minister it was difficult to make comparisons.

RESOLVED: To note the content of the 2021-22 Audit Wales Plan.

I8/21 Internal Audit Report 2022/21 and Audit Plan 2021/22

Mr Gourlay presented reports on internal audits carried out in 2020-21 and set out the audit plan for 2021-22.

Members acknowledged the lack of capacity in staff resources at present but reiterated the need for a replacement performance management system and better alignment between purposes and duty, remit letter and strategic and operational plans. The Transition Director thanked those officers who had stepped in to fill the reporting gap in performance and assured members that she was seeking additional resource to address performance and risk. Options for performance systems were currently being explored.

Mr Gourlay responded to a number of questions from members, and agreed that if members wished, TIAA could carry out a piece of work on the effectiveness of working groups as benign monitoring systems.

There was some discussion about a more coherent link on risks identified across performance areas, and the potential for one risk register comprising organisational, internal and external audit identified risks. The point was also made that there was a risk of using umbrella terms such as climate change without breaking this down to include, for example, degradation of biodiversity. Mr Gourlay reported that the Authority's risk register contained all the risks they would expect, but the important thing was how these were managed.

RESOLVED:

- a) **To note the reports;**
- b) **To approve the Internal Audit Plan for 2021-22.**

19/21 Audit Wales Action Plan Update

Members reviewed progress against the Action Plan and noted that things had progressed further since the agenda was published.

The Democratic Services Manager reported on work being done by the Monitoring Officer on the role of Policy Forum and she hoped to circulate a document for comments in the very near future.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

20/21 Budget Performance and Project Financial Management Q4

The Finance Manager presented the draft outturn figures for 2020-21 which would inform the performance report later on the agenda. Final figures would be brought to a future meeting. She advised that the costs of the cyber-attack were still accruing in terms of staff resource to restore and sort data recovered following the attack, but that it was a huge piece of work to quantify the cost of staff time.

She went through questions from members which had been raised with her in advance of the meeting.

It was noted that the format of the budget spreadsheets had cut some narrative from the report and that it was essential for members to see all information in order to scrutinise the budget.

The Chair of the Authority, in attendance in the meeting, asked the officer, in her role as S.151 Officer, if there was anything that concerned her. She responded that while she did not think there was financial risk, the generic risk of lack of staff capacity was the most serious, which impacted on the ability to ensure that staff changes were reflected in the Scheme of Delegation and levels of financial responsibility. The Transition Director concurred with this assessment of risk which remained of concern to her. She recognised the support that the Finance Manager and Democratic Services Manager had been providing during this period.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

21/21 Performance Report Q4/Year End

Members reviewed the year end progress against objectives in the Corporate Plan. They acknowledged the current gaps in staffing and the difficulty in providing this report, but highlighted some projects which were difficult to assess when working groups or project boards had not met. The Waterfalls Project was cited as an example of this. It was suggested that staff responsible for projects in the current Corporate Plan be asked to attend Audit and Scrutiny to report any changes and to map progress.

The Transition Director advised that project management was essential for effective delivery and accepted that there was progress to be made on training in this. She referred to additional funding for the Waterfalls Project and the need to establish the project board.

A general point was made that performance narratives must match the RAG status in performance reports to avoid confusion.

RESOLVED: To note progress against objectives in the Corporate Plan 2020-21.

22/21 Risk Register

Members reviewed operational risks and noted the need for additional staff resource to manage this work area.

A members highlighted the need for a more joined up, coherent risk register aligned to risks highlighted by external audit. He emphasised that biodiversity and climate change risks were separate but interrelated.

RESOLVED: To note the current risks on the Authority's Risk Register.

23/21 Complaints and Freedom of Information Requests - Year End

Members reviewed the year end report on complaints and Freedom of Information requests.

The fact that the majority of complaints were in relation to planning was felt to be more a reflection on the areas on which the public were testing the Authority than a criticism of planning, given that capacity was being restored in the department.

A member suggested that the Authority needed to consider how it communicated the current moratorium on development as a result of the phosphate issue, and to work with partners, planning agents and stakeholders. The Transition Director would take this up.

RESOLVED: To note the reports.

24/21 Action Tracking

Members noted outstanding actions from the Authority and committees. A member raised the issue of accommodation for the Authority as apparently no progress had been made. The Transition Director assured the committee that she had picked this up and had set up an officer group in the first instance to understand the issues and to request involvement in future discussions with the landlord. She advised that this would be work that the new CEO would take up on her appointment.

RESOLVED: To note the report.

25/21 Access to Information

The Chair advised that there was no further business and that this concluded the open part of the meeting.

RESOLVED: To exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of item 14 in accordance with section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

26/21 Legal Risk Register

The Transition Director briefed members on progress against the risks on the Legal Risk Register. She confirmed that outcomes of planning matters would be reported to the Planning, Access and Rights of Way Committee.

27/21 Other Business

There was no further business and the Chair thanked all for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Signed as a correct record
Chairman of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee